

Our Duties Toward Self

Q. 289. What responsibilities do we have towards self?

Our responsibilities toward self are: (1) to be an example of Christian goodness; (2) to be humble and patient with ourselves; (3) to be simple in the use of the things of this world; (4) to be pure in thoughts, words and actions; and (5) to avoid pride, laziness, envy, and intemperance in food and drink.

1. Our responsibilities toward self include being an example of Christian goodness.

No one has ever spent himself for others as much as Christ did when He dwelt among us. In his life in the world, the Christian should endeavor to personify the love of Christ in such a warm and attractive way that others will be induced to imitate it. The Christian should also communicate to others an impartial and selfless love which is as strong and as true as the love of Christ. His external conduct should be marked by the dignity worthy of a Christian. By his example, he can spread to others the faith that is in him, especially when he gives charitable assistance to his neighbor.

2. Our responsibilities toward self include being humble and patient with ourselves.

Through self-denial, we imitate Jesus. Having come down from heaven to show us the way to eternal life, Jesus followed no other way than that of the Cross. He suffered for us that we might follow in His footsteps. He said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

The true way to holiness is to love God and our neighbor for God's sake and to sacrifice ourselves in order to better fulfill this love. We sacrifice ourselves out of love for God and neighbor because we want to love still more, and because God loves a cheerful giver. Our patience in the face of our own shortcomings pleases God more than our zeal. Our sufferings, when borne for love of God, produce more fruit than our activity. Our failures, when accepted with renewed confidence in God, lead more souls to Him than our successes. All that matters is that God may be glorified and that souls may be saved, starting with our own.

3. Our responsibilities toward self include being simple in the use of the things of this world.

Detachment from earthly possessions is one of the first sacrifices Christ asks of those whom He calls to share His mission. A Christian should have a spirit of

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simplicity and dependence upon God as Christ did; he should see poverty of spirit as a key to genuine freedom and as a way to become Christ-like. Christ declared: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

In a world which feverishly seeks for earthly riches and material things, there is an urgent need for those who, by the example of their simplicity and detachment, bear witness to Christ’s teaching that spiritual, supernatural and divine things have the highest value. The witness of Christ-like simplicity in Christians who are devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of souls can be an inspiration to other Christians who may be negligent in this area. This neglect often occurs because such Christians are overly concerned with providing material goods for their own families.

4. Our duties toward self include being pure in thoughts, words, and actions.

In these days when sensual love and the pleasures of the flesh are emphasized and often depicted as ends in themselves, the example of Christian chastity is particularly impressive. To this world where the body and sensuality seem to count for so much, the true Christian, by a life of decency in thought, word, and action, demonstrates that purity is possible, fruitful, and liberating for both those who are single and those who are married.



5. Our responsibilities toward self include avoiding pride, laziness, envy, and intemperance in food and drink.

Christians must guard against the capital sins of pride, with its many manifestations; spiritual, intellectual and physical sloth (laziness); envy of other people’s successes and their financial and material possessions; and intemperance, i.e., lack of self-control and abuse of one’s bodily health by overindulgence in food, alcohol, and the abuse of all drugs.

Deliberate sin, whether mortal or venial, is preceded by an inducement to sin, which we call temptation. There are three sources of temptation: the world around us, the devil, and our own inclinations to sin. The principal temptations are those dealing with pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. If we pray, God will always give us the strength we need to overcome our temptations. In order to avoid sin, we must also avoid the occasions of sin—any person, place, or thing which in all probability will lead us to sin.

Sacred Scripture

For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? *Matthew 16:26*

Splendor of Truth

Revelation teaches that the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man, but to God alone. The man is certainly free, inasmuch as he can understand and accept God's commands. And he possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom... But his freedom is not unlimited... for it is called to accept the moral law given by God. In fact, human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance of that law. God, who alone is good, knows perfectly what is good for man, and by virtue of his very love proposes this good to man in the commandments.

God's law does not reduce, much less do away with human freedom; rather, it protects and promotes that freedom. (*section 35*)

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Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the creator (cf. Dan. 3:57-90). For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. Nevertheless man has been wounded by sin. He finds by experience that his body is in revolt. His very dignity therefore requires that he should glorify God in his body (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13-20), and not allow it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.

...When he is drawn to think about his real self he turns to those deep recesses of his being where God who probes the heart (cf. 1 Kg. 16:7; Jer. 17:10) awaits him, and where he himself decides his own destiny in the sight of God. So when he recognizes in himself a spiritual and immortal soul, he is not being led astray by false imaginings that are due to merely physical or social causes. On the contrary, he grasps what is profoundly true in this matter. *Modern World, 14*

All these human activities, which are daily endangered by pride and inordinate self-love, must be purified and perfected by the cross and resurrection of Christ. *Modern World, 37*

The Church wishes to emphasize that there can be no conflict between the divine laws governing the transmission of life and the fostering of authentic married love.

