



The 10th Commandment

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Exodus 20:17, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, James 4:1-4

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Exodus 20:17

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

James 4:1-4

⁴ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

If you're new to Hickory Grove, we've been going through the book of Exodus. We ran all the way out of Egypt with God's people. He brought them out; it's a picture of salvation. He brought them to the desert, to a place called Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. And there he gave his people the Ten Commandments. That's where we are. We've been going through all 10 of them. The first four have to do with how you relate to God. Let's see if you can, in your mind, call them out. So there are no other gods before me. You will have no graven images. You will not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. And remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy. That's one side of the Ten Commandments.

And then, the other side has to do with how we treat one another. Number five deals with the home. Honor your father and mother. Number six is you shall not commit murder. Number seven, you shall not commit adultery. Number eight, you shall not steal. And then last week, number nine, you shall not bear false witness.

Now we've gotten to the very last one. It is Exodus 20:17.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

(Pastor Prays)

The word covet is an unusual word. It's an archaic word. You don't use it very much. You might hear an older person say to another older person, I covet your prayers. That means I desire your prayers. It's not a word that we use every day. You won't hear it much in the language of the 20 and 30-year-olds. But it's a dangerous word because it masquerades as something else. It's a dangerous word because it can come across as motivation. It can feel like ambition, and we admire ambition. It works like industriousness. We like people with a good work ethic. But coveting is a cancer. It's not really

jealousy. We understand jealousy. Jealousy is overt. We see jealousy. Jealousy is rage. A jealous husband acts out. We know jealousy when we see it. It's not jealousy. It is also not envy. Envy is something a little more inward and darker. Coveting is this dull craving that's hard to shake and easy to explain away. And it drives us to sin. It's deep, you see.

Look at all of the other commandments. They have to do with outward. Outward. Honor your father and mother. Don't kill people. Don't tell lies. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery. All of those are outward. But the last one turns in. That's where the problem is, in you. When you look into the mirror of your soul, you find out that the fact is, you have broken this commandment. You see, coveting is the poisonous fountainhead of all of our rivers of sin. In fact, it's the only time in the Ten Commandments, it's the only one, that is repeated two times back-to-back. You shall not covet, you shall not covet.

In fact, if you take this commandment, of course, it's the climax. You look for this grand finale. You think about the Ten Commandments building up, and you think about a grand finale, and you get to the word covet. You don't even know what that means. This word becomes a symbol. In fact, this commandment explains the rest of the commandments. You get this one, number ten, and you deal with your own desires, and it's desire that drives us. This commandment deals with what we want and why we want it. Some have said that this commandment is the crown jewel of the commandments. I think this is probably the most important commandment. It is the most comprehensive commandment because this commandment governs how we live our lives, and it speaks to you being content.

Look, if you're under 35, let me just say to you, if you can learn contentment in the Lord, it's going to save you a lifetime of trouble. If you can learn that you are loved by God in Christ, and you've been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, you have been forgiven through his life, death, and resurrection, and you are the Lord's, he will provide for you. He will take care of you. He is working in your life, and everything that comes to you, good and bad, has

been brought by the Lord. If you can be content, the Lord is going to save you a world of trouble.

Be satisfied. I don't mean being lazy. I mean be satisfied with what God has given you in Christ. Think about how the half-brother of Jesus, whose name was James, wrote a little book, and it's hard to read. It's really hard to preach James because you read it and think, what are you going to say about that? It's just real straightforward. Let's read James 4:1-4. Listen to what he says about our inward problem. James says, *4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* This is the way I would say it for the theme of the sermon.

The Desire That Drives You, May Destroy You

Be careful. The desire you have, the desire that's motivating you, may also destroy you. Let's talk about coveting. Let's break it down with three points. Here's the first one, number one. You'll notice that...

Coveting is born out of selfishness

Selfishness. We have our own selfish desires. When James talks about being tempted, go read James sometimes. It's like he was looking at the Ten Commandments and wrote his little letter. But James, when he talks about being tempted in James 1:13-14, he says, *¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* Each person, each one of us, every person in here, man and woman and child, we are enticed, we get into trouble by our own desires. It's what coveting is. If you're looking for a way to

define the word, coveting is defined as an aggressive feeling that makes us want what we shouldn't want and consequently do what we shouldn't do.

But honestly, at the very core of the language of coveting, it is a language of discontent. That we are not satisfied with this, we want that. It's the language of "I deserve better." Be careful when you start to feel like that. Be careful when you feel somehow you've been slighted. Man, it's easy to do when you look around. It's easy to compare in a world where we see everybody's shiny, happy lives on Facebook and Instagram.

The language of verse 17, when you read it, you shall not covet it, it's the language of command. And you'll notice that the language is like this. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. Now, it could be that it's written to say, don't look at your neighbor's fine house and wish your house was as good as his. I'm going to go home today to my house. It's 2,000 square feet and was built in 1971. And to get there, I'm going to ride by some houses that are a whole lot bigger and prettier. I'm going to have to look the other way. The idea is you see what others have. So it could be the structure he's talking about.

