

Colleyville Presbyterian Church

Ten Commandments: Tenth Commandment - December 12, 2021

### **The Tenth Commandment**

Exodus 20:17: *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

Deuteronomy 5:21: *"And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."*

Is the 10th Commandment the most overlooked commandment? It is certainly, along with the Sabbath, one of the most unique of the commandments given to Israel.

What does "coveting" mean? Essentially, it means desire - to yearn for something, to long for it, to set our heart on it. And its ethical quality has to do with context - i.e. what is the object of our desire, and is it something "given" to us?

For example, it is not wrong for an unmarried man to desire an unmarried woman (or vice versa). And, importantly, it is not wrong for a married man to desire his wife (or vice versa). It is not wrong to desire friendship, or acknowledgement, or wealth, or success, or authority, or children, or sexual intimacy or any number of the good things God gives us desires for in this world. The problem becomes when we desire things or gifts or experiences or status God has given to someone else.

Rich Lusk's summary of the 10th Commandment: *"The tenth commandment means we must be content with what God has given us, and rejoice in our neighbor's prosperity."*

#### **1) The 10th commandment serves as a kind of foundational protection for the 5th-9th commandments.**

Consider the way in which all rebellion, murder, adultery, theft and false witness begins in desire for something that belongs to someone else.

For example, Genesis 3, Genesis 4, Genesis 37, 2 Samuel 11, 1 Kings 21. *To put to death covetousness in our hearts protects us from greater sin.* See James 1:14-15.

#### **2) The 10th Commandments intrudes into the "inward motions and affections" of our hearts.**

The 10th commandment is not focused on our outward actions, but the "secrets" of our hearts. (Our secrets are very often not very secret - for they are known to God, and often betrayed by our actions).

Yes, God desires, as the Scriptures teach again and again, our hearts' affections to be pure and ultimately, directed to him above all else.

Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 147. What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?

*A. The duties required in the tenth commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition, and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.*

Q. 148. What are the sins forbidden in the tenth commandment?

*A. The sins forbidden in the tenth commandment are, discontentment with our own estate; envying and grieving at the good of our neighbor, together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.*

**3) There is a deep connection between the 10th Commandment and contentment with what God has actually given to us.**

In a sense, contentment is the secret not only to happiness and joy, but also to holiness - for contentment indicates a trust in God's goodness and wisdom and a fundamental gratitude for all his grace toward us.

Contentment is the place where what we "actually" believe about God's providence is revealed.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

*A. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.*

Heidelberg Catechism Q. 27. What do you understand by the providence of God?

*A. The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.*

Luke 12:13-34, Philippians 4:4-13, James 1:14-17

What has God given you? *Everything you need to rejoice and be glad in him.* Do you believe this?

**4) The 10th Commandment is also deeply connected to how we relate to our neighbor and the "unequal" distribution of God's gifts.**

Assumed in the 10th Commandment is the reality that, in his wisdom, God gives us each of us different blessings, responsibilities, relationships and possessions. And our right posture towards our neighbor is summed up in these words: "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12).

But, in our sinful state, we are tempted to weep with other rejoice, and rejoice when others weep. How do you respond when others receive good things you desire?

**5) The 10th Commandment requires the humility to both trust God with our story and to leave the story of others to him as well.**

C.S. Lewis, "A Horse and His Boy": "It was I who wounded you," said Aslan. "I am the only lion you met in all your journeyings. Do you know why I tore you?" "No, sir."

*"The scratches on your back, tear for tear, throb for throb, blood for blood, were equal to the stripes laid on the back of your stepmother's slave because of the drugged sleep you cast upon her. You needed to know what it felt like." "Yes, sir. Please—" "Ask on, my dear," said Aslan. "Will any more harm come to her by what I did?" "Child," said the Lion, "I am telling you your story, not hers. No one is told any story but their own."*

See John 21:18-23.

**6) How do we keep the 10th Commandment and find true happiness and contentment? Perhaps, in this modern age, we need to humble ourselves and recover the rich heritage of the church throughout the ages which has always fixed its attention on the life to come.**

It seems to me that it is a decidedly modern tendency in the church to expect full happiness and satisfaction in this life, and to try and “fix” whatever gap exists between our experience and our desires - through techniques (spiritual or otherwise), through hard work, through whatever process we might employ. But, in the span of Christian history, the “gap” between our desires and our actual experience has most often been resolved by focusing one’s attention on the next life - heaven and the resurrection.

"One drop of the sweetness of heaven is enough to take away all the sourness and bitterness of all the afflictions in the world." ~ Jeremiah Burroughs

Calvin: "The happiness promised us in Christ does not consist in outward advantages--such as leading a joyous and peaceful life, having rich possessions, being safe from all harm, and abounding with delights such as the flesh commonly longs after. No, our happiness belongs to the heavenly life!"

Calvin: "Hence the reason why faith is so rare in the world; nothing being more difficult for our sluggishness than to surmount innumerable obstacles in striving for the prize of our high calling. To the immense load of miseries which almost overwhelm us, are added the jeers of profane men, who assail us for our simplicity, when spontaneously renouncing the allurements of the present life we seem, in seeking a happiness which lies hid from us, to catch at a fleeting shadow. In short, we are beset above and below, behind and before, with violent temptations, which our minds would be altogether unable to withstand, were they not set free from earthly objects and devoted to the heavenly life, though apparently remote from us. Wherefore, he alone has made solid progress in the Gospel who has acquired the habit of meditating continually on a blessed resurrection."

**7) The keeping of the 10th Commandment comes with a rich blessing - true happiness and peace.**

This really is available to us. It will not be “perfect.” But true happiness and peace is actually available to us in this life as we abide with Jesus, as we trust the wisdom of our Father, as we give thanks for what he has given us and find contentment in it, as we rejoice in our neighbor’s good fortune, and as we as we look in faith, hope and expectation to the fulfillment of all our desires in the world to come.