

On the First Commandment

Q. 1140. What is the first Commandment?

A. The first Commandment is: I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

Q. 1141. What does the commandment mean by "strange gods"?

A. By strange gods the commandment means idols or false gods, which the Israelites frequently worshipped when, through their sins, they had abandoned the true God.

Q. 1142. How may we, in a sense, worship strange gods?

A. We, in a sense, may worship strange gods by giving up the salvation of our souls for wealth, honors, society, worldly pleasures, so that we would offend God, renounce our faith or give up the practice of our religion for their sake.

Q. 1143. How does the first Commandment help us to keep the great Commandment of the love of God?

A. The first Commandment helps us to keep the great Commandment of the love of God because it commands us to adore God alone.

Q. 1144. How do we adore God?

A. We adore God by faith, hope, and charity, by prayer and sacrifice.

Q. 1145. By what prayers do we adore God?

A. We adore God by all our prayers, but in particular by the public prayers of the Church, and, above all, by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Q. 1146. How may the first Commandment be broken?

A. The first Commandment may be broken by giving to a creature the honor which belongs to God alone; by false worship; and by attributing to a creature a perfection which belongs to God alone.

Q. 1147. What is the honor which belongs to God alone?

A. The honor which belongs to God alone is a divine honor, in which we offer Him sacrifice, incense or prayer, solely for His own sake and for His own glory. To give such honor to any creature, however holy, would be idolatry.

Q. 1148. How do we offer God false worship?

A. We offer God false worship by rejecting the religion He has instituted and following one pleasing to ourselves, with a form of worship He has never authorized, approved or sanctioned.

Q. 1149. Why must we serve God in the form of religion He has instituted and in no other?

A. We must serve God in the form of religion He has instituted and in no other, because heaven is not a right, but a promised reward, a free gift of God, which we must merit in the manner He directs and pleases.

Q. 1150. When do we attribute to a creature a perfection which belongs to God alone?

A. We attribute to a creature a perfection which belongs to God alone when we believe it possesses knowledge or power independently of God, so that it may, without His aid, make known the future or perform miracles.

Q. 1151. Do those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first Commandment?

A. Those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first Commandment, because they attribute to creatures perfections which belong to God alone.

Q. 1152. What are spells and charms?

A. Spells and charms are certain words, by the saying of which superstitious persons believe they can avert evil, bring good fortune or produce some supernatural or wonderful effect. They may be also objects or articles worn about the body for the same purpose.

Q. 1153. Are not Agnus Deis, medals, scapulars, which we wear about our bodies also charms?

A. Agnus Deis, medals, scapulars, which we wear about our bodies, are not charms, for we do not expect any help from these things themselves, but, through the blessing they have received from the Church, we expect help from God, the Blessed Mother, or the Saint in whose honor we wear them. On the contrary, they who wear charms expect help from the charms themselves, or from some evil spirit.

Q. 1154. What must we carefully guard against in all our devotions and religious practices?

A. In all our devotions and religious practices we must carefully guard against expecting God to perform miracles when natural causes may bring about what we hope for. God will sometimes miraculously help us, but, as a rule, only when all natural means have failed.

Q. 1155. What are dreams and why is it forbidden to believe in them?

A. Dreams are the thoughts we have in sleep, when our will is unable to guide them. It is forbidden to believe in them, because they are often ridiculous, unreasonable, or wicked, and are not governed by either reason or faith.

Q. 1156. Are bad dreams sinful in themselves?

A. Bad dreams are not sinful in themselves, because we cannot prevent them, but we may make them sinful (1) By taking pleasure in them when we awake, and (2) by bad reading or immodest books, thoughts, word or actions before going to sleep; for by any of these things we may make ourselves responsible for the bad dreams.

Q. 1157. Did not God frequently in the Old Law make use of dreams as a means of making known His will?

A. God did frequently in the Old Law make use of dreams as a means of making known His Will; but on such occasions He always gave proof that what He made known was not a mere dream, but rather a revelation or inspiration. He no longer makes use of such means, for He now makes known His will through the inspiration of His Church.

