

The Tenth Word: Coveting What Belongs to Your Neighbor

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 20. I'll be preaching on the 10th commandment, verse 17. I was supposed to preach on this two weeks ago, but then I couldn't, and so now we're gonna go backwards in our series in the book of Exodus and cover this again.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, you are the Father of lights.

In you there is no shadow to change. And you are indeed the giver of every good gift. And the most precious gift you have given us is your Son, Jesus.

And we want to exalt his name this morning. We want to relish his grace this morning. We want to be captivated by Jesus and satisfied by Jesus this morning.

So meet with us. Speak to us. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen.

[1 : 23] If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word. I am going to read the whole passage 1 to 17 since we're finishing off the 10 commandments today. And God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock or the sojourner who is within your gates.

[2 : 55] For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 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.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. While preparing for this sermon, I came across a funny comic strip.

It's a comic strip called Tia Carmen's Old World Wisdom in which Auntie Carmen says to her nephew who is staring greedily at Car Magazine, she says this, to achieve happiness, be content with what you have.

[4 : 08] Which is a sensible advice. But right after she says that to her nephew, she says this, just be sure you have everything you want. So it's, her logic is get everything you want, then you can be content with what you have.

It's ironic and humorous because her second advice completely nullifies her first advice. But it's also witty because it highlights the absurd contradiction in how many people actually think and behave.

As long as we're craving and coveting something we don't have, we're not going to be happy. But we still go on coveting and craving, deluding ourselves into thinking that, hey, if I only get this one thing, I will finally be happy.

But there will always be something else that we want that we don't have. It's a futile pursuit because Proverbs 27, 20 says, never satisfied are the eyes of men.

The cure for coveting is not acquiring more stuff, but being content in Christ. And so my main point for this morning is this, as those who have found contentment in Christ, we should not covet what belongs to our neighbor.

[5 : 38] We're going to first talk about the scope of covetousness and the heart of covetousness and then the cure for covetousness. Let's first look at what covetousness is, the scope of covetousness.

The Hebrew word that is translated here as covet is actually a generic word that just means desire. And it's not that the desire in and of itself is wrong.

You know, I mean, some religions teach that. For example, Buddhism teaches that, you know, you should seek freedom for yourself by emptying yourself, getting rid of all desires because it claims that desire is the root, the source of all suffering.

If you don't want anything, then you will never suffer its lack. So that's what Buddhism teaches. But scripture teaches a different understanding of human nature. The problem is not that we have desires that is normal and human, but the problem is that we have disordered desires and inordinate desires.

For example, even Jesus got hungry. That's a desire. And he got thirsty. He wanted a drink. It is human to have desires. God created us, created us that way.

[6 : 51] But when the desire to eat or drink becomes inordinate, then we become gluttons and drunkards. When our desire is disordered and we desire money more than we desire God, it becomes idolatrous.

So desire in and of itself is not the problem. In fact, that word desire sometimes is used in a positive sense in scripture. That's why we have to refer to the context of this passage to figure out what it means here.

You shall not desire. You shall not covet. We know that it's referring to a bad desire because it's forbidden, right? You shall not covet. And then secondly, because of the repetition of the phrase, your neighbor.

Look again with me at the commandment. It says, 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.

This is a helpful clue for defining what covetousness is. Coveting has a horizontal social dimension. To covet is to crave what belongs to your neighbor.

[8 : 05] To covet is to crave what belongs to your neighbor. It's not merely noticing that your neighbor's \$3 million home, which there's a whole bunch of them around here in this area, that is spacious and is elegantly decorated.

There's nothing wrong with noticing that, but desiring it. Wanting it for yourself. It's covetousness. It's not merely noticing that your neighbor's wife is beautiful and charming and industrious.

That's the problem. Or that your neighbor's husband is handsome and successful and caring. That's the problem. But desiring that she is your wife, that she'd be your wife.

