

More

11th in a series on The Ten Commandments
Leaders Guide

1. The final commandment has a bit of time-specific imagery. Read Exodus 20:17 and restate it using a more modern setting.

You should not be envious of your neighbors house, his wife, those who work for him, his new car, his big swimming pool, or anything that he owns.

2. “Covet” is not exactly a common word in our normal speech. Given that the tenth and final commandment is often shortened to “Do not covet”, what does that word mean?

To covet is to have a strong desire to possess something that one doesn’t already have. It starts with wondering what it would be like to own it and then proceeds to plotting a way to get it – even if that means taking it from someone else who has it (such as his wife). It is an addictive activity in that one never has enough stuff when we allow ourselves to covet.

3. What makes this last commandment different from most of the others?

Most of the others talk about actions that should or should be be done. Loving God, refraining from killing, adultery, and stealing, telling the truth, and keeping the Sabbath are all observable actions. Coveting is often something done in our minds with no visible signs to those around us. Thus, it brings a spotlight onto what we think. It moves the realm of sin out of purely acts and into our minds. (see James 1:13-15)

4. What is it about envy that makes it such a big deal – big enough that God would include it in the Ten Commandments?

Our thoughts drive our actions. To the extent that we begin to focus on getting the next toy or “keeping up with the Jones family” next door, we are not focusing on God and doing what He wants us to do. Our minds are otherwise occupied. In our current society, there are lots of outside forces trying to heighten our sense of envy. The entertainment industry, advertisers, and merchants are all playing on trying to turn things we have never even thought about into “desires”, then “wants”, and finally “needs”.

5. When we look at the tenth commandment as a “rule”, what did Pastor Steve suggest we should do?

Draw a line between what you have and what you want, and then focus on what God has given you. Show some self-control. Avoid conspicuous consumption in which you tend to want the better version or the latest model. Only buy what you can afford right now. Don’t be driven by the desire to get more.

6. Read Philippians 4:10-13 and consider Paul's situation. If we now move our eyes up to the second level, that of the tenth commandment as a "vow", what is our focus?

Now we seek a level of contentment such that we would have no need to covet things other people have. Whatever we have, we have because God has supplied it. Thus, we should be thankful for what we have by consciously counting our blessings. We need to learn the secret of thanksgiving which then leads to trusting God to provide us with what we need.

7. Finally, Pastor Steve used the Matt 6.19-24, 31-33 passage to investigate the third and highest level of looking at the tenth commandment. When we consider it through the lens of our "nature", how does that change things?

Now it is not a rule about stuff, but an awareness that we should focus our eyes on seeking first the Kingdom of God, and everything else will take care of itself. Instead of worrying about earthly stuff, we should be conscious of what will be eternal. In a word, we need to get our "priorities" straight. Whatever we have God has loaned to us for a short time, so the top priority ought to be our relationship with God.

8. In the Matt. 6 passage we are told to lay up treasures in heaven. How does one do that?

The directive means investing our time, money, and energy on things that God is doing and wants us to help Him accomplish. To the extent that we support Christian activities (missions, church operations, Christian outreach groups) that end up leading lost souls to a personal relationship with Jesus, we are making an eternal difference. When we get to heaven, it will be different because of the small role we played.

9. Pastor Steve said that if we would serve God and not money, He will provide for us. How do you explain to a non-believer that this does not mean we will get everything on our wish list nor that we can quit our job and just wait for the heavenly check to arrive?

God provides to us what He believes we need, which probably has little connection to our desires at times. If our primary focus is on doing God's will, then we will not be affected nearly so much when we don't have as much stuff as our neighbor. Further, our joy and peace comes not from stuff, but from knowing that we are in a right relationship with God.

At the same time, God expects us to work. There is nothing good said in the Bible about those who don't contribute to the well-being of the community. On the other hand, there is much praise for those who provide contributions to support the church and those called to lead the congregations.

10. Pastor Steve ended with a question that deserves some thought. What is the one thing that you will wish you had done the moment after you leave this world?

While we could get sidetracked with theological questions about whether or not we will care at that point, whether we will have any memory of this world when we enter the next, and lots of other distractions, the question is still worth considering simply for the way in which it forces us to consider our priorities. You could use another version of this scenario if it seems more appropriate to your group – “If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do today?” There are no wrong answers to these questions, so encourage the group to throw out ideas until you start to get some general concepts. Then, ask why these seem important enough that they would be at the top of the list.