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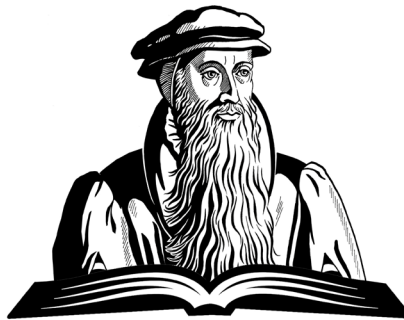
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #42

The Ten Commandments:

Love from Within

Catechism Questions 79 thru 81



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Lecture #42

The Ten Commandments: Love for the Truth

Question 79: *Which is the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment is, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, no anything that is thy neighbour’s.”*

Question 80: *What is required in the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.*

Question 81: *What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?*

Answer: *The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.*

In this lesson, we consider the last of the Ten Commandments. So far we’ve seen that each of God’s commandments directs us in the way of love—love to God, and love to our neighbor. This commandment does the same. However, it more directly addresses the inward desires of our hearts than the others do. Well, we should be clear—each of the commandments is spiritual. That is, each commandment addresses our thoughts and desires, as well as our outward actions. However, this particular commandment focuses almost exclusively on the desires of the heart. So let’s look at our Questions for the lesson before us, Questions #79 to #81, all of them regard the tenth commandment.

Question #79: “Which is the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment is, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, no anything that is thy neighbour’s.”

Notice that it’s forbidding anything that is thy neighbor’s to be coveted by us. This Question identifies the tenth commandment itself. The commandment is found in Exodus 20, and verse 17,

and Deuteronomy 5, verse 21. The word translated here as “covet,” is a word that refers to our desires. In fact, this very word is translated as “desire” in Deuteronomy 5, verse 21. So we notice the commandment is not telling us that it’s wrong to desire; it is, however, forbidding that we desire what belongs to someone else. The commandment touches on all things, thus, “any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” And so, God is saying to our hearts, as it were, “You should not long for what others have, but you should be contented with what I give you.”

Notice then, Question #80: “What is required in the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.”

Well, here we see the duties or requirements from this commandment. By “charitable frame of spirit,” is meant an inward kindness toward our neighbor, and all that is his. We’ll look at that more fully in our lesson.

Notice then, Question #81: “What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?”—“The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.”

And this Answer shows us what is forbidden, that is, what the commandment tells us we should not do. The word “inordinate” refers to something that is unregulated or obsessive. Such desires are not according to the order that God has given for our desires. We will look at this in our lesson.

For our lesson, let’s look at three main points: first, Love Regarding Our Own; second, Love Regarding Our Neighbors; and third, Love That Is Sincere.

Well, first then, Love Regarding Our Own. In order to avoid coveting what others have, we must be satisfied with what God has given to us. This is why the Answer to Question #80 notes that “the tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition.” Well, to be “content” means to be satisfied. If we’re to have full contentment with our own condition, then we will understand why the Answer to Question #81 says, “The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate.” So, with the one, it’s saying that our hearts are to be satisfied with what God has given us—our own condition; and our hearts are not to express this discontentment, this dissatisfaction with what God has given us. Full contentment means to be satisfied and grateful for what God has given to us.

This is a great challenge, particularly in our cultures today, where the world ever telling us that what we have is not good enough—we need more. The Bible is reminding us to think differently than the world thinks. And so, this full contentment is to include things about our bodies, and our families, our possessions, our abilities. Certainly it does not mean that we are to be satisfied with our sin, or sins against us. It does, however, mean that what God has given to us is to satisfy us. We may be rich or poor. We’re still to be contented. We may be tall or short. We may have many opportunities to advance in this world. We may have few opportunities to advance in the world. When you read, for instance, in the book of Ephesians, you don’t find Paul telling the servants to be discontented with their state, rather, as a servant, they were to serve with gladness their masters. And surely if they, who had so few opportunities to advance in this world, were to be content and serve the Lord in faith, surely we, in our own circumstance, whatever our circumstances are, are called to be content in the Lord, and serve him with gladness.

