

Living in Christ

saint mary's press

Christian Morality

Our Response to God's Love



Brian Singer-Towns

Living in Christ

Christian Morality

Our Response to God's Love

Brian Singer-Towns



saint mary's press

The Subcommittee on the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found that this catechetical high school text, copyright 2012, is in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and that it fulfills the requirements of Course VI: “Life in Jesus Christ” of the *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*.

Nihil Obstat: Rev. William M. Becker, STD
Censor Librorum
October 11, 2011

Imprimatur: † Most Rev. John M. Quinn, DD
Bishop of Winona
October 11, 2011

The nihil obstat and imprimatur are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the nihil obstat or imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed, nor do they assume any legal responsibility associated with publication.

The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Brian Singer-Towns, development editor; Maura Thompson Hagarty, PhD, contributing editor and theological reviewer. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary’s Press.

Cover Image: © The Crosiers / Gene Plaisted, OSC

Copyright © 2012 by Saint Mary’s Press, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320, www.smp.org. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

1150 (PO4169)

ISBN 978-1-59982-118-4, Saint Mary’s Press Online Learning Environment

Contents

Introduction 7

Section 1: Foundational Principles for Christian Morality

Part 1: Moral Choices and God’s Plan 9

Article 1: Created for Love and Happiness 10
Article 2: The Freedom to Choose 13
Article 3: New Life in Christ 18
Article 4: Justification and Sanctification 22

Part 2: The Law of God 28

Article 5: Eternal Law 29
Article 6: Natural Moral Law 32
Article 7: Law and the Original Covenant 36
Article 8: Law and the New Covenant 40
Article 9: Moral Law and the Church 45

Part 3: Sin and Its Consequences 51

Article 10: Sin in the Old Testament 52
Article 11: Sin in the New Testament 57
Article 12: Requirements for Sin 62
Article 13: Types of Sin 66
Article 14: Social Sin 69

Section 2: Honoring God

Part 1: The First Commandment: Faith, Not Idolatry 76

Article 15: Living the First Commandment 77

Article 16: Idolatry, Ancient and Modern 82

Article 17: Other Sins against the First Commandment 86

Part 2: The Second Commandment: Reverence, Not Profanity 90

Article 18: Reverence, Responding to the Sacredness of God. 91

Article 19: Keeping Sacred Commitments 94

Article 20: Other Sins against the Second Commandment. 99

Part 3: The Third Commandment: Preserving Holiness 102

Article 21: Observing the Sabbath. 103

Article 22: The Sabbath and Sunday: A Short History 107

Article 23: Keeping Sunday Holy 110

Section 3: Obedience, Honesty, and Justice

Part 1: The Fourth Commandment: Respecting Authority 117

Article 24: The Importance of Families in God’s Plan 118

Article 25: Parent and Child Responsibilities. 122

Article 26: Respect for Public Life 127

Article 27: Faithful Citizenship 131

**Part 2: The Eighth Commandment:
Reality versus Illusion 137**

Article 28: Honesty, the Key to Being Real 138
Article 29: Becoming a Person of Integrity 143
Article 30: Other Sins against Honesty 147
Article 31: Calling Society to Integrity 152

**Part 3: The Seventh and Tenth Commandments:
Justice versus Injustice 155**

Article 32: The Moral Law and Material Possessions 156
Article 33: Called to Be Just 162
Article 34: Calling Society to Justice 167
Article 35: Envy and Greed 172
Article 36: Live Simply So Others May Simply Live 176

Section 4: Respecting Life and Sexuality

Part 1: The Fifth Commandment: Respecting Life . . 182

Article 37: Life, God’s Greatest Gift 183
Article 38: Beginning-of-Life Issues. 187
Article 39: End-of-Life Issues. 191
Article 40: Called to Be Peacemakers. 194
Article 41: Personal Health. 199

**Part 2: The Sixth and Ninth Commandments:
Respecting Sexuality. 204**

Article 42: Sexuality, Sharing in God’s Life-Giving Power . . 205
Article 43: Chastity, the Key to Sexual Integrity. 209
Article 44: Sins against Chastity 213
Article 45: The Christian Vision of Marriage and Sexuality . 217
Article 46: Sins against the Dignity of
Sexuality within Marriage 222

Section 5: Making Moral Choices

Part 1: Gifts and Guides228

Article 47: Called to Be Holy	229
Article 48: Grace.....	234
Article 49: The Cardinal Virtues	239
Article 50: The Theological Virtues	243
Article 51: The Sacraments	246
Article 52: The Role of Conscience	249

Part 2: Forgiveness and Reconciliation.....255

Article 53: The Gospel Call to Forgiveness	256
Article 54: Seeking Forgiveness and Reconciliation	260
Article 55: Granting Forgiveness	266

Glossary	272
Index	282
Acknowledgments	294

Introduction

God's Law is a tremendous gift for us—a reality I was reminded of once again while writing this textbook. Unfortunately, some people do not see it this way. They believe that Christian morality is only about rules, faithfully following do's and don'ts as sort of a divine test to pass to get into Heaven. But Divine Law is not a test. In his teaching Jesus Christ reveals that the real meaning of the moral law is more than just following rules. The “rules” only serve a greater purpose; they are not an end in themselves. God's Law is meant to be a teacher, teaching us how to truly love him, our neighbors, and ourselves.

In my own life, I have known the benefits of following God's Law. When I have been faithful to it, I have known love and happiness despite difficult times and challenging circumstances. In times when I have been unfaithful to it, my life has lacked true inner peace. This is a truth that many people need to learn: God doesn't require us to wait until Heaven to know his love and the true happiness it leads to. We can know it right now, here on earth, if we only strive to live holy lives and rely on the grace that he provides.

As you study this textbook, I hope you will come to see that Christian morality is more about being a loving person than about blindly following rules, that it is more about pursuing holiness than about avoiding sin. Living a moral life is the only way to achieve the happiness, health, and holiness that God desires for us.

The contributions of teens were invaluable to me in writing this text. In particular, I would like to thank the students at Cotter High School in Winona, Minnesota, and two of their teachers, Mary Hansel Parlin and William Crozier. These students provided me with personal stories about moral decisions they have faced and their reflections on living the Ten Commandments. I incorporated their wisdom and insights into many of the Live It! sidebars in this book. These gifted teens affirmed for me that God's grace is alive in the hearts and minds of young people.

Blessings,
Brian Singer-Towns

Section 1

**Foundational
Principles
for Christian
Morality**

Part 1

Moral Choices and God's Plan

Are you happy? I do not mean just the momentary feeling you get when someone pays you a compliment or when you eat your favorite ice cream on a hot day. But deep down are you at peace, a peace that lasts even if you lose your cell phone? Are you filled with a love and gratitude that stays with you even when life doesn't go your way? God made us to live in loving communion with him and with one another, and by doing so, we will experience true peace and happiness—but for many people these seem like unattainable goals.

Even though human beings lost the original state of perfect, loving communion that Adam and Eve enjoyed, God has been at work throughout history to restore that state to us. The life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's saving plan. When we make choices to follow Christ, we participate in God's saving plan and will know true peace and happiness, a peace and happiness that the world cannot give.

The articles in this part review topics you have studied before, if you have taken previous courses in this series. This review is important so that our study of moral topics and decision making is built on a solid foundation.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 1: Created for Love and Happiness (page 10)
- Article 2: The Freedom to Choose (page 13)
- Article 3: New Life in Christ (page 18)
- Article 4: Justification and Sanctification (page 22)

Article
1Created for
Love and Happiness

God's Revelation made known to us through Scripture and Tradition is focused on one core truth: God created human beings to live in loving relationship with him. Stop and think about this for a moment; it is easy to take this amazing truth for granted. God, the Creator of the universe, the all-powerful, all-knowing Mystery who is beyond anything we can understand or imagine, wants to be in loving communion with us for all eternity. We should never take this lightly or for granted; it is the reason the Psalms are filled with praise and thanksgiving: "With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. \ O LORD, my God, forever will I give you thanks" (30:13).

Let's explore this fundamental truth further with a thought experiment. Let's think about how different things would be if God had a different purpose in creating human beings. For example, some ancient people believed that the gods (they often believed in more than one god) created human beings for the gods' amusement. Or they believed that human beings were created to feed the egos of the gods by worshipping them. If this were indeed the reason human

People in some cultures believed that they needed to keep their gods and goddesses happy through offerings and sacrifices.

beings were created, what would it mean for how we live? It could certainly mean some of the following things; you could probably come up with many other implications.

- We would be at the mercy of the gods' changing whims and desires. An action that might please your god today could change tomorrow and leave you doing the wrong thing.
- Because the gods' value system is self-centered, focused on feeding their own egos and desires, then we human beings would imitate those values and would focus only on our own egos and desires.
- We would be in competition with other people for the gods' attention and rewards.



- Our understanding of love would be fundamentally changed. Rather than something that is freely given and freely received, love would be something that has to be earned. This would make love relationships open to manipulation and difficult to trust.

Living in such a world doesn't sound like much fun, does it? But some people reading this might say, "Wait, that's the world I live in!" The sad reality is that as a result of Original Sin, many people do not know the truth about God. And even when we know the truth, the effects of Original Sin make it difficult to live as God calls us to. We see this reflected in many of the false values present in the world: greed, dishonesty, revenge. This is why idolatry, the primary sin against the First Commandment, is probably the most prevalent sin in our world. Our lips confess belief in the one true God, but our actions indicate that we are living the values of false gods, gods that do not exist.

What are the most common things that keep human beings from seeing and appreciating the truths God reveals to us?



