

# Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments

## Session 11: Commandment 10: Thou Shalt Not Covet

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

### 1) Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's "Thou Shalt Not Covet" examines the **tenth commandment** and its unique nature among ancient law codes due to its **unenforceability** by external means, requiring **self-policing**. He discusses different **denominational interpretations** of its placement as either the ninth and tenth or solely the tenth commandment, highlighting how the Catholic and Lutheran traditions separate the coveting of a wife from other possessions. Tomasino clarifies that "covet" implies not just desire but an **intention to possess**, using biblical examples to illustrate this point. He further explores how this commandment targets **internal thoughts** rather than outward actions, connecting it to the concept of **idolatry** and the **damaging personal and societal effects** of unchecked desire, particularly in affluent modern society. Ultimately, he concludes that following this commandment, and the Ten Commandments in general, is a **gift from God** meant for human benefit and happiness rather than a burden.

### 2) Briefing Document: Briefing Document: The 10th Commandment - Thou Shalt Not Covet

**Source:** Excerpts from "Tomasino\_10Commands\_Ses11\_English.pdf" by Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino.

#### I. Introduction to the 10th Commandment and its Uniqueness

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's eleventh session on the Ten Commandments focuses on the final command: "Thou Shalt Not Covet." This commandment stands out from the others for several reasons:

- **Widespread Admission, Lack of Concern:** Unlike prohibitions against adultery or murder, almost everyone readily admits to coveting, often "with a smile on their face." However, "the problem really is getting people to care that they have coveted."
- **Absence in Other Ancient Law Codes:** The command against coveting is unique among ancient Near Eastern law codes like the Ur-Namu Code or the Code of Hammurabi. This suggests it's more than just a legal regulation.
- **Unenforceable as a Legal Code:** Coveting is an internal thought or desire, making it impossible to "enforce something like this." There are "no penalty here or anywhere in the Old Testament that you will find specifically for coveting," unlike other commandments. This means it "requires that we police ourselves."
- **Focus on Internal Thoughts:** This commandment goes beyond external actions, relationships with God, or neighbors' actions. It "called to bring our own thoughts into captivity and commit the way we think to the Lord."

## II. Denominational Interpretations of the 10th Commandment

There is a difference of opinion among denominations regarding the numbering of the coveting commandment:

- **Jewish, Orthodox, and Most Protestants:** Agree that "You shall not covet your neighbor's household, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or a donkey, or anything else that is your neighbor's" constitutes the **10th Commandment**.
- **Catholics and Lutherans:** Combine the first two commandments (no other gods, no images) into one. To reach

ten commandments, they "break down the commandment regarding coveting into two commandments."

- **9th Commandment:** "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."
- **10th Commandment:** "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, etc., etc., etc., etc."
- This division is influenced by Deuteronomy 5, which reorders the elements, placing the wife first, and the Septuagint, as well as the interpretation of St. Augustine. Tomasino believes Deuteronomy's reordering reflects a "sense that the wife should not be simply grouped together with things like, you know, oxen and mules and houses."

### III. The Meaning and Intent of "Covet"

The Hebrew word "hamad" (covet) means "to desire," but carries a stronger connotation than simple wanting:

- **Implication of Intent to Possess:** In many Old Testament cases, "it seems to imply an intention to take possession of something."
- **Micah 2:2:** "they covet fields and they seize them, and houses, and they take them away."
- **Psalms 68:16:** "God coveted Mount Zion. God took Mount Zion."
- **Isaiah 1:29:** "The people coveted the oaks for places of worship, and they took them for their places of worship."
- **Job 20:20:** "because he knew no contentment in his belly, he will not let anything which he covets escape him."
- **Beyond a "Passing Fancy":** Coveting is not merely thinking, "oh, my neighbor's got a new car. I wish I had a new car." It is "more like, oh, my neighbor's got a new car. I want his new car, and I will find some way to get it."

