

The Ten Commandments: Posted on our Hearts and in our Homes

How Much is Enough?

Exodus 20:17

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Introduction to Text: If you are our guest today, you have come on a Sunday when we are concluding a major body of teaching. We have been examining the 10 Commandments, and today we are on the last commandment. The commandment has to do with coveting. Now, I have a beginning word for us this morning. We might be tempted to think that this is not an important commandment. We might succumb to some kind of ridiculous thinking that God was just rounding off to a good number like 10. I want to challenge you this morning that nothing could be farther from the truth. Actually, my study has revealed this week that though it is important to note that to God all of the 10 are of equal importance, a valid argument could be made that this commandment is the most important one of all.

Since we are concluding our study this morning, please stand with me and from the screens let's recite together the whole body of the Ten Commandments.

Text: ¹ Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

³ Do not have other gods besides Me.

⁴ Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' sin, to the third and fourth [generations] of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing faithful love to a thousand [generations] of those who love Me and keep My commands.

⁷ Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will punish anyone who misuses His name.

⁸ Remember to dedicate the Sabbath day: ⁹ You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

¹² Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ Do not murder.

¹⁴ Do not commit adultery.

¹⁵ Do not steal.

¹⁶ Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷ Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Introduction: Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story in 1886 entitled, "How Much Land is Enough?" Though it would take too long to tell the whole story, I want to offer this bit of summary.

"After slowly accumulating more and more property, a greedy Russian named Pahom hears that the Bashkirs, a minority race in Russia, are practically giving their land away. He decides to visit them and they offer him as much land as he wants, provided he can walk its perimeter in one day. Pahom agrees and goes out on his trek, but when the sun starts to set, he finds he has walked too far. Running back, Pahom collapses at the starting point just as the sun disappears behind the horizon. The Bashkirs try to congratulate him, only to find him dead." (Copied from an Internet site devoted to Tolstoy's works).

Tolstoy wrote the story to communicate the power of covetousness.

I want to do something really simple with this 10th commandment this morning. I want to just simply observe a few things from the text, illustrate the text using a couple of Biblical examples, and then lastly apply this 10th commandment to our lives by posing a question.

Observing this commandment indicates the importance of this commandment.

5 Observations about the 10th Commandment:

1. "Do not" is repeated. Anytime something is repeated that should be a signal to us of its importance.
2. There are 7 things in 5 categories we are told not to covet. The literary effect is that this commandment is all encompassing. We are not to covet anything.
3. Neighbor is repeated three times. It's not the desire that is wrong; it is the desire for something that specifically belongs to someone else that is wrong. Here is the signal that we are not content with the provision of God for our life. Here is the signal that we are not thankful for the provision of God for our life.
4. House means household. God does not mean the physical house, but all that comes with the household.
5. This is the one commandment that has no external evidence. Why is this instructive? God is concerned with our heart.

The breaking of this commandment is the precursor to the breaking of all of the other commandments.!

Illustrating this commandment indicates the importance of this commandment.

A Negative Example: Achan (Joshua 7) I remember hearing a sermon years ago entitled, "Your Achan Heart Will Tell on You." (That's Achan, not aching) Achan is a man whose character is revealed in Joshua 7. Here's the scene. During the initial Israeli conquest of the Land of Canaan, Achan acted unfaithfully in regards to a command that God had given about what they could and could not take in to their possession. Hear Achan's confession.

²⁰ Achan replied to Joshua, "It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹ When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, 200 silver shekels, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the money under the cloak." ²² So Joshua sent messengers who ran to the tent, and there was the cloak, concealed in his tent, with the money underneath. (Joshua 7:20-22)

Please notice these 4 words—saw, coveted, took, and concealed. That's the progression of covetousness.

After taking, he hid them. What was he going to do with the spoils of war? When we get what we thought sin would get us, we discover that we do not really want what sin has brought us. Not content with the provision of God, Achan coveted what did not belong to him, leading him to steal.

A Positive Example: Paul (Philippians 4)

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me, but lacked the opportunity [to show it]. ¹¹ I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content]—whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. ¹³ I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:10-13)

Philippians is sometimes called the "Book of Joy." The amazing aspect of this text is that Paul writes from prison. Paul shows us in Philippians that we can always rejoice. He doesn't tell us to rejoice in the circumstances; he tells us to rejoice in the Lord.

In this letter Paul challenged the Philippians to discover that joy is found in Christ in spite of the circumstances of life. Paul's message is certainly refreshing in light of his circumstances as a prisoner. His testimony is a powerful one when we consider his circumstances. The question to raise is "Why, the joy?" Paul's answer lies in his commitment to Christ.

Earlier in this book he said,

But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ —the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ [My goal] is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (Philippians 3:7-10)

Contentment is the key to breaking the stronghold of covetousness!

If we are going to get rid of covetousness, we are going to have to take on contentment and real contentment is only going to be found in Jesus Christ.

I want you to hear the way that Tolstoy closed his short story. Remember Pahom. He died trying to answer the question “How much land does a man need?” We might ask, “How much more do we need to be happy?” Listen to the closing words from Tolstoy as he seeks to give answer to that question of how much land a man needs.

In speaking about Pahom, he wrote, “His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.”

So What?

Can you say Just Give me Jesus?

Do you want to replace covetousness with contentment? You must come to this place where you are willing to say, “Just give me Jesus.” We are going to sing a song about that. Listen to the words before we sing. (Karyn—it would be great for you to go to the piano and begin to play behind me.)

In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise give me Jesus.

When I am alone, when I am alone, when I am alone, give me Jesus.

When I come to die, when I come to die, when I come to die, give me Jesus.

Chorus: Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus, Give me Jesus, You can have all this world, just give me Jesus.