

a sermon on EXODUS 20:17 – The Tenth Commandment:  
**THOU SHALT NOT COVET!**

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## I. A PROPOSITION

The man's heart who lives by The Word of GOD and in The Spirit of GOD will not covet what belongs to his neighbour, but will be set upon a covenantal relationship with The LORD, with his neighbour and with creation!

## II. THE TEXT - EXODUS 20:17 – THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

The King James Version of EXODUS 20:17 declares, "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." <sup>1</sup>

## III. INTRODUCTION

Saint Paul declares in ROMANS 7:7, "...I had not known sin, but by The Law: for I had not known lust, except The Law had said, Thou shalt not covet." <sup>2</sup> What becomes of the man who desires in his heart what belongs to his fellow man? When we desire our neighbour's wife, his wealth and his worldly possessions, we chase after things that can never bring happiness or blessing to our hearts. And even when we do not actually steal these blessings, given by GOD's hand to another, the mere desiring of it in our hearts is sin against GOD! Only when our hearts are set first upon a right relationship with GOD Himself, and as a consequence a right relationship with our neighbours and with creation, can our hearts obtain true happiness and blessing!

But how is fallen man to not lust for what belongs to other men? And how is sinful man to be in a right relationship with GOD first above all else, that we might then be in right relationships with one another and the things of this world? We are commanded to live within the safe pastures of GOD's Law, obeying This and all The Divine Commandments. But without a right spirit renewed within us by The Spirit of GOD, can any man hope to ever begin to truly keep GOD's Law? If we remain corrupt and fallen within, can our words and deeds be anything else but deceitful and twisted without? If we are not purged of our sin-guilt by The Almighty, can we ever hope to enter into His Presence as His adopted sons and daughters?

The answer lies in what GOD desires to work within us, as David confesses in PSALM 51:6, "Behold, Thou [O LORD] desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom!" <sup>3</sup> So The Reverend Charles Spurgeon comments that "GOD desires not merely outward virtue, but inward purity!" Yet unless The Spirit of GOD works within our hearts to purify us, we can never meet the standard of holiness to which GOD calls us to! But thanks be to GOD, "The HOLY SPIRIT can write The law [of GOD] on our heart... He can put the fear of The Lord within [our souls]... He can reveal CHRIST in us...!" Only when The Almighty so works to cleanse us from within are we "ordered aright, and truth and wisdom shall reign within us!" <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:17.

<sup>2</sup> 1, KJV, ROMANS 7:7.

<sup>3</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 51:6.

<sup>4</sup> 2, Treasury of David, Vol. 1, PSALMS 1-57. Charles Spurgeon. PSALM LI, 6, p 403.

#### IV. A WORD STUDY IN THE GREEK AND HEBREW

In The Septuagint, The Greek Text gives us, Ouk epithumeseis! - οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις<sup>5</sup> - Not you will “long for, desire, lust for or covet!”<sup>6</sup> In The Greek Septuagint text, the first word – οὐκ – meaning simply “not.”<sup>7</sup> The verb is given as a future negative imperative command to “you” singular. It is a personal prohibition against coveting which is spoken by the authority of The LORD to each of us individually, for the responsibility for our sins rest upon us. “If you have coveted in your heart anything that belongs to another in any way,” GOD commands each of us, “you shall not from this day forth ever covet again!”

The Hebrew Text begins, LO’ TACHMOD! - לֹא תַחַמֵּד<sup>8</sup> - Not you will covet! In The Hebrew Text, the first word is LO’ - לֹא - which means simply “not.”<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew verb CHAMAD - חָמַד - to covet - is given to “you” singular by GOD in the ongoing sense, in that This Commandment is and always will be in force by His decree.<sup>10</sup> So The Creator directs us all to “not now, nor ever, covet or lust over what I have given in blessing by My hand to your neighbour!”

#### V. THE NATURE OF THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Of all The Ten Commandments found in EXODUS 20, The Tenth is the only One to forbid an inward state of the heart, while all the Others deal with forbidden actions. Towards GOD, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me! Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image..., ...[nor] bow down thyself to them...”<sup>11</sup> “Thou shalt not take The Name of The LORD thy GOD in vain... Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”<sup>12</sup> Towards man, “Honour thy father and thy mother... Thou shalt not ...[murder]<sup>13</sup>. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false

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<sup>5</sup> 3, BGT, EXODUS 20:17.