© tonobalaguer/shutterstock.com

Created in God's Image and Likeness

Another fundamental truth revealed by God makes it clear what our relationship with him should be like. This truth is revealed in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" In making us in his image, God orders us to himself and destines us for eternal happiness. We are endowed with gifts that allow us to be in true, loving communion with him, both now and for all eternity. Let's look briefly at three of those gifts: our soul, our intellect, and our free will.

At our conception we are given a spiritual **soul**, a divine gift that is unique to human beings. Our soul is the innermost aspect of ourselves. It is immortal and it is what animates our bodies and makes us human. The soul and the body are not two different natures, however. Because the body and soul are completely united, they form a single nature— a human nature. Our soul will live on after our death until it is united with our resurrected body at the Last Judgment. Having a soul means that God has given us the

With God There Is No Coercion

Saint Irenaeus, a bishop and important theologian of the second century, wrote a five-volume set of books called *Against Heresies*. In the fourth volume, he affirms human freedom in beautiful and inspiring prose. Here is a sample of his writing.

God made human beings free from the beginning, possessing their own power, even as they possess their own soul, so that we obey the law of God voluntarily rather than because God compels us to do so. For there is no coercion with God. . . .

In human beings, as well as in angels, he has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who have obeyed his law might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God but preserved by our freely chosen obedience. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, not preserve for themselves what is good, and they shall receive punishment. For God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not choose to preserve it, nor deem it precious.



ability to be in communion with him in a way that is not limited by time or space.

God also gives every human person the gift of **intellect**. Intellect does not mean having a high IQ. Having intellect means that we have the ability to see and understand the order of things that God has established. Our intellect allows us to distinguish between what is truly good and what only appears to be good. Having an intellect means that God has given us the ability to understand how to be in communion with him.

The gift of **free will** makes it possible for us to choose the good that our reason enables us to understand. Because of human freedom, our actions are not predetermined by instinct or DNA (although these and other factors do impact our decision-making ability). Because we have free will, we are each individually responsible for our actions and will be held accountable for our moral choices. Having free will means that we have the ability to choose to be in loving communion with God or the opposite—that is, we can misuse our freedom and reject him. Our free will is a clear sign that God is not manipulative; he does not force us to love him. True freedom is a manifestation of the image of God present in every person.

Our soul, our intellect, and our free will give us a special dignity and a special place in God's plan. They orient us toward God and make it possible for us to be in a love relationship with him that is unique among all his creatures. But to paraphrase the comic-book hero Spiderman, "With great gifts comes great responsibility." Our intellect and free will also make it possible for us to turn away from God. Thus we now turn to the tragic side of salvation history, the reality of Original Sin and our separation from God. We must understand our history so that we can learn from it. †



soul

Our spiritual principle, it is immortal, and it is what makes us most like God. Our soul is created by God, and he unites it with our physical body at the moment of conception. The soul is the seat of human consciousness and freedom.

intellect

The divine gift that gives us the ability to see and understand the order of things that God places within creation and to know and understand God through the created order.

free will

The gift from God that allows human beings to choose from among various actions, for which we are held accountable. It is the basis for moral responsibility.

Article

2 The Freedom to Choose

Although God wants each of us to live in perfect communion with him, he doesn't force us to do so. Every person who has ever lived is free to accept or to reject God and his will for us. Adam and Eve, our first parents, exercised this freedom in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden (see



Original Sin

From the Latin *origo*, meaning “beginning” or “birth.” The term has two meanings: (1) the sin of the first human beings, who disobeyed God’s command by choosing to follow their own will and so lost their original holiness and became subject to death, (2) the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world.

original holiness

The original state of human beings in their relationship with God, sharing in the divine life in full communion with him.

Genesis, chapter 3). They chose to go against God’s plan for them to live in perfect communion with God, with each other, and with all of creation. Their decision to eat the forbidden fruit affects each of us, everyone who came before us, and all those who will come after us.

Human Freedom and Moral Choice

Adam and Eve experienced the same choice that all humans have had to face: whether to do good or to choose what is evil. And if Adam and Eve had a tough time resisting their forbidden fruit, how much more challenged are we by the world we live in. Every day we are surrounded by thousands of messages that tell us that true happiness is found in the number of friends we have, the kind of phone we use, what clothes we wear, and what our body looks like. The pursuit of popularity, pleasure, and wealth are temptations that distract us from the authentic happiness that comes from true, loving relationships with God and with one another.

But that’s where our free will comes in. Unlike animals, whose instinct drives their actions, we can think about the moral aspects of our behavior both before and after we act. Our free will allows us to choose to act in ways that are consistent with God’s revealed will. We can choose to ignore those temptations that lead us away from God because we are free to do so. Of course, freedom also means that we are



This image of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is filled with symbolism. Why are Adam and Eve naked? Why is Adam turned away from Eve? Why are they safe in the presence of a dangerous animal, the leopard?

responsible for the choices we make, especially in religious and moral matters. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand.

Although we are responsible for our actions, some factors may lessen the blame when we choose the wrong courses of action. For example, you might be ignorant of a rare side effect that a prescription drug will have on your behavior. Sometimes psychological factors such as fear can drive us to do things we would otherwise never think of doing. Likewise, strong social pressures may lessen the moral responsibility for some of our actions. These are not excuses for acting badly, but they are a recognition that we are not always acting with perfect freedom when we make moral decisions.

Although circumstances may weaken our ability to choose good over evil, our free will—and the responsibility that comes with it—cannot be taken away. God has built it into us; it is a basic human right that no one has the right to try to take from us. Our freedom to choose, however, does not give us the right to say or do anything we please. “If it feels good, do it” may make a clever slogan, but living that way is irresponsible and can lead to sinful choices that will hurt ourselves and others.

The Results of Original Sin

Making good moral choices is sometimes hard to do for another reason. We are all affected by Adam and Eve's disobedience of God's will, a condition we call **Original Sin**: “Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 417). Adam and Eve did not receive their state of **original holiness** for themselves alone but for all human nature. Thus when they sinned their sin did not



© Galushko Sergey/shutterstock.com

With freedom comes responsibility. The choices that human beings make can affect the entire planet for better or worse.

Has Original Sin Completely Corrupted Us?

Original Sin does not cause us to lose our goodness or make us completely spiritually corrupt. Some of the Protestant reformers taught that Original Sin had completely perverted human nature and destroyed our freedom to choose between right and wrong, and some Protestants today still hold that belief. In response, the Catholic Church more clearly articulated what God has revealed regarding Original Sin. Original Sin does not completely pervert human goodness, but it does weaken our natural powers for relating to God and for choosing to do good. It does not completely destroy our communion with God. It has damaged our communion with him and with one another. These effects of Original Sin can be overcome only by our faith in Christ and the grace that is given through the Sacraments.



concupiscence

The tendency of all human beings toward sin, as a result of Original Sin.

affect just themselves but affected their human nature, which was passed on to all their descendants.

Because of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. The loss of original holiness and justice makes things that should be natural to us harder and more challenging. Relationships with others that should naturally be good and loving are marked by tension and misunderstanding. We are more influenced by ignorance, suffering, and the knowledge of our own death. Moral decisions that should be easy and straightforward become more difficult and confusing; we are more inclined to sin. This inclination is called **concupiscence**.

Original Sin causes an even more serious loss. Our relationship with God is now clouded and hidden. We no longer naturally walk in the garden with God as with a close friend. Even though God desires to be just as close to us as he was to Adam and Eve, we struggle to find him. And there is the most serious loss of all: we now experience death. What God had warned Adam about has come true: “From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die” (Genesis 2:17). †



© Kratka Photography/shutterstock.com

God did not create human beings for death. How would you explain God's plan for humanity to someone who had never heard of Christ's saving work?

Pray It!

Praying for the Desire to Change

Have you ever wanted to change a habit or characteristic you have but just couldn't find the willpower to do so? This happens when we have a long habit of acting in a certain way, when we suffer from an addiction, or when we are being greatly influenced by another person. Sometimes it seems like our free will isn't so free! An ancient spiritual wisdom says that when this happens we first have to ask God to give us the *desire* to change. When we ask God for the *desire* to change, we acknowledge that we are powerless to change on our own, without the help of his grace. We have to give up the illusion that we have control in order for God to work in our lives. Here's a short prayer you can say when you find yourself in this situation:

God, I've tried to change,
 over and over again with the same results.
 I end up in the same place I started
 only more discouraged than before.
 So I place myself in your loving hands
 and acknowledge that I am powerless to change without your grace.
 Give me the desire that I need to change my life
 to turn away from sin and turn toward you.
 For I trust that with your help all things are possible,
 even the conversion of my stubborn heart.
 All praise to you. Amen.

Article
3 New Life
in Christ

If you have ever tried to make a positive change in your life, you probably discovered how hard it can be to do. Whether it is a commitment to spend more time in prayer, to work harder in school, or to get more physical exercise, the majority of people give up on such commitments within a month! The effort required to change seems too much for us and we give up.

Now think about God. After the Fall, he did not abandon humankind. Ever since Adam and Eve's sin, God has been working to get human beings to make a major change, to turn away from sin and to turn toward him. He called Abraham to be the father of a Chosen People. He formed a sacred covenant with his Chosen People and gave them Divine Law to teach them how to live as a holy people. He gave them rituals and the priesthood so they could unite with him and with one another in prayerful worship. When they fell away, he called judges, kings, and prophets to lead them back to him. Sadly, when we study these biblical accounts, we find that the human response to God's initiatives was lacking throughout salvation history. At first the people would get excited and committed, but within a generation or less they would go back to their old ways of ignoring the covenant God had formed with them. If anyone has reason to give up on us, surely it is God.