God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the most care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes. Man's sexuality and the faculty of reproduction wondrously surpass the endowments of lower forms of life; therefore the acts proper to married life are to be ordered according to authentic human dignity and must be honored with the greatest reverence. *Modern World, 51*

Therefore all the faithful are invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state of life. Accordingly let all of them see that they direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect love by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty. *The Church, 42*



Summary Prayer

Lord Jesus, You humbled Yourself by being obedient even to accepting death—death on the Cross. Give all who serve You the gifts of obedience and patient endurance. May the Father’s compassion reward and embrace all who willingly bear Your gentle yoke.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, clothe us with compassion, kindness, and humility. Make us want to be patient with everyone. You declared that whoever receives a little child in Your Name receives You, and You promised Your Kingdom to those who are like children. Never let pride reign in our hearts. Teach us to be true neighbors to all who are in trouble and distress, so that we may imitate You, the Good Samaritan.

Grant us the gift of Your mercy, forgive our sins, and remit their punishment. Look with love on those who suffer because of our indifference; come to their aid and turn our uncaring hearts to works of justice and charity. Give Your strength to all those who are in distress and help us to raise them up by our loving concern.

Loving Redeemer, through Your Passion, teach us self-denial, strengthen us against evil and adversity. Increase our faith, hope, and love, and make us ready for eternal life.

Heavenly Father, God of mercy and fidelity, You made a new and lasting pact with men and sealed it in the Blood of Your Son. Forgive the folly of our disloyalty and help us to keep Your commandments, so that, in Your New Covenant, we may be witnesses and heralds of Your faithfulness and love on earth and sharers of Your glory in heaven. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. In the Holy Bible, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). What Christian virtue does our Lord teach us in this Scripture passage?
2. In what particular ways do you practice the spirit of detachment and simplicity in your personal and family life?
3. Reflect on the meaning of stewardship and discuss how you can be better stewards of your material possessions. Thank God for all of your material possessions and pray that God will inspire you to use them generously to serve the Church and others.

Q. 290. What does the thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man help the Christian to do?

The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian: (1) to form a right conscience, (2) to always choose what is right, (3) to avoid sin and the occasions of sins, and (4) to live in this world according to the Spirit of Christ, for the love of God.



#S13-16

1. The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian to form a right conscience.

In order to sanctify our actions, we must see to it that they are inspired by supernatural love, or charity. This love should rule and guide us in all our actions, so that our whole life may be directed to God. Supernatural love comes to us from God. It is the splendid privilege of His children of adoption. As St. Paul has said,

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we should make charity “the root and foundation of our life” (cf. Ephesians 3:17). “Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14).

Our conscience tells us whether an action is right or wrong and whether it is a mortal or venial sin. Conscience is our mind’s judge on moral matters, but it must be instructed. We must learn from Christ, Who teaches us through His Church. Only with the guidance of the Holy Spirit can we consistently form a right conscience.

2. The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian to always choose what is right.

We need the light and strength of actual grace to always choose what is right and then to do it. Therefore we should pray each day to the Holy Spirit, asking for His guidance and help.

3. The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian to avoid sin and the occasions of sin.

In order to avoid sin and the occasions of sin, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. Since the world about us, the devil, and our own inclinations to sin are powerful in the face of our human weaknesses, we must put our confidence in the even greater power of God’s grace. Recall the words of St. Paul, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20).

#H5_1_4-3



4. The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian to live in this world according to the Spirit of Christ, for the love of God.

The great commandment of love requires that we act toward God as His children and toward our fellow men as their brothers and sisters, as children of the same Father. Our duties toward God and our neighbor are made known to us especially

in the Ten Commandments. If we love God, we will keep the first three commandments; they tell us about our duties toward God. If we love our neighbor and ourselves, we will keep the other seven commandments which tell us of our duties toward our neighbors and ourselves.



The Ten Commandments (reflecting the natural law written in our hearts), flow from our very nature as human beings (cf. Romans 2:13-15). Since we were created by God and depend on Him completely, we must, as intelligent responsible beings, acknowledge that dependence. We should praise God, love Him, believe and trust Him, and show reverence for His Name. Because each human person has fundamental dignity and rights which He receives from God, we must respect those rights.

In studying the commandments, we learn about the laws which tell us how we, as human beings, must behave toward God and toward our fellow man. More importantly, we, as children of God, learn about the laws which will help us to fulfill the great law of love. We will then live in this world according to the Spirit of Christ, for the love of God.

