

## COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

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# WHY SO NEGATIVE?

By the Rev. Ormond Odhner

*Readings:* Apocalypse Explained 979:2

There are actually thirteen or fourteen commandments in the Decalogue, but as the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church says, they are spoken of as the Ten Commandments, because “ten” signifies all or what is full. Now, it is notable that out of these thirteen or fourteen commandments, eleven are put in the negative form, rather than in the positive. One does not say, “Have the Lord Jesus Christ for your God”; it says, “You shall have no other gods.” It is not “Tell the truth”, but rather “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Today’s world lays a lot of stress on the affirmative or positive approach to life. In teaching spiritual-morality, the Lord did not. Eleven times in the Decalogue these words appear, “You shall not.” Why?

In general, the answer is two-fold. First, until a person shuns evils as sins, any good act he performs is like a whited sepulcher: beautiful on the outside, but full of all uncleanness within. And second, until a person shuns evils as sins, he cannot have a true understanding of what is genuinely good for himself or for others.

As an illustration of the first answer, let us look at the fifth commandment. Here, in the Decalogue, instead of saying, “Love your neighbor,” the Lord said, “You shall not murder.” In the Heavenly Doctrine this is explained in the teaching that only insofar as a person shuns murders of every kind as sins can he love his neighbor. It is obvious that you do not show love to your neighbor by murdering him. It is also obvious that a kindly act performed for your neighbor, while in your heart you want to murder him or hate him or burn for revenge against him, is not a genuinely good act. Nor is such an act good if you actively seek to destroy his faith in God—spiritual murder. Nor is any act good if in your heart you hate the Lord so much that you wish you could blot out His name—murder in the celestial sense. All good originates in the Lord alone. For any act of a person to be good, there must be an unbroken connection between it and the Lord. In other words, the love of good that flows forth from the Lord into heaven must enter a person’s mind and from that be ultimated in act. Heaven cannot inflow into a mind filled with evil; it recoils from the mere presence of evil. Shun evil as sin, then, in order to do good.

And until evil is shunned as sin, a person cannot have any true understanding of what is genuinely good for himself or for others. The light of heaven cannot flow into a mind filled with evil. Without that light the evil in the mind will distort the understanding, grasping at every false idea that will justify it and help it achieve its purposes. But with evil removed from the mind, light from the Lord flows in, giving the person an inner perception of what is right and good in every circumstance of life.