

Text: Exod. 20:17

Title: "You shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor"

Time: 8/8/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to the last of the Ten Commandments. As we begin this morning, I thought it would be helpful to remember together what the first nine are:

1. There shall be no other gods belonging to you.
2. No man-made worship of Me (no graven image in worship).
3. Do not consider the Lord's name worthless.
4. Keep My blessed day holy.
5. Honor father and mother.
6. You shall not kill.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not lie about your neighbor.

You may remember that the Lord Jesus listed many of these commandments (He had them memorized) for a rich young ruler, who had asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him he must obey the commandments, and then he lists commandments five through nine, without mentioning the Tenth. The young man confidently asserted that he had obeyed all these from his youth. But then the Lord Jesus told him what it would take to obey the Tenth Commandment. He would need to have the kind of heart that would sell all his possessions, give them to the poor, and follow Christ in ministry. This heart-condition is the essence of the Tenth Commandment, "you shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor." Not having a heart like that, the young man went away sorrowing, for he had great possessions, and it turns out that his great possessions also possessed his heart (Luke 18:18-23).

William Shakespeare wrote a poem about a Roman soldier who coveted his fellow-soldier's wife and raped her. It is called *The Rape of Lucrece*. This is how Shakespeare described the sin of coveting:

“Those that much covet are with gain so fond,
For what they have not, that which they possess
They scatter and unloose it from their bond,
And so, by hoping more, they have but less;
Or, gaining more, the profit of excess
Is but to surfeit*, and such griefs sustain,
That they prove bankrupt in this poor-rich gain.”

**To surfeit means to have so much of something that you do not want it anymore.*

There is great wisdom in this definition of coveting. Whatever is amassed by one who covets must be described as poor-rich gain that ultimately bankrupts the soul spiritually. The one who covets either loses what he has, to get what he does not have, or he gets so much that he finds out he does not really want what he has gotten after all. These are the empty achievements of the coveting heart.

Biblically, the word *covet* simply means *desire*, and it can either be a righteous activity of one's heart, or an unrighteous one. Paul tells the Corinthian church to “covet earnestly the best gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31), which is a righteous activity. Here, of course, we are focused on unrighteous coveting, desiring the best of what belongs to your neighbor. I want us to notice two simple things about the Tenth Commandment this morning, “You shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor.”

I. Coveting is a sinful desire of the human heart (Deut. 5:21-22).

Illustration: When presenting a case in a court of law, the parties must present a legal brief describing their case against their opponent. Courts generally require that legal briefs include a summary of the argument that a party is going to make in court.

Application: As we learn from the conversation Jesus had with the rich young ruler, as well as from other Scriptures, the Ten Commandments are the legal brief of heaven presented before the Judge of the universe, which contains the condemning argument of God against guilty sinners like you and me, showing us our need for the sacrifice of a righteous Savior to save us. And the summary of the argument for this legal brief is the Tenth Commandment. It really presents little that cannot be found in the other nine commandments. Instead, it tells us where our problem with the other nine commandments begins, and so it gives us a new understanding of our real problem with the other nine. Our sin begins with the sinful desires of our heart.

Our Deuteronomy text translates the word *covet* found in the Tenth Commandment as *desire*, and then adds a synonym, which the KJV translates as *covet*. One commentator summarized the unique realm of this Commandment this way: "this Commandment challenges us not simply about our outward acts of behavior but about the desires of our hearts. It challenges us as to what we are thinking, what we are wanting, what we dream about. It challenges us about what wells up from the subconscious, and it says, 'God seeks to be Lord within this realm too!'" [Wallace, *The Ten Commandments*, 173-174].

This Commandment teaches us that the Lord looks on our hearts in a way no man can. 1 Sam. 16:7, "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height

of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." 1 Kings 8:39, "Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)." 1 Chron. 28:9, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever." Heb. 4:13, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

The Lord is focused on the heart because our hearts make us who we are and cause us to do what we do. Prov. 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Prov. 23:7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

This truth explains our many violations of the Ten Commandments. Mark 7:18, 20, "Whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him . . . that which cometh out of a man, that defileth the man." Jam. 1:14-15, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Jer. 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

And so, the Bible says that for us to be righteous, we must have a new heart. Joel 2:14, "Rend your heart and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God." Jer. 31:33, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house

of Judah . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Ezek. 36:26, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

Has the Lord done this for you? Has He given you a new heart that desires to obey His law? Or is it more accurate to describe your heart as one still very much bent on breaking His commandments? The prophet Micah warned against the covetous, unrepentant, sinful heart that is set against God’s law: “Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away” (Mic. 2:1). If the Lord has not yet changed our coveting hearts, we need to be warned about ours too.