The reason for this is that ultimately, God is the one who has given us all that we have. He’s the one who gave us our parents; he’s the one who placed us where we live; and in history when we live. He’s provided our food and our houses. Indeed, he’s given us all things. Our estate—everything that is ours—is given to us from God. So in order to be content, we need to understand

that our circumstances are ultimately governed by God. So if we're to be content about what is ours, we need to see why what is ours, is ours, namely, it's ours because God, in his wisdom, has given it to us. The way that we become content then is by reminding ourselves to look to God. He is the one who is sovereign over all things.

Well, certainly, as we stand in need of things like food, and water, and clothing, we're taught to look to him, because he's the provider, and he has promised to provide us these things. Remember his Word, that as we seek first his kingdom and righteousness, all these things—food, and water, and clothing—will be given unto us. He's promised these things to us. And we should be content to live daily upon him. Think of how Christ taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." We should be content and satisfied, even if God took all other food away from us that might exist for tomorrow and the next day in our refrigerators, or in our storage. We should then be content to trust God day by day.

You see, ultimately, this is calling us to trust him. He's promised to provide. We should be content to promise him. We may, and certainly, we must ask him for things that he has promised. This is not to be sinfully discontented with our circumstances. Rather, it's to see what our circumstances are, and to be directed to God to provide as he's promised. In other words, the great way to be content with what God has given us, is to trust in him. We're to trust his wisdom and his goodness. We're to trust him to provide what we stand in need of, when we stand in need of them.

This will also teach us to be grateful for the things we have received from him. None of us deserves even small mercies from God. He is holy. He's transcendent and glorious, and we have sinned against him. But he has kindly given to us many good things. If you took the time to make a list—and I challenge you to do this—of all the good things God has given to you just today, you would start to see how merciful and kind God has been. If you then started to think about all of your life, you would see that though there have been and will be trials and troubles, yet still, the Lord has been good to you. When we start to discern this and see it, it's then we will learn to be grateful and content, for we deserve nothing from God. And so, if we've ever received any good thing from him, surely we have cause to be satisfied. And that we have received much from him is a cause to be all the more contented with what he's given to us.

Well, second, Love Regarding Our Neighbors. In the second point, we switch our attention to the things that our neighbors have. We often overlook those neighbors who have less than we do, and we often look at those neighbors who have more than we do, or have better things than we do. Well, with this, we need to remember this commandment. It's calling us to be loving toward our neighbor and all that he or she has.

Notice the Answer to Question #80, that we are to have "a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his." This may hit our hearts with heavy conviction, because we are often tempted to complain that our neighbors receive better things, as we think of them, than we do. Perhaps, at school, they receive better grades. They may receive better compliments. As we get older, we may have those that we work with who receive more money. They have more possessions. They take more trips. They have better health. But if we back up and consider this perspective from a heart of love.

Remember, the commandments are particular ways that we show our love. How does love treat our neighbor when they receive good things? Well, love rejoices in the good things that God gives to our neighbors. We see God being generous to our neighbor, and in love, we're to give thanks to God for his goodness to them. When we see God blessing our neighbor, instead of envying and becoming bitter toward them and cruel toward them, we're in love to give thanks to God, to

bless his name for his goodness. This is what the Catechism is getting at when it shows us that necessarily forbidden is our envy toward our neighbor's good things.

Notice, "The tenth commandment forbiddeth all "envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his." This expression, "motions and affections," has to do with our feelings and emotions, and how it is within we are carrying ourselves toward our neighbor.

We see this explicitly in the commandment itself. Notice the words, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house." Remember the word "covet" is desire. Don't look at your neighbor's house and say, "That's the house I want." "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife"—a married man looking to his neighbor's wife and saying, "That's the wife I want." "Nor his manservant"—his employees, in our day—"his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbour's." In other words, when we see what our neighbor has been given, it's sinful for us to have our hearts go toward it, and say, "That's what I want. I don't just want good things from the Lord. I want the things he gave to that person."

