

REVIEWING THE LAST COMMANDMENT

"The Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet," often receives less attention compared to its counterparts. At first glance, its internal nature may appear less serious, but a deeper evaluation reveals the pivotal role it plays in steering our moral compass." This article explores the interconnection it has with the other nine.

We commonly call these commandments, The Ten Commandments; but, the Hebrew literally translates as, the commands of Exodus 20, the *Ten Commandments*; however, it can also translate to "the ten words" or "the ten statements". This passage of Scripture is a divine utterance from God, conveying more than simply a list of commands; it is ten principles of life that will guide the universe for eternity. These *Ten Commandments* are not meant to be restricted to merely a list of do's and don'ts. They are words from the Mind of the Most High. They provide boundaries and the parameters of living to please our Creator. These words contain the knowledge of righteousness that our Father expects us to hold deep within our minds, hearts, and souls. They provide a framework for harmony not only between us and our God, but also between us and all of humanity.

In particular, the tenth Commandment is found in Exodus 20:17: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

It is the last instruction given in the sequence of Commands. As such, it is generally mentioned less than the others. Does this mean coveting is marginalized in terms of preference—it's the least important Command?

Consider what the Apostle James wrote: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). James' statement teaches us there are no "throwaway" Commandments; there are no "minor" Commands in the decalogue. They are all equal in their relationship to each other.

With this in mind, it is interesting and instructive to consider the connection between the individual Commandments. In contemplating these relationships, we can see how they reinforce each other.

Consider breaking one is equivalent to *breaking them all*: the variety of combinations is just stunning! For example, if you steal, you are not honoring God. You make an idol of the items you steal, thus breaking the second Commandment. By stealing, you are taking God's Name in vain, you are ruining His reputation by stealing, thereby breaking the third Commandment. Being a thief, you are not bringing honor to your earthly parents, and most certainly *are not honoring* your heavenly Father. As part of the church (a.k.a. Bride of Christ), you are actually following Satan in your dishonest behavior; instead of Christ, you're violating the betrothal, the seventh command, which is a type of adultery! You must lie in attempting to hide your crime, thus breaking the ninth Commandment. The act of stealing demonstrates that you covet someone else's

property, breaking the tenth Commandment. Stealing breaks God's Law, which defines sin (1 John 3:4). And "the wages of sin is death..." Hence, you are in effect murdering your future spiritual life, breaking the sixth Commandment (Rom. 6:23).

Other interactive examples of the commandments include: If one murders, they are stealing someone else's life. If one commits adultery, they are coveting someone's spouse, stealing their neighbor's spouse. (Eventually murdering their future self if they don't repent.)

If someone in Covenant does not observe the Sabbath, not only are they breaking the first four Commandments, but they are also stealing time from God! *Sabbath-breakers are not honoring their heavenly Father*; they also covet time that is God's. It is quite weighty and sobering to consider the depth of this violation.

Returning to the Commandment concerning coveting, the language of **Exodus 20:17** references things of value during that time like oxen, donkeys, servants, or your neighbor's wife. In modern terms, we should not covet someone's car, boat, job, home, etc. As God said, "...anything that is your neighbor's."

Let's get a clearer understanding of just what is meant by coveting. *Noah Webster's Dictionary* defines coveting as "To desire or wish for, with eagerness; to desire earnestly to obtain or possess; [*in a good sense*: "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (**1 Corinthians 12:31**). Or, conversely, "To desire inordinately; to desire that which is unlawful to obtain or possess; in a bad sense: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, wife or servant" (**Exodus 20:1**).

Synonyms for *covet* are *desire, want, long for, yearn for, crave, or lust after*. Coveting is more abstract than many of the other Commandments. We can directly observe theft, murder, and rude disrespect of a parent. We can actually see idols in Hindu temples or Catholic churches.

Our Messiah did not do away with the Commandments that were revealed to Moses on Sinai (Matt. 5:17). Christ not only lived a life of obedience to them, but He also expanded upon their application. *In Matthew Chapter 5* (the Beatitudes), Christ **enlarged** the Law's focus to include not only one's outward actions, but the individual's heart as well—***the person's intent!*** Christ taught a deeper, love-centered interpretation of the Commandments.