Desiring that he would be your husband, that is covetous. It's not merely noticing that your friend has cute babies or well-behaved kids, talented kids, but desiring such things for yourself.

Most likely, none of your neighbors have oxen or donkeys, it says here.

[9 : 23] But maybe they have a social media following that you desire for yourself. Maybe they have more friends than you do.

Maybe they are more published than you are. Have a more influential ministry than you do. Maybe they have a higher paying job than you do. Or maybe they drive a brand new Mercedes-Benz, Tesla, BMW, Porsche, Lexus.

You pick your car. While you drive your decade-old Hyundai or Toyota. Like me. And you envy them.

You desire those things for yourself. Desiring for ourselves what belongs to our neighbors is sinful because it is a failure to love our neighbor.

Coveting prevents us from rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, as Romans 12, 15 commands us to do. If we are covetous, we begrudge our neighbor's good fortune.

[10 : 34] We're envious of it. We gloat over their misfortune. We weep when they rejoice and we rejoice when they weep.

When we covet, instead of humbly counting others more significant than ourselves, we are counting ourselves more important. looking out to our interests and not our neighbors.

Coveting is a bitter fruit that brings forth many evil bitter fruits. James 4, 1-2 says, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

Coveting what belongs to another leads to murder, which is a violation of the sixth commandment. Coveting what your neighbor's wife leads to adultery, which is a violation of the seventh commandment.

[11 : 46] Coveting your neighbor's servant or his ox or donkey leads to stealing, which is a violation of the eighth commandment. Ahab's coveting of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21 led to him setting up false witnesses, which is a violation of the ninth commandment.

In this way, coveting can lead to, lead us to break every single one of the commandments, the latter half of the ten commandments intended to help us love our neighbor.

Coveting is by very, it's very nature, antisocial. In addition to this horizontal dimension toward our neighbors, coveting also has a vertical dimension toward God.

We can see this in the very first sin of humanity. It says in Genesis 3, verse 6, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired, it's the same word, to make one wise.

She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. They coveted the tree to make themselves wise.

[13 : 07] God had forbidden them from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil because it would lead to their death, but Satan tempted them saying it would open your eyes, make you like God, knowing good and evil.

And so they coveted that knowledge, God's knowledge. They coveted God's wisdom. They coveted the place of God. And so they took it.

And so before Adam and Eve ever bit into that fruit, before they ever laid hands on that fruit, they had already sinned, coveting with their eyes. In this instance, Adam and Eve's neighbor was God.

They craved what belonged to him. So the story of Achan is similar. You guys might be familiar with this. In Joshua 7, Israel is defeated in battle by the city of Ai, which is a relatively small city, so it's an embarrassing defeat.

And the reason is because they have taken some of the spoils of war from Jericho, a city that they had destroyed previously. And that city had been devoted to God for destruction.

[14 : 19] So the Israelites don't devote every city for destruction. It was only cities that they would inhabit that was part of God's promised land that he had promised to his people, the Israelites.

Those were the only cities that were devoted to destruction. And when it was devoted to destruction, the reason for this was that, as Deuteronomy 20, 18 says, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.

So the concern was idolatry. If you leave the remnants of the city, they will lead you astray into idolatry. So devoted to destruction. All the treasures were supposed to be dedicated to the treasury of the Lord, and everything else was supposed to be destroyed.

But Achan took some of the spoils of war and hid it, leading to God's judgment and the defeat of the entire nation of Israel against Ai. And in Joshua 7, 20 to 21, Achan confesses his sin this way after he is confronted.

Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel. And this is what I did. When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar and 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them.

[15 : 41] So there's an echo here of what Adam and Eve did in the garden. Two exactly the same verbs are used to describe Achan's sins. Eve desired, Eve coveted and took, and here Achan coveted and took the cloak from Shinar, which was devoted to destruction because it was beautiful.