This is a painting from the Church of the Transfiguration on the top of Mount Tabor in Israel. The tablet that Moses is holding and the light around his forehead symbolize the divine truth provided by God's Law.

© Brian Singer-Towns/Saint Mary's Press



But God never gives up on humanity, both corporately and individually. You have studied **salvation history** and the **Paschal Mystery** in other courses. You know how God the Father sent his only begotten Son as his ultimate saving act. You know how Jesus Christ saves us from sin and death through his suffering, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. You know that those who believe in Christ have new life in the Holy Spirit. The battle against sin and death has been won. In light of this reality, every person in the world faces a question only he or she can answer: Will you answer Christ's call to place your faith in him?

Called to Beatitude

In calling us to place our faith in him, Christ calls us to an entirely new vision of life. This vision is expressed in the Beatitudes. You will find these in Matthew 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–26. If you haven't read them in a while, look them up and read them again. They present a vision of life that is radically different from the vision of life held by many people, both in Jesus' time and in our time. Just consider the meaning of the first beatitude in Matthew: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Being poor in spirit is the opposite of being self-centered or egotistical. It means putting other people's needs before our own. It means trusting in God for what we need and not just in ourselves. And living this way comes with a promise, that we shall be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, both in this life and for all eternity with God in Heaven.

The other seven beatitudes are just as radical in their implications. They illustrate the paradoxes of God's wisdom. It is only in looking to other people's needs that our deepest needs will be met. It is only in letting ourselves feel grief that we shall know God's comfort. It is only in being persecuted for doing what is right that we shall be worthy of Heaven. As we begin to understand the meaning of the individual Beatitudes we start to see the big picture that Christ calls us to as his disciples. That big picture we might call a life of **beatitude**.

The Beatitudes teach us our vocation as Christians, the goal of our existence. We call this goal by different names: coming into the Kingdom of God, the beatific vision, entering into the joy of the Lord, being adoptive children of God (also called divine filiation), or entering into God's rest. By



salvation history

The pattern of specific salvific events in human history that reveal God's presence and saving actions.

Paschal Mystery

The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his life, Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

beatitude

Our vocation as Christians, the goal of our existence. It is true blessedness or happiness that we experience partially here on earth and perfectly in Heaven.

Comparing Matthew and Luke's Beatitudes

Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12	Beatitudes in Luke 6:20–23
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.	
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.	
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.	Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.	
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.	
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.	
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.	Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven.

living the Beatitudes, we begin to experience on earth the happiness that God has wanted human beings to know from the beginning of creation. A life of beatitude purifies our hearts and prepares us for the eternal happiness and joy that will come when we enter into perfect communion with the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

Living the Beatitudes brings meaning to our moral choices. For example, the Beatitudes promise that we will know happiness by embracing the hardships of life, not by avoiding those hardships. They promise that we will know

true joy by pursuing righteousness (or justice) and peace, not by pursuing wealth, fame, or power. Finally, the Beatitudes do not promise that we will fully know the joy God intends for us during our earthly life, only that we shall know it partially now and completely in Heaven. So the moral choices we make to live a life of beatitude purify our hearts and remove our vices in preparation for the perfect joy and happiness we will know in Heaven.

The Holy Trinity, Our Compass and Our Strength

Through our Baptism we are already on our way to living a life of beatitude. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, Original Sin and all personal sin are washed away, removing our separation from God. We die to sin and the false promises of Satan, which lead only to unhappiness and eternal death. We are reborn to a new life in Christ, which leads to true happiness and eternal life. As baptized people we trust God to do for us what we cannot do by ourselves.

God provides us with what we need to live the Beatitudes. Through Scripture and Tradition, he provides the compass, showing us the way to live as disciples. Through the graces given in Baptism, the Eucharist, and the other Sacraments, we are provided with the strength we need.

Live It!

Inspired to Live the Beatitudes

What gives you inspiration for living a life of beatitude? Many students report that respected peers and authority figures inspire them to make good moral choices. One student tells about having behavioral problems in middle school: "My teacher, Mr. S., understood that what I needed was some discipline in order to break my habit of disrespect. He helped me to realize that the easy road in life is often the one that can ruin us. But the hard road is the one that gives us the most happiness."

Another student reported getting her inspiration from the Word of God. She struggled with getting her homework done on time and with helping with family chores willingly. Then one Sunday at Mass she heard the Beatitudes proclaimed in the Gospel reading. The priest's homily was about making good moral decisions. The Gospel reading and the priest's homily helped her to realize she had been making some bad decisions and inspired her to make some changes. She stopped procrastinating on homework assignments and started helping at home cheerfully.

Where do you find your inspiration to live the Beatitudes?



© Sorin Popa/shutterstock.com

Scripture and Tradition provide the divine compass that shows us the way to live a life of beatitude.

Called by God the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and guided by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we constantly grow closer to the Holy Trinity through our moral choices. God alone reveals to us that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the central truth of the Christian faith. Through grace, we move toward the goal of Christian life, which is union with the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

Living the Beatitudes isn't the easiest way to live. Jesus himself acknowledges this. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13–14). At times it will be tempting to give up trying to live a moral life. We can come up with a thousand reasons to justify a decision we know deep down is wrong. But even if we give in to temptation, God never gives up on us. Since Adam and Eve's sin, God has been at work, gently calling us to true happiness and joy. Put your faith in Jesus Christ and never stop asking God to be your compass and your strength. ✝

Article

4 Justification and Sanctification

Why should we be good? Or to put it another way, what is the purpose of aligning our moral choices with God's plan? Do you do good things so that you can win the reward of Heaven? Or is being good a result of putting your faith in Jesus? Maybe you've had discussions on this question with someone who has asked whether you believe we are saved by our faith or by our (good) works?

In past centuries these questions have been the cause of angry disagreement between some Christians. Thankfully, ecumenical discussions in the last decades have resulted in greater clarity about these questions and wider recognition of the truth that God has revealed. And what has been revealed to us is this: we are saved through God's work, not our own efforts. Our primary goal in Christian morality is to collaborate with God's grace, not to try to earn our way into Heaven.

Justified by Faith in Christ

The process by which God's grace frees us from sin and sanctifies us (makes us holy) is called **justification**. Think of it this way: through our faith in Christ and the Sacrament of Baptism, we become a new person, an adopted son or daughter of God who shares in Christ's righteousness. Through Christ's Passion and the sanctifying grace received at Baptism, Original Sin is erased. Though the consequences of Original Sin remain, the restoration of our original holiness and **original justice**—which was lost through Original Sin—is made possible. Without the separation caused by sin, harmony with ourselves, with God, and with one another is again possible. God grants us this wonderful gift through Baptism because it is through our Baptism that we unite ourselves to Christ's Passion and share in his death and Resurrection.

How is Baptism related to the process of justification? Why is it such a joyful Sacrament?



© Bill Wittman/www.wpwittman.com



justification

The process by which God frees us from sin and sanctifies us.

original justice

The state of complete harmony that our first parents had with their inner self, with each other, and with all of creation.

Catholic Wisdom

Justification Is God's Greatest Work

Saint Augustine explains why the justification of the sinner is God's greatest and most excellent work in his commentary on John 14:12, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these."

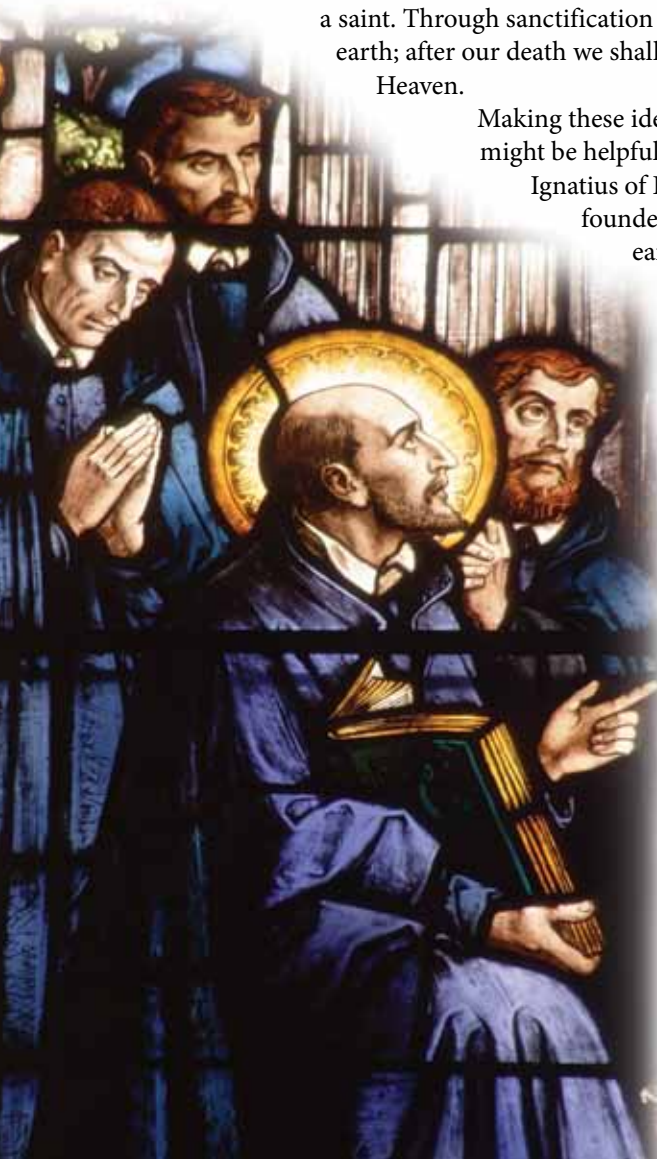
The justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth [because] heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect . . . will not pass away.¹ (CCC, 1994)

Our justification begins and ends with God's work. It starts with conversion. Prompted by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we realize that we need to turn to God and away from sin. We accept God's gifts of forgiveness and righteousness. As the process of justification continues, we become increasingly freed from the tyranny of sin and healed from its effects. We become reconciled with God, and the desire to become more and more like him grows inside us. Nourished by grace through celebrations of the Eucharist and the other Sacraments, we want our every decision to reflect what God desires. As the process of justification reaches its end, we become **sanctified**, that is, we become a holy person, a saint. Through sanctification we give glory to God here on earth; after our death we shall continue to give him glory in Heaven.

