

END-TIMES ISSUES



#144 Commandment #10 – Obligations.

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

A N D B E Y O N D I

The Tenth Commandment:

You shall not covet ...

Exodus 20:17a (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:21a.

What are the commandment's prohibitions and obligations?

- As we did before, we will organize this topic based on some historic catechisms that have a strong emphasis on Scripture. We will use the Heidelberg and the Westminster Shorter catechisms.
- Though, in many ways, this is the most serious commandment, the section in the catechisms that is dedicated to this commandment is surprisingly short.
- This is probably because a summary of how to *think* (or not think) is much shorter than a summary of all the possible ways that those thoughts (good or evil) can express themselves in *action* – influencing every possible aspect of life.
- As always, feel free to include any additional Scriptures that may apply, whether or not they fit the arrangements found in the catechisms. (We have added some verses.)

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM.

Q. What is the aim of the tenth commandment?

- The answer in this catechism is quite simple, containing two parts: what we *shouldn't* do, and what we *should* do.

[Part 1] A. That not even the slightest desire or thought contrary to any one of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts.

- Violation of this commandment begins at the very *first* redirecting of our desires and/or thoughts away from having God as the ultimate focus of our lives.
- Though these desires/thoughts occur in the *mind*, and are a violation of the *Tenth* Commandment, if we continue to hold and embrace them, they will eventually "give birth" to visible *actions* – violations of the other commandments. And even if they *haven't* become visible, we can *still* be violating some of the other commandments (especially those related to God).

[Part 2] Rather, with all our hearts we should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.

- We should replace the *sinful* desires/thoughts with a positive hatred for sin, and a delight in whatever is right (regardless of who experiences it).

What does Scripture say?

The catechism combines these two parts of the answer. It briefly mentions the seriousness of coveting, and then focuses on the godly attitude that we should have.

- The horrible nature of coveting:** Sin *uses* it to intensify it.

But sin, seizing its opportunity through the commandment [= "Do not covet"], **produced in me every kind of covetous desire.**

Romans 7:8a (BSB)

What type of attitude should we have?

- » An awareness of the *value* of Scripture (God's Law/Word). Here is the first verse of Psalm 19:7-11. (The whole passage fits here.)

The Law of the LORD is **perfect**,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is **trustworthy**,
making wise the simple.

Psalm 19:7 (BSB)

- » A desire that one's *inner thoughts* would be pleasing to God. The "heart" is the place where coveting occurs. We also have to deal with the *words* that express those thoughts.

May the words of my mouth
and **the meditation of my heart**
be pleasing in Your sight,
O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14 (BSB)

(We pursue this
by pursuing the
"renewed mind"
of Romans 12:2.)

- » A desire to be examined by God and led by him in the way of godliness.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my concerns.
See if there is any offensive way in me;
lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:23-24 (BSB)

Who can discern his own errors?
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.
Keep Your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless
and cleansed of great transgression.

Psalm 19:12-13 (BSB)

THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM.

- This catechism begins with what is required (the "positive" side of the commandment) and then moves on to what is forbidden (the "negative" side of the commandment).
- Both answers have two parts: one part concerning *ourselves*, and one part concerning *other people*.

Q. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, ...

- "Contentment" is the key word here. The *more* we learn and apply this concept, the *less* we will be inclined to covet.
- A look at the *context* of the following verses will show us that contentment applies not only to *pleasant* situations, but also to *unpleasant* ones.

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What does Scripture say?

- ✓ An attitude of blessing (= speaking well of) the LORD and praising him *at all times*.

I will bless the LORD **at all times**;
His praise will **always** be on my lips.

Psalms 34:1 (BSB)

- ✓ This is possible only when we are content with what we have. These passages show the contrast between having *contentment* and focusing on *wealth*:

But **godliness with contentment**
is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV)

CONTEXT: This "great gain" is contrasted to the harm that the pursuit of wealth can cause.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and **be content with what you have**, for God has said:

"Never will I leave you,
never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5 (BSB)

We have
GOD and
can't lose
him!

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- ✓ This contentment can (and must) exist under *all* circumstances. Our ability to have this attitude comes from Christ!