Well, why is it that we should not envy or grieve at the good that God gives to our neighbor? Well, first, we should not do so, because it is God who is giving to our neighbor the good things that he gives to them. To grieve at this, is to imply that God is not good or wise in what he's doing toward that neighbor. And so, ultimately, to be envious, or to be grieved by the good that our neighbor receives, is to raise an accusation against God, who is perfectly wise and always good.

But second, when we grieve at or envy at the good our neighbor receives, it is to ignore the many mercies we have received of God. Remember, not one good thing you or I have ever enjoyed, ever received, however small, is something that we've deserved from God. And as we examine and take inventory of what God has given us, we'll see that he's given us many good things. It may not be the same exact good things he gives to others, but when we understand what we deserve from God, especially as sinners, that we deserve his wrath and curse, and the experience of his judgment now and always, that we've been given small mercies is infinitely above what we've deserved. So to envy at or grieve at the good that our neighbors receive from God is to ignore the real mercies that God has given to us.

The other reason, the third reason, is that to envy or grieve at what our neighbors receive, is to ignore the right way to seek from God good things we need, namely, believing prayer. So think for a moment, what good does it ever do to us to envy or grieve at the good our neighbor has received. It does us no good. It does us, as it were, infects our souls, and it makes us bitter. And Paul has explicitly said that this bitter envying is to be put away from us, that we're to be filled with love toward our neighbor.

Well, what is it we should do when we stand in need of various things? We're to pray. We are to take our hearts to God. We can thank God for the good things we've received from him. We can thank God for the good things he's given to others. And we can come to God and say, "God, I stand in need of mercy. Be merciful to me." That's the way of faith and love.

So if we're to be loving toward our neighbor, instead of complaining about what they have, we're to give thanks to God for his kindness to them. That's what love does. Love loves God, who's doing these things. And love loves the neighbor who's receiving these good things. So love, then, rejoices from these good things.

Well, for our third point, Love That Is Sincere. This commandment targets our hearts directly. While we may be able to perform certain actions appropriate to the other commandment, this commandment focuses on the inward man. For example, with the third commandment, "Thou

shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain,” we may successfully keep our mouths from speaking God’s name in vain. With the fifth commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother,” we may outwardly do the things that the commandment would have us to do. However, the tenth commandment directly addresses, not our actions, but our desires: “Thou shalt not covet.” In other words, it is directly and entirely focused upon the heart.

By this commandment, the Lord is forcing us to see that he is concerned about the sincerity of our love. It is one thing to speak the right things. It’s another thing to do the right things outwardly. However, by this commandment, the Lord is directly addressing our hearts, and reminding us that our hearts must be truly and sincerely engaged with our actions.

It’s interesting, the Apostle Paul particularly identified this commandment as the one that convicted him of his sinfulness, and made him see his need of salvation. Notice his words, in Romans 7, verses 7 through 9. He writes, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

Well, there’s much going on in this passage, however, focus for a moment on Paul’s experience. And it’s particularly this commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,” that made him aware of his internal desires, and how sinful they were. He said, “I had not known lust”—that is, the sinful desire—“except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” The commandment made Paul, prior to his conversion, to see how his heart was wicked. It’s probably the case that Paul, outwardly considered, was a fairly respectable man, even before he was converted. He was probably free from much scandalous sin. And if you had looked at him, you would have looked at him as Christ described the Pharisees—on the outside they were beautiful. But as Christ said, they were like “whited sepulchres”—tombs, on the outside looking beautiful, but on the inside, filled with “dead men’s bones.” This is what this commandment made Paul see about himself. He realized that however good his outside looked, his inside was bad.

Each commandment has an inward demand. This is why Christ directs us to our thoughts and desires, in Matthew 5, when he’s clarifying and applying the law. Thus, when he’s helping us understand the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” he says, in Matthew 5:22, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” In other words, our desires—“whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause”—and our words—“whosoever shall say”—are governed by this commandment.

