

The Commands of Christ

The Tenth Commandment-A

Exodus 20:17
Part Twenty-Three

With Study Questions

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Exodus 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's (Exodus 20:17).

I. The Demon Possessed Law-Keeper

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation (Matthew 12:42-45).

Law-Keepers?

Jesus was surrounded by people who, for some reason, thought they were very good at keeping the law of God. He tells this story in the midst of these self-proclaimed law-keepers. Although I believe the lesson Christ gives here primarily applies to Israel as a nation, it still has application to the individuals who make up that nation. I also believe the principle taught here can apply to any nation or individual in history. Before we pursue our study of the Tenth Commandment, let's examine this particular passage of Scripture.

First, let's look at the nature of the evil spirit. The evil spirit finds itself driven out of a man and wandering through the dry places. The evil spirit is not content unless it torments, so it seeks refuge by re-entering its prior victim.

Secondly, we examine the victim. The victim has cleaned up his house. It is swept and put in order. But one other thing is said about the house—it's empty. Being empty, the demon finds seven other demons worse than him to occupy the empty man. The victim is now in more

troubled than before. There's an old saying, "There's nothing worse than a reformed drunk." This statement may be truer than we think.

The Danger of Success

One of the dangers of studying the law comes when there is a limited amount of success in keeping it. We might feel that we are now demon free. But, as William Hendriksen wrote, "...harmlessness is not the same as holiness. Desisting from wrong differs by a whole heaven from being a blessing."¹ We must not allow our house to remain empty; otherwise we'll be demon free but open for business. We must be indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11) which is evidenced by faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our lawlessness.

II. A History of Coveting

Covet Defined

According to Vines, covet or *epithumeo* means to fix the desire upon (*epi*, upon, used intensively, *thumos*, passion).² It means to long for or lust after. Usually the word 'covet' is used with the meaning to covet evilly. In Hebrew, the word is *hamad*. It refers to an inordinate, uncontrolled, selfish desire.³

The First Sin

For a powerful example of coveting let's go to the very beginning.

**Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
(Genesis 3:4,5)**

It was, and often still is, man's inordinate desire to be in control of his own destiny, to be "like God," that leads him into great and certain turmoil. The enemy knew that before he could get Adam and Eve to disobey God he had to get them to a boiling point of desire, lust, and

¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Baker Book House, 1973), p. 540.

² *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Macdonald Publishing), p. 254.

³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Volume 1* (Moody Press, 1980), p. 295.

covetousness.

So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

This particular sin affected the entire human race. It all starts with coveting.

Ahab

Arguably, coveting is the sin that leads to all other sins. We see numerous accounts in Scripture where a covetous spirit leads to treachery. Read the story of Naboth's vineyard.

Now it came about after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money.' But Naboth said to Ahab, 'The LORD forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.' So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food (1 Kings 21:1-4).

Poor, poor Ahab! We learn in the rest of the story that Jezebel (with less than honorable motives) plotted to kill Naboth and obtain the plot of land for her husband. Ahab, "sullen and vexed" and overcome with covetousness, made no effort to keep his wife from perpetrating this heinous act, and eventually his wife, and his descendants, found themselves under great judgment.

David

Then there is the very popular example of David.

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman (2 Samuel 11:2,3).

We see a similar violation and judgment upon King David who due to his coveting ended up taking Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, for himself and impregnating her. In order to hide this evil deed, he ended up killing her husband. He and his family found themselves under the judgment of God. In David's situation an entire nation was eventually affected. This all started with coveting.

Paul

Coveting was the sin that brought the Apostle Paul to his knees.

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.... Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful (Romans 7:7,8 & 13).

Universal Failure

One of the things we want to avoid is thinking we're pretty good at keeping the Ten Commandments. If you've read this far you, hopefully, understand that you, and I, and everyone else, continually break all ten all the time. Even people who have deluded themselves into thinking that they're pretty good at keeping the commandments cannot deny their violation of this commandment. No honest person denies the existence of covetousness in their life.

III. The Road to Covetousness

According to the *Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession Standards*,

The Tenth Commandment Requireth Full Contentment With Our Own Condition, With A Right and Charitable Frame of Spirit Toward Our Neighbour, and All That Is His.

Lack of Contentment

Covetousness is established by our lack of contentment with the allotment of God's providence in our lives. This does not mean that we advocate a stoic lifestyle of apathy and indifference. Goals, ambitions and desires can be a very good thing. We are certainly called to run our race to win; to work heartily as unto the Lord; to pray that God will increase our flock and prosper our household. All the time remembering...

The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD (Proverbs 21:31).

The road to covetousness comes when we do not have the vision to find our chief happiness in God and what He, according to His divine wisdom, chooses to give us. Covetousness comes when we ignore thanking God for His graciousness in what we presently have. The Psalmist rejoices...

O LORD, YOU are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance (Psalm 16:5, 6).

Paul gives a warning regarding the place where being a malcontent can lead.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which

plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Riches, material or otherwise, are not necessarily evil. But they can become very evil and destructive if we set our heart upon them.

If riches increase, do not set *your* heart *upon* them (Psalm 62:10).

And He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

Paul, who was converted as result of realizing that he was covetous, later states that he had learned to be content.

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:11).

Enjoying God’s Providence

Do we have—do we desire—the wisdom and vision to enjoy God’s providence even now. As one brother is fond of saying, “It’s all part of life’s rich pageant, I wouldn’t change a thing.” The violation of this commandment comes from a heart of discontent. “Give me more, Lord! Give me more!” is so often the cry.

Do we find ourselves longing to be in some other time, or somewhere else, or even someone else? Do we find ourselves cursing God’s providence in our lives and longing, as some do, to be delivered from their present state by the, so called, secret rapture⁴? I wonder if we know what an affront to God this actually is and how it leads to so many evils when we consider that God Himself “**ordained our days before there was yet one**” (Psalm 139:16) and Christ Himself challenges and assures us...

⁴ I do believe there will be a rapture but I prefer to call it the resurrection. I certainly don’t think, however, it’s going to be a secret.

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU." (Hebrews 13:5)

Next week we'll speak of what must take place in order to obtain contentment.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What was the downfall of the demon possessed law-keeper?
2. What is the danger is successful law keeping?
3. Review the examples of coveting in Scripture. Can you think of others?
4. What is the primary flaw in our character that leads to covetousness?
5. Discuss enjoying God's providence. How can this be achieved when things are tough?