### IV. The Scope of "Neighbor's Household" and Rhetorical Purpose

The lists of items not to covet in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 (household, wife, servants, animals, "anything else") serve a rhetorical purpose:

- **Emphasis on Comprehensive Prohibition:** The lists "emphasize that all of the neighbor's household and property are verboten to you." This is an ancient Near Eastern literary technique to "bring your point across a little more strongly."
- **"House" as Metonymy:** The term "house" (household) in Exodus is a metonymy for "all those belongings, all those things that belong to a man."
- **Deuteronomy's "Field" and Number Seven:** The addition of "field" in Deuteronomy's list and the reordering to bring the list to seven items is significant because "7 is the number of completions." It signifies covering "everything that could possibly be part of the neighbor's possessions."

## V. The Seriousness of Covetousness: A "Gateway Sin"

While coveting doesn't cause direct injury to others, it causes "a whole lot of injury to yourself" and is consistently reinforced in both the Old and New Testaments as a serious sin:

- **New Testament Reinforcement: Mark 7:21-22:** Jesus lists "deeds of coveting" among evil thoughts and actions that "proceed from within, out of the heart of men."
- **Luke 12:15:** Jesus warns, "Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
- **Ephesians 5:5:** Paul calls a "covetous man" an "idolater," indicating that intense desire for possessions can become a god.
- **James 4:2:** "You desire and you do not have, so you murder, you covet, and you cannot obtain, so you fight and you quarrel." (Acknowledged as potentially hyperbolic but highlighting the dangerous progression of desire).

- **The "Gateway Sin":** Coveting is often "the gateway sin," leading to greater transgressions. James 1:14-15 states, "each person is tempted when their own covetousness drags them away... And then, when covetousness has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."
- **The Story of David and Bathsheba:** This serves as the primary biblical example of coveting as a gateway sin. David's initial coveting of Bathsheba led to adultery and then the murder of Uriah. This illustrates how unchecked coveting "can bring destruction and death in its wake," even if it's an "extreme story."

## **VI. Societal and Personal Ramifications of Covetousness**

In modern society, particularly in America, covetousness is pervasive and encouraged:

- **Consumerism as "National Policy":** Modern affluence means desires can often be fulfilled through purchase rather than theft. However, "slick advertisers" and even government messaging (post-9/11, COVID-19) encourage "covetousness as a national policy" to stimulate the economy.
- **America: A "Poster Child of Gluttony":** The U.S. comprises 4.2% of the world's population but consumes "over 30 percent of the world's goods," driven by advertising and social media that fuel "consumer dissatisfaction."
- **Unhappiness in Affluence:** Despite having "lots of stuff," affluent individuals (especially teens) report "higher rates of depression, higher rates of anxiety, and higher rates of substance abuse." This suggests that material possessions are "not fulfilling" and "not meeting their needs."
- **Sacrifice of Relationships for Prosperity:** The example of wealthy parents neglecting their children in pursuit of material possessions ("keeping up with the neighbors") demonstrates how

"Coveting had caused them to sacrifice their children on an altar of prosperity."

- **Personal Effects of Coveting: Envy:** The initial stage, which can sometimes be positive (inspiring improvement) but often leads to restlessness and discontentment.
- **Resentment:** As envy deepens, it can lead to resenting those who have what one desires, poisoning relationships.
- **Hatred:** In extreme cases, resentment can escalate to hatred, as seen in the example of Adolf Hitler whose envy and resentment "grew into a bitter anti-Semitism."
- **Dissatisfaction with God's Gifts:** Coveting "breeds dissatisfaction with the good things that God has given to us," leading to a "sense of dissatisfaction" and even resenting God, driving "a wedge between human beings and their creator."
- **Lack of Thankfulness:** The opposite of covetousness is "thankfulness," which involves "appreciating the things that you do have" instead of longing for what others possess.

## VII. Obligation and Benefit of the Commandments

While believers are "not obligated to keep the Ten Commandments" in the sense of legalistic burden, adhering to their principles is beneficial:

- **Gift, Not Burden:** God gave the commandments "not as a burden, but as a gift to his people to encapsulate his relationship with them."
- **Path to Happiness and Usefulness:** Following the principles behind the commandments helps individuals "to be the kind of people who are useful to the Kingdom of God" and "to enjoy life and to be happy."
- **Focus on Relationship with God:** The ultimate purpose of the commandments is "to help us to grow in our relationship with God."

