

design and purpose with this commandment. Not only does God give this law to have us realize our obedience must be from the heart and that we must not allow even the slightest thought of disobedience, but also what God would bring out with this law is the aim He has that you and I find in Him our full satisfaction in life. In saying “*Thou shalt not covet*”, God is calling us actually to find in and with Him our full joy and contentment. And God is telling us actually, ‘You will never find true peace and fulfillment except you find it with Me, the Triune God, as revealed in Christ, and except you find it with Me and in My service more and more’.

In other words, God’s design with the tenth commandment as with all His commandments is not to be negative, not to deprive us of what is most enriching, but to have us truly find and enjoy what is most enriching, namely, His riches in and through Christ Jesus the Saviour. Coveting results in pursuing empty treasures and pleasures ultimately, whereas living focused on God and in devotion to Him results in finding treasure and pleasures of infinite substance and eternal value. King Ahab was so on the wrong track in his wicked pursuits and wrong covetous ways....and look in the end how it gained him nothing but the condemnation and judgment of God. But focusing on God and following His Word and will and that more and more, what blessings beyond measure you find in this life already, and in the world to come, forevermore! Truly as Paul says in I Timothy 6:6, “*But godliness with contentment is great gain*”...yes, for as he says in the same letter earlier, chapter 4:8, “*godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*”

With the tenth commandment God directs us to find our contentment not in coveting more and more from others and here below, but in drawing nearer and nearer to God in Christ and living more and more for Him, and finding our all and all in and with Him, as our only Saviour and Lord. God’s tenth law would direct us from a never satisfying earthly focus to an all time satisfying divine focus. We were created to know God Triune and enjoy Him forever and sin spoiled that focus, but God’s law, also especially the tenth commandment, is given to lead us again with that focus in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see and appreciate this positive focus as intended by God with this commandment, and long also so to live by this holy law of God? May God by His Holy Spirit so bless also this message on the tenth commandment to each and all. Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

In our study of the Ten Commandments we come to the last, but by no means the least, one. God says in the tenth commandment as found in Exodus 20:17, “*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s.*”

To covet means to be discontent with what you yourself have and to want to have for yourself, more than anything else, what others have. King Ahab, as I Kings 21 tells us, coveted the vineyard of Naboth and he wanted it more than anything else and he would stop at nothing to get it, with his wicked wife’s assistance. If we will live God-honouring lives, we must not live in covetousness. What a relevant topic also for our times! The focus of this message in studying the tenth commandment is on seeing God’s gracious design with this law, “*Thou shalt not covet...*” Living by this commandment truly means realizing God’s design with this law.

There is something unique and special about the tenth commandment in that it deals specifically with not our actions, but your and my thoughts and desires. Coveting is something that takes place especially in the heart, your heart and mine, and lies at the root of all sin and evil. With the tenth commandment, God’s searchlight moves most pointedly from our actions to our attitudes; from our motions to our motives; from forbidden deeds to forbidden desires just! To covet means literally to pant after, and set your heart on, and to lust for what you do not have but really want.

Clearly the design and purpose of this commandment is to have us all realize and know that true religion is ultimately a matter of the heart....yes, your and my heart relationship with the all-knowing and all-seeing God. What counts in the Christian life more than anything else is our heart relationship with God. God is interested not just in outward conformity to His standards, but is your heart too inclined after Him and His will, or is it filled with all kinds of covetous thoughts and desires? With the tenth commandment God is saying, ‘I want you not only to live in outward obedience to my laws, but with inward obedience’.

How important and good it is to be reminded of this scope of God’s law. Too many people think of the Christian life just as a matter of a few dos and don’ts but it is not that so much as whether your heart’s desires and thoughts and longings are in accord with God and His will? The Heidelberg Catechism really captures and summarizes this design of God with the tenth

commandment when it tells us in Question & Answer 113 that what God requires in this last law is, "That even the smallest inclination or thought contrary to any of God's commandments never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness."

Do you agree that this is indeed the design of God with His tenth commandment, and do you then also say, 'Help me Lord so to live indeed'? Isn't that what marks every true child of God?

