

The Commands of Christ

The Tenth Commandment-B

Exodus 20:17
Part Twenty-Four

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).

Review

I. The Demon Possessed Law-Keeper

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, ungoverned, selfish desire.³

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.

The Biblical History Includes, But is not Limited to:

Adam and Eve (food was pleasant to the eyes and desirable); Ahab sullen and vexed, sulking on his bed because he couldn't have the vineyard he wanted; David's escapades with Bathsheba; Paul uses coveting as an example of the sin that revealed to him that he was spiritually dead.

III. The Road to Covetousness

We discussed the road to covetousness and how covetousness is a consequence of a lack of contentment with the allotment of God's providence in our lives. Paul wrote:

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).

IV. Obtaining Contentment

Since lack of contentment is the primary stumbling block in regard to this commandment, how does one attain contentment? I would like to finish instruction on this commandment by quoting from Thomas Vincent's *A Family Instructional Guide*,⁴ which gives instructions on how we may attain contentment in a low, poor and afflicted condition.

1. Godliness

"First, by attaining true godliness, to which alone true contentment is accompanied." (Vincent)

Paul writes to Timothy that,

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

What is godliness but the earnest, heartfelt effort to obey God's commandments because they are wise and good. The person who trusts Jesus as Savior will certainly trust Him as Lord. It would pretty

⁴ Vincent, Thomas, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999.

inconsistent thinking to trust Christ with your eternal soul but not trust Him with your ethics and virtues. Seeking godliness, therefore, applies to the pursuit of every commandment. A life full of sin is a breeding ground of discontentedness and covetousness.

2. God's Providence

"Secondly, by being fully persuaded of, seriously and understandingly eyeing the wise and good hand of God's providence in his disposal of us, and bringing any affliction upon us." (Vincent)

Job writes,

The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD (Job 1:21).

The Psalmist also records,

I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did *it* (Psalm 39:9).

And again,

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments *are* right, and *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75).

Some find more comfort in thinking Satan is in charge. Not only is that unbiblical, but it is unreasonable to take comfort in thinking that your life is in the control of Satan rather than Christ.

3. God's Benevolence

"Thirdly, by trusting in God's promise to cause all things, even the worst things that can befall us, to work together for our good." (Vincent)

There is not a thing that transpires in our lives that is not part of the divine orchestration of God for our ultimate well being. Paul writes,

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose (Romans 8:28).

4. Humility

“Fourth, by humility, and a deep sense of our undeservings and ill deservings at God’s hands for our sins.” (Vincent)

As one great reformed theologian stated, “You have no concept of the depth of your sin.” Do our attitudes reflect Jacob’s sentiment?

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant (Genesis 32:10).

And again in Daniel,

O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You (Daniel 9:8).

We will find that we will covet less when we realize that God owes us nothing but judgment and grants us, as His children, nothing but mercy.

5. Perspective

“Fifth, by looking to others better than ourselves, who have been lower in the world and more afflicted than we have been.” (Vincent)

The Scriptures teach that our Savior had no where to lay his head. We read in Hebrews that those, of whom the world was not worthy, had no certain dwelling place in the world and many of them were destitute, afflicted, and tormented.

People talk about how bad times are, but where and when would you rather be than in twentieth-first century evangelized America? Would you rather be a victim of Lenin or Stalin? Would you rather be one of the oppressed during of the reign of terror or Spanish Inquisition? Would you rather be living in the dark ages, where a birth complication or appendicitis meant certain death? Would you rather have lived during the Roman

conquests? During the time of Babylon? The list goes on. It may be worse in America in 2010 than it was in America in 1960, but you can't judge history in fifty year chunks. You need to look at four or five hundred year chunks. I'll take the one I'm living in.

