



The Ten Commandments

Part 12 – Be Content

Exodus 20:17

You shall not covet...

At first glance the Tenth Commandment seems to be unique in the second table of the Law (#'s 5-10) in that it governs thoughts and motives rather than actions. Of course each of the commandments reach well beyond volitional actions and penetrate deeply into the heart. But the tenth bypasses actions and speaks directly to the interior world of the individual.

Specifically the final commandment forbids coveting. Coveting is the desire to possess that which belongs to

someone else. There are good and proper ways to want something. But coveting is the sinful desire to possess something. It is akin to lust. Sinful sexual desires, materialism, and jealousy are all examples of coveting. The commandment also serves as a warning to keep our desires in general in check. To be sure, there are things we need in this life. But the Scriptures remind us often against a preoccupation with worldly goods which can so easily overtake the proper desire for heavenly treasure (Matt 6:19-20).

In a sense the Tenth Commandment serves as a summation of the others. The First Commandment forbids coveting the gods of the nations. The Second forbids coveting the worship practices of the world. The Fourth forbids coveting time. The Fifth forbids coveting the honor due to others. The Sixth forbids coveting improper sexual gratification.

The commandment against coveting reminds us that God's law governs our heart. It governs the way we think and how we are motivated.

Main Idea: There is great joy and protection from sin found in godly contentment.

1. What coveting is

- To covet is to desire something that does not rightfully belong to you. We covet every time we set our desires on something that does not belong to us. Coveting is akin to greed and lust which both refer to sinful desires. The great English Puritan Thomas Watson called greed, "an insatiable desire of getting the world." More recently, coveting has been defined as "an inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire for something."
- The 10th Commandment is meant to be understood comprehensively. That is the reason behind the seven specific examples and the final statement of "or anything else."
- The 10th Commandment does not prohibit desire. God gives us a high capacity for desire. It glorifies God when we desire good things with which he desires to bless us. So, the Christian life is not about ridding the self of desire. What God prohibits is sinful desire. And as the commandment demonstrates, it is possible to desire a good thing in a sinful way.
- Colossians 3:5-6 – "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming." Here we see that covetousness is defined as idolatry. In this sense we see that idolatry is an inordinate desire or an improper desire. That desire can make an object of worship out of something bad or even something good.

2. What coveting does

a) Generates sinful acts

James 1:14–15 – “[14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

- The 10th Commandment is not a blanket condemnation of all desire. God gives good desires. He gives us the desire for food and water, for knowledge of Him, for relationship, for beauty, for justice, for truth, for heaven, etc. God’s law prohibits *sinful* desires. And not only desires for sinful things. But sinful desires for otherwise good things are prohibited. That is the heart of coveting.
- In the Old Testament the Hebrew verb “to covet” is often used in conjunction with a “doing” verb. That is, the Scriptures often make a direct connection between the attitude of coveting and a sinful act.

b) Undermines love

James 4:1-2a – [1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.”

- You cannot covet what belongs to your neighbor and love them at the same time. Coveting causes quarrels and fights because it introduces competition into your relationship with your neighbors. Coveting destroys our ability to rejoice with our neighbor in their rejoicing and instead causes us to resent them for what they have.

c) Fuels discontent

- James writes of our desires luring and enticing us (James 1:14). Those desires tell us that what we have is not enough. That’s how coveting gives birth to sinful actions.

d) Challenges God’s goodness

- When we covet we are indulging the idea that God is holding out on us; that he is not giving us what we need or deserve. This was the temptation that led to the sin in the garden (Gen. 3:1-3). The serpent directly challenged the goodness and generosity of God. Surely in this life we will be dismayed by injustices and suffering. There are times when our circumstances threaten to overwhelm us and we wonder if God is watching or if he even cares. In those times we must remember that God spared not his own Son but gave him up for us that we might be forgiven of our sins. Surely He has not forsaken us given us less than we deserve.

3. How coveting dies

1 Timothy 6:6-10; 17-19 – “But godliness with contentment is great gain...”

- Paul warns against the love of money which is a specific kind of coveting. He does not condemn the rich but rather exhorts them to think properly about their wealth and to be generous.

Philippians 4:11-12 – “...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content...”

- Contentment is where coveting goes to die. Paul had found the secret of being content with much or with little. This sort of contentment is hard won. It requires that our minds and affections are shaped by God’s Word. Paul’s, “I can do all things through Christ...” is applied directly to the heart’s battle for contentment. A contented heart is the polar opposite of a covetous heart.