

עֲשֶׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים

לא תחמד – Word Number Ten

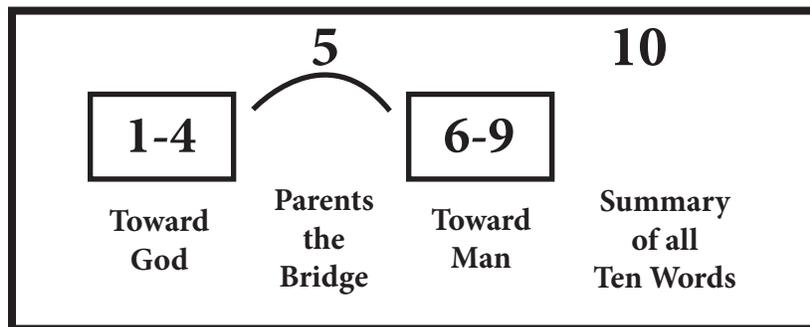
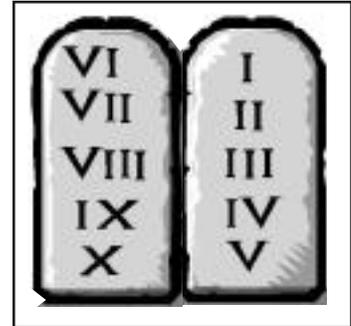
THE TENTH WORD IS: *lo tach-mod*

“You shall not covet”

The tenth word of the Ten Words is: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17).

The Hebrew word for “covet” is תָּחַמַד, *chamad*, and has the basic meaning of “desire, take pleasure in.” It is used in a good sense, as in desiring the Torah (Ps 19:11; cp. Is 53:3; Ps 39:12). More often, however, it is used of an evil desire, of an uncontrolled desire for something. Such an uncontrolled desire leads one to do evil things to acquire the object, such as stealing, cheating, deception, lying, and even worse.

The manner in which the 10 Words are structured is instructive: the first Four words are directed toward God. The Fifth Word (honor parents) is a bridge to the next Four words which are directed toward one’s fellowman. The 10th Word, then, functions as a summary:



Coveting summarizes the other nine commandments because it focuses on the desires of the heart. Obeying God always begins in the heart. Whenever we disobey God by breaking one of the commandments, the sin begins with our desires. James teaches us: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14–15). This teaches us that sin begins with an evil desire, which, if we allow this desire to remain unchecked, will lead to sinful actions.

As a summary of the Ten Words, “you shall not covet” reminds us that obeying God begins with having our heart right with Him. That is because obedience to God is the fruit of faith in God. If we believe that (1) God controls all things, and (2) that God supplies all of our needs, then we will trust Him to supply our needs and longings instead of trying to get what we want in sinful ways.

What is the heart attitude that counters evil desires? It is contentment in God. And how do we foster contentment in God? By practicing thanksgiving for what He has given us. Contentment is wanting what we already have. Learn to constantly give thanks to God for all He has given you, and seek His ways. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight” (Prov 3:5-6).

Summary of the Ten Words

אֲנֹכִי

I am Adonai

לֹא יְהִיָּה

**There shall not be
other gods for you**

לֹא תִשָּׂא

**Do not lift up the
Name in vain**

זְכוֹר

Remember Sabbath

כִּבֵּד

Honor parents

לֹא תִרְצַח

Do not murder

לֹא תִנָּאֵף

**Do not commit
adultery**

לֹא תִגְנוֹב

Do not steal

לֹא תַעֲנֶה

**Do not bear false
witness**

לֹא תַחְמֹד

Do not covet