Yahshua the Messiah emphasized that the Law's true purpose is rooted in *love for God* and for neighbor. Thus, demonstrating to us that *intentions and attitudes* are just as important as the actions themselves. ***Internal intent guides external action.***

- "You shall not murder" becomes "do not even get angry": malicious thoughts violate God's law just as much as the act itself. (Matt. 5:21-26)
- "You shall not commit adultery" becomes "do not even lust after another who is not your spouse": lustful thoughts create inner desire that could lead to breaking the seventh Commandment. (Matt. 5:27-28)

- "Love your neighbor" becomes "love your enemies": Jesus amplified this Commandment to include loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. (Matt. 5:43-48 & Rom. 12:14-21)

Loving your enemies is a type of love exhibited by God; it is a higher level of love. The Commandment against improper coveting illuminates *the true inner self*: the mind and the heart. Our actions do not necessarily reveal coveting. *It is possible to improperly covet in secret.* This sin speaks to the core of our character—*it illustrates who we actually are!* It reveals more than simply our specific thoughts and methods of reasoning. It uncovers the essential core of our personal belief system—our character and integrity.

The website *Watermark Waves* states, "In the Bible, the word *covet* means to strongly desire something that does not belong to you. It's more than just wanting something nice. It's wanting it in a way that leads to sin. Coveting can start in the heart, *but it often leads to harmful actions.* The Bible warns us about coveting because it pulls our hearts away from God. It causes people to chase after things—money, relationships, status—while forgetting to trust in God's plan and provision."

These desires become problematic when they focus on what belongs to someone else, especially when they escalate into jealousy, greed, envy, and obsession. Unchecked, out-of-control coveting and lusting leads to harmful behavior, law-breaking, and the violation of God's Commandments. Fixation on wanting more of something that doesn't belong to you, or something forbidden to you, leaves a person with feelings of discontent, sadness, or even anger.

The first recorded sin in the Bible was a result of Eve coveting the forbidden fruit! "The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and appeared delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So, she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate it, too" (Gen. 3:6 NLT).

Eve was fixated, dazzled by something she should not have.—God forbade it! Her coveting was instrumental in allowing the Serpent's conniving rhetoric to persuade her to not just sin in her mind, but to follow through with **action**, which led to her and Adam's expulsion from the garden (and the intimate relationship they had with their Creator.) Coveting was the foundation for the first murder! Cain coveted the favor Abel received from God, and consequently killed him.

There are many examples of disasters associated with coveting in the Bible. Covetousness was instrumental in defrauding Esau of God's birthright blessing. *Covetousness was involved concerning the money-changers in the Temple.* *The Rich Fool* and *the rich young ruler* both deal with the problem of covetousness.

Even the great King David was plagued by covetousness for a time. David's coveting of Bathsheba led to adultery and murder, as he had Uriah killed in battle to cover his sin. More viscerally, there was Judas: not only did he misunderstand the purpose of

Yahshua's first coming, but He also coveted wealth and power, infamously betraying the Messiah for 30 pieces of silver.

As the early church began, Ananias and Sapphira lied about how much money they gave to the church, coveting a greater reputation while secretly keeping their wealth. This dishonesty and covetousness led to their immediate deaths.

There was Simon the Sorcerer's covetousness for power as recorded in Acts 8:9-25. Simon desired the power and esteem the Apostles had through their proper use of God's Holy Spirit. Simon lusted to purchase what is freely given by God's grace. Coveting, in all its forms, is dangerous; it draws us away from God and divides our hearts. These stories serve as warnings, illustrating how unchecked desire can evolve into consequential actions. The chain of events often initiates within the mind, reinforcing the idea of coveting; and though unseen, eventually wreaks visible havoc.

Christ warned us: *"And He said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions'" (Luke 12:15). "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [money, possessions, fame, status, or whatever is valued *more than the Lord*]" (Matt. 6:24 Amplified Bible)*

Inordinate desire for the things of this world causes us to focus on what we lack rather than *what we have*. If we are occupied in this manner, it keeps us from trusting God to provide.

Notice: **Proverbs 23:4**

"Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
be wise enough to restrain yourself.
When you glance at wealth, it disappears,
for it makes wings for itself
and flies like an eagle to the sky." [BSB]

It is important to note that we are physical human beings with needs and desires that are perfectly reasonable and acceptable. We all need food, shelter, clothing, love, etc.; however, the **priority** we place on these desires is the issue our Great God is concerned about. Proper desire must include being grateful for what God has provided, is providing, and will provide. Any blessings He bestows upon us are contingent upon His timing and His Will: **not ours!**

We are to love our neighbor; as such, we should be happy when they have success and God's blessings. The tenth Commandment is significant to our God. The All-knowing, Almighty God uses this standard to weigh the hearts of men. According to the Amplified Bible, "Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs *and* examines the hearts" [of people and their motives] (Pro. 21:2).

As it is with physical ailments, it is essential to look at the root cause of the problem, not just the symptoms. Sickness starts small via some virus or bacteria that invades our body undetected. As it grows, it eventually manifests as an illness, such as a sore throat, rash, or the flu.

God knows most sin begins as a wanton desire (*this is coveting*) in the mind; therefore, He has wisely commanded us against coveting. This Command is key in helping us to obey the other Commandments!

John Reid, of the *Church of the Great God*, said the following in a sermon on coveting: "Thou shall not covet. It is the capstone commandment, alerting us that if we covet, we will end up in the spirit of breaking all Ten Commandments. The moment we seriously covet wrongly, we commit idolatry. We allow ourselves to focus on our desire and to lust after what we should not have. *We covet* what God tells us we must not covet, thus placing the idol of our desire before God's clear law." Notice, "Therefore, put to death (*subdue, control*) your members which are on the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). The Greek word for "covetousness" is *pleonexia*, meaning "the desire to have more."

"Obsessive desire for something is in fact a form of idolatry because we put our energy, our self-interest, and desires in the forefront of our minds, taking the place of God's rightful place of supremacy in our lives. We end up setting an idol in our heart, breaking the very first two Commandments."

Covetousness and Temptation go hand-in-hand: an unholy duo that leads us into sin and away from the Commands of the Covenant. Our society is saturated with consumerism, materialism, a love of money, and hedonistic traditions. So many among us covet wealth, influence, and the desire to become the next uber-popular *Tik Tok* star.

Hundred-million-dollar *Mega-Lotto* games are now commonplace; *billions upon billions* of dollars are spent gambling each year. So many covet the allure of instant wealth, *even if* it is made on the backs of the poor and downtrodden in society! Sports gambling is now available on our phones 24/7. Sin City– Las Vegas itself, is falling on hard times as our nation has thrust open the floodgates to covetous gambling anywhere, anytime. These pursuits often promise fulfillment, but instead foster a relentless chase for ***more***, detracting from genuine happiness and spiritual fulfillment. We must remain vigilant, keenly aware of this fatal enemy: coveting in our hearts. It is important to understand that we can never defeat desire, lust, or covetousness with more of the same!

Greed and the want of riches ***is not extinguished*** with *more riches* or more things. Sadly, this is illustrated by lottery winners who continue to play, *even after* obtaining enormous wealth. "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also *is* vanity" (Eccl 5:10).

Replacing silver in this verse with something else: he who loves money will not be satisfied with money. He who loves diamonds will not be satisfied with diamonds. She who loves designer handbags will not be satisfied with designer handbags, I could go on and on. The point being, when you really fixate on something, you want bigger, shinier,

rarer, and more of it: it is a desire hard to quench. Coveting unveils our thinking, our mindset.

Years ago, my brother Paul was traveling in Japan and noticed an unattended vending machine dispensing beer. My brother was amused and asked the customer he was with: "How can there be a beer vending machine? What prevents a teenager from buying beer?" The Japanese man was really perplexed, "Why would a teenager buy beer? They are **not** old enough." His answer completely surprised my brother because obviously in the USA, teenagers would be buying beer from that unattended machine 24/7!

