

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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This month's topic for consideration is found in the 9th and 10th Commandments: **"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's."** (Exodus 20:17) [Throughout this Topical Bulletin, all Scripture quotes are taken from the Holy Bible King James Version]

The fact that the LORD in Exodus 20:17 twice commands "thou shalt not covet" surely indicates covetousness is a sin our corrupt flesh is very inclined to commit. To covet is to lust after, desire, and long for that which belongs to another. The sin of envy therefore falls under the 9th and 10th Commandments; but, Romans 13:13-14 plainly instructs, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Thus, the sin of envying – coveting – is to be abstained from!

Strong's Hebrew/English lexicon defines the word "covet" as used in Exodus 20:17 as follows:

"Transliteration: ḥāmād. A primitive root; to delight in :- beauty, greatly beloved, covet, delectable thing, (× great) delight, desire, goodly, lust, (be) pleasant (thing), precious (thing)." AMG's Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament – supplies us with the following additional information on the Hebrew word: "ḥāmād-, חָמַד: A verb meaning to take pleasure in, to desire, to lust, to covet, to be desirable, to desire passionately. The verb can mean to desire intensely even in its simple stem."

Hence, Luther's Small Catechism in accord with Holy Scripture states:

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

A HOLY HEART

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, nor obtain it by a show of right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

A HOLY HEART

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not estrange, force, or entice away from our neighbor his wife, servants, or cattle, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Observe both the 9th and 10th Commandments forbid coveting— the sinful desire for our neighbor's inanimate and animate belongings. The 9th Commandment forbids the coveting of non-living things; the 10th Commandment forbids the coveting of living things. While first given in the Old Testament, both Commandments remain in force until the end of days, for we read in the New Testament, Romans 7:7, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." And, Romans 13:9 states, "For this, Thou shalt

not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Consider the following Bible verses and comments concerning what God forbids in regards to coveting.

“Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!” (Isaiah 5:8)

“Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.” (Micah 2:1-2)

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.” (Matthew 23:14)

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

Jesus “said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:15-21)

Comments: The five foregoing Scripture passages make it clear that we are NOT to covet the non-living things that are our neighbor's— such as our neighbor's property, house, and lands. Furthermore, while money itself is NOT the root of all evil, the LOVE OF MONEY is the root of all evil in that it is the sin of covetousness as forbidden in the 9th Commandment. Notice the hypocritical Pharisees went so far as to desire and acquire widows' houses to fatten their own bank-accounts. Observe that Jesus teaches how foolish it is to covet and amass worldly wealth and possessions, for the things of this world must be left behind when we die.

“...Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest

no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die. And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." (1 Kings 21:1-16)

Comment: Notice Ahab's sin of coveting Naboth's vineyard led to the further sins of bearing false witness, murder, and stealing at the instigation and instrumentality of Ahab's wicked wife, Jezebel. Beware of coveting!

"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house." (2 Samuel 11:2-4)

Comment: David broke the 10th Commandment when he coveted the wife of Uriah. David further sinned by committing adultery with the wife of Uriah, and later ordering the murder of Uriah. Hence, one sin led to another.

"The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth." (Psalm 10:2-3)

"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely." (Jeremiah 6:13)

Comment: Observe in the foregoing two Bible passages that the wicked bless the covetous and are in favor of practicing covetousness. Additionally, the sin of coveting is sometimes practiced by clergymen— not only the prophets and priests of old who were unfaithful to God and His Word, but also clergy-persons today who are not faithful to the Lord and His Word but instead make compromises in doctrine and practice in order to

gain both non-living and living worldly possessions from others.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.”
(Colossians 3:5-7)

Comment: Note that the sin of coveting is also the sin of idolatry, for when one covets he makes earthly possessions his god.

Consider the following Bible verses and comments concerning what God desires of us in regards to avoiding coveting.

“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2)

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

Comment: The Lord God desires that we be holy and perfect, as HE is holy and perfect. Thus, there is no allowance given to us to practice the sin of coveting. Oh, we ALL surely need Jesus Christ the Savior, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (1 Peter 2:1-3)

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” (Psalm 37:3-4)

Comment: We are to lay aside all envies, all covetousness. We are to trust in the Lord and do good. We are to realize the Lord will give His believing children what is truly best and needful for them. Hence, we need to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and we need to be fruitful in that faith, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 11:6)

“The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.” (Proverbs 28:16)

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

Comment: We do well to hate covetousness since coveting is sinful. Rather than coveting, we are to be

content if we have food and clothing, the basic necessities of life, because we will not carry any worldly possessions away with us when we depart this life.

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Galatians 5:13-14)

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Ephesians 5:1-5)

Comment: We Christians are to walk in love toward God and love toward our neighbors— all our fellow human beings. We are NOT to walk in covetousness. Note well that wilful sinning and impenitence leaves one headed for hell rather than headed for heaven.

“I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.” (Philemon 1:10-21)

Comment: Observe the Apostle Paul’s Christian example in not coveting the runaway servant Onesimus, but rather in a fatherly manner educating Onesimus and subsequently sending him back to his master Philemon. By God’s power working through the Word of the Gospel, Onesimus came to faith in Jesus Christ and became a fellow Christian of Paul’s and Philemon’s; hence, Paul requested that Philemon receive Onesimus as a brother in the Lord.

As we’ve pondered the 9th and 10th Commandments and related Bible passages which address the sin of coveting, we each in honesty should admit we’ve broken God’s Law. However, let us remember that Jesus Christ has paid for all our sins in full with His holy and precious blood which He shed while nailed to the cross of Calvary. Therefore, we have hope, for “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Accordingly, let us regularly repent; let us trust and confide in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has provided us with the forgiveness of sins and salvation; and, let us go forward striving to avoid all coveting with the help of God.

m.e.l.