Making these ideas a little more concrete might be helpful. Consider the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuit order. In his

early life, Ignatius was determined to become a distinguished nobleman, and he was not considered to be particularly religious. He enjoyed the pursuits of young nobles: gambling, sword fighting, and chasing women. But at the age of thirty, all his noble pursuits came to a halt when he was struck by a cannonball and injured in both legs. This turned out to be an occasion for a special grace in his life.

God's grace was active in Saint Ignatius of Loyola's life long before he was aware of it. Saint Ignatius allowed God's gifts of forgiveness and righteousness to bear great fruit in his life.



During his long recuperation, Ignatius began reading about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. Thus began his conversion. Ignatius came to believe that modeling one's life on the example of Christ was a worthy goal and eventually became convinced that such a life would be more satisfying than life in a royal court. He repented of his previous sins and was determined to change. A series of fortunate events led him to spend ten months living in simple circumstances while praying and studying the spiritual life. God had begun the process of justification in Ignatius's life. The rest of his life would be marked by the desire to discover God's will and to do it, despite numerous challenges and setbacks. Sanctified through the grace of God, Ignatius achieved true holiness. He was declared a saint in 1622. You can find more about the life of Saint Ignatius in a lives of the saints book or by asking a Jesuit priest or brother about him.

God's Work and Our Collaboration

The theological concept of **merit** is sometimes used to describe our standing in the eyes of God. In general, "merit" refers to the compensation owed by a community or to a community for the actions of its members. Merit can be a reward, or it can be a punishment. In the theological sense, having merit means that God sees us as justified persons, free from sin and sanctified by his grace. Or it can mean that God sees us in need of merit, that we have not accepted his forgiveness and grace.

It should be clear from all you have learned so far that there is nothing that we can do to earn merit in God's sight. God just doesn't need anything that we can give; everything that we are and everything that we have is already a gift from God. God has taken the initiative by freely choosing to share his love, his grace, and his forgiveness with us. God first initiates and then we respond. If our response is the response of faith in Jesus Christ, we become collaborators in God's saving work. So the merit we have in the sight of God is first and foremost God's free gift to us and then, secondly, our acceptance of his gift and our participation in his saving plan.

This brings us back to the original question: Why should we be good? We should be good because that is how God made us. We should be good because God has given us



sanctify, sanctification

To make something holy. Sanctification is the process of becoming closer to God and growing in holiness, taking on the righteousness of Jesus Christ with the gift of sanctifying grace.

merit

God's reward to those who love him and follow Christ's Law of Love. To have merit is to be justified in the sight of God, free from sin and sanctified by his grace. We do not earn merit on our own; it is a free gift from God due to the grace of Christ in us.

a share in his life and his love. We should be good because God has given us his grace to justify us and sanctify us so that we can live in perfect communion with him and all the saints for all eternity. Any other reasons, such as trying to impress others, trying to gain social status, or even to trying to earn our way into Heaven, will eventually backfire on us because they put *us* at the center of our moral choices rather than putting God at the center. †

Justification and Divinization

God reveals that it is possible for us to be a true image of him. Jesus teaches us this in the Sermon on the Mount when he commands his disciples to “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). And in addressing this question, Saint Athanasius of Alexandria wrote, “The Son of God became man that we might become god.”

Eastern Catholics describe three stages in the process of justification:

1. The first stage is *katharsis*, or purification. In this stage we remove sin from our lives so that we can focus on God.
2. The second stage is *theoria*, or illumination. In this stage we come to know and experience what it means to be fully human through our communion with Jesus Christ.
3. The last stage of the process, *theosis*, comes from a Greek word meaning “divinization.” As we put into perfect practice the teachings of Jesus Christ, we achieve *theosis*. We become saints who are in the fullest communion with God that is possible in this life.

Divinization is not something we can do on our own; it is possible only through the power of God’s sanctifying grace imparted through the Sacrament of Baptism. Divinization will be fully realized only with our own resurrection.

Part Review

1. Why are human beings unique among all of God's creation?
2. Briefly describe the three God-given gifts that allow us to live in true, loving communion with God.
3. What are some factors that can diminish our freedom and lessen the moral responsibility of our resulting actions?
4. What is concupiscence?
5. Describe what it means to live the Beatitudes.
6. How does God provide us with the direction and the strength to live a life of beatitude?
7. Define *justification*.
8. How do we gain merit in the sight of God?

Part 2

The Law of God

God has a law. Or to say it more accurately, God is the source of all true law. Our loving Creator placed in his creation an order that is a reflection of himself. This is why law and order go together naturally. God's Law governs the universe and directs it to its ultimate purpose. Everything God created obeys the order he established in creation. Well, almost everything.

Just as physical laws govern the physical universe (for example, what comes up must come down—the law of gravity), moral laws govern the relationships human beings have with God and with one another (for example, treat others as you would want them to treat you). Human beings are unique in that God has given us the gift of free will. We alone, among all of God's creatures, can choose to act in ways that disrupt the natural order and bring chaos, pain, and suffering into creation. But we can also choose to act in ways that support and strengthen the natural order and bring greater love and healing into creation.

Through the use of our reason and by studying Revelation, we are able to discover and understand God's Eternal Law. This is a necessary step in living a moral life.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 5: Eternal Law (page 29)
- Article 6: Natural Moral Law (page 32)
- Article 7: Law and the Original Covenant (page 36)
- Article 8: Law and the New Covenant (page 40)
- Article 9: Moral Law and the Church (page 45)

Article 5 Eternal Law

Let's say one day you wake up and decide that you are going to walk backward for the rest of your life. At first it is pretty rough going. You trip a lot, run into things, and maybe get a lot of people confused and even upset. But with practice you get pretty good at it. You can get places just about as fast as everyone else, and you rarely trip or fall over. People even get used to it and stop commenting on how strange you are. So you think you've proven there is nothing natural about walking forward. Except . . . a few years later, your knees start to hurt and you have constant headaches. Your doctor tells you it is from the unnatural stress you have placed on your knee joints from walking backward and on your neck from constantly looking over your shoulder. Sooner or later, he says, you are going to require knee replacements if you keep walking backward. There is a price to pay for going against God's natural order.

Let's put this in a moral context. You wake up one day and decide to tell at least one lie every day—usually something that will benefit you. At first it is pretty rough going. You aren't very good at it; people often catch you doing it and get upset. But over time you get more polished. People catch you less often, and when they do, they just shrug it off because they are used to it. You think you have proven that there is nothing natural about telling the truth and few consequences for not doing so. Except . . . a few years later, you are engaged to the person of your dreams. As you grow nearer your wedding date, your fiancé catches you telling a lie, and then another, and another. Your fiancé breaks off the engagement, announcing the decision to you by simply saying, "I cannot spend my life with a person I cannot trust." There is always a price to pay for going against God's natural order.

There are consequences to pay if we go against the order God establishes in creation. These consequences can be physical, relational, and spiritual.

© Tatiana Morozova/shutterstock.com



Types of Moral Law

We have many different expressions of moral law to discuss in the articles in this part. They include the following:

- natural moral law
- moral law revealed in the Old Testament (the Old Law)
- moral law revealed by Christ in the New Testament (the New Law)
- the Precepts of the Church
- canon law

These other kinds of law are true because they express the truth of God's Eternal Law.



Eternal Law and the Moral Law

Eternal Law

The order in creation that reflects God's will and purpose; it is eternal because it is always true and never changes. All other types of law have their basis in Eternal Law and are only true if they reflect the truth of Eternal Law.

moral law

The moral law is established by God and is a rational expression of Eternal Law. Moral law reflects God's wisdom; it is the teaching that leads us to the blessed life he wants for us.

These two stories are simple examples of the order in creation—an order that reflects God's will and purpose. We sometimes call this order Divine Law or **Eternal Law**. It is eternal because it is always true and never changes. Every part of creation finds its purpose, its true end, in Eternal Law. And God has given human beings the gift of intellect by which we can understand and appreciate Eternal Law, even if only partially. We do this by using reason (reason is the application of our intellect) and by listening to God's revealed truth.

In studying Christian morality, we discuss many different kinds of law. In general, law is a rule of behavior that is made by a competent authority for the sake of the common good. In particular, the **moral law** comes from God and is a rational expression of Eternal Law. Moral law reflects God's wisdom and love. It is the guidance and teaching he gives us that leads to the blessed life he wants for every person. Everyone can know the moral law through the gift of our conscience. As a parent guides a child away from the dangers of the world, so God's moral law prevents us from falling prey to evil and urges us to do what is good. If we listen to our conscience and follow the moral law, we will live in loving communion with God now and forever. This is why every person is obliged to follow the moral law. †



© WendellandCarolyn/istockphoto.com

This seedling can symbolize the order God has established in creation. How many natural laws can you name that govern the growth of this seedling and that are true for all seedlings?

Live It!

If I'm Free, Why Must I Follow the Moral Law?