Achan coveted and took the silver and the bar of gold, which was dedicated to the Lord because he coveted it because it was 250 shekels in weight. That's six pounds of silver and a pound and a half of gold, which would have been the equivalent of an average worker's entire lifetime of wages.

You can imagine the temptation. You could see the gold and silver right in front of your face. He coveted it, took it. A couple weeks ago, Ed shared with me, I guess three weeks ago now, or told me about a helpful article written by Pastor Garrett Kell of Delray Baptist Church entitled, Stop Photobombing Jesus.

I don't know if you guys have heard of this. The premise of the article is that even as we serve Jesus, we covet his spotlight. We keep photobombing him.

You guys know what that means? I mean, of course you guys know what that means. It's not your picture, but you're kind of entering into the frame of someone else's picture, pushing ourselves in so that we can be the object of the flashing lights and the stares of admirers.

[17 : 17] Kell lists six confessions that expose this covetousness. Number one, I want to glorify Jesus, but I want glory too. Number two, because I want affirmation, I hide my sins.

Number three, I become bitter when God uses others instead of me. Number four, I become more concerned about my public performance than my private devotion.

Number five, I fear moral failure for the wrong reasons, not because it offends God, but because it would take away my standing before men.

Number six, my desire to be something rivals my desire for Jesus to be everything. Do you covet the glory of God?

Do you covet the center stage that you belong to God alone in the church, in your life, in your marriage?

[18 : 27] When we first began this series in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, I mentioned that the Ten Commandments have a symmetrical structure.

The first half deal with loving God, the second half deal with loving our neighbors, and the two halves mirror each other. So commands four, five, six, seven, eight in the middle, they deal with actions, what we do.

And then commands three and commands nine flanking that, both deal with our speech, what we say, not taking name of the Lord in vain and not bearing false witness against our neighbor.

And then at the beginning and end of the Decalogue, commands one, two, and ten, deal with the heart and the mind. So the last word of the Decalogue peels off the layers of our actions and our speech and gets right underneath to what is going on in our hearts.

what do we worship? What do we love? What do we desire? And it is for this reason that when we get to the bottom of it, the heart of covetousness, that's my second point, is idolatry.

[19 : 41] That's the heart of covetousness. Colossians 3, 5 says, covetousness is idolatry. Ephesians 5, 5 says, a person who is covetous is an idolater.

It is not an accident that the Decalogue begins with the command, you shall have no other gods before me, and then ends with the tenth word, you shall not covet.

Because when we desire what belongs to another, when we desire what is not ours, what God has not given to us, we're desiring it more than we desire God.

God. John Piper helpfully defines covetousness this way. He says, quote, covetousness is desiring something so much that you lose your contentment in God.

Covetousness, when you covet money, if you love money, Jesus says that your money is your God. If you covet earthly things and you're preoccupied with worldly pleasures, Philippians 3.19 says that your God is your belly.

[20 : 56] Coveting at its heart is idolatrous. When you desire or are devoted to someone or something more than God, you're idolizing it. And that's what makes covetousness such a grievous sin.

We're really worshiping something other than God. we're declaring by our covetousness that God is not enough. That we need something more.

But that's not true. God is enough. He is all we need and all we could ever want. in Psalm 73, Asaph writes of how he was formerly envious of the wicked, envious of the arrogant because he saw that they prospered, lived long lives.

And when he saw this, he says he almost lost his faith, thinking to himself, all in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. However, when Asaph goes into the sanctuary to worship God, as he's worshiping, he remembers that all who are wicked eventually fall into ruin due to God's judgment.

Whereas he will be received into God's glory. And then he concludes the Psalm with this wonderful, beautiful confession of his contentment in God. He says, Whom have I in heaven but you?

[22 : 25] And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

That God is my portion. There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you, Lord. Regardless of what other people's portions in life may be, my portion is better.

I have God as my portion. This is why I despise and I oppose the prosperity gospel. It says, if you follow God and you are faithful to him, God will make you healthy and wealthy and prosperous.