I think it is probably not the structure. I think that's the general saying, do not covet your neighbor's house, and then the specific things in his house. He starts to list them all. So he talks about his wife, do not covet your neighbor's wife, and the servants, and the ox, the donkey. But when I read that, you're thinking, I don't have any trouble coveting my neighbor's donkey. So we bring it forward. Do not covet your neighbor's house or his wife or his children or his Range Rover or his Porsche. Or if you're a preacher, I'm not going to be able to drive a Porsche even if I wanted to. So for me, it would be his Mustang Shelby GT 500. And then you see at the end of the command, it's just a general statement, or anything else that he has. And it's easy to look at somebody's happy life and all that they have, and you know that person, he's not nicer than you are. Why does he have that?

Or honestly, if you folks and their children, even though they are rotten parents, sorry parents, their children turn out good, and then yours go wayward, you think, well, that didn't make sense. It's so easy to fall into that. So, at the very top of all these commandments, God has said, "Don't." Be careful with that. One of the first things that a toddler will learn, I'm having to relearn all of this myself because we now have an almost two-year-old granddaughter. And I've got one on the way. Granddaughters. What? So whatever judgment I have felt for you other dads, I take all of that back. You know, the little girl learns early. Around 2 or so, it's cute when she says "mine." It's not cute when she's 32. And that's what this is saying. You see, coveting is born out of this selfish motivation that it's insidious. And truthfully, if you get hung up on thinking what you deserve, you should have more, you become resentful, you turn inward, and you're not able to celebrate with good friends who happen to have something going really well for them. You think, "Why is she getting married? Why am I not getting married?" And if you're not careful, that attitude starts to get in your head and heart, and it affects your own spiritual growth. It affects how you walk with the Lord. It will poison your Christian friendships. It is so easy to think someone else has more than he deserves, and then you don't have what you deserve. And you know what the antidote to that is? The antidote to that is contentment. It's the gospel. It's the gospel of Jesus. You know what the gospel of Jesus reminds us? The gospel of Jesus tells us that although we were made in God's image, we are rebels against God. That our lives were so filled with sin and the things we do and think and are, that we were enemies of God. We were enemies of God. We weren't wayward children. We were enemies of God. And God came after his enemies in love. And what he did for you when you were an enemy of his, he killed that which he loves the most, his son. He poured out all his judgment, wrath, and hatred that he has against sinners on his son at the cross. That's Christianity. Jesus took the wrath of God for sinners. And the miracle is if you will turn and trust, if you will put your sin away, if you'll say, "I forsake that, I want Jesus, I believe what Christ has done for me," then there is this overwhelming ocean of love that washes over you, all of your sin gone, and you become a child of God.

So what helps me, maybe this is more autobiographical, what helps me is to think about the grace of God that it has taken to save me; the grace of God to sustain me. Maybe it's constant repentance. When you feel that coming in, you see it on social media, and you just say, "You know what, Lord, I pray for that person and pray blessings for them." The antidote to this is your contentment. Now, contentment is not complacency. I'm not saying get spiritually lazy. Contentment is saying, "thank you for what you have given me in your wise, kind providence." This is what will honor God in your life. I wrestle with it. As a Christian man, as a Christian pastor, I wrestle with being content. You want to get better, you want to lead better, you want to improve as a preacher, you want to excel as a leader. And Paul knew that when he wrote to his young protege named Timothy. That's why I had you turn to 1 Timothy. I want you to read something that Paul wrote to Timothy, the young pastor. So turn there in your Bible to 1 Timothy chapter 6. 1 Timothy 6:6. Just keep it open right there for a minute. What does he say? *⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and^[c] we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* It didn't say having money was the root of evil. It's you loving it. You could be poor as dirt and love money. So how do we guard against those things that are all around us? Because we have eyes and ears, and that's how we associate with the world. How do we guard against the temptation? How do we keep from becoming David, who looked at Bathsheba? Maybe he couldn't have controlled that he walked on the roof, and there she was; maybe he could, either way, there she was. The look started it.

How do we keep from being enamored by material things to the degree that we alter our lives? I think we learned a lesson from 1 Timothy chapter 6. Let me offer up a couple of things. One, today, I want you to commit to pursuing

holiness. Pursue holiness. What does he say in verse 6? Look what he says. *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* If you decide right now today to become a man or woman of God, that you have trusted that Christ has died for you, Christ has been raised for you, you are his because of the gospel, so that your mind is occupied with the good things of the Lord, the grace of the Lord. Or not just pursuing holiness, it's just a self-awareness.