Sacred Scripture

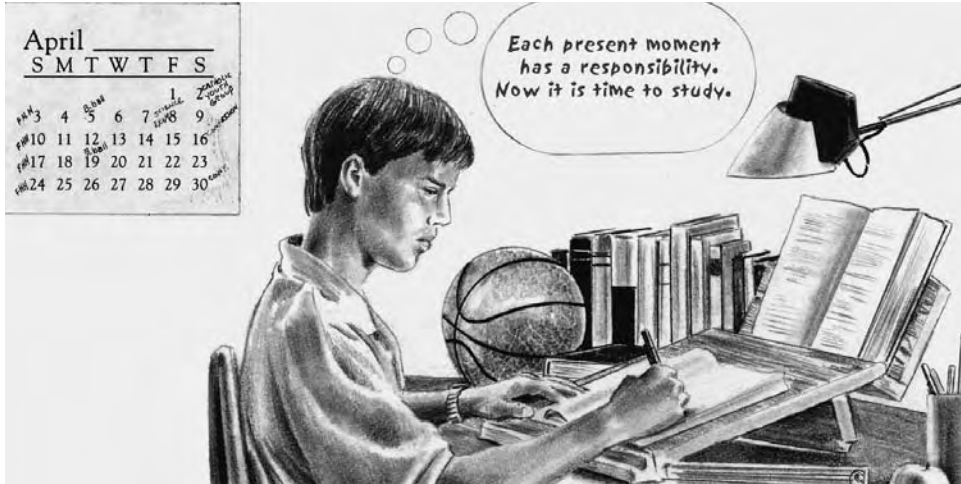
Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.
Philippians 2:12

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2244 Every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgment, its hierarchy of values, its line of conduct. Most societies have formed their institutions in the recognition of a certain preeminence of man over things. Only the divinely revealed religion has clearly recognized man's origin and destiny in God, the Creator and Redeemer. The Church invites political authorities to measure their judgments and decisions against this inspired truth about God and man: "Societies not recognizing this vision or rejecting it in the name of their independence from God are brought to seek their criteria and goal in themselves or to borrow them from some ideology.

Since they do not admit that one can defend an objective criterion of good and evil, they arrogate to themselves an explicit or implicit totalitarian power over man and his destiny, as history shows.⁷¹

#L3-28



The thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man helps the Christian to always chose what is right.

Splendor of Truth

Just as man in exercising his dominion over the world shapes it in accordance with his own intelligence and will, so too in performing morally good acts, man strengthens, develops and consolidates within himself his likeness to God. (section 39)

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Accordingly all Christians, in the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life and through all these, will sanctify themselves more and more if they receive all things with faith from the hand of the heavenly Father and cooperate with the divine will, thus showing forth in that temporal service the love with which God has loved the world. *The Church, 41*

Following the Master, every Christian must renounce himself, take up his own cross and participate in the sufferings of Christ. Thus transformed into the image of Christ's death, he is made capable of meditating on the glory of the resurrection. Furthermore, following the Master, he can no longer live for himself, but must live for Him who loves him and gave Himself for him. He will also have to live for his brethren, completing "in his flesh that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ...for the benefit of his body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). *Apostolic Constitution on Penance, Chapter 1.*

Summary Prayer

Father, guide us as You guide creation, according to Your law of love. May we love one another and come to perfection in the eternal life which You prepared for us.

The perfection of justice is found in your love. All mankind needs Your law. May justice be attained by obedience to Your commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. How do the Ten Commandments help us to live a way of life which is imbued with the Spirit of Christ?
2. Recall the Ten Commandments. Explain how you can live each of them in the ordinary circumstances of your daily life.
3. Print a nice copy of the Ten Commandments and place it on or near your family altar. Light a candle and invite your family to pray together to thank God for giving us His commandments, our way to true happiness and peace.



#C15-44

Chapter Summary Prayer

Father in heaven, the loving plan of your wisdom took flesh in Jesus Christ. The history of mankind was changed by Jesus' command of perfect love. May our fulfillment of His command reflect Your wisdom and so bring Your salvation to the ends of the earth. You have promised to remain forever with those who do what is just and right. Help us to live in Your presence. Lord, may we treasure Your commandments as the greatest of all riches; never let us fear that anything could be lacking while You are at our side.

Make us so love Your law Father, as to ponder it continually in our hearts. May it bear fruit in works acceptable to You.

Bless Your people, Lord. You have given us the law that we may walk from strength to strength and raise our minds to You in this valley of tears. May we receive the gift You have gained for us. You are the crowning glory of all the saints. Give us, Your children, the gift of obedience, which is the beginning of wisdom, so that we may do what You command and be filled with Your grace. May we live to praise You and never forget Your commandments.

Lord, send the spirit of the Gospel into our hearts, that we may walk in the way of Your commandments. You gave the Law to Moses on Sinai and brought it to perfection in Your Anointed One, Jesus Christ. May all people recognize the moral law which is written in their hearts, and keep it faithfully as a covenant so that they may reach eternal life with You.

Lord God, King of heaven and earth, direct, sanctify, rule, and guide our hearts, bodies, thoughts, words, and deeds so that we may keep Your commandments. Your commandments are the light of the world; they teach us to accomplish what is right and holy. Bless Your people and sanctify Your inheritance. Fill us with reverence for Your holy Name. Enable us to praise You worthily and thus reach our heavenly home, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 80

See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 289. What responsibilities do we have towards self?

Gospel of Life, John Paul II, sect. 55.

Q. 290. What does the thought of the duties and obligations which flow from the love of God and man help the Christian do?

Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, John Paul, sect. 42;

To the Youth of the World, John Paul II, sect. 6.



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

Q. 289: Jesus taught us that we are to love others as we love ourselves (cf. Matthew 19:19). What does He mean when He says we are to love ourselves?

Q. 290: Isn't loving ourselves as God commands being self-centered?
