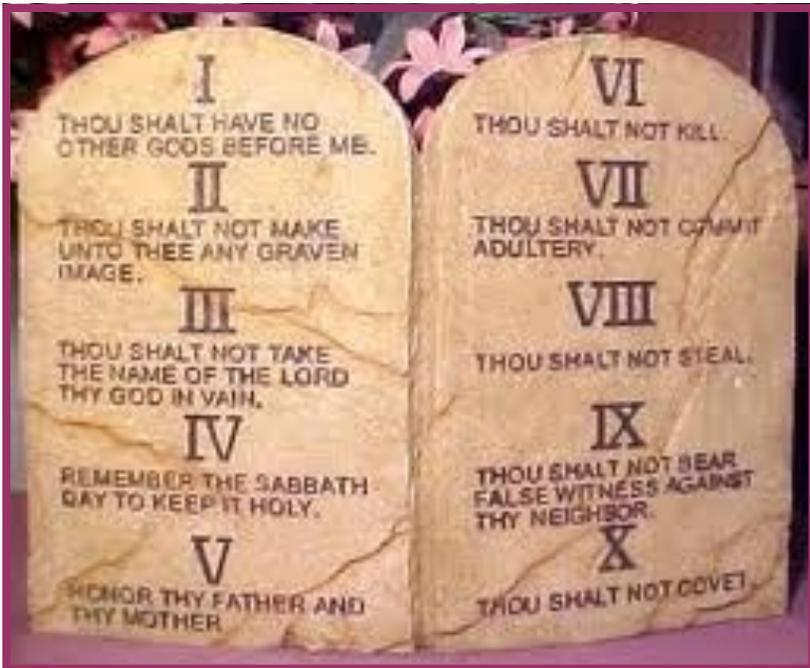


THE LAW OF GOD

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

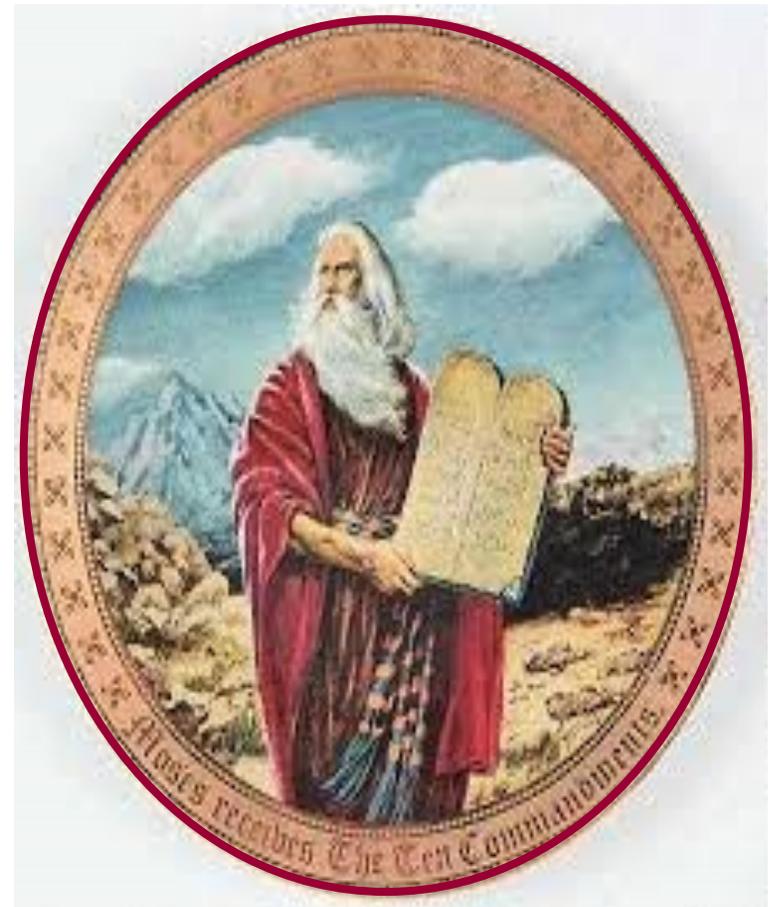


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The Ten Commandments

Commandment 9



THE LAW OF GOD

The Ten Commandments or Decalogue (10 words) was given by God on Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai) to Moses around 1280 BC. They are the core of the moral teachings of Israel and have come down to Christianity as part of Divine Revelation. The Church in commenting on the Commandments sees in them the totality of the negative and positive moral law, the things we should not do, as well as the things we should do. This is to say, they embody the entire natural law, what reason can discover of morality from the nature of the world and man. However, as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, not every society, much less every man, discovers the entire natural law, so God has revealed it in the Commandments so it could be known with certainty by all men, of every society, and every age.