### 3) Study Guide: Study Guide: The Tenth Commandment – "Thou Shalt Not Covet"

This study guide is designed to review your understanding of Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's Session 11 on the Tenth Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Covet."

#### I. Core Concepts

- **Definition of Coveting:** Beyond simple desire, coveting implies an intention to take possession of something belonging to another.
- **Uniqueness of the Tenth Commandment:** Unlike most ancient Near Eastern law codes and other commandments, it is unenforceable by external legal means, having no specific penalties in the Old Testament. It focuses on internal thoughts and desires.
- **Controversy in Ordering:** Different denominations (Jewish, Orthodox, most Protestants vs. Catholic, Lutheran) order the commandments differently, particularly regarding the coveting commandment(s).
- **Scope of "Household":** The term "household" (house) in the commandment is often a metonymy for all possessions associated with a person, not just the physical structure.
- **Coveting as a "Gateway Sin":** It is presented as a foundational sin that can lead to other, more outwardly destructive actions.
- **Modern Relevance:** The pervasive nature of covetousness in modern, affluent societies, fueled by advertising and consumerism.
- **Personal and Relational Harms of Coveting:** Envy, restlessness, resentment, hatred, dissatisfaction with God's provisions, and damage to personal well-being and relationships.

- **Antidote to Coveting:** Thankfulness and appreciation for what one has.
- **Purpose of the Commandments:** Not merely burdens, but gifts from God intended to foster a relationship with Him and lead to a more fulfilling life.

## II. Key Distinctions and Debates

- **Desire vs. Coveting:** Distinguish between a casual wish for something and a strong, possessive desire with the intent to acquire.
- **Enforceability:** The crucial difference between the 10th Commandment and others (e.g., murder, theft) in terms of legal enforcement.
- **Denominational Differences:** Understand the reasons behind the Catholic/Lutheran separation of coveting into two commandments (neighbor's wife vs. neighbor's possessions), citing Deuteronomy 5 and St. Augustine.
- **Biblical Word "Hamad":** Its connotation of desiring *with the intent to take possession*.
- **"House" as Metonymy:** Recognize how "house" encompasses all of a neighbor's property and belongings.
- **Deuteronomy's Inclusion of "Field" and Order Change:** Understand the rhetorical purpose (completeness, emphasizing the wife's status).

## III. Supporting Examples and Illustrations

- **Ancient Near Eastern Law Codes:** Contrast the absence of coveting laws in codes like Ur-Namu, Lagash, Middle Assyrian, and Hammurabi.
- **Biblical Examples of "Hamad":** Micah 2:2, Psalm 68:16, Isaiah 1:29, Job 20:20 – illustrating the link between coveting and taking.



- **New Testament Reinforcement:** Mark 7:21-22 (Jesus on evil thoughts), Luke 12:15 (guard against covetousness), Ephesians 5:5 (covetousness as idolatry), James 4:2 (coveting leading to conflict/murder).
- **David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel):** The detailed narrative demonstrating coveting as the "gateway sin" leading to adultery and murder.
- **Modern Consumerism:** The 1950s public service video, post-9/11 and COVID economic stimulus messages, and the role of social media and advertising in fostering covetousness.
- **Affluent Teens and Suburban Atlanta Disease Outbreak:** Examples illustrating the negative psychological and social consequences of affluence and parental covetousness.
- **Adolf Hitler:** An extreme historical example of envy and resentment escalating to hatred and destructive actions.

#### IV. Reflective Questions

- Why is admitting to coveting common, but caring about it less so?
- How does the inability to enforce the 10th Commandment make it unique and significant?
- In what ways is covetousness still relevant in contemporary society?
- How can coveting damage one's relationship with God?
- What is the practical application of recognizing covetousness as a "gateway sin"?