<sup>6</sup> 4, Barklay-Newman Greek Lexicon [UBS], epithumeo - ἐπιθυμέω - I long for, desire; I covet; I lust for (MATTHEW 5:28). ἐπιθυμήσεις verb indicative future active 2nd person singular.

<sup>7</sup> 4, Barklay-Newman Greek Lexicon [UBS] Ou - οὐ (οὐκ, οὐχ) - adverb, not - (generally used with indicative verbs); used in questions when an affirmative answer is expected.

<sup>8</sup> 5, BHS, EXODUS 20:17.

<sup>9</sup> 6, Whittaker’s Revised-BDB Hebrew/Greek Lexicon B4782 LO’ לֹא or לוֹא adverb “not”...[negative particle often appearing before a verb], p 529.

<sup>10</sup> 6, Whittaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, CHAMAD - חָמַד - he covets. Verb qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular.

<sup>11</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:3-5.

<sup>12</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:7-8.

<sup>13</sup> 7, NKJV, EXODUS 20:13. The NKJV uses the word “murder” where the KJV employs the word “kill.”

witness...”<sup>14</sup> But in The Tenth Commandment, we have the forbidding of thoughts and intentions of sin in the heart, “Thou shalt not covet...”<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, to covet what belongs to our neighbour and not to ourselves is as The Original Sin which was born in The Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed the only Commandment that GOD had given them as in GENESIS 2:16-17: “And The LORD GOD commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die!’”<sup>16</sup> To covet, as Wycliffe says, is “...to desire that which it is not GOD’s will that we have.” The destructiveness of covetousness is “...a hidden mental state ...which is the root of nearly every sin against a neighbour.”<sup>17</sup> And, we may add, against GOD Himself!

For if our hearts are filled with evil thoughts and desires, then our lives with be filled with evil words and works! So David cries out to GOD in PSALM 141:3-4, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, To practice wicked works With men who work iniquity...”<sup>18</sup> David prays here that The Almighty keep both his words and works free of evil by keeping his desires and intentions pure. Spurgeon sees in David’s plea the same thing which our Lord teaches us to pray in MATTHEW 6:13, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”<sup>19</sup> For “...if the tongue and the heart are under GOD’s care, all is safe. ...[And so we should always] pray that He may never leave us to our own inclinings, or we shall soon decline from The Right!”<sup>20</sup>

Our Lord is forever concerned about the evil in men’s hearts, which defile them before GOD and lead to evil acts. And so JESUS CHRIST explains in MATTHEW 15:18-19 that is not a lack of external ritual piety that make a man unclean before GOD, but what comes forth from an unclean heart: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies!”<sup>21</sup> Clean the heart of man in his thoughts and desires, and you clean the outside of a man in his words and works!

## VI. OBSERVATIONS ON THE OUTWARD AND THE INWARD

So we see in The Tenth Commandment that GOD calls men to not “long after, covet, [or] set one’s desire” on what belongs to another in our hearts.<sup>22</sup> As Walter Kaiser

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<sup>14</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:12-16.

<sup>15</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:17.

<sup>16</sup> 1, KJV, GENESIS 2:16-17.

<sup>17</sup> 8, Wycliffe, EXODUS 20:17, p 70.

<sup>18</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 141:3-4.

<sup>19</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 6:13.

<sup>20</sup> 9, Treasury of David, Vol. 3, PSALMS 111-150. Charles Spurgeon. PSALM CXLI, 4, p 308.

<sup>21</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:18-19.

<sup>22</sup> 10, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, EXODUS 20:17, p 425, paragraph 1.