Likewise the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Christ says, in Matthew 5, verse 28, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” In other words, it’s not just the act of adultery that is forbidden by the commandment, it is the desire of the heart for adultery that is forbidden as well. So it would be wrong to think that only the tenth commandment addresses the heart, because the whole law—each of the ten commandments—addresses the outward and inward man, actions and desires.

Paul wrote of this in Romans 7, verse 14: “For we know that the law is spiritual.” In other words, the law does not just address our outward behavior and actions. It addresses our inward desires. Our hearts must conform to God’s requirements, and each of the ten commandments

demands this. But it is the tenth commandment in particular that forces us to consider our inward thoughts and desires more fully. In the end, what this commandment is doing is reminding us that God demands sincere—that is, real—love. We’re not merely to do outward things that seem to conform to the outward requirements. Instead, we are really, truly, sincerely to love God and our neighbor from within.

So as we think about this commandment, it forces us to examine ourselves. And as we close, it’s good for us to take that up. The commandment itself reminds us to look to God in faith and love regarding all that he’s appointed to us. It causes us to rest in his wisdom and provision, knowing that he is good and faithful. Additionally, it calls us to look with kindness upon others and what they have from God.

And we should simply ask this question, “Is that true of me? Is my heart satisfied with what God has given to me, or do I grumble and complain against God? Is my heart glad when my neighbor receives good things from God, or do I grumble and complain about it?” Well, we may deceive ourselves into thinking we are okay if we only judge our outward actions, however, this commandment directs our attention to consider our hearts, our desires. While we may say the right things, while we may do the right things outwardly at least, our hearts may, in fact, be grumbling and complaining, and within our own souls, there is the display of sin against God. We need to realize that this grumbling and complaining is sin. And in the sight of God, it is reprehensible.

I challenge you to search the Bible for this that I’ll quote to you, and see it in the Bible itself, that covetousness is idolatry. Look in the Bible for that verse that shows us, when we covet, when we are violating this command, we are actually guilty of idolatry. Now, as you search the Bible to find that, I hope that the Lord brings it to your mind with great force and weight. But notice this, when we are sinfully dissatisfied with what has given us, we’re actually challenging God himself. Covetousness is idolatry. It’s a great sin. Though it can be hidden from the sight of others, it is not hidden from the sight of God.

We should also remember that this commandment gives us a glimpse into the work of Jesus Christ. He came to fulfill all righteousness, and one aspect of that righteousness was his obeying the tenth commandment. This means that Christ was never discontented. He was never wrongly desiring something. In other words, not only did Christ do the right things always, not only did he say the right things always, he always desired the right things only. His actions and desires were always and only in perfect conformity to God’s law. What beauty there is in Christ! In Hebrews 7, verse 26, we find Christ described as, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Everything about Christ was and is perfect. This should give us hope in two ways.

First, we are those who have not been holy, harmless, and undefiled. Not only our actions, but our desires have indeed been filled with sin. However, Christ’s righteousness is perfect. He fulfilled this commandment and all others, perfectly. This means that he was able to offer himself up as a perfect and spotless sacrifice to forgive our sins, who trust in Jesus Christ. It also means that the righteousness that he imputes to us—remember, “What is justification?”—that righteousness is perfect and faultless as we consider his actions and his desires. Thus, all those who trust in Jesus Christ have a perfect sacrifice for all of their wretched sins, outward and inward, and receive a perfect righteousness, in their perfect salvation.

Second, another encouragement is this—he is pleased to work within his believing and forgiven people to transform their hearts and their desires so that they become a people who are content and sincerely loving toward their neighbors. This is to be beautified within and without, and it is only found in Jesus Christ. If ever you or I shall have our hearts become contented, and see

covetousness put to death, it will only be as we trust in and rely upon Jesus Christ, our beloved Savior. May it be so, by God's grace, to you and to me, and all for his glory.