That is not the gospel. Because it does not make Jesus look precious. It makes money and health and success look precious.

The world looks at the prosperity gospel and then says, well, if I were healthy and wealthy and prosperous and successful, I'd be happy too. Why do you need God in the picture?

[23 : 46] It makes Jesus a means to an end. Second fiddle to our other more important pursuits in life. No, that's not right.

It makes Jesus look precious when we say, whatever my lot in life, wealth or poverty, health or sickness, a podium or a prison, fame or forgottenness, a long life or a short life, Jesus is enough for me.

That makes Jesus look precious. And that should be the cry of our hearts because that's how precious Jesus is and we want everyone to know it.

But instead, when we covet and we say, well, Jesus, he's great, but I also need that man or that woman or that job or that car or those sneakers or that publishing deal or that look or that body or that shape or that promotion or that lavish lifestyle or that comfortable lifestyle or that popularity or that many followers on Twitter or TikTok, no.

You don't need any of those things because Jesus is enough. I'm not saying that it is wrong necessarily for you to seek a promotion or a new job or to save up for a house, but if in your pursuit of that thing you are discontented in the Lord and if you didn't get that thing you would be devastated.

[25 : 46] Then you do not have a pure desire but a covetous one. That brings us to the cure for covetousness.

The cure for covetousness is contentment. Immediately being content with what we already have and ultimately being content in Christ.

So let's look at those two things in turn. First, being content with what we have. 1 Timothy 5, 5-10. Paul denounces those who imagine that godliness is the means of gain, who use their spiritual standing in an influence to enrich themselves and that should not be so.

Instead, Paul continues, godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world but if we have food and clothing with these we will be content.

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 for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

[26 : 51] It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. If we have food and clothing, Paul says, we should be content.

The bare necessities are sufficient. Why should we be content with what we already have? Because we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world, it says.

As the saying goes, I don't know if you guys have heard of this, I found a pretty groovy country song that sings this this week. It says, there is no trailer hitch on a hearse.

Yeah. The hearse carrying your coffin is not going to be pulling a U-Haul with all your stuff in it because you can't take any of it with you.

You can't take your money with you, you can't take your fame with you, so why ensnare yourself with the desire to be rich? Paul says, it is senseless to do that.

[28 : 00] Jesus says in Luke 12, 15, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Life is not about the abundance of your possessions. That is not the measure of your worth. People in the world, some of them will say that.

How much you have but your net worth is not your life's worth. So why wear yourself down in pursuit of wealth?

Despite the Bible is very, very clear teaching on this, to this day, I regularly meet Christians who say, hey, I really want to get rich. Can you imagine all the good things I can do with my wealth?

I will do so many good things once I get rich. But it says right here, in God's infallible word, 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.

[29 : 08] No one falls into a snare because they want to. They fall into it unawares. Yes. You might desire to be rich for what you think might be noble reasons, but it doesn't matter.

It can ensnare you. Do you want to be ruined? Do you want to be destroyed? If not, then don't desire to be rich.

Jesus says that the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things choke the word of God so that it does not bear fruit in our lives.

Do you want the word of God to be choked in your life so it doesn't bear fruit? Do you want to be an unfruitful Christian? If your answer to that is no, then don't desire to be rich.

Don't give in to covetousness. If you work hard and get rich as a byproduct without desiring to be rich, fine. Then be generous with your wealth, but don't desire to be rich.

[30 : 20] Don't love money even when you have it. Be content with what you have. Hebrews 13, 5, keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Isn't that an amazing promise? That's the reason. Why should we live free from the love of money and be content with what we have? Because God assures us, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

We can be content in whatever situation because we always have God with us and he is enough. And that brings us to the ultimate contentment we should have as Christians, contentment in Christ.