Some people might ask, if God created me with the gift of freedom, aren't I free to decide what is right or wrong for me? This question shows a misunderstanding of human freedom. We are free to choose to do what is right or what is wrong. But we are not free to decide what is right and what is wrong, because we would have to be as wise as God to do so! Moral truth is objective truth; it is not subjective. It is based in God's Eternal Law. We simply cannot decide on our own that something is good when in God's created order it is evil.

Still someone might ask why we need to follow laws that were created thousands of years ago. If this is referring to the Ten Commandments and the New Law taught by Jesus, then these laws were not created thousands of years ago. They were created at the beginning of time. They are based in Eternal Law, which is true forever. Yes, it is true that the moral law needs to be applied to new historical situations and new scientific advances. But this is the work of the entire Church, not just one person by himself or herself.

One final thing to remember about this question: Obeying the moral law actually makes us more free, and disobeying the moral law makes us less free. Think about the example of telling lies given at the beginning of this article. People who are recovering from chronic dishonesty will tell you that staying on top of whom they told which lies to eventually occupied their entire attention. They became totally controlled by their fear of being discovered. They were trapped and imprisoned by their immoral behavior.

Article 6 Natural Moral Law

natural law

The moral law that can be understood through the use of reason. It is our God-given ability to understand what it means to be in right relationship with God, other people, the world, and ourselves. The basis for natural law is our participation in God's wisdom and goodness because we are created in the divine likeness.

The Declaration of Independence appeals to natural law: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, . . ."

Every person is born with an awareness of good and evil, of right and wrong. Through the gift of reason, every person, Christian or not, can follow the moral law and live a life pleasing to God. We call the moral law that can be understood through our intellect and the use of reason **natural law**, because it is part of our human nature. Saint Thomas Aquinas describes natural law as "nothing other than the light of understanding placed in us by God; through it we know what we must do and what we must avoid"² (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 1993). Because we are made in God's image, the natural moral law enables us to participate in God's wisdom and goodness.

This ability to use our reason to do good and avoid evil is universal. Every human being is equipped with this ability; it does not depend on any religion. The founders of the United States acknowledged this in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that certain moral truths are self-evident. We just know them. It goes further to say that all human beings have fundamental rights and duties that cannot be taken away, including the pursuit of true happiness.

The Golden Rule is a good example of a natural moral law. Call it common sense or basic moral sense, but natural law dictates that we should treat people the way we want to be treated. Jesus reminds us of the wisdom of the Golden Rule (see Matthew 7:12), but Christians have no monopoly on it. Other great world religions, including Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, espouse it as well, although they may have a different way of saying it. Even

many people who profess no belief in God adhere to the Golden Rule.



Because natural moral law is an expression of God’s Eternal Law, it does not change with time. Regardless of the culture or religious belief, common principles bind us together and form the basis for all other moral rules and civil laws. Any community that wishes to embody justice and goodness will develop civil laws that reflect—and do not contradict—natural law.

THE GOLDEN RULE

HINDUISM
This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you
Muhurthana 5:117

BUDDHISM
Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful
Lilava/Sarge 1:17

CONFUCIANISM
One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct... loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself
Confucius, Analects 15:23

TAOISM
Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss
T'ao Shiang Wan, King P'ien, 73:126

SIKHISM
I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all
Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 1299

CHRISTIANITY
In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets
Jesus, Matthew 22:37

UNITARIANISM
We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part
Unitarian principle

NATIVE SPIRITUALITY
We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive
Chief One George

ZOROASTRIANISM
Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself
Shayast-na-Shayast 13:29

JAINISM
One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated
Mahavira, Sarabhalaga

JUDAISM
What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary
Mishna, Talmud, Shabbat 31a

ISLAM
Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself
The Prophet Muhammad/Sahih Muslim

BAHA'I FAITH
Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself
Baha'u'llah, Clearings

SCARBORO MISSIENS

To summarize, natural law is part of our humanity—part of our nature. To be moral is to be fully human. The phrase “man’s inhumanity to man” and the word *inhumane* express what happens when we do not live morally—that is, when we are no longer acting as human beings.

Natural Moral Law and the Church

Greek philosophy, particularly the teachings of the philosopher Aristotle, was one of the earliest expressions of natural law. Greek philosophy distinguished between laws that were customs and laws that were based in nature. Laws based in custom were true in a particular place and time, but laws based in nature, natural laws, were true everywhere and for everyone. Greek philosophy had a strong influence in the Roman Empire, so the early Christians were familiar with it and even made use of the natural law teaching. We can see evidence of this in the New Testament. In the first chapter of the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul explains why every person is responsible for the consequences of their sins.

For what can be known about God is evident. . . . Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. . . . And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper. . . . Although they know the just decree of God that all who practice such things deserve death, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (1:19–20,28,32)

Essentially Paul is saying that knowledge of God and of the moral law is evident to every person through creation. So if we fail to acknowledge this and thus do not follow the natural moral law, we deserve God’s just punishment.

Centuries later, Saint Augustine also appeals to the natural moral law to explain how all people, Christian or not, know in their hearts what is right. He uses the image of a king stamping his ring with the royal seal into wax as a metaphor for the way God stamps the seal of his Law into our hearts.

Where indeed are these rules written, wherein even the unrighteous recognizes what is righteous, wherein he discerns that he ought to have what he himself has not? Where, then,

are they written, unless in the book of that Light which is called Truth? Whence every righteous law is copied and transferred (not by migrating to it, but by being as it were impressed upon it) to the heart of the man that works righteousness; as the impression from a ring passes into the wax, yet does not leave the ring. (“On the Trinity,” Book XIV) †

The Importance of Natural Moral Law

Because each of us is born with the natural moral law stamped on our hearts, we all have a natural orientation to live a moral life. A person does not have to be a baptized Christian to live a life pleasing to God. A person who has never heard God’s Revelation through Scripture and Tradition still has the possibility of being saved if she or he lives according to the natural moral law implanted in her or his heart.

Natural law also serves another important function. It allows for the development of civil laws that everyone can agree to regardless of their faith, religion, or culture. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est, 2005)*, reminds us that we shape just civil policies and laws by appealing to reason and natural law.

The Church’s social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being. It recognizes that it is not the Church’s responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. (28)



Article 7 Law and the Original Covenant

Imagine that the bishop of your diocese called people from all the parishes of the diocese together for a special, once-in-a-lifetime gathering. So many people were attending that the gathering had to be held outdoors at a huge stadium. People began gathering hours before the event was to start. Suddenly, before everything was scheduled to start, something dramatic happened. Clouds gathered in the sky, and brilliant flashes of lightning and loud peals of thunder filled the air. While this was happening, a small earthquake shook the ground, causing people to lean on one another to stay upright. Then just as suddenly as it began, all the noise and commotion came to a stop. As the bishop ascended the stage to begin the event, people turned to one another and said, “We better pay attention!”

Why is natural law not sufficient for human beings to live moral lives? Why is it necessary for God to reveal his Law through Scripture and Tradition?



This is close to what happened when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. Take a look at Exodus 19:16–25. After the people arrived at Mount Sinai, they experienced a spectacular display of God’s glory: thunder, lightning, trumpet blasts, earthquakes, and even an erupting volcano. It is the most dramatic appearance of God in the Bible, and it immediately precedes the proclamation of the Ten Commandments. Through these events God was saying, “Pay attention, for these commandments are very, very important.”

Natural Moral Law Is Not Enough

If you read the news headlines every day, it is painfully clear that not everyone obeys natural moral law. The presence of so much suffering caused by immoral human actions is a testimony that since Adam and Eve, natural moral law has not been an adequate guide for our moral decisions. Public debates by well-intentioned people on the morality of everything from stem-cell research to same-sex marriages point out that there is significant disagreement about what is moral. This is in large part owing to the effect of Original Sin, which clouds our intellect’s ability to know and understand natural moral law.

It is for this reason that God has revealed his moral law to us through Scripture and Tradition. This first takes place in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Law of Moses, also called the **Old Law**, was the first stage of God’s Revelation to us about how we are to live as people made in his image. This Old Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments that God revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 20:1–17). The Ten Commandments are also referred to as the **Decalogue**. They are a special expression of natural law, making perfectly clear through God’s Revelation what he had already placed in the human heart.

The Ten Commandments and the Original Covenant

The Ten Commandments are found in the Book of Exodus (see 20:2–17) and the Book of Deuteronomy (see 5:6–21). They are part of the sacred Covenant that God made with the Israelites, his Chosen People, at Mount Sinai. To under-



Old Law

Divine Law revealed in the Old Testament, summarized in the Ten Commandments. Also called the Law of Moses. It contrasts with the New Law of the Gospels.

Decalogue

The Ten Commandments.

Other Laws in the Torah

The Jewish name for the first five books of the Bible is the Torah. The Hebrew word *torah* is sometimes translated as “law,” but it is better translated as “instruction.” This helps us to remember that the primary purpose of the Old Law is to teach us how to live in right relationship with God and with one another. These are some of the kinds of laws you will find in the Torah:

- *The Covenant Code* (see Exodus 20:22—23:33) This set of laws immediately follows the Ten Commandments and is considered to be part of the Sinai Covenant in Exodus. The laws address slavery, personal injury, property damage, money, religious practices, and a few other topics. Many of them describe the punishment for breaking the law.
- *The Priestly Code* (see Leviticus, chapters 1–7 and 11–26) In general, these laws deal primarily with religious concerns, including instructions for proper worship.
- *The Holiness Code* (see Leviticus, chapters 17–26) This distinct section of the Priestly Code may have originally been for priests and later applied to all the people. The central theme of this set of laws is “Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy (19:2).