Q. 1158. What are mediums and spiritists?

A. Mediums and spiritists are persons who pretend to converse with the dead or with spirits of the other world. They pretend also to give this power to others, that they may know what is going on in heaven, purgatory or hell.

Q. 1159. What other practice is very dangerous to faith and morals?

A. Another practice very dangerous to faith and morals is the use of mesmerism or hypnotism, because it is liable to sinful abuses, for it deprives a person for a time of the control of his reason and will and places his body and mind entirely in the power of another.

Q. 1160. What are fortune tellers?

A. Fortune tellers are imposters who, learning the past, or guessing at it, pretend to know also the future and to be able to reveal it to anyone who pays for the knowledge. They pretend also to know whatever concerns things lost or stolen, and the secret thoughts, actions or intentions of others.

Q. 1161. How do we, by believing in spells, charms, mediums, spiritists and fortune tellers, attribute to creatures the perfections of God?

A. By believing in spells, charms, mediums, spiritists and fortune tellers we attribute to creatures the perfections of God because we expect these creatures to perform miracles, reveal the hidden judgments of God, and make known His designs for the future with regard to His creatures, things that only God Himself may do.

Q. 1162. Is it sinful to consult mediums, spiritists, fortune tellers and the like when we do not believe in them, but through mere curiosity to hear what they may say?

A. It is sinful to consult mediums, spiritists, fortune tellers and the like even when we do not believe in them, but through mere curiosity, to hear what they may say:

1. Because it is wrong to expose ourselves to the danger of sinning even though we do not sin;
2. Because we may give scandal to others who are not certain that we go through mere curiosity;
3. Because by our pretended belief we encourage these impostors to continue their wicked practices.

Q. 1163. Are sins against faith, hope, and charity also sins against the first Commandment?

A. Sins against faith, hope and charity are also sins against the first Commandment.

Q. 1164. How does a person sin against faith?

A. A person sins against faith: 1st, By not trying to know what God has taught; 2nd, by refusing to believe all that God has taught; 3rd, by neglecting to profess his belief in what God has taught.

Q. 1165. How do we fail to try to know what God has taught?

A. We fail to try to know what God has taught by neglecting to learn the Christian doctrine.

Q. 1166. What means have we of learning the Christian doctrine?

A. We have many means of learning the Christian doctrine: In youth we have Catechism and special instructions suited to our age; later we have sermons, missions, retreats, religious sodalities and societies through which we may learn. At all times, we have books of instruction, and, above all, the priests of the Church, ever ready to teach us. God will not excuse our ignorance if we neglect to learn our religion when He has given us the means.

Q. 1167. Should we learn the Christian doctrine merely for our own sake?

A. We should learn the Christian doctrine not merely for our own sake, but for the sake also of others who may sincerely wish to learn from us the truths of our holy faith.

Q. 1168. How should such instruction be given to those who ask it of us?

A. Such instruction should be given to those who ask it of us in a kind and Christian spirit, without dispute or bitterness. We should never attempt to explain the truths of our religion unless we are certain of what we say. When we are unable to answer what is asked we should send those who inquire to the priest or to others better instructed than ourselves.

Q. 1169. Who are they who do not believe all that God has taught?

A. They who do not believe all that God has taught are the heretics and infidels.

Q. 1170. Name the different classes of unbelievers and tell what they are.

A. The different classes of unbelievers are:

1. Atheists, who deny there is a God;
2. Deists, who admit there is a God, but deny that He revealed a religion;
3. Agnostics, who will neither admit nor deny the existence of God;
4. Infidels, who have never been baptized, and who, through want of faith, refuse to be baptized;
5. Heretics, who have been baptized Christians, but do not believe all the articles of faith;
6. Schismatics, who have been baptized and believe all the articles of faith, but do not submit to the authority of the Pope;
7. Apostates, who have rejected the true religion, in which they formerly believed, to join a false religion;
8. Rationalists and Materialists, who believe only in material things.

Q. 1171. Will the denial of only one article of faith make a person a heretic?

A. The denial of only one article of faith will make a person a heretic and guilty of mortal sin, because the Holy Scripture says: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law but offend in one point is become guilty of all."

