

Lesson 34: Questions 84, 85, and 86

In Lesson 33, we considered the ninth commandment. It requires us to maintain and promote truth between people and to preserve our own and our neighbor's good name, especially in witness bearing. It forbids what harms truth or unjustly injures a reputation. The tenth commandment now carries us beneath outward speech and testimony to the desires, discontentments, envies, and affections from which so many outward sins proceed.

84-86

Question 84: What is the tenth commandment?

Q. Which is the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment is, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17, ESV)

The tenth commandment reaches the heart. It does not merely forbid the outward taking of what belongs to another person. Theft, adultery, false witness, and oppression are already forbidden elsewhere in the Decalogue. This commandment forbids the discontented, self-centered, or wrongful desire to possess what God has entrusted to someone else.

Notice the repeated language: "*thou shalt not covet*". Then notice the comprehensive conclusion: "*nor anything that is thy neighbour's*". Houses, possessions, work, status, relationships, opportunities, recognition, influence, and every lawful good entrusted to another fall within its scope. The law is not content to ask whether our hands have taken; it asks what our hearts have wanted.

This follows the interpretive method we have seen in the sixth through ninth commandments. Each brief prohibition names an entire moral category.

- The 6th commandment forbids not only murder but sinful anger and hatred.
- The 7th commandment forbids not only adultery but unchaste desires.
- The 8th commandment forbids not only theft but all unjust injury to a neighbor's possessions.
- The 9th commandment forbids not only courtroom perjury but every harmful falsehood.

So the 10th exposes the heart as the fountain from which sinful conduct flows.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (James 4:1-2, ESV)

This shows the progression: passions war within us and then break out into conflict and violence.

1 Kings 21:1-16 is a biblical narrative that shows this play out in a tragic way.

1. Ahab desires Naboth's vineyard.
2. Naboth lawfully refuses to surrender his inheritance.
3. Ahab becomes sullen and resentful.
4. Jezebel arranges false testimony.
5. Naboth is murdered.
6. Ahab takes the vineyard he coveted.

Coveting was not a private weakness. It became manipulation, false witness, murder, and theft. It very quickly led to violations of the 2nd table of the Law: "*love your neighbor as yourself*." (Romans 13:9)

We should, however, distinguish lawful desire from coveting. It is lawful to work, plan, seek provision, pursue a calling, desire marriage, grieve hardship, and pray for changed circumstances. The question is whether our desires are governed by faith, gratitude, love of neighbor, or by covetousness.

Question 85: What does it require?

Q. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.

FIRST, the commandment requires “full contentment with our own condition”. Christian contentment is not apathy, laziness, fatalism, or pretending that genuine sorrow is pleasant. It is the settled grace of receiving God’s wise and fatherly providence while faithfully obeying Him in the circumstances He has assigned.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5, ESV)

This joins contentment directly to freedom from the love of money and grounds it in God’s promise of His abiding presence. The believer’s security is not ultimately determined by the size of his checking account or 401(k), the certainty of his employment, or the ease of his circumstances.

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. (1 Timothy 6:6-7, ESV)

Paul is not praising poverty as inherently virtuous, nor condemning responsible provision. He is exposing the great error of measuring gain by what can be accumulated and kept in this world.

Paul’s testimony in **Philippians 4:10-13** is particularly helpful:

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:10-13, ESV)

He learned contentment **both** in plenty **and** in need. That passage is not a promise that Christians can accomplish every personal ambition they desire. Athletes really need to stop ripping this verse out of its context. This verse is not about **physical achievements**. It is Christ’s strength for **faithfulness** amid changing conditions, whether abundance or want.

This applies to money, work, housing, health, marriage, singleness, children, opportunities, recognition, ministry influence, and the apparent ease of another person’s life. Sometimes the circumstances we encounter in these categories are truly grievous. Christians may pray earnestly, work diligently, seek help, pursue lawful change, and lament real loss. Contentment does not forbid **faithful effort**; it forbids **resentful unbelief** toward God. It receives present mercies as gifts rather than treating them as insufficient because another person has been given more.

SECOND, the commandment requires “a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his.” We are not merely to refrain from taking our neighbor’s good. We are to receive it rightly and, where appropriate, rejoice in it. Another person’s lawful blessing is an occasion to thank God, not an accusation against His goodness to us.

Job gives a searching example: he refuses to rejoice at the ruin of one who hated him (**Job 31:29**). Love does not secretly delight when a rival falls. Paul identifies love as arising from “**a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith**” (**1 Timothy 1:5**). The commandment calls for a heart being progressively made sincere before God.

The description of love in **1 Corinthians 13:4, 7** gives us the positive disposition required here.

Love does not envy or exalt itself over another.

It **bears** all things, **believes** all things, **hopes** all things, and **endures** all things for the neighbor’s good.

Thus it does not treat another person’s gifts, weakness, or lawful possession as material for our resentment, pride, or self-advancement. Rather, the success of others should gladden us.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15, ESV)

Our neighbor's state of affairs should meaningfully affect us in lawful and appropriate ways. When he receives provision, recognition, restored health, a fruitful ministry, a godly marriage, children, useful gifts, or an opportunity for service, we ought to thank God for His kindness. When he suffers loss, disappointment, illness, injustice, or grief, we should not look away coldly or secretly rejoice in his pain. We should mourn with him, pray for him, and help as wisdom and calling permit.