#### Quiz: The Tenth Commandment

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What distinguishes the Tenth Commandment ("Thou Shalt Not Covet") from other commandments and ancient Near Eastern law codes?
2. How do most people react when asked if they have coveted, and what does this reaction reveal about the perception of this commandment?
3. Explain why the Tenth Commandment is considered unenforceable in a court of law.
4. Briefly describe the main difference in the ordering of the coveting commandment between Jewish/Protestant traditions and Catholic/Lutheran traditions.
5. What is the specific connotation of the Hebrew word "hamad" (covet) as discussed by Dr. Tomasino?
6. How does the example of David and Bathsheba illustrate the concept of coveting as a "gateway sin"?
7. According to the lecture, how do modern advertising and governmental policies contribute to covetousness in society?
8. Identify two negative personal consequences of coveting mentioned in the lecture.
9. Why does Dr. Tomasino suggest that thankfulness is the opposite of covetousness?
10. What is the ultimate purpose of the Ten Commandments, according to the lecture, beyond being a set of rules?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. It is unique because, unlike other commandments and ancient Near Eastern laws, it focuses on internal thoughts and desires and has no specific, externally enforceable penalty in the Old Testament.
2. Most people readily admit to coveting, often with a smile, in contrast to their reluctance to admit to sins like adultery or

murder. This suggests that people do not perceive coveting as a serious transgression.

3. The Tenth Commandment is unenforceable because it deals with internal thoughts and intentions, which cannot be proven in a court of law unless explicitly stated or acted upon. It requires self-policing rather than external enforcement.
4. Jewish and most Protestant traditions see "Thou Shalt Not Covet" as a single, the 10th, commandment. Catholic and Lutheran traditions split it into two commandments: one against coveting a neighbor's wife (9th) and another against coveting a neighbor's house/possessions (10th).
5. The word "hamad" implies not just a desire, but a strong desire with the intention to take possession of the object of that desire. It suggests a step beyond mere wanting, towards active acquisition.
6. The story of David and Bathsheba illustrates this by showing how David's initial coveting of Bathsheba led directly to him committing adultery and, subsequently, arranging for Uriah's murder. Coveting was the seed from which greater sins grew.
7. Modern advertising deliberately fuels consumer dissatisfaction and a desire for more goods, while governmental policies (e.g., post-9/11, post-COVID) have encouraged consumerism as a patriotic duty to stimulate the economy, effectively promoting covetousness.
8. Two negative personal consequences of coveting include envy, which can lead to restlessness and resentment, and dissatisfaction with the good things one already possesses, potentially breeding resentment towards God.
9. Dr. Tomasino suggests thankfulness is the opposite of covetousness because while covetousness is being dissatisfied and wanting what others have, thankfulness is appreciating and

being content with the things one already possesses. It shifts focus from lack to abundance.

10. The ultimate purpose of the Ten Commandments is not to be a burden or merely a set of regulations, but rather a gift from God. They are intended to help people grow in their relationship with God, encapsulate His covenant, and lead to a blessed and happy life.

### Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the unique nature of the Tenth Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Covet," in contrast to other commandments and ancient Near Eastern law codes. Discuss its enforceability, its focus on internal thought, and its implications for personal responsibility.
2. Discuss how the concept of "coveting" (hamad) differs from simple desire, using biblical examples provided in the lecture. Explain how this distinction highlights the commandment's depth and the potential for it to be a "gateway sin."
3. Explore the various ways modern society, particularly in affluent nations like America, actively encourages covetousness. Reference specific examples from the lecture such as advertising, government policy, and social media, and discuss their impact.
4. Using the story of David and Bathsheba as a primary example, elaborate on how covetousness can serve as a "gateway sin" leading to more severe transgressions. Additionally, discuss other personal and relational harms caused by unchecked covetousness, as outlined in the lecture.
5. Discuss the different denominational interpretations regarding the ordering of the coveting commandment(s). Explain the historical and theological reasons behind these differences, particularly the roles of Deuteronomy 5 and St. Augustine in Catholic and Lutheran traditions.

