

What The Ten Commandments Really Mean: 10th Commandment

The tenth commandment concerns itself with property. It is more detailed than most of the other commandments because it spells out what is right and wrong with respect to the property of others. The tenth commandment states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17).

Man is covetous by nature. Jesus said so. ". . . That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:20-22). The Apostle Paul adds, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers" (Rom. 1:28-29). "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:1-2). These texts reveal that man is covetous by nature. Coveting is a major aspect of human nature, a flaw that is deeply ingrained in habit and practice of many. James tells us, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" (Jas. 4:5). Envy is a symptom of covetousness.

In the King James Version of the Bible the word "covet" describes this characteristic of desiring the possessions of others. How does the Bible view coveting? Notice this statement. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The fact that coveting is regarded as the same as idolatry links it to the first commandment. Those who covet the goods and possessions of others make that very desire a god in itself. Why? Because it places the desire to satisfy the self ahead of the true God who forbids this practice. Coveting violates both the tenth and the first commandments.

What is the meaning of the word "covet?" The dictionary defines coveting as the exceeding of reasonable limits. It is this excessive craving for what belongs to another. It is lust. Paul defines it as such. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). Coveting is the root of many sins.

Due to the plethora of goods and articles mass produced in this modern world, the list of prohibitions in Exodus 20:17 could be expanded to include almost anything that does not belong to us.

There is the continual tendency in almost all of us to be dissatisfied with what we have. People seem to want something better. Those who are swept away with the obsession to always want something better are in a trap. They are controlled by lust-the exceeding of reasonable limits. What does the Bible say about this problem? "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:7-8). Coveting or lust is the motivation behind most wars. James wrote, "From whence come wars and fighting's among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. 4:1-3). The origin of war begins with theft driven by the desire to obtain the possession of others.

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The tenth commandment goes far beyond the acts of violence or subterfuge that dispossess others of their possessions or wealth. The tenth commandment is designed to govern our thoughts. During Old Testament times God did not hold one accountable for what he may have thought. He required obedience to the letter of the law only. A look at the Ten Commandments implies a proper attitude and frame of mind behind that obedience. Those who are driven by lust fail to bring their desires under control; they lack the determination to avoid that which, in reality, keeps them unhappy. Lust and excessive desire run uncontrolled in the hearts and minds of many. So, the tenth commandment is a guide to our thoughts. It states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17).

Notice how the wicked are described in the Bible. They refuse to take God into consideration in what they do. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight. . ." (Ps. 10:4-5). "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity" (Ps. 94:11). The thoughts of man have no real lasting value. Overcoming the sin of covetousness requires a renewal of our thoughts, the recognition of the vanity of human thoughts, and the desire to acquire the thoughts of God. When it comes to our dealings with our fellow man, the Ten Commandments tell us how to apply our thoughts in our daily contacts. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Ph'p. 2:5). The mind of Christ helps us to do the will of God and to resist the temptations of the flesh. Those who have God's Spirit are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14). They are not controlled by the excessive desire to possess the goods and wealth of others (Rom. 8:4).

How badly do men need to regulate their thoughts? The Bible tells us, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:7-9). Most of the actions of men result from their thoughts. Thoughts that are wrong must be brought under control. To attain to the righteousness of God, man must recognize the problem of his own nature and seek to change his thoughts to conform to the mind of God. Without the mind of God, and with the failure to understand the difference between right and wrong, man has little chance in overcoming the sin of coveting.

Man is engaged in a spiritual struggle. We must have God's power in order to overcome the weakness of coveting.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

When reflecting on the tenth commandment, keep the above text in mind. We must not allow our thoughts to determine how we react when we want something that we cannot afford. Countless people are heavily in debt, paying high rates of interest, because they allow their desires to dictate their life styles. Coveting is a major problem for millions. Man needs the help of God. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

The proper use and control of money is a gigantic problem for many. Why? Because they are ruled by lust and the desire to possess things. The possession of and use of money is a highly emotional issue. Coveting leads many into credit card debt. As a result of easy credit millions have placed themselves under servitude (Prov. 22:7). Coveting and easy credit have become a curse. Money lenders, along with advertising, have taken advantage of this human weakness. People who covet seldom think of the

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consequences of their actions. One who cannot control his emotions and continually covets, more than likely, will soon find himself heavily in debt. Thousands of homes have been ruined and marriages wrecked by the sin of coveting. Gambling, a form of lust, has led to untold harm. Gambling is such a powerful pull for many that it becomes compulsive. There is always the hope of winning, and even when many do win, they promptly lose the money they have gained. In the long run they usually lose. Gambling plays upon the lust that is in the human heart. It should be avoided like the plague.

With God's help the sin of coveting can be overcome. Those who view coveting lightly will not only hurt themselves but others as well. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Those who covet the wealth and goods of others are instructed, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9-10). "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). While coveting may seem impossible for some to overcome, Jesus said, ". . . The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).