... I have learned to be **content regardless of my circumstances**.

I can do all things **through Christ who gives me strength**.

Philippians 4:11b, 13 (BSB)

- ✓ Some more verses about contentment:

- » An example of applying this to life: John the Baptist told the soldiers to be content with their wages – Luke 3:14.
- » The word "contentment" indicates that "God has given us all that we need"; *but we have to define "need" the way God does!* This is the basis for what Paul says, when he tells us that we can be content if we have "food and clothing" – 1 Timothy 6:8. (It's the same thing that Jesus says, in Matthew 6:24-34!)
- » When describing what God provides, this word is translated as "sufficient." [God gives *enough* ("sufficient"); I have *enough* ("contentment").] And so, Paul said that God's grace was *sufficient* for demonstrating God's power through him – 2 Corinthians 12:9.

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... with a correct and charitable orientation of our spirit toward our neighbors and all that is theirs.

- The "positive" expression of this commandment includes our attitude toward *others*. "Love for neighbor" applies, even when the others have *more* (resources, abilities, opportunities, etc.) than we do.

What does Scripture say?

- ✓ **Love, which summarizes all of the Ten Commandments, represents the attitude we must have.** It is a *commitment* that necessarily expresses itself in our *conduct*. If love is present, it will orient our mind/spirit in all matters.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **Love** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

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- ✓ Scripture gives us many specific ways that such an internal attitude – the "positive" expression of this commandment – will affect our conduct. Here are some examples:

- » Example of what we *won't* do... grudges; desires for revenge.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against any of your people, but **love your neighbor as yourself**. I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:18 (BSB)

- » Examples of what we *will* do... focus on the good of others. These are practical "positive" applications of the command to not covet.

Rejoice with those who rejoice;
weep with those who weep.

Romans 12:15 (BSB)

Each of you should **look** not only to your own interests, but **also to the interests of others**.

Philippians 2:4 (BSB)

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- ✓ There are *parables* that illustrate this – such as in **Luke 15**.

- » In two parables, people are invited to *rejoice with* someone who has found something that was lost.

[He] calls together his friends and neighbors to tell them, **'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep!'**

Luke 15:6b (BSB)

... she calls together her friends and neighbors to say, **'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin.'**

Luke 15:9b (BSB)

- » In the parable of the prodigal son, we see examples of *both* obeying and disobeying this commandment (Luke 15:11-32).
 - The **older brother** was angry that people were celebrating the return of his wasteful brother – vs. 28-30.
 - The **father**, in contrast, was filled with compassion for his "lost" son – vs. 20-27, 32.

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- ✓ There are **examples of people who lived this way**. Here are some Old Testament examples:

» **Mordecai** (uncle of Queen Esther).

[He was] ... **seeking the good** of his people and **speaking peace** to all his countrymen.

Esther 10:3b (BSB)

» **Job** was *never* happy about another person's misfortune.

If I have **rejoiced in my enemy's ruin**, or **exulted when evil befell him**—
I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life with a curse—

Job 31:29-30 (BSB)

He did NOT have these heart attitudes, NOR the words that come from such attitudes.

» **David**, in Psalm 122:6-9, expressed the desire for peace and prosperity to come to those who live in Jerusalem, "for the sake of my brothers and friends" and "for the sake of the house of the LORD our God."

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Q. What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment forbids all manner of discontentment with our own state [= conditions/circumstances], ...

What does Scripture say?

- Scripture gives us specific instructions related to this matter, as well as examples of people who committed this sin.

✓ There are **prohibitions of this type of conduct**. For instance:

» **James** warns that such an attitude does not come from God.

But if you harbor **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast in it or deny the truth.

Such wisdom does not come from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where **jealousy and selfish ambition** exist, there will be disorder and every evil practice.

James 3:14-16 (BSB)

(This verse also applies to the next section.)

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» **Paul** tells us to learn from Israel's violation of this commandment, rather than doing what they did!

And **do not complain**, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel.

1 Corinthians 10:10 (BSB)

✓ Some Old Testament examples of people who committed this sin:

» **Ahab** – jealous of Naboth's vineyard; pouting because of it.