6. Heavenly Minded

"Sixth, by laboring so much the more to abound in spiritual riches, the less we have of temporal; and if we have no earthly inheritance to secure our right to, living by faith upon our heavenly inheritance; hereby the poorest some become the richest, and those that have most outward trouble have most inward joy." (Vincent)

As Christians our treasure must be that which has the most value. For the things which have the most value, God gives in abundance. Even though it is not very Christian to be anti-material, we must realize that material things can be taken from us at any moment. We must, therefore, set our hearts on that which is eternal.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5)

7. Earthly Destiny

"Seventh, considering how we brought nothing into the world, and that we can carry nothing with us out of it." (Vincent)

We must keep everything in perspective. The well-known bumper-sticker reads, "He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins." It should read, "He Who Dies With The Most Toys Is Dead." As Job records,

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. (Job 1:21)

Paul instructs his young protégé in the ministry,

For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.⁸ And having food and clothing, with

these we shall be content (1 Timothy 6:7, 8).

It seems little kids are most ill-behaved when they go to Disneyland. They allow their lust for enjoyment to bring out the worst in them. We must be careful not to be babes in this respect. In the four score years God granted us on this earth, we ought not allow His gifts to bring out the worst in us.

8. Example of Christ

“Eighth, by going to Christ to teach us the lesson of universal contentment, and fetching strength from him to exercise this grace in every condition.” (Vincent)

We must continually go to Christ and learn from Him. His promises are great and His promises are sure. Paul writes,

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11–13).

Beloved, covetousness is a sin whose food is discontent and whose symptoms are ruin and destruction. I pray that we would all have the ears to hear and eyes to see the graciousness of God’s grace. I pray that in our headlong pursuit of those things in this world, some which are good and proper, we would never lose sight of the beauty of today and the glory of God’s providence in every small and wondrous creature and event that crosses our paths. Before we attempt to change the world to suit our fancies, let our hearts be changed to delight in the Lord, allowing Him to give us the desires of our heart according to His infinite wisdom and goodness.

V. Justification by...

We have now studied the Ten Commandments. And although we have spent numerous weeks in them, we have only scratched the surface of the fullness of God’s law. As we conclude our devotions here, let us be

reminded of how we are to think of the law. The apostle Paul treats law in some detail in Galatians.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. (Gal. 2:16)

Justification

I cannot think of too many things in Christianity, in life, more important than understanding justification by faith. What is justification? Justification is a forensic or legal declaration of acquittal; to be justified means to have the confidence that no one can bring an eternal charge against us as God's elect (Romans 8:33).

To be justified means that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—not tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword. To be justified means that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Justification is a wonderful thing.

So how is one justified? The verse just cited teaches us that we are not justified by the works of the law. In other words, justification has nothing to do with our character, our intellect, our morality, our presence of mind, the meritorious nature of our own faith, or any other attribute or quality we may possess. Romans 8:33 teaches us that it is God who justifies. Paul goes on to teach in Galatians,

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*"¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "*the just shall live by faith.*"¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but "*the man who does them shall live by them.*"¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*"),¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that

**we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith
(Galatians 3:10-14).**

If we are looking to any aspect of our own being for our justification, we are truly lost, for we are required to succeed perfectly in all things which are written in the book of the law, and who has done that but Jesus? But the justified man lives by faith. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. That is to say, the condemnation we deserved, He took. And the righteousness that He lived, we freely received. The promise to Abraham was that through his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed. And if we have been made right before God it is because of God fulfilling His promise through Christ Jesus.

Our best efforts to keep the law of God should, and will, yield better churches, families and nations. But our best efforts to keep the law will also yield eternal damnation apart from a God given faith in Jesus Christ. And as much as we should desire to see strong churches, families and nations, what we should desire the law achieve even more is a hunger and passion for the cross of Christ.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the primary flaw in our character that leads to covetousness (page 3)?
2. What is godliness and how is it obtained (pages 3, 4)?
3. How does a proper understanding of God's providence lead to contentment (page 4)?
4. Why is God's benevolence encouraging to Christians (pages 4, 5)
5. In what way can humility contribute to contentment (page 5)?
6. What does it mean to have a proper "perspective" regarding our condition (pages 5, 6)?
7. Discuss what it means to be "heavenly minded" (page 6).
8. What is our earthly destiny and how should the govern our thinking (pages 6, 7)?
9. How does Christ give an example of universal contentment (pages 7, 8)?
10. What is justification? Why is this important (pages 8, 9)?
11. Discuss the role of the law with justification (pages 8, 9).
12. How is one justified (pages 8, 9)?