

The Ten Commandments

Commandment 10: You shall not covet

Recently I laid a small circle of poison around a hill of stinging ants. Thinking the tiny granules of poison were food, the ants began to pick them up and carry them throughout the colony. I returned later to see how well the poison was working. Hundreds of the stinging ants were carrying the poison down into their hill. Then I noticed a hole in the circle of the poison. Some of the poison was moving the opposite way—away from the hill. Some smaller, non-stinging ants had found this “food” and were stealing it from their ant neighbours. Thinking they were getting the other ants’ treasure, they unwittingly poisoned themselves. When we see someone with more than we have, we must beware. The hunger to beg, borrow, or steal our way into what is theirs may poison us spiritually.

Bob James

Exodus 20: 17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

1) Self centeredness – the heart of covetousness

- Covetousness has self centeredness at its root
- This is reflected in our lives in various ways:
 - In the way we pray. Our prayers are often a list of requests for things we want or requests for God to bless us with more than we already have.
 - In the way we desire things or people without any regard for others. It’s has in mind the pursuit of personal happiness
 - Proverbs 30: 15 The leech has two daughters. ‘Give! Give!’ they cry.
 - In the way we hold on to our things.
 - In Matthew 19: 16 – 22 a rich man approached Jesus and asked him how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commands. But after stating that he does Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. This was one thing that he wasn’t willing to do. Jesus had touched the raw nerve – he wasn’t willing to obey the 10th commandment.
- We could say that the tenth commandment of “Do not covet” sums up the attitude behind the Ten Commandments.
 - If the Ten Commandments are incorporated in the two commands of loving God and loving your neighbour then the command not to covet takes our focus off ourselves and allows us to, firstly, centre our focus on God, then, secondly onto our neighbour leaving no room for self centeredness
- How can the Tenth Commandment sum up the attitude behind the other commandments?
 - “This is a most excellent moral precept, the observance of which will prevent all public crimes; for he who feels the force of the law that prohibits the inordinate desire of any thing that is the property of another, can never make a breach in the peace of society by an act of wrong to any of even its feeblest members.”

Adam Clarke on the Tenth Commandment

- Firstly we covet by focussing on ourselves and not on God
 - We covet other gods or idols for our own happiness and run after them without any regard to God.
 - We misuse the name of the Lord and do not intervene when other do so because self centeredness covets attention rather than the glory of God
 - We covet our time as our own to do with what we like and God will get some if there is some left over rather than dedicating a day for His honour. Our rest time is so that we are energised to pursue the goals of life that we covet rather than to be energised to serve God wherever we may be.
- Secondly we covet by focussing on ourselves and not on loving others
 - As the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments forbid us to injure our neighbor in deed, the ninth forbids us to injure him in word, and the tenth, in thought. No human eye can see the coveting heart; it is witnessed only by him who possesses it and by Him to whom all things

are naked and open (Luke 12:15-21). But it is the root of all sins of word or deed against our neighbor (James 1:14-15).

Barnes Commentary

- Coveting our own happiness rather than honouring our parents
 - Desiring something enough that we will kill for it
 - Desiring our neighbour's wife that leads to adultery
 - Desiring our neighbour's possessions so much that we will steal them to have them
- When does proper desire become coveting? I think we can put the answer down simply: desire becomes sin when it fails to include the love of God or men. Further, I think there are two practical tests as to when we are coveting against God or men: first, I am to love God enough to be contented; second, I am to love men enough not to envy.

Francis Schaeffer

2) The consequences of covetousness

- A discontentment with life (Israelites)
- Disobedience to God (Rich man)
- You become ensnared by the things you covet
 - Deut 7: 25 "The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God"
- It leads to commit other sins (David)
- Domination of others (Military conquests)
- Strife
 - There will always be strife when someone wants something that someone else has got and is not content until he has it
- Eternal consequences
 - Matthew 19: 23 – 24 "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"

3) Dealing with covetousness

- Recognise it for the sinfulness that it is
 - We might not have realised how serious covetousness is because it is an inward sin seen by God and not by man.
 - Romans 7: 7 – 8 What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.
- The Law is a tutor to lead us to Christ
 - Galatians 3: 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith
 - Accept God's forgiveness and deliverance from the sin of covetousness
 - Romans 7: 24 – 25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!
- Learn to live a life of contentment in Christ
 - Philippians 4: 11 – 13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.