295 Precept (*Preceptum*)

Note[[1]](#endnote-1) that here properly speaking is the authority of doing something or not doing. But affirmative mandates properly are said to be thoughtful precepts. In truth they are called prohibitions. Therefore, the Lord’s precepts are to be filled for multiple reasons. First by reason of commanding in which is the almighty powerful presence, distinguishing all things with justice, and repenting rightly.

¶ Concerning the first, Lev. 20[:8]: “Keep my precepts,” and judgments, “and do them. I am the Lord.” Guard these things in the heart, as they might be in the memory through retention, as they may be in the intelligence through consideration, in the will through devotion, and do them in work through execution little by little. For namely knowledge without use, Psal. [98:7]: “They kept his testimonies, and the commandment which he gave them.”

¶ Concerning the second, if by the roaring lion,[[2]](#endnote-2) the director of the land beasts, they are fixed nor dare to proceed, how much more rational men ought to restrain all things of cruelty at the thunder of God for the present and always, Isai. 30[:20-21]: “Your eyes shall see your teacher. And your ears shall hear the words of one admonishing you behind your back: This is the way, walk in it.”

¶ The example of Thais the courtesan in the *Vitae Patrum*,[[3]](#endnote-3) who said to Abbot Paphnutius, there is no place which God does not see.

¶ Concerning the third, we have not seen that the precepts of the remiss prelate are to be neglected, but our preceptor God is most prompt in punishing evils, Jer. 7[:12]: “Go to my place in Silo and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people.”

¶ Again, may the proud see further the case of Lucifer, the submersion of the world, the damnation of the greedy Pharaoh, the reprobation of the ungrateful rich, the wicked servant not wishing to have mercy.

¶ Condemnation of the slothful, of the lazy servant, the cleansing of the lustful, the drowning of the gluttonous, the burning of the Jewish people, Tob. 3[:4]: “For we have not obeyed your commandments, therefore are we delivered to spoil and to captivity, and death, and are made a fable, and a reproach.”

¶ Secondly, the precepts of God are to be fulfilled by reason of form and mode in commanding. Which certainly the form is firstly obligatory as to always.

¶ For the laws of the matter belong to the buyer.

¶ Since therefore God made us and redeemed us, we are his and not ours. Especially when they observe this obligation irrationally, Job 39[:27]: “Will the eagle mount up at your command?”

¶ Because it is also senseless, Job 9[:7]: “Who commands the sun and it rises not.” Therefore, how much more are the rational obliged to carry out his precepts for them, Deut. 8[:1]: “All the commandments, that I command you this day, take great care to observe.”

Second, the form of the precept is threatening as far as the rebel ban of the prince who received under penalty of losing the earthly substance and the body well served. But the divine precept was commanded to be guarded under penalty of temporal matters, the body, and grace, Psal. [118:4]: “You have commanded your commandments to be kept most diligently.” Gen. 2[:16-17]: “God commanded man: Of every tree,” etc., and it follows, “of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For in what day so ever you shall eat of it, you shall die the death.”

¶ The example of Semei, 3 Reg. 2[:43] not serving the precept of the king.

¶ The third form of the divine precept is permitting to the obedient, Deut. 4[:40]: “Keep his precepts that it may be well with thee.” Just as one keeps well a castle committed to him, he guards it defensively. Thus, it is concerning the divine precept, Eccle. 8[:5]: “He that keeps the commandments shall find no evil.”

¶ Third, the divine precepts are to be fulfilled with reason because they are easy, for with delight nothing is easier, John 15[:12]: “This is my commandment, that you love one another.” Wherefore also it is said about Naaman, 4 Kings 5[:13]: “If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, how much rather,” etc. And Deut. 30[:11]: “This commandment, that I command you this day is not above you, nor far off,” etc. [1] John 5[:3]: “His commandments are not heavy.”

¶ Second, because they are not good and useful whatever is desired, under this aspect of the good they are desired. For you have not dedicated good precepts to them, Psal. [110:8]: “All his commandments are faithful: confirmed for ever and ever.” There was not such a precept said about one killing, 2 Kings. 8[:2].

¶ Third, because they are delightful. For through these becomes the conjunction of the agreeing with the agreeable, namely, of the obedient soul with God, Eccli. 23[:37]: “There is nothing better than the fear of God.” Such was not the command of Herod who ordered John to be beheaded, Mar. 6[:28].

1. Cf. Hugh Ripelin of Strasburg, *Compendium Theologicae Veritatis* 5.59 (8:196b): Praeceptum est imperium faciendi aliquid, vel non faciendi. ... Praecepta affirmativa, stricte sumendo dicuntur *praecepta*; sed negative dicuntur *prohibitiones*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 18.63 (1505, p. 460b): In altissimis montibus occultat se, et inde contemplat predam suam qua cum viderit alte rugit, ad cuius vocem terrentur animalia et subito figunt gradum circa quue cume cauda in orbe linea ducit, et illius lineature circulum transire quodlibet animal pertimescit et stant animalia stupida quasi edictum expectantia regis sui.

He hideth himself in high mountains, and espieth from thence his prey. And when he seeth his prey he roareth full loud, and at the voice of him other beasts dread and stint suddenly: and he maketh a circle all about them with his tail, and all the beasts dread to pass out over the line of the circle, and the beasts stand astonied and afraid, as it were abiding the hest and commandment of their king. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Vitae Patrum*, *Octobris VIII. Vita Sanctae Thaisis, Meretricis* (PL 73:661): Quae cum abbas Paphnutius audisset, sumpto habitu saeculari et uno solido, profectus est ad eam in quadam Aegypti civitate; deditque ei solidum pro mercede peccati. At illa accepto pretio, ait: Ingrediamur domum. Tunc ille ingressus, ut lectum pretiosis vestibus stratum conscenderet, invitabat eam, et dixit: Si est interius cubiculum, in ipso eamus, illa dixit: Est quidem, sed si homines vereris, nec in isto exteriori cubiculo ullus ingreditur; si vero Deum, nullus est locus qui divinitatis ejus [Col.0661B] oculis abscondatur.

Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* 152. Saint Thais, Courtesan (Ryan, 2:234-235): Thais the courtesan, as we read in *Lives of the Fathers*, was a woman of such beauty that for her many men sold all they possessed and were reduced to penury. Her lovers, driven by jealousy, frequently fought each other at thje woman’s door and covered the threshold with the blood of young men. ...

... Finally she said to him: “There is a little room that nobody goes to; but if you are afraid of God, there is no place that is hidden to his divinity.” .... [↑](#endnote-ref-3)