

## REFORMATION 500 WEEK 44: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA 113-115

**Question 113:** WHAT DOES THE TENTH COMMANDMENT REQUIRE? **That not even the least inclination or thought against any commandment of God ever enter our heart, but that with our whole heart we continually hate all sin and take pleasure in all righteousness.**

The Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house [or wife, or anything that is your neighbor’s],” is the one commandment that speaks *directly* to the heart. The word *covet* means “strong desire.” By itself it is not a bad word. It depends on what we strongly desire. We can earnestly desire *good* things, as Paul commanded us in 1 Corinthians 12:31: “*covet* [earnestly desire] the best gifts.” The Tenth Commandment forbids “coveting those things which God has forbidden” (Ursinus, 606). Even if we don’t *take* what belongs to our neighbor, it is a sin to *want* it. Even if we don’t sleep with our neighbor’s spouse it is a sin to wish we could. Even if we don’t rob a bank, it is a sin to wish we could and to rejoice in others who do. Love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). The Tenth Commandment is last to teach us that obeying *all* of God’s commands is a matter of the heart. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5). “You shall not hate your brother in your heart... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:17-18). “The Lord Jesus Christ re-emphasized this truth in His sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:20-48), that the commandments require heart-purity and heartfelt love to God and our neighbor. The natural, unregenerate man – such as the Pharisees in Jesus’ day were proud of their outward obedience and resented Jesus’ teaching about the heart [Matt. 23:28; John 7:7]” (Jones, *Study Helps*, 283).

When God redeems us by faith in Jesus Christ, He not only forgives the eternal *penalty* of our wicked heart, He also *purifies* our hearts in sanctification, so that with our whole heart we continually hate all sin (even the least inclination or thought against any commandment of God) and take pleasure in all righteousness. “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” (Psalm 119:35-36).

The cure for covetousness is contentment. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have: for He has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation... For the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:8-10). Therefore, to sum up how to be content: “1. We must be satisfied with what God gives us because He is free and sovereign, and He gives us what He wishes us to have for our best. He alone is Master of our lives. 2. God is all-wise and infinitely good in giving His gifts. His love toward us in Christ is perfect. He never withholds from us that which is for our spiritual good and for His glory. To think that God would be unfair to us is folly and unbelief. We deserve nothing, and all we have, we have received by God’s rich mercy. 3. Contentment with God’s providence enables us to live in peace and joy, in gratitude and praise. The unsatisfied person is never happy, and is likely to break the commandments of God in order to get what he desires. Having the Lord and His salvation, we need nothing more, and our joy is full” (Jones, 284).

**Question 114:** CAN THOSE WHO ARE CONVERTED TO GOD KEEP THESE COMMANDMENTS PERFECTLY? **No, but even the holiest of men, while in this life,**

**have only a small beginning of such obedience, yet so that with earnest purpose they begin to live not only according to some, but according to all the Commandments of God.**

“The natural man, who is un-regenerated, is not able to obey God’s holy will in any degree [Rom. 8:7] .... But the question asks if the *converted* or regenerated person can keep God’s holy commands perfectly.” Since the regenerated person “still has his ‘old man,’ the old nature of sin, he is unable to give God perfect obedience.... The most sanctified Christians, such as the Apostles, are still sinful and not perfect. The Scriptures tell us of Noah’s drunkenness [Gen. 9:21]. Job cursing the day of his birth (Job 3:1-2), David’s acts of adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11), Peter’s shameful denial of his Lord (Luke 22:54-62), and Paul’s confession of indwelling sin (Rom. 7:21). ... Christ taught us to pray for *daily* forgiveness, even as we pray for our *daily* bread (Matt. 6:11-12; cf. 1 John 1:8-10)” (Jones, 287-288). Since the Lord commands us to “be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48), we only have a small beginning of the obedience which God requires. But at least by God’s grace we have a beginning, and an earnest purpose to obey *all* of God’s commands, just as Paul did: “I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).

**Question 115:** WHY THEN DOES GOD SO STRICTLY ENJOIN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS UPON US, SINCE IN THIS LIFE NO ONE CAN KEEP THEM? **First, that as long as we live we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and so the more earnestly seek forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ; second, that without ceasing we diligently ask God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we be renewed more and more after the image of God, until we attain the goal of perfection after this life.**

There are two reasons why God requires us to obey His commands perfectly even though we never will in this life. First, the more we learn what God requires in His commands, the more we discover how far short we fall (Rom. 3:20-23; 7:7); and the more earnestly we seek forgiveness and righteousness in Christ. “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24-25). Second, God’s law is not only designed to drive us to Christ for forgiveness but also for *renewal* (sanctification), so that God’s holy image is more and more restored in us (Eph. 5:1). We not only need *daily forgiveness* for covetousness, we also need *daily renewal* so that we “put to death...evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5) and learn to be more content with the Lord’s loving presence in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.... For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:12-13, 20). So, “God commands us to seek and to desire the perfect fulfillment of the law in this life...because He purposes at length to accomplish it in those who desire it, and to grant it to us after this life, if we here truly and heartily desire it” (Ursinus, 616).

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