

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 we do not force or entice our neighbor's spouse, workers, or animals, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I would start out by saying that in our churches, we have two commandments at the last part of the 10 Commandments. The two commandments call on us to live with a holy heart. Other churches make two commandments out of the First Commandment. Neither way is wrong. I will follow Luther's Small Catechism which speaks of two commandments against *coveting*.

What is **coveting**? The 2017 Small Catechism lists the following definition, "*To covet means to have a sinful desire or craving in our hearts for something God hasn't given us.*"

An example of this is found in Joshua 7. When Joshua and the Israelites took possession of Jericho, which the Lord had given them, they were commanded not to take any treasure for themselves. But a man named Achan found treasure and wanted it for himself. He took a precious Babylonian robe and some gold and silver from the city. The Lord brought trouble on the Israelites because of Achan. His evil desire led to sinful actions and trouble.

The Lord God commands us today to be content. In Christ we have the treasure of salvation. We also have the promise of God meeting our needs. Therefore the Lord wants us to help our neighbor keep what is rightfully his.

So we have this thought: **Neighbor's Rights Matter to the Contented Christian.**

1. What does God forbid in these two commandments?

Someone might accuse a pastor of overplaying this sin. After all we are God's people. Are we really going to sit around entertaining evil thoughts? Sadly the situation with Achan wanting forbidden treasure and taking it is happened all too often among God's people.

A. A quick survey of coveting in the Bible.

People have coveted power. In 2 Samuel 15:2-6 we hear of King David's son, Absalom wanted his father's throne. His evil desire led him to speak badly about his father among the people and then he raised and led an army against his father. He ended up dead as a result.

King Ahab who was rich wanted a little piece of land that he couldn't have. So with his wife, Jezebel, they plotted and murdered Naboth and took his vineyard not far from their palace. (1 Kings 21)

In the New Testament era, King Herod coveted his brother's wife and he stole her away and married her.

B. There are other examples. Isaiah, the prophet, (5:8) laments that God's people routinely took possession of homes and fields that didn't belong to them. We would be foolish to think that this does not happen today.

2. We are forgiven our sins against this commandment.

God's commandments are still in force today. You and I are not to covet. We are not to desire our neighbor's house, property, wealth, spouse, workers or anything that belongs to our neighbor.

A. This commandment unmasks the sins in our hearts.

1. Listen to St. Paul's words in Romans 7:7, **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."** Paul clearly states that God's law forbids evil thoughts and desires. If we engage in them, we are breaking these commandments.

2. The difficulty is that it is hard to look at someone's home and property or their wife and kids and wonder, "why is that person so fortunate and I am not?" The minute we feel jealousy, envy, anger, hate, the desire to steal, then that thought is a sin. Children too are guilty when they look at someone else's bike, clothes, toys and feel jealous. When this happens, we are not the

holy people God demands and we deserve to be condemned by God to an unhappy eternity.

B. The good news is that we have a holy Jesus and our sins against these commandments have been forgiven.

1. In the letter to the Hebrews we are told, **“For 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.** (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus was tempted by the devil, but he did no wrong. Jesus died for us as St. Paul tells us, **For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.** (1 Corinthians 15:3)

2. These commandments are troublesome to us, because it is so hard to control random thoughts from one second to the next. When we are hurt or taken advantage of it is difficult to avoid thoughts that are sinful. Even worrying is a sin. (Matthew 6)

Therefore this good news is of the greatest comfort. Every time we struggle with our thoughts, we can go to Jesus and his cross. There we see forgiveness. We remember that no matter how we feel about it, he has made us God’s holy child. We can go back to working at having holy thoughts.

3. The Commandment guides us to be content.

Years ago I visited a couple in their home and they were probably the richest couple I ever met. You would not know it from their home. It was plain and sparsely decorated. The few plaques or paintings were Christian in nature. Why do I say they were rich? In every sentence, they oozed contentment. No matter whether we talked about the good times in their life or the bad, they were content. Their conversation was sprinkled with Jesus’ name. They knew the source of their contentment. The secret? God’s word guides his people to be content.

A. Paul had learned the secret. He writes in 1 Timothy 6:6-8, **But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**

1. People think that more things will make them happy, but the Bible teaches us that contentment lies in having a few necessary things. Then rather than worrying about all we have, we are free to live and help others.

2. Contentment lies in helping others. In 2 Corinthians 8 St. Paul call on us to be generous in helping others. The Corinthians were able to help their fellow Christians in Jerusalem with a generous offering. In his letter to the Philippian Christians he tells them, **“not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”** We heard in the Old Testament lesson how Abraham cared about the interests of his nephew Lot and let him choose where he wanted to live before Abraham made his choice.

B. Someone might say, *“I want to be content and help others, but I barely get by day to day. Besides it seems that those who live for themselves do much better.”* At times there will be challenges, however, we need to trust the Lord. Only with this help can we be content and help others.

We have a number of promises. Psalm 37:4, **Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.** In the New Testament in Hebrews 13:5 it says, **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.”** With God’s promises we can live a holy life even under difficult circumstances. We can help others and look after their interests. God has our back.

Conclusion: Martin Luther’s Small Catechism has a Conclusion to the 10 Commandments.

It is prefaced with the question, *“What does God say about all these commandments?”* It quotes Exodus 20:5,6,

“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

God is serious about his commandments. He shows this in Exodus 20:5,6 by giving threats of punishment for those who break them and promises of blessing to all who keep them.

I hoped that you have been reminded in this series that we do break the commandments. The commandments act as a mirror that reveal our sins. We also have been reminded that Jesus kept all the commandments for us and paid for our sins at the cross. In Christ we follow the commandments not because we have to, but because we love our God who loved us first. As we work at keeping them, we encounter the many blessings God intends to give through his commandments. Amen.