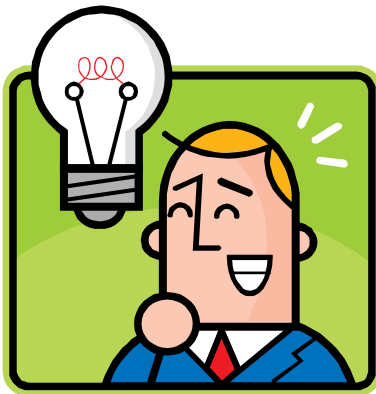


Conscience: Our Moral Compass

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. . . .” (Eph. 4:1)

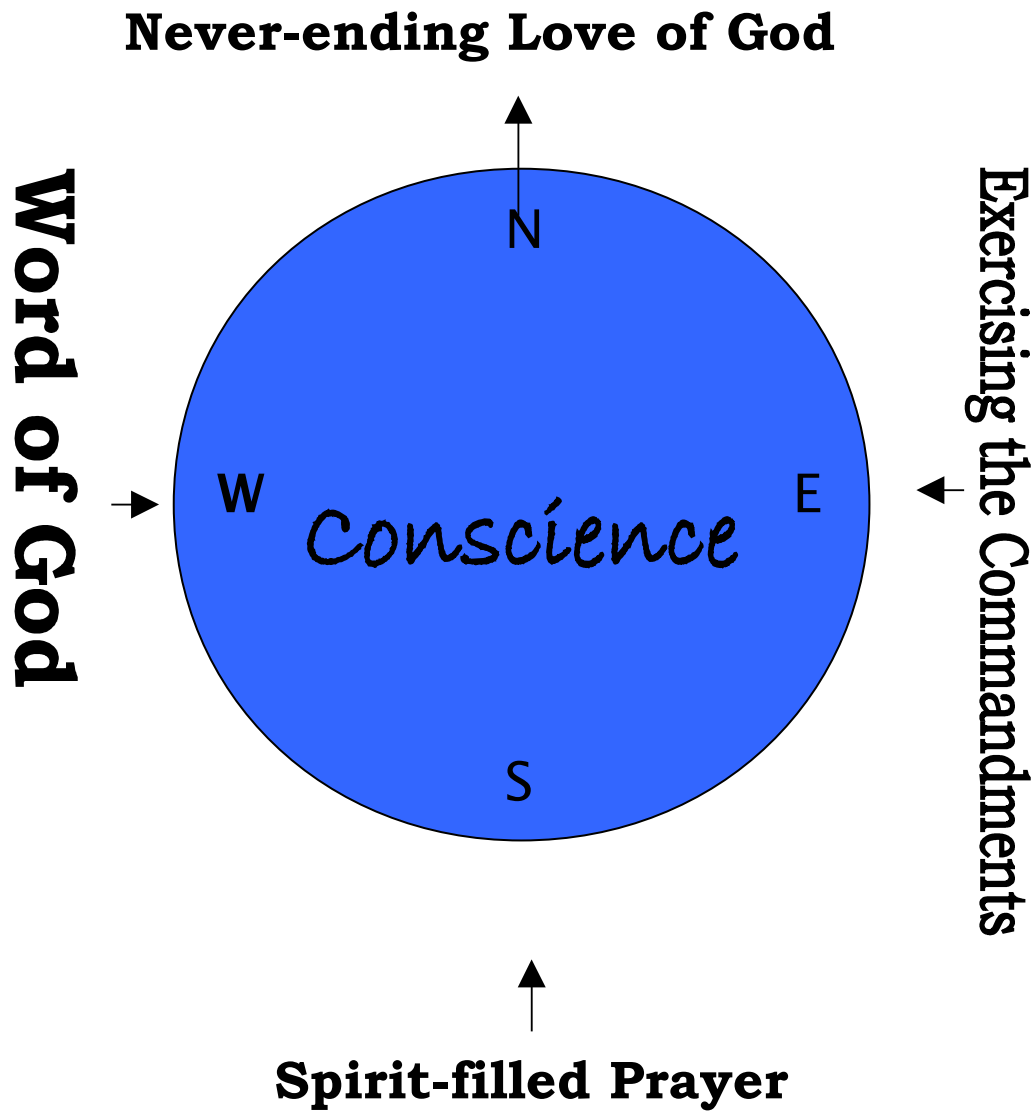
Morality is a necessary part of every life, certainly of every Christian Catholic life.



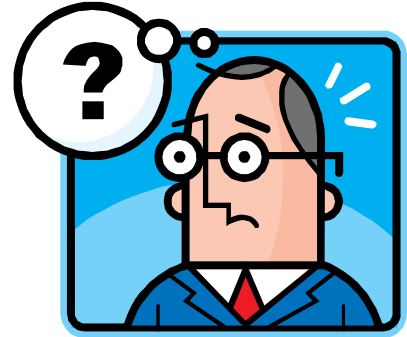
The basis for moral decisions is an informed conscience. We have the responsibility to "train" our conscience based on studying the gospel message, Church teachings, our own education and experience and follow it!