### Glossary of Key Terms

- **Covet:** (Hebrew: *hamad*) To desire strongly and excessively, often with the implicit or explicit intention to take possession of something that belongs to another. More than just wanting; it implies a possessive desire.
- **Ancient Near East (ANE) Law Codes:** Historical legal documents from ancient civilizations in the Middle East, such as the Ur-Namu Code, Lagash, Middle Assyrian laws, and the Code of Hammurabi. Dr. Tomasino contrasts the Ten Commandments with these, noting their lack of a coveting prohibition.
- **Covenant Agreement:** A sacred, binding agreement or promise, particularly between God and His people, often implying a relationship rather than just a set of external regulations. The Ten Commandments are presented in this light.
- **Enforceability:** The quality of a law or rule that allows it to be put into effect or to be compelled through external means, such as a court system or penalties. The Tenth Commandment is described as largely unenforceable by external means.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), which contain much of the Mosaic Law.
- **Septuagint:** The oldest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew.
- **St. Augustine:** An influential early Christian theologian and philosopher. His division of the Tenth Commandment influenced the Catholic and Lutheran ordering of the Ten Commandments.
- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept (e.g., "house" standing for an entire household and its possessions).
- **Envelope Structure:** A rhetorical device where a passage begins and ends with similar ideas or phrases, creating a framing effect. Used to describe the structure of the coveting list.

- **Gateway Sin:** A sin or transgression that, if engaged in, makes it easier or more likely for a person to commit other, often more serious, sins. Coveting is identified as a gateway sin.
- **Epithumios:** A Greek word used in the New Testament (e.g., James) meaning "covetousness" or "lustful desire," implying a strong, often illicit, desire to possess.
- **David and Bathsheba:** A biblical narrative (2 Samuel) illustrating the destructive consequences of coveting, leading to adultery and murder.
- **Consumerism:** A social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts.
- **Envy:** A feeling of discontent or resentment aroused by the superiority, success, or possessions of another. While it can sometimes inspire self-improvement, it often leads to negative emotions like restlessness and resentment.
- **Thankfulness:** The quality of being grateful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. Presented as the antithesis or antidote to covetousness.

#### 4) FAQs:

What makes the 10th Commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Covet," unique among the Ten Commandments and ancient law codes?

The 10th Commandment stands out because, unlike others that prohibit external actions like murder or theft, it targets an internal state: desire. Dr. Tomasino highlights that while almost everyone admits to coveting, getting them to care about it is the real challenge. Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern law codes like the Code of Hammurabi do not contain any injunctions against coveting, making this commandment unique to the biblical tradition. It's also unique because it's unenforceable by human law; there are no specific

penalties for coveting in the Old Testament, requiring self-policing and a focus on one's thoughts and intentions.

How do different denominations interpret and order the 10th Commandment?

There is a difference in opinion among denominations regarding the ordering and division of the final commandment. Jewish, Orthodox, and most Protestant traditions consider "Thou shalt not covet" as the 10th Commandment, encompassing all listed items (neighbor's household, wife, servants, animals, and anything else). In contrast, Catholics and Lutherans combine the first two commandments (no other gods and no images) into one. To still arrive at ten commandments, they divide the coveting commandment into two: the 9th being "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and the 10th being "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, etc." This division by Catholics and Lutherans is influenced by the reordering found in Deuteronomy 5 (where the wife is listed first) and the theological interpretations of figures like St. Augustine, who also separated the coveting of a wife from other possessions.

What is the deeper meaning of the word "covet" (hamad) in the Old Testament?

The Hebrew word "hamad," translated as "covet," goes beyond a simple desire. Dr. Tomasino argues that in many Old Testament contexts, it implies an *intention to take possession* of what is desired. Examples from Micah 2:2, Psalm 68:16, Isaiah 1:29, and Job 20:20 illustrate this active connotation, showing that coveting often precedes or is directly linked to seizing or acquiring the desired item. It's not merely a passing fancy but a deep-seated want that seeks fulfillment through action, whether through legitimate means or otherwise.

What is the rhetorical purpose behind the detailed lists of items not to be coveted in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5?