Jr. observes, This Commandment "...deals with man's inner heart and shows that none of the previous nine Commandments ...[can] be observed merely from an external or formal act."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, perhaps this is why The Almighty reveals This Commandment last, from where it may cast its shadow over all the previous nine Commandments. For GOD desires that we keep all of His Commandments externally and that our hearts be washed clean of evil within! And when our hearts are made clean by GOD's Spirit, we by His Grace are given the nature and ability to choose to not covet – as Saint John lists them in I JOHN 2:16 - "...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..."<sup>24</sup>

But until the righteousness of CHRIST is applied to cover our souls before The Throne of Divine Justice, and until The Spirit of GOD works to renew us from within in His Ways, no amount of mere external ritual piety and good works will suffice to justify us before The Creator! As Spurgeon observes, "The best of men are men at the best; and, apart from the work of The HOLY SPIRIT, and the power of Divine Grace, hell itself does not contain greater monsters of iniquity than you or I might become! Within the magazine of our hearts, there is powder enough to destroy us in an instant, if omnipotent Grace did not prevent!"<sup>25</sup> And not for nothing does the prophet tremble in confessing these words in ISAIAH 64:6 before The Holy One of Israel, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." before Thee, O LORD!<sup>26</sup>

## VII. TO SET OUR HEARTS FIRST ON GOD

GOD calls us to set our hearts, not on desiring things of this world to fulfill our lives, but to set our hearts on Him! For if our hearts are set first on a covenant relationship with The LORD, and then secondly with one another, our hearts will hold a proper attitude towards the blessings of creation which The Almighty deems to bestow upon us and our neighbours. So JESUS CHRIST declares to us in MATTHEW 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see GOD!"<sup>27</sup> Man's only true happiness rests not in coveting things of this world, but in relationship with GOD. Only then will all else fall into proper perspective. Saint Gregory of Nyssa observes that it is "The promise (of seeing GOD) [which alone] surpasses all beatitude... [For] In Scripture, to see is to possess... Whoever sees GOD has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive!"<sup>28</sup>

So The HOLY SPIRIT and The faithful Church call all men as in REVELATION 22:17, "...let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely!"<sup>29</sup> JESUS CHRIST Himself is our "Water of Life" sent to call us to drink both now and forever of blessed fellowship with GOD! Saint Augustine echoes this when he

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<sup>23</sup> 10, Expositor's Bible Commentary, EXODUS 20:17, p 425, paragraph 2.

<sup>24</sup> 1, KJV, I JOHN 2 :16. Saint John lists here 3 forms of covetousness.

<sup>25</sup> 11, Life and Work of Our Lord, Volume 1, CHRIST in The Old Testament. Charles Spurgeon. A sermon: "The Mediator – The Interpreter," p 110.

<sup>26</sup> 1, KJV, ISAIAH 64:6.

<sup>27</sup> 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:8.

<sup>28</sup> 12, Catechism of The Catholic Church, The [Catholic] 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, # 2548, p 671.

<sup>29</sup> 1, KJV, REVELATION 22:17.

says, "...GOD Himself ...[is to be] the goal of our desires; we ...[should above all else seek to] contemplate Him without end, love Him without [reservation]..., praise Him without weariness!"<sup>30</sup> By GOD's Grace, we are offered this now in part within His Church on earth, and in full within His Church in Heaven!

### VIII. THE DIVINE CURE - THE LAW OF GOD AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD

What is The Divine cure for lost man, that he might be brought back into covenant relationship with The LORD, with his neighbours and with creation? It is twofold, contained within both the Word of GOD and The Spirit of GOD. The Word of GOD is inspired by The HOLY SPIRIT. So we read in II TIMOTHY 3:16-17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of GOD may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>31</sup> EPHESIANS 6:17 declares, "...the sword of The Spirit ...is The Word of GOD."<sup>32</sup> The Word of GOD guides us into righteousness from without as The Divine Law, revealing to us The Creator's will for our lives, teaching us right from wrong, keeping us from evil, convicting us of our sins and driving us to our knees at The Cross!

