

• The Ninth Commandment

• Originally about accurate testimony in a law court

• Neighbours and strangers

• Jesus keeps the ninth commandment in the richest possible way

• The Christian is invited to be a 'witness' also

• The apostles were unique witnesses

• Witnesses to the power of Jesus' kingdom at work in daily life

• Millions of witnesses

The Tenth Commandment

The ninth commandment reads: 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour'^{Ex1}. It is clear from the reference to 'testimony' that the command concerned giving accurate testimony in a law-court. It was not originally a general command about truth-telling. The Christian goes further than the Mosaic law. He or she will be led by the Spirit to live an open life and to live without the spirit of deceit. But we are not under any obligation to tell out everything we know to those who have no right to private information.

'Your neighbour' included anyone and everyone who might be brought before a court. Although the 'neighbour' would generally be someone within the community of Israel, yet the law also said 'The stranger who stays with you temporarily shall be to you on a level with the home-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself'^{Ex1}. In Exodus 11:2 'neighbour' refers to nearby Egyptians.

Jesus keeps the ninth commandment in the richest possible way. Jesus comes to the world and 'testifies' to it. When Jesus was on trial, His enemies produced false witnesses who twisted the facts concerning Jesus. But Jesus Himself, His self-testimony, His miracles and His Father's testimony to Him all present the straightforward truth concerning Jesus. Jesus Himself referred to the rules about legal testimony. 'In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I am one who witnesses for myself; my other witness is the Father...' ^{Ex1}.

The Christian is invited to be a 'witness' also. Jesus is the model for us. He gave faithful witness to Himself. Now we too are to stand before the world, conscious that Jesus is on trial, and we give our 'witness' concerning Jesus. The Christian is to be conscious that the 'courtroom' in which he presents his witness is the entire world. He is specially enabled by the Holy Spirit. 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses...' ^{Ex1}. The apostles were unique witnesses in that they literally witnessed the resurrection^{Ex2} and boldly declared the facts of the case before the courtroom of the world. But even those who are not in a position to 'testify' to resurrection appearances may be witnesses by the Holy Spirit of the power of Jesus' kingdom at work in their lives. This is the greatest way of fulfilling the ninth commandment. A witness must testify^{Ex3}. A truthful witness saves lives^{Ex4}. Many Samaritans believed because of one woman's 'witness'^{Ex5}; something similar may take place when we bear 'witness' to Jesus, as we know Him and have experienced Him. Like the apostles we – at our own level – are able to say 'We are witnesses and so is the Holy Spirit'^{Ex6}. During His lifetime false witnesses came forward to speak against Him^{Ex7}; now He has ascended to heaven millions of witnesses are ready to step forward and speak in His favour.

The tenth commandment reads: 'You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet you neighbour's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's'^{Ex1}.

^{Ex1} 20:16

^{Ex1} Lev 19:34

^{Ex1} John 8:16-17

^{Ex1} Acts 1:8

^{Ex2} Acts 1:26

^{Ex3} Lev 5:1

^{Ex4} Prov 14:25

^{Ex5} John 4:39

^{Ex6} Acts 5:32

^{Ex7} Matt 26:59-60

^{Ex1} 20:17

- *Unique*
- *This is the law's most sharp and powerful command*
- *The tenth command internalises all of the other commands*
- *This command pointed to the real need – for a heart that did not even want to sin*
- *The tenth command defines the need of the human race*
- *The problem is the human heart*
- *Not the externals*
- *Not lack of education or intellect*

The tenth commandment is of great importance and in some ways is entirely unique among the legislation of the Bible. The apostle Paul knew what he was talking about when he said 'I had not known covetousness if the law had not said "You shall not covet"' ^{□1}. It was this particular command that he chose when he made that remark. This is the law's most sharp and powerful command.

The tenth command internalises all of the other commands. It is only this command that can induce any kind of conviction of sin. This was Paul's point in Romans 7:7–25. In Romans 7:7–25 Paul takes up the question 'Is the law a sinful thing in itself?' His answer is 'No', but he says if we ever come under the command not to covet we shall discover that it gives an intense experience of what sin is like.

This introduces us to a vital point. There are two ways of taking the law of God. The law may be taken externally and it may be considered with special reference to 'covetousness'.

It was this command, and this command only that showed the law could be taken to refer to the heart after all. It was to be administered by magistrates, but there was this one line in it that could not be administered by magistrates. It showed that the real need of the people of Israel was for a heart that did not even want to sin.

The tenth command defines the need of the human race. The problem with the human race is that we are all born with our desires and appetites out of control. Out of the heart – said Jesus – come various kinds of 'covetings'^{□1}. What really matters is the heart. Sin does not consist in religious ceremony or lack of religious ceremony. Sin does not consist merely in failure of intellectual understanding. Sin and righteousness consist of what is taking place in the heart. The trouble with men and women is that we are born with sin in the 'heart' – the central core of the human personality. Out of the heart come many inclinations to sin and malice and impurity^{□2}. These arise within a man or woman's life. It is not failure to wash the hand that 'defiles' man, as was thought by the Pharisees of Mark 7. Nor is it a failure in education or intellect, as tends to be thought by modern people. The fountainhead of all human problems – ultimately – is failure to control the wickedness within. Each person is tempted when he is enticed by his own desires^{□3}.

□1 Rom 7:7

□1 Mark 7:22

□2 Mark 7:20-22

□3 James 1:14



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