219 Commandment (*Mandatum*)

Through three matters a man can be impeded from fulfilling the commandments of God, namely if there is in them heaviness, a large number, or obscurity.

But, “his commandments are not heavy,” as it is said in the canonical [1] John 5[:3]. The example, an object that is heavy by throwing it on the earth is lighter than if it is lifted, and especially if one holds it suspended. Thus, the ancient commandments that were written in stone tablets that were hard and heavy, so that they may lie upon the earth because they were put forth on account of fear. However, Christ lifted them up and converted them into love, John 13[:34]: “A new commandment I give unto you, that you also love one another.” As evidence of this matter Christ converted the heaviness of the commandment and made it light. He responded to one asking which is the greatest of the commandments in the law, Matt. 22[:37, 39]: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole [heart],” etc. “And the second is like to this,” etc.

¶ Again, when something heavy is carried by two, it will be lighter for that one who carries it later. But in the old law the man to whom the commandment was directed carried it alone, not, however, the one commanding. Wherefore, Christ said to the Pharisees who were observing the law literally, Matt. 23[:4]: “For they bind heavy burdens on men's shoulders,” etc. But in the new law Christ carried before us the commandments which he commanded. And therefore, they were not heavy, as Chrysostom says, *Homily* 59,[[1]](#endnote-1) the law was not only so heavy because it commanded heaving things, but also because what it commanded to be done and to be made it did not afford any help. But the new law both commanded light things and gave the strength for them to be done in us. Where Pope Leo in a *Quodlibet*,[[2]](#endnote-2) all commandments easily come into effect, when grace extends assistance, and obedience softens the order. Nor are hard things served there by necessity where what is owed is loved. Therefore, Christ said in Matt. 11[:30]: “My yoke is sweet and my burden light.” And a mandate differs from a precept because a mandate is ended by the death of the one mandating, such as outside of the office of a delegate, but a precept not at all. Therefore, although Christ died once, but arose and now does not die, so his commandments still obligate.

¶ Again, the commandments of God are not too numerous. Because just as the ten fingers are given to man by nature for doing necessary things for himself, therefore his hand is called the organ of organs according to the Philosopher, second book, *De Animalia*,[[3]](#endnote-3) so God ordained for man ten commandments for working within for the health of his soul, Prov. 19[:16]: “He that keeps the commandment, keeps his own soul.” And Eccli. 35[:2]: “It is a wholesome sacrifice to take heed to the commandments.”

¶ Concerning which, it is known that God gave to the Jews a triple commandment or a triple kind of commandments. Of which the first is moral. The second is ceremonial, as abstain from offerings of foods. The third was judicial about which Exod. 231[:1]. Concerning the moral, it is known that there are then as is evident in Exod. 24[:12] and Deut. 5[:6]. Of which three are said to be of the first table because he directly ordained them to God. The remaining seven are said to be of the second table.

In the first commandment, which is, “You shall not have strange gods” [Exod. 20:3], is prohibited all idolatry explicitly, but implicitly are prohibited all sorcery, incantations, figures, and characters.

In the second commandment, which is, “You shall not take the name of God in vain [Exod. 20:7], principally every heresy is prohibited, but secondarily every blasphemy and irreverence in naming God as happens in perjury.

In the third, “Remember that you keep holy the sabbath day” [Exod. 20:8], man alone should not be occupied with necessities extrinsic to the body. Secondly is commanded abstinence from spectacles and from occasions of sins. Wherefore as says Augustine, *De decem cordibus*,[[4]](#endnote-4) that it is better to plow on the day of the Lord than to lead a dance.

Again, Jeremias said concerning Jerusalem, Lam. 1[:7]: “The enemies have seen her and have mocked at her sabbaths.” And Extra. *De feriis* c. *Omnes dies*,[[5]](#endnote-5) we decree that Sundays from vespers until vespers again should be observed with every reverence, and abstain from illicit and servile work, of such kind is commerce, legal, and assemblies. And it is treated in *Historia tripartite*, book 1, c. 9.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In the precept of the second table, man is ordered to bear it in mind. It orders man, To honor his parents [Exod. 20:12], with explicit devotion and sanctification, and every man according to his rank.

