

“Commands With Promise”
“You Shall Not Covet”

We come to the last of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). This final commandment forbids *coveting*. Don't covet your neighbor's house (this really means "household" – one's possessions and property). Don't covet *anything* that belongs to your neighbor.

What exactly does it mean to “covet”? Coveting has to do with *desire* – *wanting* something. Of course, just *wanting something* isn't wrong in itself - to want an education, to want a nice, dependable car or truck, or a decent home. But coveting has 2 aspects to it that make it wrong: (1) It's *excessive* desire, and (2) it's *selfish* desire.

Coveting *is excessive desire*. It comes from a word that means “grasping for more”. To covet is to crave more than we need or more than what we can use. When we covet, no matter how much we have, we're not satisfied. We want more. Coveting also is *selfish* desire. It's wanting for *myself* what *somebody else* has.

Coveting is closely connected with other ugly things, like greed, envy, jealousy. Someone has a good job and we're *jealous* of that person's position and paycheck. Or, I *envy* a person for their good health, or good looks, or for winning the lottery. Envy and jealousy are first cousins of this sin of coveting!

How common is this thing of coveting? It seems to me that this is something deeply ingrained in us, part of our fallen human nature: that we are so prone to be greedy for more, or want what other people have. If you watch little children playing, there may be a lot of toys in a room. One child grabs one of the toys. And which one does the other child often want? Right – *that same toy!* Or you give children popsicles, one purple, one red – and the child who got the purple one whimpers, "I wanted the purple one!" (or vice versa). It'd be nice to think we naturally outgrow this behavior, but we often don't! It's in our nature to want more than we need, or cast an envious eye on what belongs to someone else. Case in point: compared to most people in the world, we in the U.S. have much. And yet, often, we aren't satisfied. We want more.

The Scriptures, and Jesus, mince no words about the serious nature of coveting.

The prophet Micah spoke out against the greed of the people: "Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds...they covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance. Therefore, the Lord says: 'I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves'" (Micah 2:1-3).

Then we have these words of Jesus, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). Jesus gives a warning here! "Watch out" He says! Our life ultimately is not measured by how much "stuff" we accumulate! Have you ever heard the phrase, "He who dies with the most toys wins"? Jesus would not have agreed! Someone else has said: "He who dies with the most toys...dies".

Why is coveting such a big deal? Why is God against it? For one thing, coveting is destructive *because it's like a chain reaction that can lead to other sins*. Breaking *this* commandment can lead to breaking *other* commandments. We see this with King David in the Old Testament. He *coveted* Bathsheba, another man's wife, and before the dust had settled, this coveting led him to lie, steal, commit adultery, and murder her husband. Just think of some of the hurtful things people do because they want something so badly – and will do most anything to get it.

Then too, coveting is hurtful *because it spoils our relationship with other people*. Men, if I covet your wife, how's that going to strengthen our friendship? (And please don't say, "Be my guest! You can have her!"). If I'm jealous of your mechanical skills or your ability to cook or bake, I won't be able to share fully in the joy of your accomplishments. If I'm envious of your money or good fortune in life, you're probably going to be able to sense this begrudging attitude, and not really like being around me. Coveting spoils our relationships with others

Coveting also ruins our relationship with God. For one thing, *it robs us of a thankful spirit*. How can I be thankful for what I *have* when I'm so focused on things I *don't have*? Coveting starves a thankful spirit, and ingratitude distances us from God

Coveting also gets in the way of a generous spirit. Instead of looking at what I have and how I can share it, I am looking at getting more for myself. Focusing on *getting*, not *giving*, never brings us closer to God.

Furthermore, *coveting and being greedy for things can become more important than our relationship with God*. This is why the Bible says coveting is *idolatry* – we make an idol out of the things we crave. Colossians 3:5-6 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and *covetousness*, which is *idolatry*. On account of these the wrath of God is coming."

On a larger scale, when groups and nations covet what belongs to others, that has been the cause of many conflicts and wars! History is marked by one nation coveting another nation's land, or natural resources, and then going to war to grab it. Isn't the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East between Arabs and Jews the result of coveting land which each claims is their own? So, once again, we see that God has

given us a commandment for our benefit. Coveting destroys the goodness of life.

What can we do to overcome this trait that's so ingrained in our human nature?

(I think we know, don't we!) First, keep our eyes off what other people have.

If we're focused on what other people have, we'll always be able to find someone with more money, a nicer home, a newer car or truck, better health, more friends. When I was a kid, I wanted one of those skinny bikes with different gears so badly. They were kind of the new thing. So, that became #1 on my Christmas list. And I got one. It was so cool! But then my friend Johnny Martin got a Schwinn – a fat Schwinn – saddle bags and all! I'm still embarrassed to admit that I went to my parents and asked if I could trade mine in for one like Johnny Martin's. They said no. (Looking back, I don't blame them). See, I was OK with my bike, until I looked at what somebody else had.

The next point follows: *keep our eyes on what God has already given us!* Stop being jealous of what other people have. Be thankful for what *you* already have! Some years ago a young man named Michael Renberg played for the Philadelphia Flyers. The newspaper reported that he signed a new contract for \$1 million a year. (Most of us would gladly settle for a million dollars, but at the time other hockey stars were signing contracts for perhaps 3 or 4 million dollars a year. Apparently Michael signed the contract quickly and with no hassle. When he was asked why he didn't hold out for much more, it was reported that he said something like this: "I'm happy to sign for a million dollars. I don't need any more money." In the midst of the current insanity of professional sports salaries, isn't that refreshing? *A thankful heart is great medicine to cure a covetous and greedy spirit!*

A third way to ward off the sin of coveting is to keep our eyes on things that last.

Jesus had some words to say about this: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes...do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"(Luke 12:22-23, 29-34).

So many of the things we lust after and salivate over are just *transient* – they don't last. The expensive clothes go out of style. The thrill of the new car or truck wears off. The money we crave won't buy happiness. The electronic device we just absolutely "need" is almost obsolete by the time we get it home! Jesus says *crave*

the things that will last! Things that are eternal! A meaningful relationship with our Creator...a satisfying prayer life...a trust in God that gives us inward serenity...a joyful life of service to others.

So there we have it. The Ten Commandments! Nine weeks ago, in the introduction to this series of sermons, I said God's commandments and laws serve at least 3 basic functions: First ***they preserve the order of creation.*** I hope we've seen that Ten Commandments are moral laws that provide a basic stability and sanity for living.

I said the laws and commandments ***provide a standard of obedience*** – they help us understand how to obey God and do His will. God's design for how we should live is not vague and elusive. It's spelled out in His laws and commands.

Thirdly, the commandments ***show us what sin is, and that we need a Savior.*** As we've look at the commandments, unless you've been asleep during these messages, or are in total denial, haven't you seen that nobody can keep all of the commands? Especially as Jesus interpreted them, where He pointed to the *motive* and *intent* behind the outward act.

God has given us these commandments to make us realize that we're sinners, and that we need a Savior. Thank God He's given us His Son Jesus, who died for our sins so that we can be forgiven, and be brought into a relationship with God that will never end!

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