We should notice further, however, that the design of the tenth commandment is not only to reinforce that true religion is a matter of the heart, but also to reinforce how sinful and defiling just wrong desires can be and are. Sin begins in the heart and great evil is done starting always with covetous thoughts. The design of this commandment is also to convict us and to keep us from even the beginnings of sin. The apostle Paul apparently realized too how hidden evil covetous thoughts so exposed him as a sinner. He says in Romans 7:7, "*I had not known sin. ...except the law had said, you shall not covet*". Just this commandment truly marked him also as such a sinful sinner by nature before God!

Here consider with me just briefly how covetous thoughts lie at the root of all other sin and sins committed. Behind every sin there lies in its origin covetousness. Let me prove that to you. The first commandment forbids us to have any other god besides the Lord. When you covet, you set the one true God aside for something or someone else. In Colossians 3:5 Paul calls coveting idolatry, because the things coveted become your god, controlling your life. Surely that was the case with Ahab with his coveting Naboth's vineyard. Covetousness so easily leads to breaking of the first commandment. Who will not honestly admit that is so true?

The second commandment forbids us to have and worship idols, but what does the covetous man do? He does not bow before images of wood and stone perhaps, but in actual fact, he bows before the pleasures and treasures of this life. The covetous person spends himself not for God and His service, but for other and lesser things of this earth. "*Take heed*" says Jesus in Luke 12:15, "*and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.*" Ahab's covetous thought for Naboth's vineyard led him to transgression of both the first and second commandment. And also the third, for notice how God's name was taken in vain in calling a special fast and false witnesses were used who would speak under oath nothing but lies. How often have covetous thoughts resulted in the breaking of the third commandment so that people don't worship God in spirit and truth but with false motives and more for their own ends than for God's praise and honour? Coveting causes much sin against the fourth commandment which calls us to keep the Sabbath day holy. How many, even confessing Christians, use the day or part of it for material gain or earthly recreation rather than for God's worship and Christian service to

our neighbour. Again, coveting causes people to disobey the fifth commandment, not honouring parents and those placed in authority over us. Think here how Ahab would not respect the authority structure God had given to the Israelites about keeping their land in the family line. Think of Absalom so out to discredit and even kill his father, being covetous of his fame and position as the king of Israel. The sixth commandment too is again and again violated on account of covetousness. Throughout history people have been murdered because someone coveted another person's money, or their spouse, or their position. Ahab killed Naboth because of covetousness. Without question covetousness, wrong desires, lies behind the breaking of the seventh commandment which forbids all adultery and fornication. David lusted after, coveted, Beersheba and his wrong thoughts and desires left unchecked resulted in the act of wicked adultery and even murder. Covetousness is also the root of all transgression against the eighth commandment which forbids stealing and theft of any kind. Ahab stole Naboth's vineyard, not forsaking his covetous thought and desire for that piece of land. The ninth commandment forbidding bearing false witness is easily and often broken on account of covetousness. What lies are made to cover up lust for what doesn't really belong to us. Think again here of Ahab, and what about Gehazi and Annaias and Sapphira, just to mention a few examples.

The design of God with the tenth commandment is to have us realize not just that He looks on our hearts in connection with our devotion to Him but also that the least departure from Him, yes, just in our thoughts even, is so wrong and can lead to so much other evil too. How humbling and convicting this all is, isn't it so, for which true Christian doesn't have to confess still all too often wrong thoughts and desires? God's law convicts of sin, especially also the tenth commandment, "*Thou shalt not covet*". Do you confess this too, honestly before God? Do you know for yourself, with sorrow and repentance, if you let evil thoughts and desires come up and reign in your heart and life, it will soon lead to all kinds of sinful words and deeds too, in transgression of all God's commandment?. Do you know the awful danger of harbouring even one covetous thought in your life at any time?

How thankful we may be that God will have us walk so carefully, that even our thoughts are all pleasing to Him and that we keep from all covetous desires and sinful inclinations against His will at all times. Thank God that He wants our obedience before Him to be genuine and that He would lead us that we be kept far from sin's vicious grip, not allowing even the slightest desire against God's will. Living by the tenth commandment in true gratitude before God surely means realizing and appreciating this design of God with His law. It means looking to Christ Jesus, the Saviour from sin, daily for forgiveness of all our sins also just in covetous thoughts and looking to Him for a right focus rather than a sinful, covetous mindset.

Saying that brings me to one more matter in connection with God's