We need not call sin good, excuse injustice, or assume that prosperity proves God's approval. Nor does sympathy require us to approve every desire or judgment expressed in suffering. The concern is our neighbor's lawful good and the posture of our own heart toward it.

So contentment and charitable love belong together. A person who receives God's providence with gratitude is freer both to celebrate another's blessing and to share another's sorrow. The tenth commandment thus directs us away from coveting and toward gratitude, generosity, love, and holy joy.

Question 86: What does it forbid?

Q. What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

FIRST, the commandment forbids "all discontentment with our own estate". Discontentment appears in grumbling, resentment, self-pity, comparison, ingratitude, and an inability to receive present mercies with thanks. It is not the same as acknowledging hardship, pursuing lawful change, or lamenting suffering. It is the heart's sinful quarrel with God's providence.

Ahab again illustrates this in [1 Kings 21:4](#). He has a kingdom, yet he lies down vexed because he cannot have Naboth's vineyard. Haman provides an even more vivid example. Though he possesses great wealth, honor, royal access, and a large family, he says that it all avails him nothing while Mordecai remains at the king's gate ([Esther 5:9-13](#)). *Envy makes real blessings invisible.*

Israel's grumbling in the wilderness also warns us that dissatisfaction can become a complaint against God Himself ([1 Corinthians 10:10](#)). We should be careful here. The believer may cry to God in pain, ask Him hard questions, and mourn what has been lost. The Psalms teach us to do so. But lament brings sorrow to God in faith; grumbling puts God in the dock and demands answers.

SECOND, the commandment forbids "envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor". Envy is:

- Sorrow at another person's lawful blessing
- Resentment of another's success
- Secret pleasure at his loss

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:26, ESV)

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (James 3:14-16, ESV)

Envy does not remain private for long. It readily becomes harmful speech or conduct. It appears in church life, family life, work, ministry, reputation, health, relationships, possessions, and influence. We may envy someone's platform, abilities, friends, marriage, children, income, or success. Envy can disguise itself as discernment, criticism, false humility, or concern for justice. It may notice genuine weaknesses in another person, but it uses those weaknesses to feed a secret resentment of his good.

A charitable spirit does not mean indifference to sin or injustice. The Christian must sometimes name wrong plainly and seek lawful redress. But another person's lawful blessing must never become an excuse for bitterness. If we cannot give thanks for the good God has given our neighbor, we should bring that inability honestly before Him.

THIRD, the commandment forbids “all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.” In plain language, it forbids desires that are unlawful, excessive, wrongly directed, or allowed to rule the heart. Sinful desires often begin as **inward** movements before they become **outward** acts.

“And you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Deuteronomy 5:21, ESV)

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. (Romans 7:7-8, ESV)

For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Romans 13:9, ESV)

This reaches possessions and money, but it also reaches status, sexual desire, control, comfort, relationships, recognition, and influence. A good thing becomes an inordinate desire when we **demand** it from God, **resent** its presence in another’s life, or **withhold** obedience until we receive it.

Yet the purpose of the law is to expose sin honestly and drive us to Christ, not to make tender Christians despair. There is a real difference between temptation, an unwanted sinful thought, a desire entertained and embraced, and settled covetousness that is defended and cultivated. The first two call for watchfulness and prayer; the latter two call for repentance as well. We must not minimize sinful desire, but neither should we confuse **temptation** with **deliberate rebellion**. Christ knows the weakness of His people and supplies mercy and help in time of need (**Hebrews 4:15-16**).

Conclusion

Questions 84 through 86 teach us that the tenth commandment reaches the desires of the heart.

84. **The commandment itself:** forbids coveting anything that belongs to our neighbor.

85. **What it requires:** contentment with God’s providence and a joy in our neighbor’s lawful good.

86. **What it forbids:** discontentment, envy, resentment, and every inordinate desire for what belongs to another.

Take this lesson with you in three ways.

- **FIRST**, receive God’s providence gratefully.
Work, pray, plan, seek help, and pursue lawful change where you can.
Contentment is not passivity; it is faithful obedience without resentful unbelief.
- **SECOND**, rejoice in your neighbor’s lawful good.
When God gives another person provision, health, recognition, usefulness, or opportunity, thank Him. Refuse the comparison that turns another person’s blessing into your own complaint. Love does not **grieve** at a neighbor’s good; it seeks to **promote** it.
- **THIRD**, bring covetous desires to Christ.
Coveting often begins quietly: a comparison entertained, a blessing resented, a desire allowed to rule us. Bring these things into the light through repentance and prayer. Christ did not grasp selfishly at status, but humbled Himself for our salvation (**Philippians 2:3-8**). He forgives covetous, envious, and discontented sinners, and by His Spirit teaches His people gratitude, generosity, contentment, and love of neighbor.

Receive God’s providence with gratitude.

Rejoice sincerely in your neighbor’s lawful good.

And practice generosity as one who has received every true good from God.