

# The Tenth Commandment

by A.W. Pink

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*A.W. Pink's sermon on the Tenth Commandment emphasizes the importance of internal desires and the need for divine grace to combat sinfulness.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:17, James 1:14

**Topics:** "Inner Purity", "Coveting"

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## Description

A.W. Pink expounds on the Tenth Commandment, emphasizing that it forbids not only the outward act of coveting but also the internal desires and inclinations of the heart. He explains that concupiscence, or unlawful lusting, is the root of sin, and that God's law extends to our thoughts and imaginations, holding us accountable for our inner life. Pink highlights the importance of recognizing these hidden sins, as they lead to overt actions, and stresses that true obedience to God involves purity of heart. He concludes that the Tenth Commandment serves as a guard for the other commandments, revealing our sinful nature and pointing us to the grace found in Christ. Ultimately, it calls believers to seek cleansing from secret faults and to rely on God's grace for true transformation.

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## Transcript

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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"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 anything that is thy neighbour's" (Ex. 20:17). That which is here prohibited is concupiscence or an unlawful lusting after what is another man's. In our exposition of the previous Commandments we have pointed out that while their actual terms are confined to the forbidding of outward acts, yet the scope of each one takes in and reaches to the condemnation of everything which has any tendency or occasion to lead to the overt crime.

Here in the final precept of the Decalogue we find clear confirmation of the same, for in it God expressly imposes a law upon our spirits, forbidding us to so much as lust after whatever He has forbidden us to perpetrate. The best way to keep men from committing sin in act is to keep them from desiring it in heart. Thus while the authority of each of the first nine Commandments reaches to the mind and the most secret intents of the soul, yet the Lord saw fit to plainly and literally state this in the tenth, where He specifically reprehends the first motions of our hearts toward any object He has fenced, and therefore it is the bond

which strengthens the whole.

Evil concupiscence consists of those secret and internal sins that go before the consent of the will and that are the seeds of all evil. Concupiscence or lusting is the firstborn of indwelling depravity, the first risings and expressions of our corrupt nature. It is a violent propensity and inclination toward what is evil, toward that which is contrary to the holy will and command of God. The soul of man is an operative and vigorous creature, ever putting forth activities suitable to its nature.

Before the Fall, the soul of man was drawn forth to God as its supreme Object and the End of all its exercise, but when man apostatized and turned from God as his only Good or satisfying Portion, his soul became enamored with the creature. Thus the soul of fallen man, being destitute of Divine grace and spiritual life, craves sinful objects to the slighting of God, and inordinately lusts after things which in themselves are harmless, but become evil because he neither receives them as from God nor uses them for His glory.

Concupiscence, then, is that irregular disposition of soul that is here termed "covetousness." The Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins (to whom we are indebted for much in this chapter, as also for many helpful points in the preceding ones) has pointed out that there are four degrees of this sinful concupiscence or coveting. There is the first film or shadow of an evil thought, the imperfect embryo of a sin before it is shaped in us or has any lineaments or features. This is what the Scripture refers to as "every imagination of the thoughts" of the human heart.

Such imaginations are expressly declared to be "evil" (Gen. 6:5). Such are the first risings of our corrupt nature toward those sins which are pleasing to our sensual inclinations. They are to be steadfastly watched, hated, and resisted. They are to be stamped upon as the sparks of a dangerous fire, for as soon as they begin to stir within us they pollute our souls. Just as the breathing upon a mirror sullies it, leaving a dimness there, so the very first breathings of an evil desire or thought within one's breast defile the soul.

A further degree of this concupiscence is reached when these evil motions of our corrupt nature are entertained in the mind with some degree of complacency. When a sinful object presents itself before a carnal heart there is an inward response that affects that heart with delight and begets a sympathy between it and the object. As in an instance of natural sympathy a man is often pleased with an object before he knows the reason why he is, so in an instance of sinful sympathy or response the heart is taken with the object before it has time to consider what there is in that object which so moves and affects it.

At the very first sight of a person we many times find that we are more drawn to him than to a whole crowd of others, though all may be equally unknown to us. So the very first glimpse of a sinful thought in our minds reveals that there is that in us which works a regard for the same before we have leisure to examine why it is so. This second form or degree of concupiscence is harder to eject than the former. If such evil motions are entertained by us, then an assent and an approbation to sin follow in ones practical judgment, which, being blinded and carried away by the strength of corrupt and carnal affections, commends the sin to the executive faculty.