So Saint Paul writes in GALATIANS 3:24 of the essential function of The Law: "Wherefore The Law [of GOD] ...[is] our schoolmaster to bring us unto CHRIST, that we might be justified by faith!"<sup>33</sup> The conscience is convicted by knowledge of its sin before The Absolute Decrees of Righteousness of The King of The Universe! As Spurgeon says, "It is no little thing to see how The Law judges the thoughts, desires and imaginations of the heart. ...So pure, so just, so uncompromising is The Law of GOD, that when It is really understood, It makes us quail, and brings us to our knees! ...[For] no man knows the brightness of The Gospel till he understands the blackness of those clouds which surround The Law of The Lord!"<sup>34</sup>

But as Stanley Grenz observes, "JESUS Himself declared that GOD's intention for us does not stop with mere outward conformity to [His] Laws... A focus on [only] outward [Pharisee-like] obedience fails to acknowledge that the human 'heart' is the source of evil actions..."<sup>35</sup> It is the heart of man that must be purged within, and the spirit of man that must be remade from within. And only The LORD may do this great work in us! So David cries out to The LORD in PSALM 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O GOD; and renew a right spirit within me!"<sup>36</sup> As Spurgeon says here, "The heart

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<sup>30</sup> 12, Catechism of The Catholic Church, The [Catholic] 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment, # 2550, p 671-672.

<sup>31</sup> 1, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:16-17.

<sup>32</sup> 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 6:17.

<sup>33</sup> 1, KJV, GALATIANS 3:24.

<sup>34</sup> 11, Life and Work of Our Lord, Volume 1, CHRIST in The Old Testament. Charles Spurgeon. A sermon: "The Mediator – The Interpreter, p 109.

<sup>35</sup> 13, The Moral Quest. Stanley Grenz. 6. Christian Ethics & the Contemporary Context, p 229, paragraph 1.

<sup>36</sup> 1, KJV, PSALM 51:10.

is the rudder of the soul, and till The Lord take it in hand, we steer in a false and foul way!”<sup>37</sup>

Our Lord answers in His discourse with Nicodemus in JOHN 3:5, “...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of The Spirit, he cannot enter into The Kingdom of GOD!”<sup>38</sup> If we are in CHRIST, as I CORINTHIANS 3:16 declares, “...The Spirit of GOD dwelleth in ...[us],”<sup>39</sup> cleansing our hearts and renewing our souls within us! But woe to the man who is not in CHRIST! For as Matthew Henry says here of the unredeemed and unregenerate man, “The [unredeemed] soul is still a spiritual substance, but so wedded to the flesh, so captivated by the will of the flesh, so in love with the delights of the flesh, so employed in making provision for the flesh, that it is mostly called flesh; it is carnal. And what communion can there be between GOD, Who is ...[holy], and a [fallen, unwashed human] soul in this condition?”<sup>40</sup>

The Almighty calls us, by His HOLY SPIRIT, to enter into a new covenantal life with Himself, with His holy community The Church and with all that He blesses us with from His loving hand. But we must first be redeemed in CHRIST, that we might be regenerated and sanctified by GOD’s Spirit. Only then may we enter into His Kingdom. As Grenz says, “This Divine Spirit, Who is The Spirit of JESUS [CHRIST], brings us into right relationships with GOD, with each other and all creation!”<sup>41</sup> Thus the washing and rebirth in the physical water of baptism brings us into a new life of covenantal living within His visible Church! The Almighty also calls us to be remade and born again in our souls to be holy as He is holy. Thus the washing and rebirth in spiritual baptism of The HOLY SPIRIT brings us into a new life within His invisible Church!

As Grenz observes, The Law of GOD, which He has given us in His Holy Scriptures, “...work[s] hand in hand with The Spirit [of GOD]. As we seek to live within the realm toward which The Law points, The indwelling Spirit creates the kind of relationships that honor GOD!”<sup>42</sup> So The Word of GOD – given to us by the inspiration of The Spirit of GOD - is to guide us from without. And The indwelling Spirit of GOD – given to us when we are redeemed by The Saviour JESUS CHRIST - is to guide us from within. Both work together – and never contrary to One Another - to bring us into His Kingdoms both earthly and eternal. Why? So that we might, as His adopted sons and daughters, dwell in His holy and loving Presence both now and forever! The inside of the cup being made clean by His Grace to us and in us - through The HOLY SPIRIT - what proceeds from the fountain of our hearts will then also be clean!

