

The statutes of God

In the Divine Services of our Church, one of our frequent requests to God is to teach us His "statutes". The term "**statutes**" or "**ordinances**" of God is found in both the Old and the New Testaments. We read for example in the very beginning of the Holy Gospel according to Luke (1:6) that "Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and **ordinances** of the Lord". The Orthodox Church has drawn from the Bible the rich terminology of its common worship and thus, naturally, it also adopted the term "statutes" of God. Every day in the Matins, in the Vespers and in the Small Compline we repeat: "**Blessed are you, Lord, teach me your statutes**". It is the 12th verse of Psalm 119 (LXX, 118). The very same verse is sung repeatedly in the Evlogitaria – the blessings of resurrection – in Matins of Sunday; in the Funeral Evlogitaria of Saturday; and especially in the Great Doxology, which we read daily at the end of Matins. This request to the Lord is repeated three times:

"Blessed - that is 'You are glorified O Lord' - teach me your statutes". Blessed are you, Master, grant me understanding of your statutes. Blessed are you, Holy One, enlighten me with your statutes".

When the Church places so much emphasis on God's "statutes" and implores God daily to teach us to co-ordinate us with them and to enlighten us with them, it is clear, that our knowledge and respect for God's statutes are something very, very important.

However, the question arises: Do we know what God's statutes are?

The word "statutes" may bring to mind the many struggles of our time for "human rights statutes", the rights of the working class and all other classes of people, who are claiming their rights, sometimes even through bloody revolutions. They claim to be deprived of support for their individual and collective interests, which they consider to be legally inalienable!

The statutes of God have nothing to do with such rights. God, we say according to theological language, is "**unaffected**", that is, he is not in need of anything. He possesses everything and no one can deprive God of the slightest thing. Therefore God does not draw His statutes from man. On the contrary, as He is Love itself, He offers man everything he needs, without the need to receive in return something from man. To put it simply: God has no interests! What then are God's rights?

The term "statutes of God" in the Bible is used in various senses. For example in Romans 1:32 "the statutes of God" is that which God has established as the righteousness of the law (Rom 2:26); and in verse 5:16 the statutes of God means the decision of God by which man is justified. In verse 33 of Psalm 119 [LXX 118] it is written: "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes". The word statutes here signifies God's commandments. The Commandments of God express the will of God, which is justice and truth. In order not to elaborate – as we do not have a lot of time – on other details found in this Psalm 119 [LXX 118] and other verses in the Holy Bible, we can say the following: "**God's statutes are the expression of God's will through His word, which reach to us as decisions and commandments of God through the**

unmistakable witnesses of God, that is, through the Bible and the Holy Tradition.

Usually, when we hear the word commandments, we humans become impatient. We think that when someone gives us orders he humiliates us, that is why we react and we try to find a way not to keep them, while at the same time trying to escape the consequences of violating the very same commandments. We should understand, that the commandments that God gives us are for our own good only. Whether we observe or violate them, God does not suffer anything, because He is "apathetic" – that is, not affected by the will or deeds of man – as characterized in dogmatic theology. **The violation of His commandments will hurt us.** The commandments of God are, if you will, like the instruction manual of an electronic machine, given to us by the construction company in order to operate the machine properly. If we violate the instructions, we may destroy it or even be ourselves injured due to the mishandling of the machine. When buying a car, we also get a manual with instructions. It says what kind of fuel the car runs on. If its engine requires diesel and we ignore it and instead fill the tank with petrol, then as soon as we start the engine, the car may catch fire and burn us who are inside.

This is what happens to the one who ignores the instructions by which the Creator created man as a psychosomatic being, consisting of body and soul. It is in our best interest to know exactly how we should act, to maintain our physical and mental health, and to reach our final destination safely and successfully.

God has given us basic instructions - "statutes-commandments" - to live by. But in everyday life we face many problems that stun us and we do not know how to deal with them. Let us then not try, distanced from God, with our own little minds to find solutions by ourselves.

Let us take refuge, my dear brothers and sisters, every day, with confidence in our Almighty and Man-Loving Lord and God, and beg Him:

-To teach us how he wants us to act in every situation.

-To give us wisdom in order to properly assess each problem and in a similar way to seek its solution.

-And to illuminate the course of our life, so that we can finish the course of our lives there where the Victorious Christ is waiting for us, to give us the crown of victory!