

The Ten Commandments:

**The Tenth
Commandment.
Concluding Remarks**

The 10th Commandment.

Introduction

You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor

- Exodus 20:17 (NRSV)

The 10th Commandment

Introduction

Controversary over the meaning of “covet”

- *hamad* (to covet, lust after)
- Does it mean a:
 - the combination of the feeling of desire plus the action to obtain the object of desire, or
 - just the feeling of desire for that which belongs to another?

The 10th Commandment

A Matter of the Heart

“the commandment is probably solely concerned with attitudes of the heart/mind that subtly or not so subtly lead to the misuse of that which is not one’s own.”

- Terrence Fretheim, Exodus, Interpretation
Bible Commentary Series

The 10th Commandment

A Matter of the Heart

- 10th Commandment differs from the previous commandments about sins against one's neighbor. It warns:
- not against an *action* (murder, stealing, adultery, lying testimony),
 - but against a *state of the heart*, a *feeling*

The 10th Commandment

A Matter of the Heart

The 10th Commandment “. . .relates to the spirit of the individual that forms the interior ground of the violation of the other commandments.”

- Terrence Fretheim, Exodus,
Interpretation Bible Commentary
Series

(an appropriate culmination of the Ten
Commandment)

The 10th Commandment

A Matter of the Heart

Implications:

God wants us not just to be a people who does not murder, steal, commit adultery or lie, but in addition:

God wants us to be a people *who are not tempted* to murder, steal, commit adultery or lie, a people *in whose heart* such acts are repulsive

The 10th Commandment

A Matter of the Heart

“ . . . it is easier to obey ‘duties of the limbs,’ those obligations and prohibitions that involve outward behavior, and which thus involve social approbation and disapprobation, than it is to fulfill the ‘duties of the heart,’ since ‘only’ God knows if we have fulfilled the latter, not our neighbors, or, often, not even ourselves.”

- paraphrase by Rabbi Weiman-Kelman in **Broken Tablets** of Bahya ibn pakuda in his 11th century work **Duties of the Heart**

Desire

The Commandment is not against desire.

Human beings are driven by desire. The Commandment is specifically against a *desire for that which is not properly one's own*. This is:

- a misdirection of desire
- a desire destructive to community
- a desire destructive to the person who covets

Desire

“It is not forbidden to wish to have a house like my neighbor’s house or a car like his or even a woman just like his wife. What is forbidden, I think, is to want *his* car or *his* wife, *her* house or *her* husband -- to replace the other, not to replicate her. It is all right to want to have a big house. It is forbidden to want to live in someone else’s house or life. I am commanded to be me, not you or her. I am forbidden to covet *your* place, to wish to be *you*.”

- Rabbi Arnold Wolf, in Broken Tablets

Desire

“to covet is to deny our own life and our own being, which God cannot abide”

- Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva in Broken Tablets

Desire

(from Keenan)

Both Luther and Calvin commented that the 10th Commandment is about our “deepest desires”

Our “deepest desires” are:

- rarely expressible
- complex, wanting satisfaction in a variety of ways

Desire

Our “deepest desires” are:

- often discernable / felt in:
 - disappointments of expectations arising from them. Disappointments can be “windows” to our deepest desires
- loss
- the pleasure or happiness in seeing something that fits in with those desires

Desire

Our goal as Christians:

- our deepest desires should be grounded in a love of God and neighbor
- images and hope for the “kingdom of God”
 - a world where God rules and God’s will is done -- should live in our deepest desires

Desire

“As Christians, we have a deeply abiding and viscerally felt image of the kingdom of God that we carry in our hearts.”

- Keenan

In the Tenth Commandment, **“we confront our own desire for a loving relationship with God. Will I covet the things of this world, and envy others the things I don’t have, or will I turn all my desire to the Lord?”**

- Timmerman

Changing Our Hearts

- learn an enduring, grateful satisfaction with our lot (the opposite of coveting)
“discipline our hearts to accept what is ours and what cannot be ours (objects and abilities)” - Mikva
- have no “false idols.” Turn both our minds and hearts to God
 - first and last Commandment often described as “bookends” to the Commandments
 - violating the 10th Commandment rises from a violation of the 1st.

Coveting and Consumerism

(from Brueggemann)

“the propensity to covet in our society is enacted through an unbridled consumerism that believes the main activity of human life is to accumulate, use, and enjoy more and more of the available resources of the earth.”

- based on an assumption of scarcity, which justifies accumulating all that one can

Coveting and Consumerism

“This commandment summons the faithful to break with the practice of acquisitive individualism and to reject the ideology of scarcity upon which it is based.”

- Brueggemann

Links with the Fourth Commandment on the Sabbath.

- “coveting is an “activity of untrusting restlessness”

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

(Brueggemann)

A Unique Revelation

Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17)

- only direct address of commands from
God to Israel
- thus a unique revelation

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

(after Brueggemann)

Position of the Commandments in Biblical Faith.

Views:

- 1. Non-negotiable will of God. Absolute rules / laws of God
- 2. “mission statement” of the community of the faithful, providing a framework for specific actions
- 3. “instructions” for the “inculcation of an attitude of the mind / heart” (Fretheim)

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

(after Timmerman)

Two truths that stand out in the study of the
Commandments:

- The Centrality of God
- The Rewards of Righteousness

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

1. The Centrality of God

- Commandments fundamentally relate to our relationship with God
- violation of any Commandment is an offense against God, an undoing of God's intention for creation
- God's passionate response seen in Exodus 22:21-27

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

(Timmerman)

2. The Rewards of Righteousness

“O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea;”

- Isaiah 48:18 (NRSV)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

- John 14:27 (NRSV)

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

(Brueggemann)

Jesus and the Commandments

- Asked what is necessary for eternal life, Jesus cites some of commandments (Matt 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-30), but suggests more
- Commandments are a “threshold to more serious discipleship and a step on the demanding way to ‘eternal life’!”

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

Jesus and the Commandments

Matthew 5:17-19 (NRSV):

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter; not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Concluding Comments on the Commandments

Jesus and the Commandments

Mark 12:28-31 (NRSV):

“Which Commandment is the first of all?”

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

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