

The Unknown Commandment, You Shall Not Covet

By Dianne D. McDonnell

If the average person was asked to explain the word "covet" he would probably start stuttering and stammering because the word just "does not compute" for most Americans. If you explain that it is the key word in a Commandment from God Himself that relates directly to our lives, happiness, and way of life, most still wouldn't understand half of the significance of this simple principle. It is a principle that is totally forgotten in today's world. To understand it and obey it inevitably increases your own happiness and satisfaction!

To covet means to longingly desire something that belongs to another person. Webster's Dictionary defines the word, "to wish for enviously, to desire what belongs to another, inordinately or culpably." In other words, "covet" means to envy, long for, and become fixated on what is not rightfully yours. Here is the way the tenth Commandment is worded:

Deuteronomy 5:21 "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."
(The author is quoting the New International Version Bible throughout.)

It is interesting that the first thing God warns us against desiring is a woman married to someone else! How many married couples today started drifting apart due to the husband or wife desiring someone else? Many times that coveting or "strong desiring" leads to inappropriate advances, and finally culminates in the very painful break-up of a marriage that was once strong and loving.

If this commandment was ingrained into the very heart of each person, then each could resist that attraction—with God's help. Every married person would keep friendships or work relationships platonic, or stay away from a person they find themselves coveting. And those who are single would take care not to start desiring a married man or woman.

When marriages come apart it creates excruciating pain for the rejected mate and children left behind, and also plenty of pain for the one leaving. Often little boys and girls are left to long for the missing parent that is no longer there to comfort them. Even older children go through agony that can only be expressed in bitter tears. God knows about these results, and God cares about the pain inflicted on everyone concerned. So out of caring and love for us, He warns us to turn away at the very start of an attraction to someone committed to another in marriage, or when we are married. God tells in this Commandment, don't start down that path, not even with one single step!

The rest of the Commandment expands from spouses to anything owned by another person such as their home, possessions, and even their donkey (once used as transportation as a car is today). If you are impressed with what another possesses, be happy for their good fortune or blessings, and DON'T let it destroy your own happiness or detract from the positive features of your own life. If you are caught up in envy and covetousness then it changes your relationship with the one you are envying. You are unable to be a true friend or sincerely care about him or her. Coveting anything a friend has is like building a stone barrier between the two of you—isolating yourself in your own dissatisfaction and discontent on the bad side of that cold stone wall! Envy cuts you off from friendship with the person being envied. Don't build barriers between yourself and other people!

Refusing to be caught up in envy is a **freeing concept**. One becomes more satisfied with one's own life, mate, and blessings when no time is spent in envying what another person has. What you are grateful for? How are you working to make your own life better? What are the good features of your life, location, or possessions? What are your hopes and plans for the future? Pray for change, but center on how God has blessed you—not on what another person has. God provides instructions and Commandments that provide you with a sound structure for a happy life, and a solid framework for building sound character.

2 Timothy 2:19 Nevertheless, **God's solid foundation** stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

Remember that Jesus taught "...**whoever practices and teaches these commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**" (Matthew 5:19). Jesus says there are future rewards for practicing God's Commandments!

When Jesus discussed the subject of adultery he started with that first look—the first covetous desiring as the beginning of sin! "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:28). Jesus then talked about how hard it is to stop once you are caught up in this kind of sexual sin. He compared it to having to give up your eye or your right hand, see Matt 5:29-30! Yet if you are enmeshed in such a wrenching situation, God CAN and WILL help you get free if you repeatedly pray for help.

Robbery and theft also have their start in coveting what belongs to another. God's law against coveting is amazingly wise, insightful, and good, and will bring about good results for those who obey it—now and in the Kingdom that Jesus promises to those who truly love him and obey him.

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."