Q. 1172. What is an article of faith?

A. An article of faith is a revealed truth so important and so certain that no one can deny or doubt it without rejecting the testimony of God. The Church very clearly points out what truths are articles of faith that we may distinguish them from pious beliefs and traditions, so that no one can be guilty of the sin of heresy without knowing it.

Q. 1173. Who are they who neglect to profess their belief in what God has taught?

A. They who neglect to profess their belief in what God has taught are all those who fail to acknowledge the true Church in which they really believe.

Q. 1174. How do persons who are members of the Church neglect to profess their belief?

A. Persons who are members of the Church neglect to profess their belief by living contrary to the teachings of the Church: that is, by neglecting Mass or the Sacraments, doing injury to their neighbor, and disgracing their religion by sinful and scandalous lives.

Q. 1175. What chiefly prevents persons who believe in the Church from becoming members of it?

A. A want of Christian courage chiefly prevents persons who believe in the Church from becoming members of it. They fear too much the opinion or displeasure of others, the loss of position or wealth, and, in general, the trials they may have to suffer for the sake of the true faith.

Q. 1176. What does Our Lord say of those who neglect the true religion for the sake of relatives or friends, or from fear of suffering?

A. Our Lord says of those who neglect the true religion for the sake of relatives or friends, or from fear of suffering: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me"; also: "And whosoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Q. 1177. What excuse do some give for neglecting to seek and embrace the true religion?

A. Some give as an excuse for neglecting to seek and embrace the true religion that we should live in the religion in which we were born, and that one religion is as good as another if we believe we are serving God.

Q. 1178. How do we show that such an excuse is false and absurd?

A. We show that such an excuse is false and absurd because (1) It is false and absurd to say that we should remain in error after we have discovered it; (2) because if one religion is as good as another, Our Lord would not have abolished the Jewish religion, nor the apostles have preached against heresy.

Q. 1179. Can they who fail to profess their faith in the true Church in which they believe expect to be saved while in that state?

A. They who fail to profess their faith in the true Church in which they believe cannot expect to be saved while in that state, for Christ has said: "Whosoever shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven."

Q. 1180. Are we obliged to make open profession of our faith?

A. We are obliged to make open profession of our faith as often as God's honor, our neighbor's spiritual good or our own requires it. "Whosoever," says Christ, "shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven."

Q. 1181. When does God's honor, our neighbor's spiritual good, or our own good require us to make an open profession of our faith?

A. God's honor, our neighbor's spiritual good, or our own good requires us to make an open profession of our faith as often as we cannot conceal our religion without violating some law of God or of His Church, or without giving scandal to others or exposing ourselves to the danger of sinning. Pious practices not commanded may often be omitted without any denial of faith.

Q. 1182. Which are the sins against hope?

A. The sins against hope are presumption and despair.

Q. 1183. What is presumption?

A. Presumption is a rash expectation of salvation without making proper use of the necessary means to obtain it.

Q. 1184. How may we be guilty of presumption?

A. We may be guilty of presumption:

1. By putting off confession when in a state of mortal sin;
2. By delaying the amendment of our lives and repentance for past sins;
3. By being indifferent about the number of times we yield to any temptation after we have once yielded and broken our resolution to resist it;
4. By thinking we can avoid sin without avoiding its near occasion;
5. By relying too much on ourselves and neglecting to follow the advice of our confessor in regard to the sins we confess.

Q. 1185. What is despair?

A. Despair is the loss of hope in God's mercy.

Q. 1186. How may we be guilty of despair?

A. We may be guilty of despair by believing that we cannot resist certain temptations, overcome certain sins or amend our lives so as to be pleasing to God.

Q. 1187. Are all sins of presumption and despair equally great?

A. All sins of presumption and despair are not equally great. They may be very slight or very great in proportion to the degree in which we deny the justice or mercy of God.

Q. 1188. How do we sin against the love of God?

A. We sin against the love of God by all sin, but particularly by mortal sin.