The detailed lists (household, wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, donkey, field, anything else) in both Exodus and Deuteronomy serve a

rhetorical purpose: to emphasize that *all* of a neighbor's household and property are off-limits for covetous desire. While a simple phrase like "Don't covet anything that belongs to your neighbor" would convey the same meaning, the extensive listing is a common ancient Near Eastern literary technique to strengthen a point through repetition and elaboration. The inclusion of "household" (often a metonymy for all possessions) at the beginning, followed by specific examples, creates an "envelope structure" that comprehensively covers everything a person might own, concluding with "anything else" to ensure completeness. The addition of "field" in Deuteronomy's list is suggested to bring the total number of items to seven, symbolizing completeness.

How does the New Testament reinforce the seriousness of covetousness?

The New Testament repeatedly reinforces the gravity of covetousness. Jesus, in Mark 7:21-22, lists "deeds of coveting" among other evil thoughts that proceed from the human heart. Luke 12:15 warns against "all covetousness," emphasizing that life is not defined by possessions. Paul, in Ephesians 5:5, equates a "covetous man" with an "idolater," implying that intense desire for possessions can replace God as the object of worship. James 4:2 dramatically connects coveting to more extreme sins, stating, "you covet, and you cannot obtain, so you fight and you quarrel," and even implies it can lead to murder (though Dr. Tomasino acknowledges this may be hyperbole). Ultimately, James 1:14-15 portrays covetousness as a "gateway sin" – the seed that, if left unchecked, "gives birth to sin," and "sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

What is the story of David and Bathsheba, and how does it illustrate the destructive power of coveting?

The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel) is presented as a prime example of coveting as a "gateway sin." King David, while his army was at war, saw Bathsheba bathing from his palace. He coveted her, which led him to commit adultery with her. When Bathsheba became



pregnant, David tried to cover up his sin by bringing her husband, Uriah, home from battle, hoping Uriah would sleep with his wife. When Uriah refused, David orchestrated Uriah's death in battle to take Bathsheba as his own wife. This progression from looking and desiring (coveting) to adultery and then murder demonstrates how unchecked covetousness can lead to a cascade of destructive actions and profound consequences, ultimately causing trouble in David's household for generations.

How does modern American society, particularly consumerism and advertising, contribute to covetousness?

Dr. Tomasino argues that modern American society actively encourages covetousness. He points to consumerism, driven by slick advertising and social media, as a national policy, citing instances where even presidents have encouraged buying to stimulate the economy after national crises. This constant bombardment with "newer and better and faster and just shinier gadgets" fuels consumer dissatisfaction and encourages a relentless desire for more possessions. America, despite comprising only 4.2% of the world's population, consumes over 30% of its goods, making it a "poster child of gluttony, of covetousness." This societal push for material acquisition can lead to a state where desires are rarely frustrated, perpetuating a cycle of wanting.

What are the personal and spiritual consequences of unchecked covetousness?

Unchecked covetousness has significant personal and spiritual consequences. Personally, it can lead to:

- **Envy:** While sometimes inspiring, envy often makes people restless and discontented.
- **Resentment:** Envy can escalate into resentment towards those who possess what is desired, poisoning relationships.

- **Hatred:** In extreme cases (like Adolf Hitler's anti-Semitism mentioned as an example), resentment can evolve into bitter hatred.
- **Dissatisfaction and Unhappiness:** Despite acquiring possessions, covetousness leads to a perpetual state of wanting, fostering anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, particularly among affluent individuals who "have everything."

Spiritually, covetousness:

- **Breeds dissatisfaction with God's blessings:** It makes individuals despise the good things they already have, constantly longing for what they lack.
- **Leads to resentment of God:** This dissatisfaction can morph into resentment towards God, questioning His fairness when others (even "bad people") appear to have more.
- **Drives a wedge between humans and their Creator:** It replaces a thankful heart—the opposite of covetousness—with a focus on what is absent, hindering a healthy relationship with God. The commandment, therefore, is a gift designed to help individuals find happiness and live a blessed life.