Excursus: And so coveting is a sinful desire of the heart. Before we go on, I need to mention a tragedy in the church of Jesus Christ today to which we must apply this truth. In the Presbyterian Church of America, a pastor in their Missouri Presbytery is teaching that it is not a sin to experience same-sex attraction, so long as you never act on that attraction. The idea says that, for some, homosexuality is an incurable consequence of the Fall of man in Genesis 3. While it tells homosexuals not to practice homosexual behavior, it counsels them that they will never be anything but this. Greg Johnson, the pastor teaching this idea, claims to be a “gay Christian.”

This falsehood turns the good news into bad news. All sin begins with the human heart’s attraction toward sin. While it is true that none of us is free from the struggle with sin, this struggle does not mean we are incurable when it comes

to specific areas of sin. Everyone is equally fallen in that regard. And when God gives a new heart, that new heart is the desire to have victory over all the desires of our fallen human flesh. We gain in victory as we renew our minds in the power of God's Spirit. No one is less curably an adulterer than any other sinner, and no one is less curably a homosexual than any other sinner, because God's mighty work of salvation changes the heart, where all our sins begin.

II. Coveting is destruction through desirability (Josh. 7:21).

Illustration: We read earlier about the tragic consequences of Achan's violation of the Tenth Commandment. Many brave men died at the battle of Ai. God's blessing was withdrawn from Israel's pursuit of their promised land, as they camped behind enemy lines. For his own life and the lives of his family, Achan's sin was equally disastrous.

Application: Achan's sin problem, of course, dates to the Garden of Eden. Gen. 2:9 tells us that every tree of the Garden was desirable to the eyes, and later in Chapter 3 we read that Eve found this to be true of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had forbidden (v. 6). It is not true that the forbidden tree was undesirable. It was just as desirable as the other trees of the Garden, and on that day Eve, and Adam after her, found it to be even more so under the deception of the enemy. Think of the devastating consequences of their coveting hearts – the introduction of sin and its results into God's creation.

Scripturally, there are two desirable things Satan primarily uses to cause our hearts to covet. The first is the desirability of silver and gold – Deut. 7:25, "The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be

snared therein: for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God." The word translated *desire* is the Hebrew word from the Tenth Commandment, *covet*. Paul found victory over this form of coveting: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:11-12). Paul never felt compelled to play the Lotto or go to Vegas. Godly contentment with God's provisions was Paul's great gain.

The second desirable thing Satan uses brings us back to Shakespeare's poem. Satan uses the desirability of sexual pleasure and beauty to cause coveting in the heart - Prov. 6:25, "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids." Here the word *lust* is the same Hebrew word of the Tenth Commandment, *covet*. God used Solomon, who failed miserably to follow his own instruction here, to write these words undoubtedly to highlight the enormity of our need for God's salvation in this part of our lives. Empowered by the technologies of today, the porn industry can feed any of our covetous hearts the way only a king like Solomon could feed his in his day. In his Song, however, he describes the good desire of true marital love (SoS 2: 3, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." Here the word *covet* is translated *great delight*.

And so, especially in the realm of our possessions, and in the realm of sexual beauty and pleasure, the desirability of which Satan keeps ever before us, coveting is our heart's selfish self-destruction. Achan fell; Adam and Eve fell; Solomon fell. They broke the Tenth Commandment desiring

the desirability of what God has forbidden. You and I have done so too.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I want us to see the remarkable truth that, in contrast with all that is desirable in this world, both good and bad, Jesus was explicitly undesirable (Isa. 53:2). The saving power of God's Spirit causes a sinner to turn from the attraction of his desirable sins to desire the undesirable Jesus instead. That work of grace produces in us the opposite of coveting. It is the making of a new heart. To desire the undesirable Jesus is supernatural salvation from the sin of coveting.

Unlike the rich young ruler, and unlike you and I, Jesus obeyed the Tenth Commandment. He sold everything He had, and He offers it to poor sinners like you and me. His offer is forgiveness for sin, and the gift of a new heart. He went to Calvary's cross in your place, and He arose again to bring new life to you. Will you receive this gift of salvation from sin this morning, and ask Him for a new heart?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching