

The Tenth Commandment

by Martin G. Collins

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The Ten Commandments are living, moving, active laws that are even more permanent than the laws of physics that govern matter and energy. They are automatic in their results. If we break them, we incur horrible curses, but if we keep them, we receive wonderful blessings. So it is with the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Covetousness is an insatiable desire for worldly gain and lies at the heart of where most sin originates. Of all the commandments, the tenth especially emphasizes man's relationship to man, which is readily seen in the repeated phrase "your neighbor's." It protects the interests of others in seven major areas listed individually within the commandment.

1. How is covetousness involved in the process of sin? James 1:13-15. Is anyone immune to covetousness? Jeremiah 6:13. Where do wars and fights come from? James 4:1-2.

Comment: It is not wrong to want something. We can want a spouse, a house or a car, but not if it belongs to our neighbor—unless he is selling a possession, and we acquire it in a fair and honest manner. However, when "desire has conceived," it may result in breaking any of the Ten Commandments, including covetousness, to which everyone is susceptible. Uncontrolled lust for power, land and wealth can drive men to murder, if necessary, to obtain a coveted prize.

2. Should we value our accomplishments by our possessions? Luke 12:15; I Timothy 6:6-11; Matthew 16:26.

Comment: The apostle Paul tells Timothy that "godliness with contentment is great gain" and that, instead of possessions, we should be pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Paul learned to be content in whatever state he was in (Philippians 4:11). Jesus Christ set our primary goal as seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). The inevitable result of doing this will be wonderful blessings and eternal life.

3. Covetousness is described as what spiritual sin? Colossians 3:5. After a man gathers possessions through covetousness, what does he normally do? Habakkuk 2:9; Obadiah 4; Psalm 39:6.

Comment: If we seek something contrary to God's will, we covet. If we lust after something, it can become an idol to us, and we will serve it (Romans 6:16). The Bible associates lust with pride and vanity (I John 2:16-17). When a man amasses possessions, he feels a false sense of security because they make him feel he is superior to others. He deceives himself into thinking that calamity will not touch him, yet covetousness is never satisfied and brings on many sorrows.

4. What does covetousness produce? Joshua 7:20-21, 25; Proverbs 1:18-19; Acts 5:1-10; I Timothy 6:9-10.

Comment: Covetousness produces only negative results like theft, lying, murder, harmful lusts and apostasy. Only sorrow comes from covetousness—and eventually death, if it is allowed to dominate a person's mind.

5. Should a minister of God be covetous? I Timothy 3:1-3. What can covetousness cost us? I Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:3, 5.

Comment: It is just as wrong for a minister to covet as it is for anyone else, and his judgment is harsher. A minister should be setting a proper example in this area for others to follow. An unqualified man should not covet the position of minister if he does not meet the biblical requirements (I Timothy 3; Titus 1). God will exclude any covetous person from His Kingdom.

6. Who delivers us from sin, including covetousness? Romans 7:22-25; 8:1-2; Galatians 5:16. What is our responsibility? Proverbs 23:4-5; 28:16; Luke 12:15; Romans 6:12-13; Hebrews 13:5.

Comment: Even the elect struggle in resisting covetousness, but God through His Spirit helps us to resist the desires that war within us. He expects us to oppose the lusts of the flesh, and promises to help us if we obey Him. It is our responsibility to present ourselves as instruments of righteousness, being careful to hate covetousness and be content with what we have.

7. What is the opposite of coveting? Proverbs 21:26; 22:9. What should we pursue? Matthew 6:19-21; I Timothy 6:10-11.

Comment: Although the tenth commandment deals most obviously with human and physical relationships, its spiritual requirement is in many ways even more rigid. Like the others, the tenth regulates the mind and heart (II Corinthians 10:5). Many people look on sin as physical action, not realizing that the holy, righteous character that God purposes to form in us necessitates that even our thoughts be completely purified and made like His (Matthew 5:8; Philippians 2:5). God is a Giver, and He gives good and perfect things (James 1:17). This is the character we must emulate.

The Ten Commandments are a complete set of principles that we can keep properly in their spiritual intent only with the help of the Holy Spirit. God uses them as the standard of righteousness by which He develops His righteous mind and character in us. We need to keep them now more than ever!