

PART THREE SECTION TWO CHAPTER THREE (PARAGRAPHS 2052-2082)

FAITH: Catholicism | TEXT: Catechism of the Catholic Church | VOLUME: 1997 Volume | AUTHOR: John Paul II

OVERVIEW

This chapter of the Catechism situates the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) at the heart of Catholic moral theology. It opens by analyzing the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man (Matthew 19), interpreting Jesus' command to 'keep the commandments' as a condition for entering eternal life. The text asserts that the Decalogue is part of God's Covenant, revealed to Moses but also accessible to human reason through Natural Law. Crucially, it cites the Council of Trent to affirm that the justified man is still bound to observe the commandments and that they are not impossible to keep, as God provides the grace necessary for obedience. The text solidifies the Church's authority in interpreting, numbering (following St. Augustine), and teaching these laws as grave obligations required for salvation.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, The Rich Young Man, Moses, St. Augustine

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. NECESSITY OF THE LAW FOR SALVATION

Assertion: To enter into eternal life, one must keep the Ten Commandments.

"'If you would enter into life, keep the commandments' (Mt 19:16-17)... The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians (2068)."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology generally interprets Jesus' interaction with the rich young ruler as a pedagogical device to expose the man's self-righteousness and inability to keep the law perfectly (Galatians 3:24), thereby pointing him to the need for a Savior. The Catechism, however, interprets this passage prescriptively, asserting that adherence to the Decalogue is a prerequisite for 'entering life.' This suggests that while grace is necessary to help one obey, the obedience itself remains a condition of final salvation, violating the evangelical tenet that Christ's active obedience is imputed to the believer.

2. POSSIBILITY OF OBEDIENCE

Assertion: God makes it possible for humans to keep the commandments; they are not impossible.

"What God commands he makes possible by his grace. (2082)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism acknowledges that the Holy Spirit empowers believers to grow in holiness (sanctification), but maintains that no one can perfectly keep the law in this life (1 John 1:8). The Catechism, supporting the Council of Trent, insists that the commandments are not 'impossible' for the justified man. This places the burden of maintaining a state of grace on the believer's performance, whereas Evangelicals place the security of salvation on the finished work of Christ.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the function of the Law regarding justification. The Catechism (2068, 2075) explicitly links the obligation of the commandments to the attainment of eternal life, citing the Council of Trent. This establishes a soteriology where justification is preserved and increased through obedience. Evangelical theology holds that the Law's primary function regarding salvation is to condemn and shut every mouth (Romans 3:19), driving the sinner to Christ for justification by faith alone. For the Evangelical, the Law is a rule of life for the saved, not a condition for remaining saved.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Ten Commandments as God's Law; Belief in the inspiration of Matthew 19; Belief that God's grace is necessary for Christian living

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Asserts that keeping the commandments is necessary to 'enter into life' (2075).
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Elevates the Council of Trent and St. Augustine's division of the law to authoritative status.
3. [Major] Anthropology (Total Depravity) – Claims that obedience to the commandments is possible for the justified man (2082).

Semantic Warnings:

"Grace"

In Text: The divine help that makes it *possible* for us to keep the commandments and merit life.

Evangelical: Unmerited favor that saves a sinner despite their inability to keep the commandments (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Example: *In CCC 2082, grace is the fuel for works. In Romans 11:6, grace is the opposite of works.*

"Perfect"

In Text: A state of higher spiritual attainment involving evangelical counsels (poverty/chastity) beyond the commandments (2053).

Evangelical: Often refers to maturity or the imputed righteousness of Christ, not a two-tiered system of morality.

Example: *The text distinguishes between 'entering life' (commandments) and 'being perfect' (selling possessions).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering into life (Eternal Life).

How Attained: By grace, through keeping the commandments (2075).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of salvation in this text; assurance is contingent on continued obedience to 'grave obligations.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the 'good deed' (keeping commandments) a condition for eternal life, citing Matthew 19:16-17 as a prescriptive formula rather than a diagnostic tool.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Keep the commandments to enter into life (2075)
2. Observe the Ten Commandments as grave obligations (2081)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the Church's specific numbering and interpretation of the commandments (2066)
2. Believe that obedience is possible through grace (2082)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Catechesis of baptismal candidates based on the Decalogue (2065)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When Jesus told the rich young ruler to keep the commandments, do you think He was setting a standard the man could actually meet, or showing him a standard he had failed?
2. Paragraph 2082 says God makes it possible to keep the commandments. How do you handle the times you fail to keep them? Does that mean you lacked grace or lacked effort?
3. If keeping the commandments is required to enter life (2075), how many do you have to keep, and for how long, to be sure you are safe?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Rich Young Ruler's Question – This is the universal human question. The text answers with 'do this.' The Gospel answers with 'It is finished.' The young man went away sorrowful because he couldn't do it; Jesus died

because we couldn't do it. [Romans 8:3-4]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Legalism [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the knowledge that their entry into eternal life is contingent upon their ability to keep the commandments. Failure is not just a stumble; it is a potential forfeiture of salvation (mortal sin).
2. Intellectual Submission [Mild] – The believer must submit to the Church's specific numbering and interpretation of the Law, rather than simply reading Scripture directly.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (God speaking) and Reason (Natural Law).

Verification Method: Adherence to the teaching authority of the Church (Council of Trent, St. Augustine).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth through Scripture alone (2 Timothy 3:16). The CCC claims the commandments are known through 'divine revelation' AND 'reason alone' (2071), validated by Church Tradition.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1997 (Latin Typical Edition)

Authorship: Promulgated by Pope John Paul II; drafted by a commission led by Joseph Ratzinger.

Textual Issues: The text notes the variation in numbering the commandments between Jewish, Catholic/Lutheran, and Orthodox/Reformed traditions (2066).