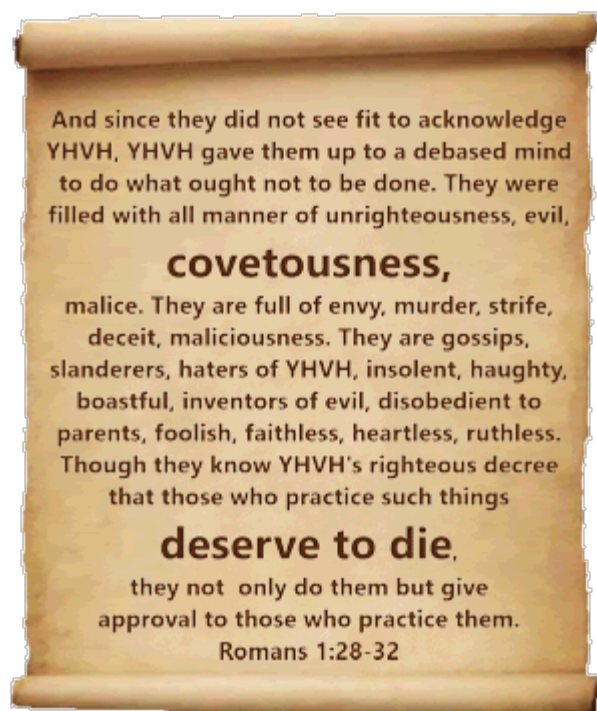


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*the Ten Words Series*  
**Covetousness**

by haRold Smith  
a citizen of the Commonwealth (Ephesians 2:19)

*"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 is your neighbor's.**" Exodus 20:17*

*"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry.**" Colossians 3:5*

In the previous article, [Honor, Murder & Adultery](#) ([click on highlighted words to view content](#)), we found what is considered to be the Sixth Word (commonly known as commandment) actually was found in the [Hebrew scriptures of Exodus 20:13](#) to also include the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Words as well - because they all are related as having [the death penalty](#). From the Hebrew

perspective they were written from, they are all in the [same neighborhood](#). In looking at the verse from [Romans 1:28-32](#) we see where *Sha'ul* (the Hebrew apostle Paul) has placed "covetousness" in the same neighborhood as an act deserving death. Why would he do that?

To answer that question, in the same regard as we approached the neighborhood bundle of verses found in Exodus 20:6-9, we also should not just skip through this collective arrangement in Colossians 3:5 at the top of this article as well. In other words, don't treat each of these actions mentioned as if they are individual unrelated behaviors. Notice that *Sha'ul* collects them under one heading - [idolatry](#). We should notice the similar characteristics of each as being in the [same neighborhood](#). That works for fornication, impurity, passion and evil desire - all of these are tied to sexual behavior. But we usually don't think of covetousness as sexual and because we don't see it that way, we think that *Sha'ul* designates only covetousness as idolatry. We read the verse as if the phrase [hostis esti](#) (which is) applies only to the last of his list, [pleonexia](#) (covetousness). That's a mistake. The first four items are clearly sexually oriented: fornication ([porneia](#)), impurity or uncleanness ([akatharsia](#)), passion or inordinate affection ([pathos](#)), and desire ([epithymia](#)), all having sexual connotations. But what about [pleonexia](#)? In Greek literature, the word means, "having or wanting more." Aristotle uses it in the sense of covetousness. In the LXX, the word describes unlawful gain or material advantage, again connected to coveting. *Sha'ul* may have the tenth Word in mind, a commandment that is not limited to economic conditions. "*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife*" is clearly a sexual norm. We can see that all these terms are tied together by the common thread. Now the question becomes: How are these characteristics of idolatry?