Keep in mind that all these laws must be interpreted in light of the New Law modeled and taught by Jesus Christ.

stand the purpose of the Ten Commandments, we must first understand the purpose of the Sinai Covenant. We sometimes call this the Old Covenant to distinguish it from the New Covenant. But we might better call it the Original Covenant because it is not “old” in the sense of being outdated. It is “old” in the sense that it was the Original Covenant God made with a special people. Jesus did not do away with this Covenant, rather he fulfilled it.

First and foremost, the Covenant was a relationship of love between God and his Chosen People. God tells Moses to tell the Israelites, “If you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine” (Exodus 19:5). Through the Covenant, God sought to restore the loving communion that was lost through Original Sin, starting with the Israelites and then extending to all the people of

the earth. As part of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments taught the Israelites how to live in loving relationship with God and with one another. They summarized the many particular laws that follow in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, and they actually make up only a small percentage of the laws in the **Pentateuch**. Although many of these particular laws are no longer applicable to our culture, the moral principles expressed in the Ten Commandments are true in all places and all times.

Christians have always acknowledged the importance and significance of the Ten Commandments. Strictly speaking, the Commandments address serious moral issues: idolatry, murder, theft, adultery. But they also embody moral principles that help us to address all the moral issues we face, including less serious issues that we still have an obligation to address morally. For this reason, many **catechisms** throughout the Church's history have used the Ten Commandments as the framework for teaching Christian morality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses this approach, as does this student book.



Pentateuch

A Greek word meaning “five books,” referring to the first five books of the Old Testament.

catechism

A popular summary, usually in book form, of Catholic doctrine about faith and morals and commonly intended for use within formal programs of catechesis.

Pray It!

The Torah Psalms

One category of psalms in the Book of Psalms is called the Torah psalms. These psalms praise God for giving us his Law and proclaim that following God's Law brings true happiness, and that the wise person knows this, but the foolish person does not. Examples of Torah psalms are Psalms 1, 19, and 119. Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible; at 176 verses it is almost like reading ten psalms! It is a beautiful psalm to meditate on and pray with. Here's a sample.

Lord, teach me the ways of your laws;
 I shall observe them with care.
 Give me insight to observe your teaching,
 to keep it with all my heart.
 Lead me in the path of your commands,
 for that is my delight.
 Direct my heart toward your decrees
 and away from unjust gain.
 Avert my eyes from what is worthless;
 by your way give me life.

(Verses 33–37)

Scripture teaches that our loving Father gives us his Law to lead us to a life of eternal happiness and to keep us from sin and evil. But as holy, spiritual, and good as the Old Law is, it was not enough to restore humanity's original holiness. The Ten Commandments show what must be done, but they do not give us the strength, or the grace of the Holy Spirit, to do it. The Old Law is the first stage on the way to the Kingdom of God, preparing us for conversion and faith in Jesus. In this way the Old Law is a preparation for the Gospel. †

1. I am the LORD your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.

2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

3. Remember to keep holy the LORD's day.

4. Honor your father and your mother.

5. You shall not kill.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

7. You shall not steal.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Article

8 Law and the New Covenant

God's Old Covenant with humanity is impossible to separate from the Old Law. So it should come as no surprise that when Jesus established the New Covenant he also taught a **New Law**, which fulfilled and completed the Old Law. This New Law, also called the Law of the Gospel, is the perfection of God's moral law, both natural and revealed. The New Law challenges us to be perfect in love by following the example of Jesus himself.

The Sermon on the Mount

Although Jesus' New Law is found in many different places throughout the Gospels, he taught the core of it in his Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:1—7:29; see also Luke 6:20–49). The location where this teaching took place is important because it makes connections between Moses and Jesus, between the Old Law and the New Law. Just as Moses delivered the Old Law to the people from a mountain as part of the Old Covenant, Jesus taught the New Law from a mountain (see Matthew 5:1) as part of the New Covenant.

The Sermon on the Mount starts with Jesus' proclaiming the Beatitudes. This is no accident. The values of the Beatitudes—poverty of spirit, meekness, mercifulness, righteousness, purity of heart, peacemaking, willingness to suffer for what is right—are the values we need to live a moral life and to satisfy the desire for happiness that God has placed in our hearts. God's original promises in the Old Covenant find their fulfillment in the Beatitudes. By embracing the Beatitudes and living them out, we become citizens of the Kingdom of God. (The meaning of the Beatitudes is described in more detail in student book article 3, "New Life in Christ.")

In the Sermon on the Mount, directly following the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches us an important purpose of living the New Law. He says that his followers should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Matthew 5:13–14). These two metaphors emphasize that by living according to Christ's New Law, we can show others the way to true happiness and joy. We live by Christ's Law not only to bring ourselves into communion with God but also to show others the way to that communion.

Jesus then gives a series of teachings on topics such as avoiding anger, lust, revenge, and violence; loving our enemies; avoiding hypocrisy; giving generously; and trusting in God. Many of these teachings begin with Jesus' saying "You have heard that it was said . . ." after which he quotes a law from the Old Testament. Jesus then teaches the true meaning of that law. With this formula, Jesus is showing us that his New Law does not abolish or devalue the Old Law but instead releases its full potential. Let's consider one example:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn



New Law

Divine Law revealed in the New Testament through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and through the witness and teaching of the Apostles. The New Law perfects the Old Law and brings it to fulfillment. Also called the Law of Love.

Great Commandments

Jesus' summary of the entire divine Law as the love of God and the love of neighbor.

Jesus' teaching attracted great crowds of people. Why is his teaching so inspiring when it is also so challenging to follow?

the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. (Matthew 5:38–41)

Does this strike you as a little crazy? What was Jesus saying here? Well, first he reminded his listeners that the Old Law limited the revenge you could take on someone who had hurt you. If someone put out your eye, the most you could do was put out his or her eye; you could not kill the person. But the New Law taught by Jesus is about love. Rather than exacting revenge (even if it was limited revenge), the morality of the New Law witnesses to others the love of God through forgiveness, patience, and even outrageous generosity. Who can live this way? Only the kind of people Jesus describes in the Beatitudes—people who are meek, pure in heart, merciful, and willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

The Great Commandments: The Law of Love

An even shorter summary of the New Law is found in all three synoptic Gospels. In Mark it is told like this:

One of the scribes . . . asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (12:28–31)

The two **Great Commandments** emphasize that the heart of the New Law is love. These two Commandments were not new;



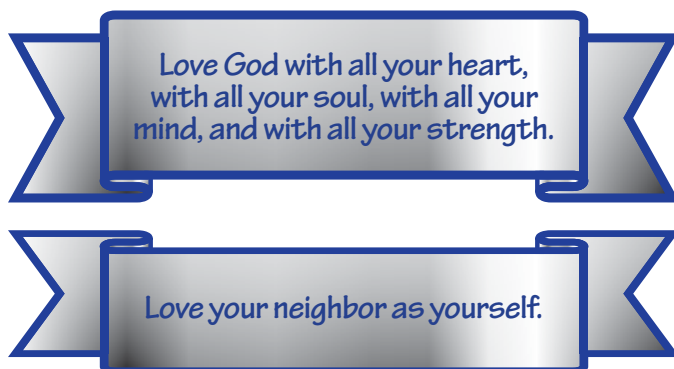
© Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library

they were part of the Old Law (see Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18). In fact, you have probably noticed that the first Great Commandment, “Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,” is a pretty good summary of the first three Commandments of the Decalogue. And the second Great Commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” summarizes the last seven Commandments of the Decalogue. What is new about the Great Commandments is that Jesus pulls them out, highlights them, and says that these two are the first and the greatest of all the Commandments. This is why the New Law is also called the Law of Love. The Law of Love is the basis for properly understanding and interpreting all other moral laws. Christ’s Law of Love fulfills the Old Law by going beyond the letter of the Old Law. Jesus challenges us to live the deeper moral truths the Old Law is intended to teach us, thus revealing its true meaning. Through his Paschal Mystery, Jesus redeems us from all our sins against the Old Law. The New Law is the reason we treat sinners with mercy rather than with vengeance—the reason, for example, we no longer put people to death for cursing their parents (see Exodus 21:17)

Other New Testament Moral Teachings

Besides Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels, many of the letters, or epistles, of the New Testament contain moral teaching too. Often the letters address a particular moral situation, as the Apostles apply Jesus’ New Law to their moral situations. Here are some examples.

Passage	Moral Teaching
Romans 12:9–21	general guidelines for moral living
Romans 13:1–7	respecting civil authority
Romans 14:13–23	whether to eat meat sacrificed to idols
1 Corinthians, chapter 13	defining what true love is
Ephesians 4:17–5:5	what it means to live according to the New Law
Ephesians 5:21–6:4 and Colossians 3:18–21	guidelines for family life
Colossians 3:5–17	vices to avoid and virtues to practice
Philemon	slavery



or for adultery (see Leviticus 20:10) or for the many other sins that in the Old Law required the death penalty.

To correctly understand the two Great Commandments, we must properly understand what Jesus means by *love*. Jesus isn't talking about a do-whatever-feels-good-to-you kind of love. He is talking about a love that is based in God's Eternal Law. It is a love that is forgiving but also expects that we are working hard at being holy people. It is a sacrificial love that puts the good of others before our own comfort, just as we hope others would do for us. The Law of Love means that we hold ourselves to a high standard of moral living—God's standard.

Jeremiah describes in beautiful language the promise of the New Law, the Law of Love: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God,

Catholic Wisdom

Pope Benedict XVI on the Greatest Commandments

In his encyclical *God Is Love*, Pope Benedict discusses the two Great Commandments and emphasizes that you cannot have one without the other.

If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other [my neighbor] anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be "devout" and to perform my "religious duties," then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely "proper," but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. . . . Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. (18)

and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31–33). It is truly amazing that God wrote the natural law into the hearts and minds of all people, made it even clearer in the Ten Commandments, and when we still didn’t get it, the Father sent his Son, who became one of us to reveal the perfection of the divine Law. Now through our faith in Christ, we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to live the two Great Commandments. And each time we receive the Sacraments, we receive further grace, nurturing us to love God and to share his love with others. †

Article 9 Moral Law and the Church

“He’s a Christian, but I know he goes out drinking most weekends.” “She belongs to that big church in town, but she’s the worst gossip in school.” “They read the Bible every day, but they’ve never reached out to anyone with a helping hand.”

Unfortunately, some people love to point out the flaws of others but seem more than willing to overlook their own shortcomings. Rather than sitting in judgment of others, we should reflect on how we can live more fully as Christ taught. None of us is perfect and without sin (see Romans 3:9–10), yet being Christian means we must strive to live a life of holiness and to be models of holiness for others, leading them to God. Saint Paul uses the concept of imitation to describe this: “So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love” (Ephesians 5:1–2). “Join with others in being imitators of me” (Philippians 3:17). “You became imitators of us and of the Lord . . . so that you became a model for all the believers” (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7).

The Law of Love, embodied in Christ’s two Great Commandments, calls us to put our faith into loving action.

© Bill Wittman/www.wpittman.com





To help us to be imitators of Christ, the Church's teaching authority guides us, and the Sacraments strengthen us.

Precepts of the Church

Sometimes called the commandments of the Church, these are basic obligations for all Catholics that are dictated by the laws of the Church.

canon law

The name given to the official body of laws that provide good order in the visible body of the Church.

Two Types of Church Law

With Christ as our head, the Church is the visible Body of Christ. Christ has given the Church the responsibility of being a light to the world and a model of his New Law. The Church does this through the witness of her members and by teaching the world Christ's Law of Love. In addition, the Church has her own laws to guide her members. The **Precepts of the Church** provide us with general guidance in living a Christian life, and the Church's **canon law** provides specific rules to maintain good order within the visible society of the Church.

The most basic of Church laws are called the precepts of the Church. You will find these laws listed in the sidebar on page 47. As you read them, you will notice that they primarily ask us to participate in the sacramental life of the Church and to participate in the Church's mission in the world. They are meant to be the minimum disciplines that we must practice to ensure that we grow in love of God and neighbor. For example, they require us to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation only once a year (but hopefully we would receive it more often than that).

Catholics are obligated to follow these precepts. Rather than seeing them as a burden, we should approach them as helpful reminders about how to live our faith in a deep and enriching way. They are really minimum requirements for being Catholic, asking us to participate in the rich faith life of the Church to receive the nourishment we need to live morally and to fulfill what it means to be a Christian. The last part of this book will return to these precepts in discussing the gifts and guides that God provides for us for making moral choices.

Canon law is the law of the Church. *Canon* comes from the Greek word for "rule." Each individual law of the Church is called a canon. The canons are collected in a large book called *The Code of Canon Law*. Trained experts in canon law are called canonists or canon lawyers. These people often teach in seminaries and universities and work for bishops in diocesan offices.

Canon law is concerned with the relationships among different members of the Church and with matters that affect the Church's mission. It governs such things as norms for the celebration of the Sacraments and public worship, norms for Catholic education, regulations for the administration of Church property, the rights and responsibilities of bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and the laity, and how to resolve conflicts among members of the Church. Canon law even gives penalties that apply when certain canons are broken. Canon law is of course based in Eternal Law and applies the truths of Eternal Law to life within the Church community.

The Precepts of the Church

The following are the Precepts of the Church as articulated by the bishops of the United States:

1. To keep holy the day of the Lord's Resurrection; to worship God by participating in Mass every Sunday and on the holy days of obligation; to avoid those activities that would hinder renewal of the soul and body on the Sabbath (for example, needless work or unnecessary shopping).
2. To lead a sacramental life; to receive Holy Communion frequently and the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation regularly—minimally, to receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation at least once a year (annual confession is obligatory only if serious sin is involved); minimally also, to receive Holy Communion at least once a year between the first Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday.
3. To study Catholic teaching in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, to be confirmed, and then to continue to study and advance the cause of Christ.
4. To observe the marriage laws of the Church; to give religious training, by example and word, to one's children; to use parish schools and catechetical programs.
5. To strengthen and support the Church—one's own parish community and parish priests, the worldwide Church, and the Pope.
6. To do penance, including abstaining from meat and fasting from food on the appointed days.
7. To join in the missionary spirit and apostolate (work) of the Church.

The Magisterium and Moral Teaching

The moral guidance of the Church goes beyond the Precepts of the Church and canon law. God has given the **Magisterium**—the bishops of the world united with the Pope—the responsibility for passing on and teaching his revealed truth. Revelation includes moral truth of course, and so the Magisterium has the responsibility for teaching the fullness of the New Law of Christ first to the Church and secondly to the entire world.

The Magisterium is always applying Christ’s moral teaching to modern situations. In recent times they have given moral direction on such issues as genetic testing, the use of embryos in medical research, abortion, the death penalty, and welfare laws. When speaking on these issues, they apply natural law and reason to appeal to people of diverse faiths and beliefs. The people who make civil law do not always accept the moral truth spoken by the Pope and the bishops, but the Church’s voice must be an important part of the dialogue when people make important decisions about moral issues.

Catholics always have a special obligation to listen carefully to what the Pope and bishops say about moral matters. When they speak to us, they are the “living, teaching office of the Church, whose task it is to give an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form (Sacred Scripture), or in the form of Tradition” (*CCC*, page 887). The Magisterium ensures that we stay faithful to the teaching of the Apostles in matters of faith and morals.

When the Pope and the bishops agree on a matter of faith and morals, they speak with infallible authority. This means that the Holy Spirit guides them to teach the truths, or doctrines, of our faith without error.

Infallibility is a great gift God has given to the Church; it means we can rely on the Church’s

The bishops of the Church, united with the Pope, have the responsibility for passing on and teaching God’s revealed truth.

© Bettmann/CORBIS



teaching as being true. Thus we as Catholics are obliged to accept the doctrine of the Church. The gift of infallibility applies to all doctrine, including moral doctrine, that is necessary for our salvation. The role of the Magisterium is to see that these truths of the faith are preserved, explained, and observed. To be clear, not every statement of every Pope or every bishop is an infallible statement; however, the Magisterium speaks with infallibility when teaching doctrine of faith and morals clearly revealed in Scripture and Tradition. Because of this special charism, we must take seriously all the Magisterium's teachings.

Can the Church Impose Her Moral Views on Others?

Some people have a concern that the Catholic Church imposes her morality on people who are not members of the Church. Their concern is that in a free society people should be free to make their own moral decisions. Should you ever face this argument from someone, here are some important points to make in response.

- The moral law taught by the Church is not her invention but is God's universal law meant for all people. All people have the ability to know the universal Divine Law, as it is written on our hearts and can be understood by using our intellect. The majority of the Church's moral teaching is something most reasonable people of all faiths and traditions readily agree with.
- The Catholic Church does not try to impose her moral teaching on anyone, but part of the Church's mission is to share with all people the moral law revealed by God. Even though the Church does this as publicly as possible, she respects each person's right to accept or reject this truth.
- The Catholic Church has a responsibility to influence public opinion to create laws and build social structures that support and defend the moral truths revealed by God. This is true in free societies, but it is even truer in dictatorships and other societies with limited freedoms. The Church's moral teaching is crucial for the common good. Imagine the chaos and suffering that would result if every person lived only by his or her own personal moral code. And



Magisterium

The Church's living teaching office, which consists of all bishops, in communion with the Pope.

infallibility

The Gift of the Holy Spirit to the whole Church by which the leaders of the Church—the Pope and the bishops in union with him—are protected from fundamental error when formulating a specific teaching on a matter of faith and morals.

remember the suffering and evil that happens in the world when states enact laws that are contrary to divine Law.

- The Church does not seek to take over the responsibilities of the state or to make Church law the law of the land. Catholics recognize the important distinction between the Church and the state and the dangers that come when one of these institutions tries to take over the responsibilities of the other. ✝

Part Review

1. Why is every person obliged to follow moral law?
2. Name five different types or expressions of moral law.
3. Describe the natural law.
4. Why is natural moral law important?
5. What law do the Ten Commandments summarize? What is another name for the Ten Commandments?
6. Why is the New Law called “New”?
7. Give an overview of the content of the Sermon on the Mount.
8. Describe the two types of Church law.
9. What is infallibility?

Sin and Its Consequences

The first two parts of this introductory section have painted a pretty positive picture of God's moral law. We described it as the path to beatitude, to living a life of true happiness in union with God in this life and in the next. Yet if God's moral law is in fact a path to happiness, why are so many people in the world unhappy, including many Christians? The main reason for this discrepancy is the reality of sin.

Is the word *sin* a part of your vocabulary? Sin is real. It is deliberately choosing to act in a way that is contrary to God's will. There are small sins and big sins, sins that mostly harm ourselves (but never only ourselves) and sins that cause harm to thousands or maybe even millions of people. Because of the sin of our first parents, we are all born under the influence of Original Sin. This unfortunately makes it easier for us to commit other sins. Every human being ever born except Mary is guilty of sin.

The result of every sin is that we are further alienated from God, from other people, and from our true self. We become less and less the holy people we know deep in our hearts we should be. We become unhappy because we are alienated from God and others, and we are ashamed because we know we should be better than we are. The ultimate consequence of sin is death. But sin does not have the final word; God the Father sent his Son to save us from our sin.

