

The Ethical Rule

By Bishop George Khodr

Many people believe that the Ten Commandments include all Christian ethics. However, the truth is that they are just an example, with numerous sins not being mentioned. Furthermore, the second commandment “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” is a feature of the Jewish liturgy that we no more have to respect, for the Lord has set us free from the Sabbath through His resurrection. And the fact that we abstain from work on Sundays is not a divine commandment, but rather an ecclesiastic arrangement to hold the Mass. Even in the Old Testament, the most comprehensive commandment is: “Love the Lord your God as yourself” (Leviticus 19: 18). This commandment was also adopted by the Christ, when He said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment”. Then He added: “And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mathew 22: 37-40). Having said this, He summarized and claimed: “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets”. According to the teachings of Jesus, ethics are equal to love.

But, what is the link between this new commandment and the Ten Commandments? Paul explained this association when he declared: “He who loves another has fulfilled the Law. For the commandments, ‘*You shall not commit adultery*’, ‘*You shall not murder*’, ‘*You shall not steal*’, ‘*You shall not covet*’, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*’. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13: 8-10).

One might begin to abide by the laws, but, when he knows Jesus, he will discover that our capability to fulfill the commandments is derived from the grace of God. In order not to turn the commandments into a sword that threatens humans, they should be emanating from the heart illuminated by the light of the Christ. This is the New Testament Jeremiah had spoken about when he said: “I will cause them to dwell safely. They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart... And I will make an everlasting covenant with them; that I will not turn away from doing them good.” (32: 37-40). Thus, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and with the safety we know God has delivered to us, we shall be capable of fulfilling every word He said. If the Word has dwelled in us, it will generate good work.

We have become in the Kingdom of the Christ, in His sovereignty upon us. When we realize His love to us, we do what satisfies him; and this shall bring us joy. With the appearance of the Kingdom of Christ, Jesus gave us the compiled Law of the Kingdom in the Gospel of Mathew, in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, mentioned in chapters 5, 6 and 7, and their equivalents in the Gospel of Luke.

The first blessing is: "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Jesus did not give a law that has no roots in the Old Testament. He came to fulfill the latter. Jesus accomplishes the prophecy and leads it to its utmost. He makes it possible thanks to the love He rendered. Jesus fulfills the ancient Law and links it to love. The commandment was above humans, but now it comes from the individual who bestowed himself to the Lord.

Jesus reached the roots. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not murder*'.... But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.... You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not commit adultery*'. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." It is not matter of abstaining from an external sin, but rather purifying our hearts so that we have no tendency for the bad.

Hence, Christian ethics consist of guiding our souls so that we love the Lord, and keeping an eye on them, to cause them to abstain from sins and love righteousness. Then, commandments will spontaneously stem from the purified heart.