The understanding is the trier of every deliberate action so that nothing passes into action which has not first passed trial there. Whether this or that action is to be done is the great question canvassed in this court, and all the faculties of the soul await what definite sentence will be here pronounced and thus carried out. Normally two witnesses appear and put in their plea to the understanding or judgment about sin: God's Law and God's vicegerent the conscience. The Law condemns and the conscience cites the

Law.

But then the affections step in and bribe the judge with promises of pleasure or profit, thereby corrupting the judgment to give its vote and assent to sin. Note how all of this receives illustration in the colloquy between Eve and the Serpent before she partook of the forbidden fruit. When any sinful motion has thus secured an allowance from the judgment, then it betakes itself to the will for a decree. The understanding having approved it, the will must now resolve to commit it; and then the sin is fully formed within and lacks nothing but opportunity to bring it forth into open action.

"But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth (open) sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (Jas. 1:14, 15). Thus we have endeavored to show what concupiscence or coveting is, and the several degrees of it: the first bubblings up of evil thoughts in our hearts; our delighting in the same (and it is altogether against corrupt nature not to love these firstborn of our own souls); the assent and allowance of our judgment; and the resolution of our wills.

Each of these is expressly forbidden by the tenth commandment. And if the sin proceeds any further, then it exceeds the bounds of this commandment and falls under the prohibition of some of the former ones, which more specifically forbid the outward acts of sin. This final precept, then, utters its solemn protest against sin in the inner life. Herein we may behold and adore the boundless dominion or sovereignty of the great God. He proclaims His rights over the hidden realm of desires.

His authority reaches to the soul and conscience and lays an obligation upon our very thoughts and imaginations, which no human laws can do. It would be vain for men to impose statutes upon that of which they can take no cognizance, and therefore our desires and lustings are free from their censure, except so far as they discover themselves by overt acts. But though they escape the commands and notice of men, yet they escape not the scrutiny and sentence of God, for He sees not as men see, neither judges He as men judge.

The secrets of all hearts are open and naked before His eyes; not the least breath of a desire can stir in our souls but it is more distinctly visible to Him than the shining of the midday sun is to us. God's Law, like His knowledge, reaches into the most secret recesses of your soul, searches every corner of your heart, judges those lusts which no human eye can spy, and if they be harbored and approved of, condemns you as a guilty transgressor and worthy of eternal death, no matter how pleasing your external deportment may be.

Then how vain it is for us to content ourselves with an outward conformity to God's Law! How we should labor to approve our hearts in sincerity and purity before God; otherwise we are but pharisaical hypocrites who wash merely the outside of the cup while within we are still full of unclean lusts. How many there are who suppose that God's Law reaches only to the outward man, and that, though they entertain and cherish wicked desires and evil purposes in their hearts, so long as these lusts break not forth into external crimes they will not be charged to their account.

But the Day of Judgment will show it is far otherwise. How very few reflect upon heart sins! How very few pray, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults"! Be not deceived, God is not mocked, and He cannot be duped by external shows. See here the wisdom of God in setting this commandment at the close of the Decalogue, for it is a fence and guard to all the rest. It is from inward defilements of the soul that all our visible sins of word and deed have their rise. All Sabbath-breaking proceeds from the restlessness which

is born of unholy desire.

"Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries" etc. (Matthew 15:19). Observe well that Christ places "evil thoughts" in the front, as the leader of this vile regiment! "Thou shalt not covet." Thou shalt not set thine heart upon, or have the least hankering after, what belongs to another. An objector may say, "It is impossible to prevent the desire for what we admire." Very true, yet in that fact is revealed the fallen condition of man and the desperate wickedness of his heart.

That such desire is sinful and damning is only discovered in the light of this commandment. He who honestly faces this final precept in the Decalogue must be convicted of his sinfulness and brought to realize his helplessness, or this is its ultimate design. God has given His Holy Law to us in order that we might see the utter hopelessness of our case if we are left to ourselves. This He has done in order to shut us up to Christ and the magnitude of His grace toward repentant sinners who will believe on His beloved Son, Who perfectly obeyed the Law and in Whom the Father is well pleased!

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