In the second precept is prohibited, Every killing [Exod. 20:13], by consent, word, and deed for favor, and consequently every unjust injury of any person. Here however note that spiritually they kill, who do not assist the indigent in a case of extreme necessity, and who seduce or oppress the innocent.

In the third commandment is prohibited explicitly, Every adultery [Exod. 20:14], implicitly in truth every fornication, as is evident in Deut. 23[:1-2]. And any use of the genital members than for good lawful uses is not excused.

In the fourth if prohibited any Appropriation of another’s belongings [Exod. 20:15], with the owner unwilling, both by fraudulence as well as injuriously, whether it happens through usury or through violence or through fear.

In the fifth is prohibited, False testimony [Exod. 20:16], and lying.

In the sixth is prohibited all Desire of another’s immobile property [Exod. 20:17].

In the seventh is the Desire of mobile property, [Exod. 20:17]. Here Augustine says in book 6 *Contra Faustum*, c.2,[[7]](#endnote-7) in which these commandments are mandated for performing the ceremonial and judicial parts of life, they are for signifying life. Wherefore it is said in Prov. 6[:23]: “Because the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light.” For who has lived against the commandment seems to despise the light. What is so proud, or ungrateful, than it would live against the will, from that one you have accepted to live. Than to despise the precepts of that one, who therefore commanded anything, that he has the means of rewarding?[[8]](#endnote-8) And even we have despised not only his precepts, but also his promises we count for nothing. Wherefore Jerome, *Ad Demetrias*,[[9]](#endnote-9) the contempt of whatever precept, is an injury of the one commanding, and often they command more difficult precepts, the more promptly they are heard. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Homilia* the fourth,[[10]](#endnote-10) how much lighter are the commandments, so much the greater punishment for those who do not obey. Therefore, the commandments of God are to be observed for many reasons.

And first, for the reason of the one commanding who is great and is present, Eccli. 2[:21]: “They that fear the Lord, keep his Commandments.”

¶ Again, Psal. [118:168]: “I have kept your commandments because all my ways are in your sight.” For in the absence of the prelate the precept is more easily omitted.

Again, by reason of the power of the one punishing. For he not only punishes under the crime of the whip, but under the pain of the heart and soul, Psal. [118:4]: “You have commanded your commandments to be kept most diligently.”

Secondly, divine precepts are to be observed by reason of the material. For how much better the matter so much more it ought to be observed, but Eccli. 23[:37] it is said, “There is nothing sweeter than to have regard to the commandments of the Lord.” And this is deservedly so, because his commandment is faithful, Psal. [110:8]: “All his commandments are faithful.” Such a commandment of God was not easy, it often happens that a difficult commandment is despised but, [1] John 5[:3]: “His commandments are not heavy.” And 4 Kings 5[:13]: “If the prophet had bid you do some great thing, surely you should have done it.”

¶ What therefore is easier than to love God, John 13[:34]: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another.” Deut. 30[:11]: “This commandment, that I command you this day is not above you, nor far off from you.”

¶ Third, the commandments of God are to be observed by reason of form. For they are beautiful, because they are common or few for receiving. Often, they are complained of when one is received and another is punished in the same case, Eccle. last chapter [12:13]: “Fear God and keep his commandments.”

Second, because what has been commanded are open and few, without the overshadowing of figures. Often obscurity and unintelligibility of the commandment beget neglect, but it is the contrary in Psal. [118:104]: “By your commandments I have had understanding: therefore (have I hated every way of iniquity).”

Fourth, the commandments of God are to be observed by reason of their end. For an object that is more useful is guarded more carefully, but in Prov. 19[:16] it is said. “He that keeps the commandment, keeps his own soul.”

¶ For they are peaceful in the present and what is better than peace, Isai. 48[:18]: “O that you had hearkened to my commandments.”

Second, they are salubrious in the future if man obeys the earthly commandment, on account of the health of the temporal life, much more on account of the removal of eternal life, Matt. 19[:17]: “If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.” So, the puppy serves on account of a morsel, the clerk on account of the prebend, Luc. 18[:18, 20-21]: “Master, what shall I do to possess everlasting life?” To whom Christ replied, “You know the commandments.” Who said: All these things have I kept from my youth.” And he said well “all” because a transgression of one commandment impedes eternal life, just as an uneven addition to an even makes the whole number uneven. And one negative attached makes the conclusion negative however many attached affirmatives go before. Therefore, it is said in John 2[:5]: “Whatsoever he shall say to you, do.” And Acts 9[:6]: “Lord, what will you have me to do?” For he who sins does not something but nothing, according to Augustine, *Super Canonica Joannis*.[[11]](#endnote-11) Mich. 6[:8]: “I will show you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Verily, to do.”

1. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum*, Homilia 28 cap. 11. 25 (PG 56:779): Ergo lex non solum ideo gravis est, quia gravia praecipit observationis mandata: sed et quia praecipit fieri, et faciendi non praestat auxilium. Nec ideo solum gratia levis est, quia levia ponit mandata: sed quod fieri praecipit, et ipsa in nobis faciendi operatur virtutem. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Leo I, *Sermones* 35.3 (PL 54:249): facile omnia praecepta veniunt in effectum, quando et gratia praetendit auxilium, et obedientia mollit imperium.

*Sermones* 89.1 (PL 54:444): Obedientia enim mollit imperium, nec dura ibi necessitate servitur, ubi diligitur quod jubetur. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Aristotle, *Problems* 15.3 910b24-911a1 (Barnes 2:1416): Why do all men, barbarians and Greeks alike, count up to 10 and not up to any other number, ... Or is it because all men have ten fingers and so, as though possessing counters that indicate the numbers proper to man, they count all other things by this quantity?

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Iª q. 76 a. 5 ad 4: Ad quartum dicendum quod anima intellectiva, quia est universalium comprehensiva, habet virtutem ad infinita. Et ideo non potuerunt sibi determinari a natura vel determinatae existimationes naturales, vel etiam determinata auxilia vel defensionum vel tegumentorum; sicut aliis animalibus, quorum animae habent apprehensionem et virtutem ad aliqua particularia determinata. Sed loco horum omnium, homo habet naturaliter rationem, et manus, quae sunt organa organorum, quia per eas homo potest sibi praeparare instrumenta infinitorum modorum, et ad infinitos effectus. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Augustine, *Sermo de Scripturis* 9.3.3 (PL 38:77): Melius enim faceret Judaeus in agro suo aliquid utile, quam in theatro seditiosus existeret: et melius feminae eorum die sabbati lanam facerent, quam toto die in maenianis suis impudice saltarent.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIª-IIae q. 122 a. 4 ad 3: Unde Augustinus dicit, in libro de decem chordis, melius faceret Iudaeus in agro suo aliquid utile quam in theatro seditiosus existeret. Et melius feminae eorum die sabbati lanam facerent quam tota die in Neomeniis suis impudice saltarent. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Decretales, X.2.9.1, *Omnes dies:* Omnes dies dominicos a vespera in vesperam cum omni veneratione decernimus observari, et ab omni illicito opoere abstinere, ut in eis mercatum minim fiat neque placitum, neque aliquis ad mortem vel ad poenam iudicetur. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Cf. Cassiodorus, *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita* 1.9 (PL 69:891-894): De legibus quas Constantinus pro Christianis posuit, et de mutatione rituum paganorum Christianorumque provectu, et de victoriis ejus, et veneratione religionis. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* lib. 22 passim (PL 42:401-467). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. Jerome, *Epistola* 148.4 (PL 22:1206): Quid enim unquam tam superbum, quid vero tam ingratum videri potest, quam adversus ejus vivere voluntatem, a quo ipsum vivere acceperis? quam illius praecepta despicere, qui ideo aliquid imperat, ut causas habeat remunerandi? [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jerome, cf. Pelagius, *Epistola Ad Demetrias* (413) cap. 15 -16: contemptus cujuscumque praecepti, praecipientis injuria est.... cumque difficiliora praecipiunt, libentius audiuntur.

<https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1296.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Chrysostom, cf. Alexander of Hales, *Summa* IIa-IIae, Inq. 3, Tract. 1, S. 1, Q. 2, M. 3, C. 4:

Contra. 1. Dicit Gregorius: "Quanto sunt leviora praecepta, tanto maius est supplicium iis qui non observant".

<http://scta.lombardpress.org/text/ahsh-l2Bi3t1s1q2m3c4/critical/transcription> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Augustine, *In Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos* 7.7 (PL 35:2033): Videtis quia non quid faciat homo, considerandum est; sed quo animo et voluntate faciat. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)