

96. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments.

Thou shalt not covet. *Rom. 13, 9.*

The last two commandments teach us that even the evil thought of the heart is truly a sin and, being a sin, already brings us into the judgment of God.

That even a thought may be sin, people do not know by nature. Therefore the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," shows the spiritual nature and requirements of the Law. It condemns all self-righteous men, who view the divine Law superficially, as though it demanded no more than outward conformity to its precepts; it teaches us that in God's sight evil lust, the mere desire for something that He has forbidden, is indeed and truly sin, that therefore we should have no evil lust whatever in our hearts, but that only holy desires and love of God and of all that is good ought to dwell there.

But to make the matter very clear, God mentions as examples of what we should not covet our neighbor's house, wife, servants, and cattle. How do we know that we covet something? When we begrudge our neighbor something that he has, when, because we envy him his prosperity, we begin to dislike him, and when we desire to have "anything that is our neighbor's." If a Christian does not check these envious thoughts at the very beginning, they will drive him to deprive his neighbor of his advantages and gain them for himself; he will seek to appropriate them craftily and by a show or right. The world does not consider such methods wrong. But God does not want us to deprive our neighbor of anything that is his, even though in the eyes of the world we may be regarded as the rightful owners of what we have craftily taken from him.

The lust of gain is thus characterized by the Bible: "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Again: "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" Scripture warns us not to be evil affected by our riches. For "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown man in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil." It is wrong to get rich at the expense of our neighbor.

Prayer.

O holy and righteous God, have mercy upon us for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ. Cleanse our hearts more and more from all covetousness and grant us grace to love our neighbor and to help him and to be of service to him in keeping what is his. Give us hearts that are content with such things as we have and let us not desire what Thou hast not intended for us. Fill our hearts with Thy Holy Spirit, so that all our desires may be centered in Thee, in Thy grace, and in Thy spiritual, heavenly treasures. Raise our thoughts and affections from earth to heaven. In Thy mercy I will ever trust. Amen.

If earthly cares and want oppress me
And cause me sorrow and regret
That things so vain can still distress me
And give me so much trouble yet, -
Though I am bowed down to the dust,
Still in His mercy I will trust.

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