

The Ten Commandments

The Tenth Commandment

“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.”
Exodus 20:17

The Foundation

- The first nine commandments deal primarily with outward actions and only touch the inward motivations by implication.
- The tenth commandment directly addresses desires of the inward heart that influences the actions of the outward hands.

The Commandment

- The key Hebrew word *chamad* (Strong's H2530, “desire, delight, beloved”) for “covet” occurs 30 times in the Old Testament in both positive and negative senses.
 - In Psalm 19:10, God's Law should be *desired (chamad)* more than gold.
 - In Joshua 7:21, Achan *coveted (chamad)* the forbidden wealth of Jericho.
- Note - In Deuteronomy 5:21, *chamad* is used first before a second verb, *avah* (Strong's H183), meaning “desire, lust, covet”.
- The prohibition here is not against desiring something, but to desire what belongs to someone else.
 - This fine distinction is key. It does not say that we cannot have property or wish to increase our possessions.
 - “As man from God's original commission may marry and acquire property, this does not forbid marriage, but it does forbid one coveting his neighbor's wife; nor does it forbid the individual ownership of land, houses, servants, domestic animals, and other property. On the contrary it is based upon the assertion of the neighbor's right to own these things. This commandment could not exist at all if your neighbor did not have a right to his own wife, to his own home, his own servants, his own cattle, and his own lands. It does not forbid ownership; it assumes ownership. There must be ownership before this command could come in at all. It permits our lawful desire for marriage, home, and property but forbids to look toward our neighbor's property in any of these things. Here you see it is a great mistake to say that this commandment forbids acquisitiveness or the accumulation of property. It does neither the one nor the other. - Carroll
- Boardman describes the prohibited targets as:
 - neighbor's house – “real estate, whether houses, tenements, lands, hereditaments, freehold interests in landed property, or what not.”
 - neighbor's wife – “domestic joys, his household peace, his home life.”

- manservant/maidservant – “skilled labor, his accomplished craftsman or clerk or drummer, his mechanical instruments, his commercial appliances.”
- ox/ass – “personal estate or property, his movables, his chattels, whatever belongs to him that is not of the nature of freehold property, or property descendable to heirs.”
- any thing – “anything whatsoever that belongs to thy neighbor, whether property, or luxury, or comfort, or office, or rank, or honor, or what not.”

Historical Application for Israel

- Maimonides (1138-1204) divides this into two commands:
 - Not concocting schemes to acquire that which is our neighbor’s.
 - Not desiring or craving something that is our neighbor’s.
- It is observed that covetousness can be a factor in breaking the other nine commandments.

Practical Application for Today

- Christ reaffirms this commandment in Luke 12:15, as does Paul in Romans 7:7 and Colossians 3:5.
- Paul writes it is not money (possessions) that is sinful, but the love (desire, covetousness) of money that is sinful – I Timothy 6:10.
- III John 2 gives us a principle that prospering financially is good so long as our soul is also prospering.
- Carroll observes five limitations to man’s acquisitions:
 - We must not so desire property or so accumulate it as to invade God's paramount right.
 - He must not so desire property or so accumulate wealth as to harm himself.
 - He must not invade the rights of his wife.
 - He must not so desire to accumulate property as to harm his neighbor.
 - He must not harm society in any of its organized forms.
- To covet is to not be satisfied with God’s provision.