

# The Ten Commandments in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - 7

## Honesty and Coveting

### The Ninth Commandment: **You Shall Not Give False Evidence**

This commandment is primarily aimed at people who are asked to give evidence in court. When someone is accused of a crime, the judge asks people who saw or heard the incident to stand up in court and recount exactly what happened. They are made to swear an oath that they will only speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The judge (or jury) must decide what really happened by listening to a number of witnesses, asking them questions, and comparing their accounts.

Now, if someone has an enemy who is accused of a crime, they might be tempted to invent an untrue or distorted account in order to have the person punished, whether or not they

are guilty. A rich person might bribe witnesses to change their story to escape being condemned.

A typical case was the trial of Jesus. The High Priest wanted to have Jesus put to death. So men were paid to say that they had heard Jesus say he would destroy the temple and then build it again in three days. Under Jewish law, this would be blasphemy, a crime worthy of death. Jesus did say those things metaphorically, but the false witnesses distorted his words.

Under the Law of Moses, a witness who was proved to deliberately have told lies in court was given the same punishment they hoped to have brought upon their enemy. We can read more about this in Deuteronomy 19:16–19.

It was obviously very important if justice was to be done that people accepted the responsibility to speak the truth in court. Otherwise the country could be reduced to anarchy.

### **A Principle for Life**

Although the precise wording is aimed at the situation in a court of law, in other places it is made clear that God always expected His people to speak the truth.

*You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. You shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:11–12).*

Note how the Law refers you back to God Himself. God does not tell lies, or



hurt innocent people. He is kind, and absolutely reliable. If He says something, we know it is true.

When we come to the New Testament, this commandment is repeatedly laid upon Christians. It is a fundamental aspect of Christian life that we love truth. Christadelphians even call the system of doctrine that we believe 'the Truth'.

There is much error out there in the field of religion, some of it deliberately false. We must only be satisfied with truth in what we believe, and we must always speak the truth to each other. The Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3:9: *"Do not lie to one another."*

This aspect of the Gospel is very important, and we need to take it to heart. In Revelation 21:8 we read that liars are amongst those who find themselves condemned to the 'Lake of Fire'; in other words, they will not be in God's Kingdom.

## **The Tenth Commandment: You Shall Not Covet**

The Hebrew verb here 'to covet' refers to something that takes place inside our heads. It means desiring something we do not have, but which someone else has. We may see a rich man drive past in his four-wheel drive Mercedes. We imagine ourselves driving up to our new house in a car like that, and we are consumed with the desire to have a similar limousine.

If we actually took his car, it would be stealing. This commandment tells us that even the desire to have it is wrong. It is different from all the others. If we bow down to an idol, everyone can see it. If we commit murder, a body lies on the ground. But if we break the Tenth Commandment nobody can see it. Nobody, that is, except God.



We have some examples of coveting in the Bible. In Genesis 3, when Eve stood under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the serpent suggested it was all right to eat the fruit, she coveted it. It looked juicy and attractive, she was hungry, and if she ate it, it could make her as clever as God Himself. It was wrong for her to eat it, but she desired it in her heart, and before long she was biting into it. She coveted the forbidden fruit.

When the nation of Israel crossed over into the Promised Land, the first city they came to was Jericho. God told the people that they would capture the city, but that all the silver and gold they found must be given to the Tabernacle, and the rest burned with fire. Later, they would be able to take home the spoil from other cities, but this first one was to be given to God.

One of the soldiers entered a house belonging to the enemy. He saw a piece of clothing, a heavy wedge of pure gold and some pieces of silver. It seemed a shame to him to have to burn the garment, and to hand over the money to the priests. The man, Achan, said:

*When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred*

*shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them (Joshua 7:21).*

He admitted himself that he had broken the Tenth Commandment. He wanted something that God said he must not have. A few hours later he was dead.

### ***Coveting in Today's World***

We can see that this commandment is probably the most difficult one to keep. It is natural to covet. It is human



nature to envy someone who has the perfect figure, or a big yacht, or an Armani dress. We want things, all the time.

In fact, coveting is at the heart of the advertising industry. We switch on the TV and within minutes we see the perfect family on the beach in the sunshine, the mother in her sunglasses relaxing with a magazine, the father with his children trying out their new jet ski, and we want to be there. We must go on a holiday like that. Or we see a Land Rover bouncing across the desert in the Dakar Rally, and then the advert shows a man just like us slipping behind the wheel of a new shiny car and accelerating into the distance,

and we want a car like that. The advertisers put pressure on us. They make us feel inadequate and useless unless we have the computer or house or washing machine they are trying to sell. They coax us to covet.

### ***Jesus' Teaching***

What does the New Testament say about coveting? Jesus has an important saying we need to remember:

*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses (Luke 12:15).*

The situation was that there were two brothers, whose father had died and left property which was supposed to be divided between them. But one brother refused to hand over the half that belonged to the other. So Jesus was asked to act as arbitrator between them. But Jesus refused. To him, money and possessions were unimportant. We are not here, he said, to accumulate wealth and possessions. We are here to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus went on to tell the story of a rich farmer who had an excellent harvest, with so much corn his barns were full and still there was corn standing outside. So he decided he would knock down his old barns and build bigger ones. It would cost him a lot of money, but after that he could stop worrying about the future because he would have so much corn in store that he could relax and have a really easy time for years.

He did not think to say thank you to God who had sent the rain and sunshine that gave him such a bountiful harvest. We can imagine he went to

bed full of plans for spending his money. But that night he died of a heart attack. Read Luke 12:16–21 for the full story.

Notice the sting in the tail. Jesus says this man was rich in his own eyes, but he was not rich in God’s sight. When we are dead, the only thing that will matter is how rich we are in God’s eyes. People today put their savings into stocks and shares, or put them in the bank to collect interest. But there is nothing actually there except certificates, or numbers in a computer file. You cannot take your savings into the Kingdom of God. What will count on the Day of Judgment is what you did with your time and money while you were alive. Jesus said:

*Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:33, 34).*



### **Putting It into Practice**

Coveting will ruin our life. It will make us miserable, because it leaves us unhappy because we do not have the things that we desire. Human nature

means that even having spent a fortune on those things, we will immediately want something bigger or better, never satisfied.

Yet at the end of our life, God will not measure our success by how nice our apartment is or how many designer outfits are in our wardrobe. Like the servants in the parable of the talents, He will look at how much we have gained for Him (Matthew 25:14-30).

Here is what the Apostle Paul said towards the end of his life:

*Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:6–8).*

Jesus said:

*Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:31–33).*

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