

Session 23– Study Notes
Exodus 20: 17
Rev. Janice Y Cook – The Village Church

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

1. The last commandment is the only one that seems to be restricted to the heart rather than to actions. This commandment is not focused on our actions; it is focused on our thoughts, our desires and our feelings.
2. Coveting (hamad) refers to an inward desire that, if fanned, will lead to action.
3. It is the tenth commandment that seeks to internalize the law for each of us as it tells us not to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor.
4. The term for “covet” does not refer to the simple and natural human desire that can be aroused by viewing and attractive object or person. Rather it denotes the intense desire that is generated by passion and thus not easily controlled.
5. In driving home, the importance of this command, the Israelite is taken on a tour of his surroundings. Look around you: your neighbor’s wife, his servants, his animals – in fact, anything that belongs to him.
6. The command is not given in reverse, since this specific sin is committed only when a married woman is involved.
7. Being an Israelite is not a matter of private, personal piety. It has vertical and horizontal dimensions, and obedience to God is required on both fronts.
8. Unlike the other commandments of the Decalogue, this one repeats its admonition. “You shall not covet...” appears twice in succession, each time with a different object.
9. Children are not included in the list of human members of the household, perhaps because forestalling adultery is the intent. Another factor may have been the desire to list a total of seven things not to be coveted. In the aggregate, these seven symbolize the totality of a household.
10. We can see how the tenth commandment is often interpreted as a summation of the nine preceding commandments.

11. Coveting happens when someone sees the prosperity, achievements, or talents of another, and then *resents* it, or wants to *take it*, or wants to *punish* the successful person. It is the harm to another person, “your neighbor”—not the desire to have something—that is prohibited.

Covetousness is driven by greed. Greed feeds on itself and leads to even greater sin. It is a form of greed, which Paul calls idolatry.

12. Francis Shaeffer commented that we always break the commandment not to covet before we break any of the other nine.

13. Coveting is the single ingredient that sets us at odds with our world, God and ourselves.

14. Coveting emerges from a disdain for what one’s life looks like and an inability to wish for the best for others.

REFLECTIONS

1. How are coveting, envy and jealousy different? Or are they?
2. Share a time when you experienced or watched someone else covet something or someone,
3. Read the true story below. Like the story of David trace the various commandments that are broken and discuss what would drive a person towards this brink.

Shanna Widner was in eighth grade when her mother decided that the only way to assure Shanna a spot on the cheerleading squad at Channelview High School, was to take out a hit on Verna Heath, the mother of their neighbor, thirteen-year-old Amber, who was also a cheerleader. Holloway enlisted her former brother-in-law to commit the murder, but the plan unraveled when he went to the police.

Sources

1. The Book of Exodus by Brevard Childs
2. Exodus (Interpretation) by Terence Fretheim
3. The Particulars of Rapture by Rabbi Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
4. Covenant and Conversation by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
5. The New Interpreter’s Bible