

The Ten Commandments

A Study in Luther's Catechism¹ - Lesson 10

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or obtain it by a show of right, but do all we can to help him keep it.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, workers, animals, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not force or entice away our neighbor's spouse, workers, or animals, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Coveting

Keep the Desires of the Heart Pure

Many sins we commit can be seen or heard by others: a child hits his brother or we speak an angry word. But sin is not always so obvious. We can offend our perfect God simply with our thoughts.

Consider God's warnings in the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. Both commandments warn us that sin starts with the thoughts and desires in our hearts. God knows what we think, but he also forgives us fully so that we can turn away from sin and live as his children (p. 103).

Consider and discuss:

- These last two commandments deal in general with sins of the heart. Why might we wrongly think that sins of the heart are less serious than some of the other sins covered in the commandments?
- Agree or disagree: "Every sin starts as a sin of the heart."

91. To **covet** means to have a sinful desire or craving in our hearts for something God hasn't given us. The Ninth Commandment points to our neighbor's house and property. The Tenth Commandment points especially to those people who bring blessings to our neighbor's life and occupation. **What does God forbid in these two commandments?**

Micah 2:1, 2 Woe to those who plan iniquity.... They *covet fields* and seize them, and houses, and take them. *They defraud* people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance.

Luke 20:46, 47 Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.... *They devour widows' houses* and for a show make lengthy prayers.

Isaiah 5:8 Woe to you who *add house to house* and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.

Joshua 7:1-21 (Achan had a sinful desire to take the spoils of war that were supposed to be dedicated and given to God.)

Matthew 14:3, 4 (Herod had taken his brother's wife for himself.)

2 Samuel 15:2-6 (Absalom coveted his father's kingdom and tried to take it away from David by turning the people against him.)

1 Kings 21:1-16 (Jezebel devised a devious plan to get Naboth's vineyard by a show of right.)

Consider and discuss:

- Define "coveting."
- Agree or disagree: "It's wrong to want something"
- Consider Naboth's vineyard. Was Ahab's request reasonable or was he sinning right from the start?

¹ This study will use *Luther's Catechism* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2017). You may purchase a copy at nph.net.

The explanation to the Ninth Commandment says that we should not obtain our neighbor's property by a "show of right." What does that mean? *Show of right* means that someone tries to get someone else's property in a way that may appear legal but is really not ethical or the right thing to do.

92. By giving *two* commands that address coveting, God impresses upon us that even if we haven't actually stolen something, a sinful desire to have something that is not ours is wrong. **How do the Ninth and Tenth Commandments serve as a mirror, unmasking the sin of coveting within our hearts?**

Romans 7:7, 8 I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For *I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."* But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead.

James 4:1, 2 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your *desires that battle within you?* You desire but do not have, so you kill. *You covet* but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

1 Timothy 6:9, 10 Those who *want to get rich* fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, *eager for money*, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Mark 7:21, 22 It is *from within, out of a person's heart*, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

Consider and discuss:

- Consider the passage from Romans 7 above. Can someone know that coveting is wrong if they don't have known God's Law? Should people naturally know that desires can be sinful?
- Agree or disagree: "*The world makes people evil or influences them to do bad things...*"
- Why is there evil in the world? Why might someone really struggle to answer this question?

93. Coveting is a sin. We want something that is not his will to give us. Coveting also leads to many other sins. **How might coveting lead to other sins?**

James 1:14, 15 Each person is tempted when they are *dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed*. Then, after desire has conceived, it *gives birth to sin*; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Genesis 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

1 Timothy 6:10 The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. *Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

Deuteronomy 27:17 "Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

James 5:5, 6 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

2 Samuel 11:1-17 (David's sin of coveting Uriah's wife led to sins of adultery and murder.)

Consider and discuss: Agree or disagree: "*Sinful desires are harmful because they may lead to serious sins.*"

94. **How do we know that our sins against the Ninth and Tenth Commandments are also forgiven?**

Hebrews 4:15 We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—*yet he did not sin*.

1 John 3:5 You know that *he appeared so that he might take away our sins*. And in him is no sin.

1 Corinthians 15:3 What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures.

Hebrews 9:26 He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to *do away with sin* by the sacrifice of himself.

95. Contentment is the opposite of coveting. **Why can we say that contentment is a gift from God?**

Psalms 145:15, 16 The eyes of all look to you, and *you give them their food at the proper time*. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is *from the hand of God*.

1 Timothy 6:6, 7 *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

Proverbs 3:5, 6 *Trust in the Lord* with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Psalms 37:25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

Consider and discuss: How might contentment show itself in your Christian life?

96. Jesus came to do away with our sin. Because of his sacrifice, we want our hearts to be pure so that all we do honors him.

How do the Ninth and Tenth Commandments serve as a guide for our daily lives?

Luke 12:15 He said to them, “Watch out! *Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.*”

1 Timothy 6:8 If we have food and clothing, *we will be content with that.*

1 Peter 1:14–16 As obedient children, *do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Genesis 13:1–12 (Abram unselfishly allowed Lot to choose the best land for himself.)

Genesis 14:1–24 (Abram refused to take even what was offered as a reward for saving the kings. He was content with what God gave him, and he wanted everyone to know that he trusted God to provide for him.)

Genesis 39:6–8 (Joseph remembered God’s will and resisted coveting his master’s wife.)

Hebrews 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have,* because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Colossians 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

Philippians 2:4 ... *not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

Consider and discuss:

- We know where evil desires come from. Where do holy desires come from?
- What does a Christian want to do? (Consider Romans 7:14-25)

Connections

Coveting what belongs to someone else can quickly lead to other sins. King Ahab was interested in a vineyard that was owned by a man named Naboth. Discover how dangerous coveting is as you read what happens next.

1 Kings 21:1–16

Make a list of the sins that were committed as a consequence of Ahab’s coveting. Imagine that you were Ahab. What could you have done to stop the sins that led to Naboth’s death? Imagine you were Jezebel. What could you have done to stop the sins that led to Naboth’s death?

What different things can you do to fight against the sins of your own heart?

God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It (Stanzas 1, 5)

God’s own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!

He, because I could not pay it, Gave my full redemption price.

Do I need earth’s treasures many?

I have one worth more than any

That brought me salvation free, Lasting to eternity!

There is nothing worth comparing To this lifelong comfort sure!

Open-eyed my grave is staring: Even there I’ll sleep secure.

Though my flesh awaits its raising,

Still my soul continues praising:

I am baptized into Christ; I’m a child of paradise!