## IX. THE PATH OF CHRISTIAN PURITY BY HIS GRACE

The faithful Christian man - being elected, bought and reborn by The Triune GOD - is given Divine Grace needed, that he might cease from coveting in his heart. For by

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<sup>37</sup> 2, Treasury of David, Vol. 1, PSALMS 1-57. Charles Spurgeon. PSALM LI, 10, p 405.

<sup>38</sup> 1, KJV, JOHN 3:5.

<sup>39</sup> 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 3:16.

<sup>40</sup> 14, Matthew Henry, JOHN III, 1-21, CHRIST’s Interview w. Nicodemus, 1., (2.), [2.], [c] v.6.

<sup>41</sup> 13, The Moral Quest. Stanley Grenz. 7. Foundations of a Christian Ethic, p 253, paragraph 2.

<sup>42</sup> 13, The Moral Quest. Stanley Grenz. 7. Foundations of a Christian Ethic, p 253, paragraph 3.



His Grace, we find ourselves possessing chastity, which "...lets us love with upright and undivided heart" The Creator, one another and creation. By His Grace, we develop purity in our thoughts and desires, in which "...the baptized person seeks to find and to fulfill GOD's will in everything." By His Grace, we grow in the purity of our feelings and imagination, in which "...all complicity in impure thoughts that incline us to turn aside from the path of GOD's Commandments" die away. By His Grace, we learn by prayer to offer up to The Divine Maker our "...inner[most] groaning[s] ...[and to] cast our cares on..." Him! <sup>43</sup>

#### X. VENI, SANCTE SPIRITUS! – COME, HOLY SPIRIT!

So it should ever be the burning desire and daily prayer of all Christian men to be both guided by The Word of GOD from without and The Spirit of GOD from within, that we would be more and more like our Lord JESUS CHRIST! That GOD would, in the writing of His Law upon our hearts, convict us of our utter sinfulness and the desperate need for His Grace at The Cross of our Saviour! That The HOLY SPIRIT would cause our hearts to be swept clean of evil desires and intentions, so that our lives may be swept clean of evil words and works! This prayer - The "Veni, Sancte Spiritus!" or "Come, Holy Spirit! - is attributed to Pope Innocent III of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. May it ever be the cry of our hearts to The Throne of The Divine Grace:

Holy Spirit, Lord of life,  
From Your clear celestial height  
Your pure beaming radiance give!

Light immortal, Light Divine,  
Visit now these hearts of Thine  
And our inmost being fill!

If You take Your Grace away,  
Nothing pure in us will stay;  
All our good is turned to ill!

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;  
On our dryness, pour Your dew;  
Wash the stains of guilt away!

Bend the stubborn heart and will;  
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;  
Guide the steps that go astray!

You, on those who evermore  
Confess You and still adore,  
In Your ...[loving] gifts descend!

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<sup>43</sup> 12, Catechism of The Catholic Church, The [Catholic] 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment, # 2520, p 664-665.

Give them comfort when they die,  
Give them life with You on high;  
Given them joys that never end!<sup>44</sup>

#### XI. IN CONCLUSION

How then shall we learn to not covet? Only by GOD's Grace, which we may receive only at The Cross of JESUS CHRIST! For only the man redeemed by The precious Body and Blood of our Lord is truly guided by The Word of GOD and the Spirit of GOD into new life: a life in covenant with The Almighty, with fellow saints in The Church and with all men and with the good things of this world! Only the heart that is thus born again is given by Divine Grace the ability to keep The Commandment of EXODUS 20:17, "Thou shalt not covet...!"<sup>45</sup> For the man's heart who lives by The Word of GOD and in The Spirit of GOD will not covet what belongs to his neighbour, but will be set upon a covenantal relationship with The LORD, with his neighbour and with creation! May it ever be so with us. In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost! AMEN.

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<sup>44</sup> 15, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Prayers to The HOLY SPIRIT, "Veni, Sancte Spiritus," p190-191, stanzas 1, 5-10. Notation reads, "Called the 'Golden Sequence,' this prayer was probably written by Pope Innocent III at the end of the twelfth century [AD]." I have substituted "loving" for "sevenfold" in stanza 9.

<sup>45</sup> 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:17.

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