Idolatry is effacing the person before me. It is discounting the person as a visible and viable image of YHVH. It is treating the person as [an object of my desire](#). All sexual fornication effaces the other. Sexual fornication views the partner as a means for satisfying my needs and desires, as a way for me to [gain advantage](#). Sexual fornication is anti-intimacy. There is only one person in the encounter - the one who controls. Therefore, sexual fornication is idolatry, not because it is sexual but because it destroys what YHVH considers holy - I trod under [His Presence](#) in the life of the other. When the purpose of sex is to satisfy me, it is worship of a god of my own making. There is a very good reason why the [one-flesh covenant relationship](#) between YHVH and His people is analogous to marriage. Marriage is about exclusive intimacy. But even in marriage, it is possible to be an idolater. We are capable of erecting our own "high places" where we should have observed holy space. Marriage without the covenant relationship of benevolence toward the other is still [pleonexia](#). The only safeguard is constant watchfulness over my true motives by [bringing them in line](#) with what YHVH is truly saying in these Words and putting to death any thought that rises up against [the true knowledge](#) of what these Words mean.

In Exodus 20:17 above the Hebrew word translated as the English "covet" is **chamad** which, of the 21 usages in scripture, primarily means "desire, delight in." Clearly, the word is used in both good and bad contexts. In fact, from this root we find derivatives that include "pleasant, precious and desirable." The bi-polar use of the word is found as early as **Genesis 2:9** where the same word is translated as the English "pleasant" and is used to describe the delight of YHVH in all the trees of the Garden. Negatively, however, the Tenth Word prescribes, "You shalt not *chamad* (covet)", which refers to an "inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire" (**BDB, p.818 - bookmarked as Covet**). Israel was not to "desire" the gold adorning idols (**Deuteronomy 7:25**), to "lust" after prostitutes (**Proverbs 6:25**), or to "covet" fields (**Micah 2:2**). There is a fine line of distinction between desire and covet. They are both woven from the same fabric, but the garments are worn differently. This dichotomy is illustrated in the Messianic Writings concerning the Life Yeshua exemplified for us to follow. Scripture says when, after forty days of fasting in the wilderness, Yeshua hungered. **The tempter** came to Him and said, basically, "...it's OK. Just say the words, turn these rocks into bread and you won't be hungry anymore" (**Matthew 4:1-11**). It is a perfectly natural desire to want to eat when we are hungry - so, how was it Yeshua recognized those thoughts as coming from the tempter?



*...in the wilderness*

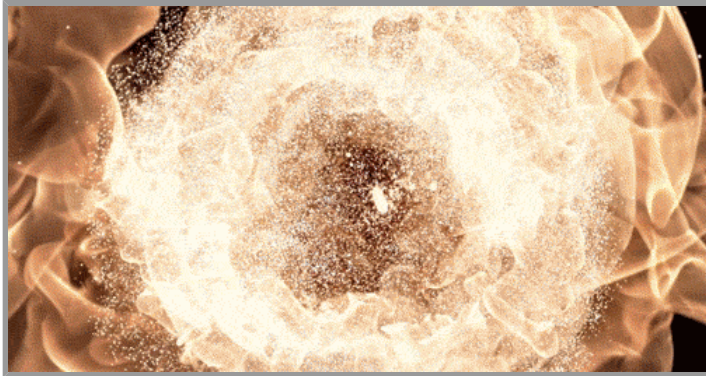
**James 1:14-17** says that we are "*tempted when we are drawn away of our own lust, and enticed.*" The Greek word translated as the English "lust" used here is the same one discussed earlier in Exodus 20, **epithymia**, and means "desire, craving, longing." Interestingly, this is the same Greek word translated as the English "desire" by Yeshua in **Luke 22:15** when He said "...with desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you." It is the natural desires that YHVH has placed within us that we become enticed with - to draw our attention and our faith away from YHVH as our provider of everything we need. As our example of how we are to behave in like circumstance, Yeshua resisted the enemy there in the wilderness - He didn't take the bait (**James 4:7**). He didn't try to pray His way out of the circumstance He found Himself in after those forty days. He stood in the Goodness of His Father, and having stood - continued to stand (**Ephesians 6:10-17**). In the end, the Father sent angels to minister to Him - He didn't leave Yeshua forsaken. That is the promise we have in YHVH for those who keep His Words by the example Yeshua set for us to follow.

