

Commandment 10 "You shall not covet" (Exod. 20:17)

Intro: a challenging commandment, because it deals with what is in our hearts.

A. Meaning of the word "covet"

1. Hebrew *chamad* "desire, take pleasure in"
 - a. Used "in bad sense of inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire" (--BDB)

(Genesis 3:6) So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

(Joshua 7:21) [Achan:] when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

(Proverbs 6:24-25) to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;
 - b. Also used "in good sense" of desire, delight regarding things that are beautiful or attractive (Gen 2:9; Ps 19:10; Ps 68:16; Song 2:3)
2. New Testament: two Greek words:
 - a. *epithumeō*: strong desire, either positive or negative ("to have a strong desire to do or secure something, desire, long for" --BDAG)
 - i. Negative sense: (quoting Exod. 20:17): Rom 7:7, 13:9; see also:

(Matthew 5:28) But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

(Acts 20:33) I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.
 - ii. Positive sense: Luke 22:15; 1 Tim 3:1; 1 Pet 1:12
 - iii. Positive/negative in same verse: Gal 5:17
 - b. The other NT word: *pleonexia*, "the state of desiring to have more than one's due, greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness" (BDAG)

Luke 12:15 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."

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

(2 Peter 2:14) They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! (see also *pleonektēs*, "a greedy person": 1 Cor. 6:10)
3. After understanding the word used in Ex. 20:17, what does the 10th Commandment forbid?
 - a. **Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."**
 - b. Desiring, longing for something that is not rightfully yours
 - i. House: it is your neighbor's, not yours!
 - ii. Wife: she is your neighbor's wife, not yours!
4. What is the opposite duty that is commanded (by implication)?
 - a. Desiring, delighting in what does belong to you, what God has given you
 - b. Being joyful for what God has given to others
5. What is the difference between coveting something and rightfully wanting to purchase it? (ox, or TV, car, house)
 - a. Is desire based on morally right planning for future acquisition? (Ex: saving to buy a car): good

This would be wanting to buy (in the future) something that God wants you to work for and purchase
 - b. Or based on morally wrong longing for something you can never expect to acquire in a morally right way? (such as: your neighbor's wife – or husband – or your neighbor's house)
6. Coveting can involve not just marriage or possessions, but also position, even ministry:

(Numbers 16:1-2) Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men. ² And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men . . .

(Numbers 16:8-10) And Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, ¹⁰ and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also? . . .

(Numbers 16:16-19) And Moses said to Korah, "Be present, you and all your company, before the LORD, you and they, and Aaron, tomorrow.¹⁷ And let every one of you take his censer and put incense on it, and every one of you bring before the LORD his censer, 250 censers; you also, and Aaron, each his censer."¹⁸ So every man took his censer and put fire in them and laid incense on them and stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.

(Numbers 16:35) And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.

Application (examples):

Christ our example: Heb. 5:1-5

B. Why does God give this command? What is wrong with coveting anyway?

1. Coveting implies you do not trust in God to provide what you need, what is best for you and right for you.
 - There is a strong correlation between our moment-by-moment relationship with God and contentment. (Hebrews 13:5) Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Philippians 4:11) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. (1 Timothy 6:6, 9) But godliness with contentment is great gain But those who desire (Greek *boulomai*) to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires (Greek *epithumia*) that plunge people into ruin and destruction.
2. Coveting implies you think God's laws are wrong, the way he has ordered the universe.
 - a. Not content with laws protecting other people's private property, or marriage: you inwardly desire something different (Gen 3:6; Prov 6:25)
3. Coveting implies you think God's provisions in your life are wrong.
 - a. People's gifts, abilities, opportunities, are ultimately from God – and they differ
 - b. But differing gifts => differing possessions. do you trust God in this? (1 Cor 4:7)
4. Coveting implies that you want something on this earth more than you want God.
 - a. It implies that God is not first in your heart.
 - b. It implies that you do not "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:5), which Jesus said is the first and greatest commandment (Matt 22:37-38). (also: Ps. 73:25-26)
 - c. That is why Paul says coveting is idolatry: it shows where our heart really is! (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5)
5. Coveting shows that we have missed the purpose of what we have in this life. God's purpose in giving us good things is not for the things in themselves, but to draw our hearts to him.
 But if the things we have are not drawing us to him, then getting the things we don't have surely will not draw our hearts to him! Coveting shows that we really want the things more than we want fellowship with their Maker. We want the gifts, not the Giver!
 (1 Timothy 6:17-19) As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

C. The wonderful benefits of this command

1. It nips sin in the bud:
 - a. If you don't covet, you won't steal. if you don't covet, you won't commit adultery.
 - b. Therefore this command is an excellent challenge for Christian growth
 - c. Meditating on this command can work wonderful changes in our hearts.
 (1 Timothy 6:6-8) But godliness with contentment is great gain,⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.
 - d. It shows us early on that wealth does not itself produce happiness
2. It draws us to God
 - a. It teaches us the purpose of all good gifts: thankfulness, love, joy in our Creator
3. It drives us to Christ for help
 - a. Who can ever obey this perfectly?
 - b. Thus, this most demanding command reveals to us the sin in our hearts. And this causes us to despair, then to flee to Christ to forgive us and to cleanse our hearts (Rom 7:7-8,24-25)
 - c. Our sinful "flesh" (that is, ourselves apart from the Holy Spirit's work) produces covetousness & many other sinful

desires in us, but we need Holy Spirit's work to replace these with Christ-like attitudes of heart (Gal 5:19-23)

c. This command is a "gospel" (or pre-gospel) message to show unbelievers their need for Christ (Prov 20:9)

4. It promotes peace and unity and love among people

a. If any nation or city could be free of coveting, it would have no theft, no adultery, no extra-marital sex, no materialism, no wrongful focus on material possessions, and much less murder

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. (Jam 4:2)

5. This 10th Commandment shows us that all of ethics is not only about right actions (don't murder, don't steal) but also right attitudes of heart

a. Knowing 10th Commandment, Jesus rightly interprets #6 and #7 in Matt. 5:21-30, on murder and adultery

b. (The next time I teach ethics, I should probably include more emphasis at end of each lesson on heart attitudes)

D. Coveting is a horribly destructive emotion (Jas 4:1-5)

1. Ahab and Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-2)

2. David and Bathsheba (1 Samuel 11:3-4)

3. Achan (Josh 7:20-21)

4. Today: excessive consumer debt, much (not all) resulting from coveting

5. A harmful emotion in politics also (envy, resentment of "the rich," focus on how much more person X makes than person Y, rather than on being sure that person Y has skills and opportunities for job, for advancement)

E. What about our hearts today?

1. Are you content, or are you coveting what God has not given to you

→ is there a frequent or continual longing in your heart for a different:

House, car, TV, clothing, other things (advertising can be very harmful here),

Or: wife or husband (pornography very harmful here), friend, child, parent,

Or: appearance, personality, intelligence, athletic ability, job, ministry responsibility

2. Positively: Do all your material possessions (and everything else you have) cause you to be thankful to God, draw your heart closer to him?

**Audio recordings of these classes, as well as these handouts, are available on the class website:
<http://www.christianessentialsbc.com>.**

See also www.waynegrudem.com