The articles in this part address the following topics:

- Article 10: Sin in the Old Testament (page 52)
- Article 11: Sin in the New Testament (page 57)
- Article 12: Requirements for Sin (page 62)
- Article 13: Types of Sin (page 66)
- Article 14: Social Sin (page 69)

Article 10 Sin in the Old Testament

Some people claim that the awareness of sin is disappearing from our society. Annual Gallup polls taken since 2010 indicate that 76 percent or more of the United States' population believe the country's moral values are getting worse. You could view this statistic as encouraging news because it means the majority of people in this country care enough about morality to notice that it needs improving. Or you could view it as discouraging news because it means that even though a majority of people believe the country's moral values are declining, it doesn't seem to be making any difference!

Regardless of how aware our society is about sin, in the Bible sin is a prominent topic. The word *sin* and its variations occur 915 times in the New American Bible translation. The central focus of salvation history is how God saves us from sin and death. Sin entered the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. And with sin came death. Sin and death were not part of God's plan for human beings. Throughout history he has worked to save us from our slavery to sin and death. Starting with his Covenants with Noah, Abraham, and the Israelites, continuing through the preaching of the prophets, and culminating in the Paschal Mystery, the Bible tells how the miraculous power of God's saving love defeats sin and death once and for all.

Previous courses in the Living in Christ series have covered the story of salvation history and the Paschal Mystery in depth. In this article and the next one, we focus on key ideas about sin that are revealed in Scripture.

Rebelling against God

One key idea about sin, especially in the Old Testament, is that sin is rebelling against God. This happens at the beginning of salvation history when Adam and Eve disobey God's direct command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Genesis 2:1–6). It is also a common theme in Exodus. The Israelites openly rebel against God by grumbling against him in the desert (see Exodus 16:2) and by creating and worshipping a golden calf (see chapter 32). At the end of his life, Moses even says:

Take this scroll of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD, your God, that there it may be a witness against you. For I already know how rebellious and stiff-necked you will be. Why, even now, while I am alive among you, you have been rebels against the LORD! (Deuteronomy 31:26–27)

The prophets spoke frequently about sin as a rebellious attitude toward God:

Woe to the rebellious children,
 says the LORD,
 Who carry out plans that are not mine,
 who weave webs that are not inspired by me,
 adding sin upon sin.

(Isaiah 30:1)

Old Testament Understanding of the Consequences of Sin

The Old Testament contains no teaching about Heaven or Hell. The ancient Israelites believed that you would be punished for your sins or rewarded for your virtues in this life, not in an afterlife. Although there are exceptions, the Old Testament teaches that these were some of the consequences of sin:

- *Sin affects people's children and the people in their community.* “The LORD is slow to anger and rich in kindness, forgiving wickedness and crime; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but punishing children to the third and fourth generation for their fathers' wickedness” (Numbers 14:18). This belief is also the reason that so many sins carried the penalty of death: to remove the sinner so his or her sin could not infect the rest of the community.
- *God punishes people directly for their sin.* Many Old Testament passages teach that God directly punished people for their sins. See Psalm 99:8, Jeremiah 23:2, Ezekiel 5:8, 2 Maccabees 1:17.
- *God withdraws his favor as a consequence of sin.* This understanding is strong during the time of the judges and the kings of Israel. Repeatedly the Israelites would fail to follow the Law of the Covenant and as a result they experienced God's withdrawing his favor from them, allowing them to fall under the power of other kings and nations. See Judges 3:7, 12 and 2 Kings 17:1–18, 24:19–20.

These Old Testament understandings of the consequences of sin contain important insights but are incomplete. We must interpret them in light of the teaching of Jesus Christ, who fulfills and completes the Old Law.



© Scala/Art Resource, NY

The Israelites rebelled against God because they grew tired of waiting for Moses to return from the holy mountain. What are some reasons people rebel against God's Law today?

But this people's heart is stubborn and rebellious;
they turn and go away,
And say not in their hearts,
"Let us fear the LORD, our God."

(Jeremiah 5:23–24)

Son of man, you live in the midst of a rebellious house; they have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 12:2)

The Hebrew word most often used to express this idea is *pasha*, which is translated as "transgression" or "rebellion" or "sin." Why do we rebel against God? People rebel because they want life to be different than it is, and ultimately they want God to be different than he is; we want to be "in control." But when you give it some thought, rebelling against God is kind of like rebelling against the air or against the sun. God is love and truth and life; we have no existence outside of him. Why rebel against that which makes life possible? Living a moral life means accepting God's Eternal Law as it is and not as we want it to be and accepting God as he is and not as we want him to be. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we must have a childlike faith in the Kingdom of God (see Mark 10:14); we must trust that God loves us even more than we love ourselves.

Missing the Mark

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament most commonly translated as sin is *chatâ*, a word that literally means “to miss,” as in an archer missing his target. This concept points us to another key understanding of sin, that sin is missing the goal of living a life that is in harmony with God’s Eternal Law. This understanding of sin is slightly different than seeing sin only as active rebellion against God because *chatâ* indicates a desire to live according to God’s will but failing in some of our attempts to do so. Some reasons for this failure are a lack of commitment, not setting our moral standards high enough, letting outside forces influence us—this list could go on and on.

Sin as an occasion of missing the mark happens throughout salvation history. In fact, many of Israel’s greatest heroes were guilty of this. Here are just a few of the instances recorded:

- After God gives Gideon victories in battle, Gideon makes a golden idol, breaking the First Commandment (Judges 8:27).
- The mighty judge Samson breaks the Law repeatedly: he marries a foreign woman, touches a dead lion’s carcass, takes outrageous revenge, visits prostitutes, and reveals the secret of his divine power to another foreign woman (see Judges 14:1—16:19).
- The sons of the wise judge, priest, and prophet Samuel “sought illicit gain and accepted bribes, perverting justice” (see 1 Samuel 8:3).
- King David, known for his great faith in God, committed adultery and then arranged for the husband of the woman he got pregnant to be killed in battle (see 2 Samuel, chapter 11).
- King Solomon, known as one of the wisest men in the Bible, had many foreign wives and joined them in worshipping their foreign gods and goddesses (see 1 Kings 11:1–10).

The understanding that sin is missing the mark points out a reality that Saint Paul names in one of his letters: “What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate” (Romans 7:15). Sometimes sin seems to have its own life within us; even when we want to

do what is right, something in us makes us act wrongly. But realizing our inclination to act in this way can actually be an occasion of grace, because missing the mark should make it clear to us that we cannot overcome sin on our own power. We must ask for and trust in the grace of Christ given to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can find encouragement in these further words of Paul:

“The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness. . . . We know that all things work for good for those who love God” (Romans 8:26,28). †



© serdar duran/istockphoto.com

Pray It!

Psalm 51

The most famous prayer about sin in the Bible is Psalm 51. It is attributed to King David, who would have written it to acknowledge his guilt and to ask for forgiveness after committing adultery with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel, chapter 11). You can pray this Psalm whenever you feel the weight of sin upon your heart.

Have mercy on me, God, in your goodness;
in your abundant compassion blot out my offense.
Wash away all my guilt;
from my sin cleanse me.
For I know my offense;
my sin is always before me.
Against you alone have I sinned;
I have done such evil in your sight. . . .
Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, make me whiter than snow.
Let me hear sounds of joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Turn away your face from my sins;
blot out all my guilt.
A clean heart create for me, God;
renew in me a steadfast spirit. . . .
My sacrifice, God, is a broken spirit;
God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart.

(Verses 3–6,9–12,19)

Article

11 Sin in the New Testament

Hamartia is the most common Greek word used for sin in the New Testament. It literally means “falling short” and is essentially equivalent to the Hebrew word *chatâ*. So the understanding of sin as missing the moral mark continues to be important in the New Testament.

Other Greek words associated with sin in the New Testament are *paraptoma* and *parabasis*, which can be translated as “trespass” or “transgression” (see Matthew 6:14–15 and Galatians 6:1), and *anomia*, which is usually translated as “lawlessness” (see 1 John 3:4). When we consider the meaning of these Greek words, an expanded understanding of sin emerges. Sin is not only missing the goal of living in accordance with God’s will but also crossing a boundary established by God and breaking the natural law that is written on every human heart (see Romans 2:14–16). The result is that human beings live in lawless communities that do not reflect God’s plan for humanity. Although these concepts can be found in the Old Testament, the New Testament provides some new teaching that deepens our understanding of the reality of sin.

One result of sin is that it can lead to lawless situations or lawless communities that endanger human life and dignity.



Everyone Has Sinned

A truth about sin made clear in the New Testament is that *everyone, except Jesus and his mother, Mary, is affected by Original Sin and is subject to death and a weakened nature prone to evil because of this.* This truth is implied in the Gospels, but it is made explicit in the writings of Saint Paul. For example, John the Baptist proclaims “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). Jesus implies that people in all nations have sinned when he charges the Apostles to continue his mission, saying, “Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations” (Luke 24:46–47).

Saint Paul directly addresses this in his Letter to the Romans. Paul speaks at length about sin, its effects, and how we are freed from it. He teaches that Jews and Greeks (meaning all non-Jews) are “all under the domination of sin” (3:9). A few verses later he says, “All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” (3:23). A few chapters later he makes the point again: “Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned” (5:12). Paul is teaching the Romans and all believers that we are all in need of the salvation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Light and Truth versus Darkness and Lies

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says this in response to some questions from the Pharisee Nicodemus:

And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God. (3:19–21)

Jesus is revealing an important insight about sin: every sin is a lie against the truth, a lie about what truly brings God’s saving love and joy into the world. People sin because they have fooled themselves into believing that a sinful action will make them happy or fulfilled. They tell themselves that this little bit of cheating, this act of revenge, this physical pleasure, or this act of stealing will make them