

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(According to the original book by H.H. Pope Shenouda, III)

The Tenth Commandment

"Do Not Covet What Is Your Neighbor's"

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's"
(Deuteronomy 5:21 - Exodus 20:17)

1. The Seriousness of Lust and Its Development

The statement *"You shall not covet"* reveals to us an aspect of beauty in the law of the Old Testament. People did not understand this sublime law because their minds were covered with a veil. Believe me when Jesus Christ said, *"I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17), part of what he intended was to complete people's understanding of the law.

The commandment, that *"whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Matthew 5:28), has its roots in the Old Testament law where God said, *"Neither shall you desire your neighbor's wife"*.

Through the commandment *"You shall not covet"*, God penetrated sins to their roots in order to uproot them. Adultery begins with the bodily lust, stealing with the lust to possess or the lust for money, lying with the lust for justification or plotting for something, and murder with the lust for revenge or some other lust leading to it. If man fights lust and conquers it, he will have conquered all sins. How beautiful is the sage's statement: *"Rejoice, not for a lust attained, but for a lust subdued"*. It is an insult calling someone "lustful" for it means that one is led on by one's lusts.

The best way, when you confront lust, is to escape from it instead of engaging it in a struggle where you may be defeated, or where, before scoring a victory, your heart becomes polluted with lust. Profit by the words of the apostle who said, *"Flee also youthful lusts"* (2 Timothy 2:22).

Since lust does not give up until it is fulfilled, escaping from it is the better way. Why should you engage it in a struggle or discussion? The more space you give it, the more slack you allow it, and the more you communicate with it, the stronger it becomes, and from the communication stage it moves on to excitement, to inflammation, and to fulfillment.

You gradually move on from thinking about it, to getting attached to it, to being led by it, to fulfilling it, to repeating it, to getting crazy about it, and to being enslaved by it. Man may resort to wrongful ways to fulfill his lusts such as lying, deceit, trickery, or may be more than that.

Disadvantages of satisfying an insatiable lust:

When man become tired of a lust, he is deceived into saying: It is better to satisfy this lust so that I may quell this longing and get relief! However, lust is never satisfied. How profound the words of Jesus Christ are when he said: *"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again" (John 4:13)*. When one becomes thirsty, one drinks, only to become thirstier without end. Whenever man pursues lust he finds pleasure and pleasure invites him to another pursuit, and the story never ends.

Satisfying lust does not save man from it but increases it. For instance, if a man lusts for money, the more he amasses it the more he longs for more. If a young man looks forward to getting promoted he longs for level three when he reaches level four, and when he gets to level three he longs for level two, and so on and so forth.

In adultery also, when satisfying one stage one longs for the following one.

Adam had all the trees in Paradise except one. He was not satisfied but longed for that one in particular! Ahab who owned a lot was not satisfied with all his possessions and craved for the field of Naboth the Jezreelite! David had seven women, and yet he was not satisfied but lusted for another. Solomon pursued the road of satisfaction to the end and said, *"And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them" (Ecclesiastes 2:10)*. And what was the result? He took on a thousand women and left us his experience in his undying statement: *"All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full... The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1:7,8)*.

Do not, therefore, think that satisfaction saves you from lust. Nothing will save you except self-control, and the best way is fleeing from that. Joseph, as a bachelor, conquered lust by chastity and escape, and David, the husband of so many, was conquered by lust when he allowed himself to satisfy it.

Types of lust:

There are many types of lust which the apostle concentrated his statement: *"For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16)*. *"The flesh lusts against the Spirit" (Galatians 5:17)*. *"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24)*.

The pleasure attained through the crucifixion of the body and its lusts is one where man feels the loftiness of the spirit.

The lust of the flesh might be for adultery, food, or enjoyment of sight, hearing or smell.

By the words, *"Neither shall you desire your neighbor's wife"* God meant adultery. As to the lust of food, it is the sin in which Esau fell when he famished for the lentil stew cooked by Jacob and sold his birthright for it (*Gen. 25:29-34*). Likewise was the craving of the Israelites when they wept and said, *"If only we had meat to eat... we remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic" (Num. 11:4,5)*. And the Lord gave them meat but struck them with a very great plague and many died and *"that place was called 'kibroth hattaavah' because there they buried the people who had the craving" (Deut. 11:34)*.

There is also the lust for money, for possession or property as king Ahab craved for the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. So the Lord warned us, *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house...nor anything that is your neighbor's"*.

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Collecting post stamps, works of art or even things of no use may be an object of coveting.

There is also the lust for being honored or becoming famous, the lust for positions and titles and the lust for greatness in general as well as the lust for adornment and beauty. All this coveting for greatness might take various forms; such as a person who changes his car every time a new model is produced. Another example is the fall of the devil who said, *"I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High"* (Isa. 14:13,14). The same lust can be traced in the fall of Adam and Eve who the devil tempted to be *"like God"* (Gen. 3:5).

One of the most dangerous lusts is that of destruction, an example of which is found in the devil against the human beings. His desire was to destroy them, so the Lord said of him *"He was a murderer from the beginning"* (John 8:44). The lust of revenge falls under this same category.

Conclusion:

A person can overcome such lusts by the spirit of renunciation, by feeling that he is a stranger in the world, that *"all is vanity and grasping for the wind"* (Eccl. 1:14), and that *"the world is passing away, and the lust of it"* (1 John 2:17). Also continual thinking of the other life, love of fellow human beings and the spirit of giving would be of great use in this concern.