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You Shall Not Covet Anything That Belongs to Your Neighbor

20: 17

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor **REFLECT:** Has my desire for another's possessions or loved one turned into a preoccupation to get what I want no matter whose it is, or who it hurts?

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17).

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

In some respects, the tenth and last commandment is the greatest of the last seven that are more horizontal and describe our relationship with one another. This last commandment gives the internal aspect because it focuses on the desires of the heart. If we keep this commandment, all the other commandments are more easily kept. No system of law has ever had a statute that deals with intent because there is no human way to enforce it. It goes beyond regulating outward acts to requiring us to control our inner thoughts. The apostle Paul said it this way: **We demolish arguments and every arrogance that raises itself up against the knowledge of God; we take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah (Second Corinthians 10:5 CJB).**



We need victory over our thought life more than anything else. **Covetousness** makes people greedy and causes them to steal. **Covetousness** drives people to sacrifice the lives of others, even to kill, for what they want. **Covetousness** gives rise to that uncontrolled lust that plunges people into adultery. **Covetousness** endangers mutual trust and causes people to lie about themselves and each other to gain money, power, prestige or praise. In short, this commandment covers a multitude of sins.

So, what does it mean to **covet**? Does it mean to desire something? Absolutely not. Desires are a normal and healthy part of human life. Our desire for food makes us hungry. That's how we maintain our health. Our desire for sex is a vital part of love and marriage. This leads to the creation of life. We desire approval and respect. That's what makes us bathe ourselves and brush our teeth. Another legitimate desire is to get along with others for common goals within society. Basically, without desires we wouldn't have life.

Therefore, does coveting mean desiring something that we don't have? Not exactly. For example, many people attend college because they desire an education, something they don't have. But this is not coveting. Almost everything we call progress, improvement or civilization has come from a desire for something we don't have. Desire is even important in spiritual matters. The Apostle Paul said in **First Corinthians 12:31, eagerly desire the greater gifts. Jesus** also said: **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.** No, **coveting** is not merely a desire for something, even something we don't have.

Covetousness is a desire that runs rampant over the rights of others and even over one's own reason. It is out of control desire that will injure or destroy to get what it wants. It's not wrong for a man to want a house, **wife** or a car. But it's wrong for him to want his neighbor's house, **wife** and car. This kind of desire is different because a desire for someone else's belongings plants the seeds of a willingness to lie, steal or kill in order to fulfill that desire. When we feel this type of desire we may even destroy or injure ourselves to get what

we want. **Covetousness** is a normal desire gone terribly wrong. It says, "I want this and I will get it whatever it costs me, whatever the consequences." A practical substitute for the word **covet** might be *greed*. It's hard to define, but you know it when you see it.³⁹⁷

Nathan the prophet saw it in King David (**Second Samuel 12:1-13**). **ADONAI** sent Nathan to King David after he had committing adultery with Bathsheba, his neighbor, and murdered Uriah, her husband. But instead of confronting him with the actual crimes he had committed, he told him a story. There was rich man who had a large amount of land with lots of sheep and cattle. One day one of his very best friends came to visit him and he wanted to have a great feast. But he didn't go out and find one of his own sheep to slaughter, he took his sheep from a poor man who had only one little ewe lamb, a family pet. The rich man could have chosen a sheep from his vast herd, but he took the only lamb the poor man owned. Nathan pointed out that David was the rich man, and **covetousness** was David's sin.

When **Jesus** came **He** taught that the cure for **covetousness** was to surrender to the Lordship of **Christ**. **He** wanted change from the inside out. **He** said that wrong ideas and wrong desires lead to wrong actions. No matter how pious our outer life may be, if we yield inwardly to covetousness, we are guilty of breaking the commandment. Only when we first seek the Kingdom of **God** and **His** righteousness will everything else be given to us (**Luke 12:31**). To accomplish this change we need a new birth, a conversion, a change of outlook and a change of values. Since **covetousness** is a sin of the inner life, our supreme need is to be set right within our hearts.

Are you master or slave to your desires? The only way to change, to become master, is to surrender to **Jesus Christ**. We must find a new **Master** who brings us peace so that we can agree with the apostle Paul and say: **For to me, life is in the Messiah, and death is gain (Philippians 1:21 CJB)**. The only answer to covetousness is to find our delight in **ADONAI**. So the B'rit Chadashah teaches us not to covet by being content in **Jesus Christ**.³⁹⁸

Yeshua summarized the Ten Commandments by condensing them into two. **He** said that **the first and greatest commandment** was **to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all soul and with all your mind (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37)**. Then **He** went on to say that **the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matt 22:39)**. **He** concluded by boldly claiming that **all the Torah and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:40)**. **Christ** was saying essentially that **love** for **ADONAI** (that is, obeying the first four of the Ten Commandments) and **love** for **neighbor** (that is, obeying the last six of the Ten Commandments) form the basic teaching of the TaNaKh.



Messiah understood **love**, the most positive force in the universe, as the total intent and thrust of the Ten **Commandments**. Psychiatrist Karl Menninger says much the same thing in his definition of **love** as “the medicine for the sickness of the world.” The combination of ingredients in **God’s** prescription for human happiness known as the Ten **Commandments** is guaranteed, if taken, to keep us spiritually strong and healthy. To obey **His** covenant stipulations is to receive **His** bountiful blessings.³⁹⁹