

Deuteronomy 5:21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-5/deuteronomy-521/>

The LORD prohibits covetousness.

The Tenth Commandment

The tenth commandment is distinct from the others in a couple of ways. First, along with the fourth commandment regarding Sabbath, the tenth commandment has no parallel with ancient Near Eastern law. Scholars agree that there is no other law in the ancient Near East that addresses coveting. Second, whereas the previous commandments speak of one's actions (outward acts), the tenth commandment speaks of one's intentions (that is, his inner disposition).

The LORD began by saying, "*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.*" Coveting describes a state of mind wrongfully directed at things that belong to others. It most often pertains to a desire that is stimulated by sight. Thus, someone who covets his *neighbor's wife* consistently nourishes thoughts and cravings for her. Such a behavior can lead him to employ maneuvers in order to acquire his *neighbor's wife*.

Furthermore, God said, "*And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey.*" The verb translated as "to desire" often refers to an evil thought that is contrary to the will of God. It pertains to a desire that arises from an inner need ([Deuteronomy 12:20](#); [2 Samuel 23:15](#); [Psalms 10:17](#)). Yet both verbs (to covet and to desire) describe states of mind wrongfully inclined at things that belong to others.

Finally, God declared, "*Anything that belongs to your neighbor.*" The idea is that one should be content and satisfied with what the Suzerain (Ruler) Yahweh grants him. Coveting leads to adultery, stealing, and false testimony because it is directed by selfish desires. Thus, it seems reasonable to say that the tenth commandment encompasses the rest in that it begins with thoughts and cravings rather than actions. Actions are preceded by thoughts.

This command also emphasizes that God's rule of law is the basis for a self-governing society. There is no possible way a human ruler could enforce this

command. But in a self-governing society, God is the ultimate authority, and He is a discerner of “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” ([Heb. 4:12](#)).

Jesus emphasized the principle of the tenth commandment when He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” ([Matthew 5:27-28](#)).

The tenth commandment, which applies to heart, is very important because it is central to a righteous walk because it applies to the source of all actions — our thoughts. For, as Jesus says, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” ([Matthew 15:19](#)).

The Apostle Paul addresses this point extensively as well, emphasizing that the walk of faith of a believer begins with our hearts and minds. For example, in [Galatians 5](#), Paul contrasts the “flesh” as an avid opponent of the “Spirit” with flesh advocating for us to choose it to rule over us, and the Spirit likewise. This is an internal battle that has external consequences. Paul states that we can determine which we are choosing by examining our actions.

Biblical Text:

²¹ ‘You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.’