



March 10, 2017
The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

[Read Genesis 3:1-7](#)

Luther puts the last two commandments together in his *Large Catechism*, and they usually appear on the same page in his *Small Catechism*. The word that ties the two commandments together is rarely used verb, “covet.” The word means to “yearn to possess or have (something).” So these commandments are about our desires. Will we desire God or some substitute for God?

Modern marketers are experts at activating our desires. They focus our attention on the things that really make us perk up and take notice: sex, danger, and the chance to improve our situations. They entice us to desire more. Now, wanting more is not a bad thing if our desires are properly focused. If we desire first of all to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, then we will want more of God and more of life. That’s a very good way to live.

We tend, however, to desire to “like” God rather than to desire God. That is the issue in the garden. The woman and the man desire to be wise like God and thus to become independent of and perhaps even equal with God. That is the beginning of the end for them, and for us.

When we covet, we want more sex, more safety and more stuff. Those are things addressed in the ninth and tenth commandments. We are warned against scheming to deprive our neighbors of spouse, property, employees, business or inheritance. Luther sees these commandments directed, not toward outright thieves (that’s the focus of the seventh commandment) but rather to “respectable” people who use the tools of the market, the state and even the church to pry sex, safety and stuff out of our neighbor’s hands.

In his *Large Catechism* he writes, “You must learn that God does not wish you to deprive your neighbor of anything that is his, letting him suffer loss while you gratify your greed, even though in the eyes of the world you might honorably retain the property. To do so is dark and underhanded wickedness...”

On the one hand, we can see the value of these commandments. Any market system really depends on trust more than on capital. If we cannot trust the agreements we make, then business will grind to a halt. If we must fence in every transaction with multiple regulations, the cost and burden of business will become intolerable. Human community depends on human character. The more we keep these commandments the better markets will operate.

On the other hand, we know the depths of the human heart—how we desire every more sex, safety and stuff. So we must have enough rules and regulations to protect us from ourselves and others. The balance in these commandments seeks to lead us into a community where we desire God and love our neighbors.

Let’s pray. Dear God, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts to drive out our desire to replace you. Fill us with a desire for You and a love for our neighbors that we might live together in honesty and blessing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Make a list today of how advertising might lead you to covet. Use that list to regulate your desires. And give something away that you aren’t using as a discipline of those desires.

Pastor Lowell Hennigs
Emanuel Lutheran Church
2444 N Broadway
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503-0499
www.emanuelcb.org