

YOU SHALL NOT COVET

2 Sam 11, Lk 12:13-34; Lent Midweek 3; March 6, 2024

The 9th and 10th Commandments are combined under the general statement: **You shall not covet.** What does it mean to “covet”? I don’t find Luther’s *Small Catechism* explanations of these commandments about coveting that helpful. He focuses more on the consequences of coveting than the coveting itself. Getting your neighbor’s inheritance or house in a “way which only appears right” is actually theft, breaking the 7th Commandment, **You shall not steal.** To “entice or force away our neighbor’s wife,” is adultery, breaking the 6th Commandment, **You shall not commit adultery.** The one word Luther does use that that explains coveting is “scheme,” which goes on in our minds. To scheme is to make devious plans to get what our hearts want. Coveting is a sinful desire, wanting something that God has not given us, which can and does lead to stealing and adultery.

What does God tell us not to covet? Let’s review the 9th and 10th Commandments and their explanations printed in the bulletin.

- P** What is the Ninth Commandment?
- C** **You shall not covet your neighbor's house.**
- P** What does this mean?
- C** **We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.**
- P** What is the Tenth Commandment?
- C** **You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.**
- P** What does this mean?
- C** **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.**

We should notice that the things God says we should not covet are all good things we need in life, the things we pray for in the 4th Petition: **Give us this day our daily bread.** If all these things are gifts from God, why is it a sin to covet them, desire them in our hearts?

Wanting what belongs to our neighbor does not do him or her any harm. How can that be sinful? These commandments are put at the end of the “Second Table” of the Law, commandments 4-10, which concern our relationship with our neighbor. These commandments are summarized by, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** The Second Table of the Law is about loving our neighbor, but the last two commandments bring us back to where God began, the First: **You shall have no other gods before Me.** Luther’s explanations to commandments 2-10 all begin, “We should fear and love God so...”

When we sin by coveting, the sin is not against our neighbor unless we act on it. But the scheming in our hearts to get what belongs to our neighbor is a sin against God. Breaking the 9th and 10th Commandments, we sin against God first and foremost. Whenever we covet, we think that God has not taken proper care of us. We look at what our neighbor has—whatever it is—and we compare that to what we have, become dissatisfied with what’s ours, and accuse God of not being fair. “Why don’t I have what he or she has? They don’t deserve that, but I do!” Coveting is a sin against God that often leads to sins against our neighbor. David’s coveting of Bathsheba, his neighbor’s wife, led to adultery and then murder in an attempt to cover up his sin.

Jesus taught in Luke 12 that coveting leads to other types of sinning. The young man coveted his brother’s share of the inheritance. In his discontentment, he turned to Jesus to get what he thought he deserved. Not happy with what he had from God, he blamed God for bad treatment and demanded that Jesus make things right. Our discontentment with how God takes care of us is evidence of coveting.

Jesus also associates coveting with being anxious. **“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”** When we worry about things like these, we show that we don’t trust God to take care of us. We think God is not giving us the daily bread we need. And if God does not provide for what we need, then we need take matters into our own hands. We look at our neighbor, to whom God has given what we want, and we scheme to get it for ourselves. If we fear, love, and trust in God then we don’t have to be anxious over stuff or covet what belongs to others.

As we consider coveting, scheming to get stuff from others, what comes to my mind is the current fixation by some on DEI, which stands for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness, especially Equity, which is defined as, “providing equal outcomes for all.” The goal of “equity” is that everyone ends up with the same thing. To bring about “equity,” something must be taken away from those who have more and given to those who have less. Surrounding inequity talk is the accusation that those who have more must have gotten it at the expense of those who have less. Those who have more are guilty of past or present injustices that must be corrected by them paying reparations to those who have less. Those who have less often accuse those with more of being bad, who must be forced to pay for the equal outcome, or, if they won’t pay up, what they have can be taken from them by force. Isn’t that, essentially, coveting that leads to stealing?

The solution to coveting is faith in God. Do we believe what we confess of God in the 23rd Psalm, **“The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want”**? To **“not want”** is to lack no good thing, to have everything God thinks we need, and believe that God is going to take care of us, so we don’t need to covet what others have. Faith in God trusts that we don’t need to worry about not having enough. With faith in God, we don’t see the stuff of this world as most important and chase after those things. We reject as a lie the main objective of those who advertise the latest and greatest products for us to buy, the lie that we can be happy in life only if we get whatever we covet.

And when we find ourselves coveting, we must repent of our lack of faith and trust in God and ask God to forgive our sins of putting our trust in stuff and worrying about not having everything the world says is most important. In faith we ask God to give us new hearts and minds set on heavenly treasures, and “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” We believe what Jesus said about what it means to live before God. **“Seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”** Content with God and what He has given us, we are freed from coveting what belongs to our neighbor and, then, our eyes will be opened to see the needs of our neighbor so we can love him or her the way God loves us. Amen.