

The Tenth Commandment

Q. 146. *Which is the tenth commandment?*

A. The tenth commandment is, *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.*

Q. 147. *What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the tenth commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition, and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.

Commentary

1. **What is different about the tenth commandment that the rest of the decalogue?**

The tenth commandment is different because it goes **straight to the heart**. The other nine commandments explicitly condemn outward actions like making idols, working on the Sabbath, and killing innocent victims. The tenth commandment starts on the inside. It is not concerned with what we do, but what we "want" to do.

2. **What is proved by the fact that this commandment goes straight to the heart?**

The tenth commandment makes explicit what the other commandments only imply—namely, that God requires **inward** as well as **outward** obedience.

3. **What is meant by "contentment"?**

Contentment, as the word is used in the catechism, means willingness to **accept** that condition in which God's providence has placed us, without murmuring or complaining, or being envious at the blessings or prosperity of others.

4. **Why are communists particularly opposed to the tenth commandment?**

Communism opposes the tenth commandment with the slogan "Religion is the opium of the people"; that is, communism holds that Christianity, by this commandment and similar statements of God's Word, teaches people that it is their duty to be patient and contented with their situation in life, whereas communism would have the people improve their condition by **violent revolution**, the poor taking possession of the wealth of the rich, etc.

5. **Does the Christian duty of contentment imply that it is wrong to try to improve our condition in life?**

No. It is our duty to be content with our condition in life, as long as by God's providence it remains our condition. This does not imply that it is wrong to try to change or improve our condition, so long as we use **right and lawful means** and methods for doing so. The duty of contentment must not be made an excuse for laziness, lack of ambition, or neglect of industrious work.

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6. Is it true that "Religion is the opium of the people"?

No doubt there have been some very corrupt and degenerate forms of Christianity that have tended to destroy people's ambition and make them satisfied to live in misery and wretched poverty. But this is not true of real Christianity, especially that of Protestant Christianity in its most consistent form (the Reformed Faith). True Christianity leads to honest government, initiative, hard work, and thrift, which greatly improves the condition of the people.

7. What attitude toward our neighbor is required by the tenth commandment?

The tenth commandment requires "a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor," which means that we are to love our neighbor in such a way that we will be **glad** and **thankful** for his true welfare and prosperity, as if it were our own.

8. Is it easy to have such an attitude of love toward our neighbor?

No. Our natural sinful hearts are extremely selfish, and they tend toward **envy** and **covetousness** at the welfare and prosperity of others.

9. What is meant by "our inward motions and affections" with regard to our neighbor?

By "our inward motions and affections" the catechism means the thoughts, desires, and motives of our hearts, which spring from our **character**, and which determine our outward **life** and **conduct**.

10.

Why must our lives "tend unto, and further" the welfare of our neighbor?

Because God has placed us in human society as **members** of it; it is his plan and purpose that human beings be dependent on one another for their welfare.

Q. 148. What are the sins forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the tenth commandment are, discontentment with our own estate; envying and grieving at the good of our neighbor, together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

Commentary

1. Why it is sinful to be discontented?

A spirit of discontent is sinful because it involves **dissatisfaction** with God's **providence**. The discontented person really feels that God is not treating him right. Thus discontent amounts to finding fault with God. Therefore discontent is really a form of irreverence, and unbelief in the goodness and love of God.

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2. What is envying, and why is it wrong?

Envying means **selfish** and unfriendly **grudging** in view of what another possesses or enjoys. It means that if we do not have the same blessings as our neighbor, we are not willing for him to have them either. Envy is wrong because it proceeds from sinful selfishness.

3. What causes people to grieve at the good of their neighbors?

It is people's **sinful hearts** that cause them to grieve at the good of others. Because of our sinful hearts, we sometimes take more satisfaction in the knowledge that our neighbor has committed some sin, or suffered some loss, than in thinking of the blessings that God has bestowed on him.

4. What Bible characters violated this commandment in a specially wicked manner?

- a. **Achan**, who took the devoted things and his whole family was destroyed to remove the wrath of God. (Josh 7)
- b. **Ahab**, who coveted Naboth's vineyard. (1 Kings 21)
- c. **Haman**, who coveted worldly honor and therefore was grieved at Mordecai.

Note that in each case the sin of coveting led on to other forms of sill.

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Scripture References:

- Exod. 20:17. The tenth commandment.
- Phil. 4:11; Heb. 13:5; 1 Tim. 6:6. The Christian duty of contentment.
- Job 31:29; Rom. 12:15; Ps. 122:7-9; 1 Tim. 1:5; Esther 10:3; 1 Cor. 13:4-7. The duty of a right attitude toward our neighbor and all that is his.
- 1 Kings 21:4; Esther 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:10. The sin of discontentment with our own estate.
- Gal. 5:20; James 3:14-16. The sin of envy.
- Ps 112:9-10; Neh. 2:10. It is wrong to grieve at the good of others.
- Rom. 7:7-8; 13:9; Col. 3:5; 5:21. The sin of having a wrong attitude toward anything that is our neighbor's.