Here's another one, just knowing that you are prone to sin. If you understand yourself, understand your own sin and need for grace, you know what happens? When you think deeply about how God has loved you regardless of how you are, and he has forgiven you because of Jesus, you are less likely to be so harsh on other people. What's helped me is to have a grasp of Christian history. I recommend reading a Christian biography. Go and read the life and diary of David Brainer, who ministered to the American Indians. You read that and weep, thinking about what he went through. Or Jonathan Edwards, who died in his 50s after being cast out of his head of school and out of his church and out of his mission, he lost his daughter. Or George Mueller, the German who came over to England and took care of all those orphans and just prayed, and how God answered his prayers. Or William Tyndall, who translated the Bible that you're reading, the English Bible, and they killed him for it, and as he died at the stake, he's praying, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Think about Robert Murray McShane, the Bible reading plan I use, who was 29 years old when he died. He was the pastor of his church at 29, and he said, "The greatest thing my people need out of me is my own personal holiness." Think about William Borden. Think about Borden Milk. William Borden would have inherited all of the Borden fortune, but at 25 years old, he felt the call to missions, and he left all of that behind. He went to Egypt to train, to learn the languages, and before he even got on the mission field, he died, saying no reserves, no retreat, no regrets. Those lives ministered to me because I see God's grace working.

You are a part of a church, you can think about how God's grace is working in your life and the hardship. God uses that to draw you to himself to combat

coveting. Why? Because coveting is born out of selfishness. That's the first point. Let me give you a second one. I'm going to go faster. I've got three points. I'll give you a second one, number two.

Coveting will tear down those around you

If you decide right now today to become a man or woman of God, that you have trusted that Christ has died for you, Christ has been raised for you, you are his because of the gospel, so that your mind is occupied with the good things of the Lord, the grace of the Lord. Or not just pursuing holiness, it's just a self-awareness.

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Coveting never sins alone

It's never by itself. I tried to say it on the front end of the sermon, and I'll say it on the back end. Some have called this the fountainhead of sin. Some have said it's the gateway sin. Because it is almost like what is said about marijuana, the gateway drug that leads to other drugs. Anyway, this is a gateway sin. It always leads to more sin. When God gave us the Ten Commandments, they are structured on purpose. It is not an arbitrary structure. There's a method to the listing. The first four, this is how you are in fellowship with God. And then that fellowship with God will start to impact your fellowship with other people. It starts at home, honoring your father and mother. And then it goes out in concentric circles, and it ends with a grand finale.

Earlier, I mentioned David and Bathsheba. I mention that because it's the famous sin. You don't have to even really read the Bible much to know about David and Bathsheba. That David, he pursued and stole the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba. They committed adultery and had a child. It's a terrible scene. He ends up killing Uriah, her husband. It's a terrible thing. But you take that sin, and list the commandments that were broken. So let's start at the top with the 10th commandment. He coveted Bathsheba. He broke that commandment, broke it. You should not bear false witness (number 9). He lied to Uriah and broke that one. You should not steal. Number 8, he took what was not his, broke that one. Number 7, you should not commit adultery. Committed

adultery, broke that one. Number 6, you shall not murder. When it looked like Uriah was going to find out, he had Uriah killed. He broke that one. And here, as the king, number 5, honor your father and mother, he broke that one.

He broke at least six of the Ten Commandments, starting with coveting. Now think with me. If the writer of the Psalms, whose heart was after God's own heart, left unchecked, how do you think you fare against it? If David could fall so terribly, knocking out all these commandments, we are not more spiritual or prayerful than David. What then do we do? What can we do? How does our attitude work? We take our eyes, our hearts, our minds, and we go to the gospel, and we think they're on the gospel. We think about the power of the cross of Jesus. We think about God's forgiveness and his ability to sustain you.

In fact, this is what Paul says in Galatians 2:20, it's one you ought to memorize. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Seal your heart today against breaking the 10th commandment.

Now, as we come to a close, I want to guide you through a prayer. So I'm going to ask you to join me with your heads bowed. And if you'd like to get in that posture of prayer, close your eyes, and listen and pray as I speak with you. With your heads bowed this morning, would you pray and thank God? Thank God for grace. So think of the gospel: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thank God that he saved you. If you have food and clothing, thank God for his provision. Would you admit to God that you have coveted? Would you repent of that right now? Because you already have forgiveness at the cross. You confess that it is a sin, and you ask God. He's your Father. You are His child. Call for help. He is a kind, benevolent, sovereign Father who loves His children and will hear their prayers and answer them. And would you make this commitment? I want to live my life as one crucified with Christ. I want to live my life by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. Father, we thank you for your law that causes us to run to your

grace. We pray that the gospel, like a blanket of contentment, would rest on us. God, we thank you for the righteousness of Christ. We thank you for His death in our place. We thank you for the resurrection that gives us hope, for the ascension that tells us of his lordship, and for the assurance that we can live for Jesus. We ask you to help us do that. In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.