*"Keep your life free from love of money, and **be content** with what you have, for YHVH has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you!'" Hebrews 13:5 (quoting Joshua 1:5)*

How much is enough? YHVH answers: what you have been given. That's a particularly uncomfortable answer for almost everyone. Few are those who willingly accommodate their lives to what YHVH has provided. While His provision is adequate for what we need, most of us require and expect - just a little bit more (**Psalms 37:25**). Of course, we are quick to renounce any motivation based on the "love of money." That would be base, selfish and socially unacceptable. But, maybe we are just a little too quick to deny these motives. The Greek word in **2Timothy 3:2** translated as the English word "covetous" is **philarguros** meaning "lover of money" or, more literally, "a friend of silver." The verb is **philos**, the same verb used positively to describe love of the brothers and sisters in the Body. It is not the action that is inappropriate - it is the object of the action. The Messianic Writings treat **philarguros** as a form of coveting. It is the desire for wealth as a solution to life's problems. How many of us become **philarguros** every week when we buy a lottery ticket. How many more show ourselves **philarguros** when we idolize Hollywood celebrities or Wall Street billionaires. "*Why shouldn't I have what they have?*" That demand is the tragedy of the American entitlement mentality. "*I deserve to have it,*" becomes the expectation of **philarguros**. You don't have to be a scrooge to be ruled by the love of money. All you have to do

is want more than what YHVH gives. All you have to do is forget that your life is a gift. Then you can stand with *Havvah* in front of the Tree and ask yourself, "Why should I be denied what will benefit me?" - or perhaps you can avoid the implicit selfishness by modifying the question to: "Why should I be denied what will benefit someone else?" The man who says, "I'll give to charity after I achieve my financial goal" will never give to charity because his goal is himself and scriptural charity is the demand to think of **others before we think of ourselves..** *Philarguros* are those who think life is determined by what I have, not what I give away. It does not matter if you are rich or poor - if money is on your prized possession list, then you are one of the *philarguros*, "lovers of silver." Consider the process of coveting. Yeshua's remark in Luke gives us some direction:

*"The lamp of your body is the eye. When you have a 'good eye,' [that is, when you are generous], your whole body is full of light; but when you have an 'evil eye,' [when you are stingy,] your body is full of darkness. So take care that the light in you is not darkness!" Matthew 6:22-23 (CJB)*



*...the lamp of the body*

The Greek term in this verse from **Matthew** that is translated as the English "clear" or "single" in most modern versions is **haplous**. Various Greek commentators note that the word means "simple, open, without hidden motive, or healthy." But this is a **Hebrew idiom** translated into Greek. It is not about vision but about **generosity** says David Stern in the **Jewish New Testament Commentary**: "If you have a 'good eye' is in the Greek text but the explanation, that is, **if you are generous**, is added by me the translator because in Hebrew 'having a good eye,' an *ayin tovah*, means 'being generous'

and 'having a bad eye,' an *ayin ra'ah*, means 'being stingy.' That this is the correct translation is confirmed by the context - greed and anxiety about money being the topic in both the preceding and following verses." So, a "good eye" means that the person is generous. How does this help us understand "covet"? Simply put, one cannot be covetous and generous to the same subject at the same time. To be covetous is to wish to have what another has, but generosity is the polar opposite. It is to act in such a way that what I have is given to another. If you want a test for coveting - watch the behavior concerning generosity. And according to Yeshua, generosity is the source of light for the entire person. This is based on the Kingdom principle of distribution. YHVH's world operates on the **principle of distribution**, not accumulation. What YHVH gives to me I pass on to others **within His Kingdom**. The gifts I receive from Him are designed to be distributed **to the brethren**. Obviously, this kind of behavior cannot occur in concert with coveting.

Instead of imaging how you can have something that belongs to another, take a step back and ask yourself, "What do I have that I can give as a benefit to this person?" Then do it. You will transform "covet" into "delight" and be transformed into the Light of **the Present Presence**. The Tenth Word is not an exercise in mental control. It is a call to the opposite action.

**Covetousness, a discussion**

*"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit **you put to death the deeds of the body** you will live." Romans 8:13*



**the Ten Words Series**

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**Part Two: Keeping the Sabbath**

**Part Three: Honor, Murder & Adultery**

**Part Four: Covetousness**

???Questions???

Please feel free to email me at [harold@hethathasaneer.com](mailto:harold@hethathasaneer.com). While not claiming to have all the answers, it would be an honor to partake with you of what Spirit is uncovering.

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