

“Desire” Exodus 20:17

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“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”
Exodus 20:17 (English Standard Version)

Take-Home Truth: Do not allow ungodly desires to incubate in the heart!

THE SIMPLE MEANING OF THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

Covet = Hebrew verb = *hamad* = desire, yearn for, covet, lust

The narrow meaning of coveting = “setting your desire on that which belongs to someone else”

OT: Deuteronomy 7:25; Proverbs 12:12; Joshua 7:21; Micah 2:1-2

NT: Luke 12:15; Romans 7:7-8; Colossians 3:2-5; Ephesians 5:5; James 4:1-2

Stages of Coveting

(from J. Douma’s “The Ten Commandments”)

- Spontaneous desire
- Nursing that desire
- Making a plan to achieve that desire
- Acting out that desire

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. ²They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away . . . Micah 2:1-2 (ESV)

Every good gift and ever perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights . . . James 1:17 (ESV)

THE BROAD MEANING OF THE 10TH COMMANDMENT

All sinful desires are forbidden (not just the desire for what belongs to someone else).

(Refer to Genesis 3 and Joshua 7)

“A man is generous because he trusts God and never doubts but that he will always have enough. In contrast, a man is covetous and anxious because he does not trust God. (from “Treatise on Good Works” by Martin Luther)

“[The Commandments] stubbornly keep our desires directed toward God . . . All of our desires are created to come to a rest in their one ultimate good: communion with God. Augustine’s famous sentence from *Confessions*—“You have made us and draw us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you”—expresses how our desires find rest and fulfillment only in God. If other created things are elevated to the position of the ultimate good . . . coveting is the unavoidable result since none of these created things will bring rest.” (from “Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics” by Reinhard Hutter)

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 73:25-26 (ESV)

APPLICATION TIPS

- Understand that desire can be and must be controlled.

“Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”
Proverbs 4:23 (New Living Translation)

Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. James 1:14-15 (NLT)

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