This interaction demonstrates the difference between these two cultures. There are distinct differences in the mindsets, morals, and expectations *of people* in different societies. God is creating a family. He wants to live with that family in harmony forever. A future world without sin, corruption, jealousy, envy, greed, or covetousness. This utopian existence can only be accomplished if all members of that Kingdom are of like mind. Individuals not just understanding, but putting into practice, *ALL* that God has said.

The Ten Words, (a.k.a. the Ten Commandments), provide the perfect framework for developing that mindset, a mind based on the thoughts of the perfect ideal of the Eternal King of the Universe.

The foundation of God's Law of Liberty is love: true love, benevolent and affectionate! **Love** is an *action word*, agape is *Love in action*. Agape love embodies selflessness, sacrifice, and unconditional care for others without expecting reciprocation. If we are to exhibit this sort of love for others, we must work on expunging any traces of covetousness we retain from our selfish nature.

We cannot hold on to desires for the things possessed by others if we genuinely expect to have such a God-like level of love for them. Agape prompts us to genuinely celebrate others' successes and blessings, dispelling envy and instead fostering community and unity. To be truly happy and free, we must be content with what we already have. ***Being content is the opposite of covetousness.*** Contentment, therefore, becomes the antidote to covetousness. It is not a passive acceptance of circumstances but an active practice of appreciating and valuing the present. The Apostle Paul's words to Timothy serve as a guiding principle: **Godliness with contentment is great gain.** If we are completely satisfied with all that God has provided, be it during a time of feasting, or famine, a time of safety, or peril; we will have obtained a higher level of faith—a faith as exemplified by our biblical ancestors like Job, Joseph, and Daniel.

Baptist theologian John Piper said, "God has gone the extra mile in the Bible to warn us mercifully that the idolatry of covetousness is a no-win situation. It's a dead-end street in the worst sense of the word. It's a trick and a deadly trap."

John Rittenbaugh of the Church of the Great God states, "The tenth commandment pierces through surface Christianity, truly revealing whether a person has surrendered his

will to God or not. The spiritual requirements for keeping this commandment are in some ways more rigid than any other because they pierce right through to the thoughts....we step from the outer world of word and deed into the secret place where all good and evil begins: ***the heart and its intents.***"

Our obedience to the "bookend" Commandments of **Exodus 20**, "You shall have no other gods before me" and "You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor," is not visible to the outside world. However, our behavior concerning these Commands does in fact demonstrate our true character to God. These unseen matters of the heart are only visible to you and our Father! We must be mindful of this aspect in our relationship with Him, as it is so easy to deceive ourselves. (Jer. 17:9-10). "Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them" (Deut. 11::16). God has laid before us His rules of the Covenant. He is the Righteous Judge of our level of attainment in reaching the standards He has set.

"Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path *and my lying down*, and are acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139: 1-3). We must be steadfast in keeping ourselves "in check" regarding these *spiritual Commands*.

Let's remember, sin starts inside the mind, and in our heart. With the help of God's Holy Spirit, we can continue the work toward transforming our nature into the image of Jesus Christ. We must battle our human nature by concentrating on spiritual values rather than material things. Earnestly using prayer, studying scripture, and examining our hearts to ensure our **treasure** is placed in heavenly things, not earthly ones. Remember, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of *the things he possesses*. . . . But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things *shall be added to you*" (Luke 12:15 &:31) Christ says, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give *in exchange for his soul*" (Matt.16:26)?

Solomon lived a life immersed in covetousness and riches. Yet, the king gifted with untold Wisdom wrote this: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's *all*. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil" (Eccl. 12:13-14).

Ultimately, the Tenth Commandments serves as both a warning and an invitation. It warns us of the dangers of unchecked desires while inviting us into a lifestyle rich with spiritual fulfillment and peace. By understanding and addressing covetousness, we embrace a divine framework for living that prioritizes eternal values over fleeting earthly possessions. As we aspire to align our lives with God's commandments, overcoming covetousness stands as a fundamental step toward spiritual maturity. It requires diligence, introspection, and a heart open to change, but the rewards—a life of contentment, peace, and divine love—are profound! Let us take this journey together, conscious of our thoughts, desires, and **INTENTS**, and remain steadfast in our pursuit of a "*lifestyle*" that honors God above all else.