

[Exodus 20:17:] "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

[Luther's Explanation to the Tenth Commandment:] We should fear and love God that we do not force or entice away our neighbor's spouse, workers, or animals, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

1. The Tenth Commandment gets a little lost in Lutheranism because we tend to combine it with the Ninth Commandment when we teach the concept of coveting, which is wanting something we are not supposed to have. But that's not Luther's fault. He was very clear to distinguish between the coveting of inanimate things like property and inheritances in the Ninth Commandment and animate things in the Tenth Commandment. In other words we have reciprocal relationships with the people around us and even the animals around us.
2. As an aside, I'll tackle the topic of animals here because it's foreign to our modern ears. Animals used to have such a more prominent role in the lives of the average person. More than just companionship, they provided food, clothing, transportation, and work to the average person. They were valuable just like money. God's even concerned for animals, reminding the people to not muzzle the ox while it treads the grain (Deuteronomy 25:4), a specific example of how we are to be stewards of creation when He told us to rule over the animals. Many of us are a step removed from animal husbandry, but enjoy the benefits of what farmers and ranchers provide for us. Yet we can still take the point to not covet what someone else has.
3. Now we'll talk about coveting people. We can directly covet a person. David did that when he coveted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. That sin against the Tenth Commandment led to so many more. We can also covet things about people. {Read verses 32-34.} If I see another I can help and decide that I'd rather keep that help for myself, then I'm wanting something I'm not supposed to have: in my selfishness I want to ignore my responsibility for others.
4. There are a couple of things that set the stage for the rest of our text (and therefore the sermon) as we heard from Jesus. First of all, He is dealing with sins of the heart. It is so easy to have an impure heart with regard to our relationships with others. Instead of rejoicing what others have, we wish we had it—even the people and relationships in their lives. Instead of joyfully helping others, we resent the imposition—wearying of the relationship we wish we could just hide from. But where is our treasure supposed to be? It is in heaven.
5. Jesus exemplified this. He did not covet with regard to relationships with others. He was chaste. He had the interest of others in mind as He interacted with them: even when He was harsh He was being so for their benefit, calling people to repentance. He never resented the task He came to do: to give His perfect life for our covetous ones, to give His perfect mind for our sins of the mind. And that leads to the other thing we see in this text.
6. Jesus sets the pattern of *don't ... do ... do ... do ... do ...* So often, when we are dealing with commandments we focus on prohibition: don't do something. And sure enough Jesus

does begin with one: {Reread verse 32.} But the rest of this text from Luke is filled with things to do. We give of our possessions to support those who need help. We do that because we love God Who first loved us. And we know that God loves it when we love our neighbor as He loved us. He then adds others things we do. {Read verses 35-36.} These are all "do" things in the positive sense: Be dressed (in other words have the things of God first and foremost in your mind), keep your lamps burning (in other words, be deliberate about how God is first in your life), open the door (in other words, act in line with welcoming God and His Word in your life).

7. In his Explanation to the Tenth Commandment, Luther follows Jesus' *don't ... do* pattern: *do not* force or entice away our neighbor's spouse, workers, or animals, but urge them to stay and *do* their duty. A fascinating tie-in is how Jesus exemplifies doing our duty as in this text He gives us a teaching example of how the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus upholds the Tenth Commandment perfectly even as He teaches it to us. {Read verse 37.}
8. What a beautiful role-reversal! Jesus will teach in Luke 17 that we should not expect God to wait on us as a servant. After all, we serve Him because He is the Lord. So, how much more wonderful it is that He Himself chooses to serve us! Jesus does for us what He expects us to do for Him. This is what makes Him the unique and wonderful God He is. He becomes one of us to uphold the very commandments He expects us to uphold. His perfect life given for us on the cross is what motivates us to live for God. So we love what Jesus has to teach us with regard to what we should do. {Read verses 39-40.}
9. Jesus teaches here that we are always to be ready for Jesus' return. The point of His little metaphor here is that the owner of the house was not able to pinpoint the time of preparation for the thief's arrival. He needed to be ready all the time. The point for us is that we should be ready for Christ's arrival at any time. And part of that readiness is upholding the Tenth Commandment like Jesus did, doing the things of God with our minds as we interact with the people around us.
10. God forgive us when we don't! And He does forgive us. {Reread verse 32.} How wonderful that Jesus tells us this despite the fact that we have not upheld the Tenth Commandment! He tells us to not fear because He upholds the Tenth Commandment for us. Amen.