So Ahab went home, **sullen and angry** because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed **sulking** and refused to eat.

1 Kings 21:4 (NIV); see also the context – much sin occurred because of this.

» **Haman** – hated to see Mordecai being honored.

"But all this [honor] gives me **no satisfaction** as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

Esther 5:13 (BSB)

[The king's gate was a place of honor and privilege.]

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... envying or grieving at the good state of our neighbors, and all excessive feelings and desires for anything that belongs to them.

- This includes their *circumstances*, as well as their *possessions*, etc.

What does Scripture say?

✓ Examples of "things." Obviously, the commandment itself gives us examples of how people might violate this commandment – coveting anything that belongs to one's neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's **wife**. You shall not covet your neighbor's **house** or **field**, or his **manservant** or **maidservant**, or his **ox** or **donkey**, or **anything** that belongs to your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:21 (BSB)

✓ Example of "circumstances." When Nehemiah came to help the Jews in Jerusalem:

But when [certain officials] heard about this, they were **deeply disturbed** that **someone had come to seek the well-being of the Israelites**.

Nehemiah 2:10 (BSB)

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✓ These covetous attitudes are the result of sin working within us. (In the end, it will result in *visible* expressions of sin.)

But sin, seizing its opportunity through the commandment [= "Do not covet"], **produced in me every kind of covetous desire**.

Romans 7:8a (BSB)

✓ It is incompatible with "love for neighbor" (as is the violation of any other commandment).

The commandments "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "**Do not covet**," and any other commandments, are **summed up in this one decree: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**

Romans 13:9 (BSB)

✓ The wicked get angry when others are blessed. (In contrast, the righteous, when blessed, share with the poor – v. 9.)

The wicked one will see it and be **angry**; he will gnash his teeth in **despair**.
The **desire** of the wicked leads to ruin.

Psalms 112:10 (CSB)

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✓ Don't hold on to any form of a covetous attitude. Or even the "verbal clashing" that coveting may produce. *Get rid of it all!*

Let us not become **conceited**, **provoking** and **envying** one another.

Galatians 5:26 (BSB)

Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, **lust**, **evil desires**, and **greed**, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5 (BSB)

But if you harbor **bitter jealousy and selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast in it or deny the truth.

James 3:14 (BSB)

(We also included James 3:14-16 at the beginning of this question, where we applied it to discontent with *our own* situation in life.)

Don't **grumble** against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James 5:9 (NIV)

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Here is a SUMMARY of what the catechisms teach us:

[Heidelberg Catechism:]

Coveting is a horrible trap that leads us into other sins.
We need to oppose it!

- We need to *value* the Word of God, and let it change the way we think.
- We need to trust God to accomplish what is necessary, in order for this change to occur.
- (As we fulfil our responsibility, we discover that God's sovereignty and our responsibility are *working together*.)

[Westminster Catechism:]



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How should we respond to coveting? WHAT TO DO:

- Learn contentment; for contentment and covetousness *cannot* coexist.
- Connected to this is trust in God to provide what we need. (This may include God providing *opportunities* that we must take, in order for that provision to occur.)
- Be concerned about the well-being of others; and promote it (as possible), rather than being jealous if they have more, or glad if they don't.

How should we respond to coveting? WHAT TO AVOID:

- Avoid all forms of coveting; recognize its demonic source, and don't let sin take hold of you! Recognize its *incompatibility* with love.
- Learn from the examples of the past, instead of repeating the sin of coveting that they committed.

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OUR MISSION!

UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF COVETING.

Reject it, because it will **kill** you, if you let it grow.

RELY on God.

He uses his Word to enable us to conquer
coveting in all its forms.

(Implied: We must be willing to learn and submit to Scripture,
or he won't be able to use it to accomplish its purpose.)

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The CATECHISMS (in modern English, accessed 9/16/25:

- Heidelberg - Text and Scripture references: <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>, question #113.
- Westminster (shorter) - Text: https://www.cityreformed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/wsc_in_modern_english.pdf, questions #80 - #81; (Scripture references from several catechisms.)

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