

Deuteronomy 5:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Analysis

The tenth commandment 'Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife' addresses internal attitudes, not merely external actions. The Hebrew 'chamad' (covet/desire) targets the heart—wrongful craving that leads to sin. Coveting violates contentment, breeds envy, and ultimately produces theft, adultery, and murder. This command reveals that God's law governs thoughts and affections, not merely behavior. Paul identifies coveting as the sin that convicted him of heart corruption (Romans 7:7-8). Only Spirit regeneration can transform covetous hearts, producing contentment in God's sovereign provision (Philippians 4:11-13, Hebrews 13:5).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes addressed external actions (theft, murder, adultery) but not internal dispositions. Israel's tenth commandment uniquely probed the heart, demonstrating that God sees and judges inner motives. The comprehensive list—wife, house, land, servants, livestock—covers all areas where covetousness operates. James traces sin's progression: desire conceives, gives birth to sin, produces death (James 1:14-15). Achan's coveting led to theft and Israel's defeat at Ai (Joshua 7).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does this commandment reveal that God's law addresses heart attitudes and desires, not merely external behaviors?
2. What does Paul's testimony (Romans 7:7-8) teach about coveting as the root sin that reveals our utter dependence on grace for transformation?

Interlinear Text

אַל	תְּחַמֵּד	אֲשֶׁת	לְרַצְבָּן	אַל
H3808	Neither shalt thou desire	wife	or any thing that is thy neighbour's	H3808
	H2530	H802	H7453	
תְּתַאֲגֵה	בְּיַתָּהּ	לְרַצְבָּן	שֵׁדֶה	
neither shalt thou covet	house	or any thing that is thy neighbour's	his field	
H183	H1004	H7453	H7704	
אֲשֶׁר	אֲכַל	אֲמַתָּה	אֲמַתָּה	
or his manservant	or his maidservant	his ox	or his ass	
H5650	H519	H7794	H2543	H3605
אֲשֶׁר	אֲכַל	אֲמַתָּה	אֲמַתָּה	H834
לְרַצְבָּן				
or any thing that is thy neighbour's				
	H7453			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:17 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Romans 13:9 (Parallel theme): For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Luke 12:15 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he posseseth.

Habakkuk 2:9 (Parallel theme): Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

Micah 2:2 (Parallel theme): And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.