We know that following our conscience does not guarantee that we will not make mistakes. One of the best gauges we can use to try to prayerfully [evaluate our conscience](#) is to look back on our actions periodically and compare them to the ideals in the [gospel stories](#) (e.g. Luke 6:27–38: Love your enemies, turn the other cheek, do good to those who hate you, give to others).

Our Moral Compass



TRUE OR FALSE?



1. What God wants for us is ultimate happiness.

True False

2. The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the recognition of Original Sin and our subsequent tendency toward sin.

True False

3. We humans are pre–destined to commit the acts (both good and bad) that we commit.

True False

4. Sin always damages our relationship with God, others, and self.

True False

5. One can commit mortal sin and not fully realize it.

True False

6. The Ten Commandments show us the issues that constitute the "grave matter" of mortal sin.

True False

7. A venial sin does not damage our relationship with God, it only hurts other people.

True False

8. God's mercy allows us to be forgiven of all sin.

True False

9. The Bible is a good tool to help a person form his or her conscience.

True False



True Happiness

What God wants for us more than anything is ultimate happiness. And God knows that the only way to achieve ultimate happiness for all is if we live a life of obedience to the Ten Commandments infused with the spirit of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12).

Living a moral life and making good moral decisions involves five principles:

- **We are made in God's image.**

The most basic principle of the Christian moral life is the recognition that every person carries the dignity of being made in the image of God. Within each one of us lies a powerful surge toward good because we are made in God's image, and a darker pull toward sin because of the fall and Original Sin.

- **We exercise the practice of responsible freedom.**

Freedom is simply the capacity to choose. The best way to grow in freedom is to perform good acts. The way to hinder our freedom is through bad acts.

- **We understand what makes a moral act.**

There are three factors that determine the morality of any human action:

- The inherent good or evil of the act itself (objective).
- The intention of the person doing the act (subjective).
- The circumstances in which the act is performed.

All three elements must be good—the objective act, the subjective intention, and the circumstances—in order to have a morally good act.

- **We understand the reality of sin.**

When we choose to do wrong instead of good, we sin. Sin always damages our relationship with our self, with others, and with God. We commit mortal sin when we freely and consciously choose to commit a serious offense against God. A venial sin is a less serious offense against God and neighbor. While it does not destroy our relationship with God it does damage it. In our consideration of sin we remember that God is all merciful, and God's mercy is greater than sin.

- **We continually form our conscience.**

A good conscience requires lifelong formation in order to make judgments based on reason and the good that is willed by God.

Forming our moral conscience...

Each one of us must form our conscience to objective moral standards. There are several tools that help us do so.

1. The Word of God as embraced through study, prayer, and practice.
2. Advice and example from others.
3. Teachings of the Church.
4. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, wonder and awe.)

Using these tools we must regularly examine our conscience which will help us develop a morally sensitive conscience.

Up to Vatican II, Catholic morality had emphasized the “don’ts” of the moral life while paying little attention to the more positive “do’s.” Vatican II stressed that Christian morality is active and positive, not passive and negative.

Likewise, the Commandments may be viewed in terms of positive actions!

FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS....

...ARE ABOUT LOVING GOD.

Commandment	Law of the Heart	Spiritual Stretch
I am the Lord thy God.	The Law of Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Believe in and love one God.• See the reflection of God in yourself and others. • God is an experience not a thing or idea.
You shall not have strange gods before me.		Examine what we have put before God in our lives.
You shall not take the Lord God's name in vain	The Law of Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Honor the name of God and others.• Do not use God's name uselessly.• Do not invoke the name of god to justify ungodly things.• Leave God out of it when God has nothing to do with it.
Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.	The Law of Remembrance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Praise God.• Make the Sabbath a celebration of those moments in life that transcend the schedule and free us from the slavery of schedule.

THE LAST SEVEN COMMANDMENTS... ...ARE ABOUT LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Commandment	Law of the Heart	Spiritual Stretch
Honor your father and mother.	The Law of Caring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cherish human relationships • Do not take love for granted
You shall not kill.	The Law of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect life—yours and others • Choose carefully the kinds of power we opt to exercise.
You shall not commit adultery.	The Law of Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truly care about the people we say we love. • Love people more spiritually than loving them physically
You shall not steal.	The Law of Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice, love for the poor, not caring excessively about possessions
You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.	The Law of Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truth and serenity
You shall not covet thy neighbor's wife/husband.	The Law of Self-Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purity, chastity in mind and heart
You shall not covet thy neighbor's goods.	The Law of Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generosity

Jesus provides us the best model and example for living the moral life. We must immerse ourselves in the Gospels to know the person of Jesus Christ, who is at the very center of the moral life.

The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5) show us the fulfilled meaning of the moral life. At the heart of Jesus' preaching, the Beatitudes fulfill all the promises made to God's people. They express the attitude, actions, and vocation of the Christian life.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The beatitudes are important to living a moral life. In the same way that the Ten Commandments inform our minds, the Beatitudes form our hearts and emotions for living a moral life.