The Bible gives two versions of the Ten Commandments, in essential content identical, one in Exodus and another in Deuteronomy. The enumeration of the commandments (which is number one, which is two etc.) are traditional and neither contained in the texts nor obvious. The Catholic Church has traditionally used the Deuteronomy account and followed the division of the text given in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Scriptures made by second century BC Jews in Egypt and used by the early Church as its Old Testament. The Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church also use this account. The other Reformation churches use the Exodus listing, and adopted the Jewish enumeration of the Hebrew text. The Commandments are probably best known from the traditional formulas used in catechesis.

Commentary is by Saint Thomas Aquinas. By universal consent, Thomas Aquinas is the preeminent spokesman of the Catholic tradition of reason and of divine revelation. He is one of the great teachers of the medieval Catholic Church, honored with the titles Doctor of the Church and Angelic Doctor.

Commandment 9

THE NINTH (TENTH) COMMANDMENT You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

[St. Thomas places the Tenth Commandment before the Ninth. The Tenth Commandment is wider in extension than the Ninth, which is specific.]

“You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.” There is this difference between the divine and the human laws that human law judges only deeds and words, whereas the divine law judges also thoughts. The reason is because human laws are made by men who see things only exteriorly, but the divine law is from God, who sees both external things and the very interior of men. “You are the God of my heart” [Ps 72:26]. And again: “Man sees those things that appear, but the Lord sees the heart” [1 Sam 16:7]. Therefore, having considered those Commandments which concern words and deeds, we now treat of the Commandments about thoughts. For with God the intention is taken for the deed, and thus the words, “You shall not covet,” mean to include not only the taking by act, but also the intention to take.

Therefore, it says: “You shall not even covet your neighbor's goods.” There are a number of reasons for this.

The **first** reason for the Commandment is that **man's desire has no limits**, because desire itself is boundless. But he who is wise will aim at some particular end, for no one should have aimless desires: “A covetous man shall not be satisfied with money” [Eccles 5:9]. But the desires of man are never satisfied, because the heart of man is made for God. Thus, says St. Augustine: “You hast made us for You, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You” [Conf. I]. Nothing, therefore, less than God can satisfy the human heart: “He satisfies your desire with good things” [Ps 102:5].

The **second** reason is that **covetousness destroys peace of heart**, which is indeed highly delightful. The covetous man is ever solicitous to acquire what he lacks, and to hold that which he has: “The fullness of the rich will not suffer him to sleep” [Eccles 5:11]. “For where your treasure is, there is your heart also” [Mt 6:21]. It was for this, says St. Gregory, that Christ compared riches to thorns [Lk 8:14].

Thirdly, covetousness in **a man of wealth renders his riches useless both to himself and to others**, because he desires only to hold on to them: “Riches are not fitting for a covetous man and a niggard” [Sir 14:3].

The **fourth** reason is that it **destroys the equality of justice**: “Neither shall you take bribes, which even blind the wise, and pervert the words of the just” [Ex 23:8]. And again: “He who loves gold shall not be justified” [Sir 31:5].

The **fifth** reason is that **it destroys the love of God and neighbor**, for says St. Augustine: “The more one loves, the less one covets,” and also the more one covets, the less one loves. “Nor despise your dear brother for the sake of gold” [Sir 7:20]. And just as “No man can serve two masters,” so neither can he serve “God and mammon” [Mt 6:24].

Finally, covetousness produces all kinds of wickedness. It is “**the root of all evil**,” says St. Paul, and when this root is implanted in the heart it brings forth murder and theft and all kinds of evil. “They that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evil” [1 Tim 6:9-10]. And note, furthermore, that **covetousness is a mortal sin** when one covets one's neighbor's goods without reason; and even if there be a reason, it is a venial sin.

End of Commandment 9