

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - Tenth Commandment

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

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

What does God forbid of us in the Tenth Commandment?

God forbids, also in the Tenth Commandment, the sin of covetousness. The Ninth Commandment mentions a single object like house and inheritance. The Tenth Commandment lists a number of objects. This commandment strikes at the root of all covetousness. Covetous is not an act but a condition of the heart. Covetous may very well lead us to win his wife's, workers, friends by gifts and promises or by favors and flatteries with the thought that they will leave him and come to us.

- Matthew 19:15: For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.
- Luke 12:15: Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.
- James 1:14-15: ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.
- Psalm 37:4: Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

What does God require of us in the Tenth Commandment?

There are two things to know before going into this part of each commandment:

First, one of the best ways to move away from wrong behavior or habits is to do the very opposite actions. Each of the commandments asks the question: What does this mean? Following that question and near the end of the explanation, Luther offers positive behaviors that would aid in doing a better task of following God's direction in this commandment. Work at practicing these.

Second, right after the question comes the statement, "we should fear and love God." In the commandments to "fear God" means to "stand in awe of Him," to revere, respect, esteem, and honor Him. We are NOT to shake in our boots from fright.

God requires that our hearts be filled with holy desires only. Whenever our neighbor's wife, children, workers, friends are dissatisfied with him and complain to us about him, and intend to leave him, we should not support or encourage them. Instead we should

urge them to stay with him and do their duty. Paul returned the runaway slave Onesimus to his master. (Book of Philemon)

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.