And this contentment goes even beyond being content with the bare necessities. It says in Philippians 4, 11 to 13, Paul says that he learned in whatever situation to be content even when he faced plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

He says in 2 Corinthians 12, 10, for the sake of Christ that I am content even with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

[31 : 39] For when I am weak then I am strong. Even without bare necessities. Paul says you can be content in Christ.

Some of us in the future might have the hardship but also the privilege of being in a situation where we need to display the preciousness of Jesus by finding contentment even in the midst of a desperate situation.

Maybe it's in the midst of brokenness, weakness, hunger, suffering, war, persecution. But in order to be content in Christ even in such situations we need to grasp the surpassing worth of Jesus.

What did Paul say in Philippians 3 and this is the key to this contentment. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. Rubbish.

[32 : 56] Street refuse. Garbage. Jesus is the pearl of great price worth selling everything you have for in order to acquire.

Jesus is the Lord. the great I am who died on the cursed cross so that our covetous and idolatrous hearts might be cleansed and forgiven.

We might not have the perfect portfolio or the perfect career or the perfect family or the perfect house or the perfect body but we have Jesus. Isn't Jesus enough?

In the book The Insanity of God author Nick Ripken recounts his travels to various parts of the world where Christians are persecuted and shares his interviews with the Christians in the book and in one chapter he tells the story of the man he calls the quote the toughest man I ever met and this man was in such an intensely persecuted part of the world that he agreed to meet Ripken quote in a secure non-public setting where he would not even be able to see his face or attempt to learn his name.

The whole time during the interview this man spoke to Ripken from the shadow in a corner so that his face could not be seen. He told Ripken his testimony of how prior to coming to Christ he was a zealous Muslim and he killed infidels for sport.

[34 : 30] He stopped counting how many people he killed after 100. he would slit their throats and let the blood wash over his hands as an offering to Allah. But after some time he began to have a recurring dream the same dream over and over again of the spots of blood on his hands that grew larger and larger until eventually the blood was running down and dripping off his arms and the man knew instinctively that the blood on his hands were the blood of the people that he had killed.

the recurring dream was so incessant that the man began to wonder if he was insane and even started to see blood on his hands during the day during his waking hours.

He'd wash his hands and scrub it with sand and pumice which is a rough textured volcanic rock that people use as an abrasive for cleaning. But no matter how hard he scrubbed he could not get the blood off.

Eventually however the dream changed. In that same dream there appeared a man clothed in white with a scarred head.

He also had scarred hands a scarred side and scarred feet and the scarred man said to this Muslim man I am Jesus the Messiah and I can get the blood off if you will just find me and believe in me.

[36 : 01] So the man began searching. It took him over a year to locate a copy of the Bible and eventually it took him even longer to understand what he was reading. Occasionally he would run into someone who could answer some of his questions and finally this man found Jesus and the man said that when he gave his life over to Jesus I got the blood off.

Jesus took that blood onto himself and his nightmares stopped immediately. And the man started smuggling Bibles into his country even Jesus films he went over mountains to another country and to smuggle these things in he did these for years and in doing so he had been beaten near to death by Muslim soldiers he used to lead because they heard that he was an apostate.

After listening to the man's story for over six hours Nick Ripken asked him a question. You have told me that you are married that you have sons and that you have led your wife and your children to Christ and that you have even baptized them.

What I'm wondering is this where do they fit into your ministry? You haven't talked about that. How do they help you? What is happening with your family?

And Nick Ripken recalls how he did not expect what happened next. He says the man leapt out of the darkness and suddenly stood face to face with me. He clamped his scarred hands down tight on my shoulders and his fierce dark eyes bored like lasers into mine and I instinctively thought of my earlier question about the number of men he had killed.

[37 : 38] For hours I had listened to his inspiring story but now I was terrified as he shook me and demanded to know how can God ask it? Tell me how can God ask it?

I have given him everything. My body has been broken. I have been jailed. I have been starved. I have been beaten. I have been left for dead.

I have even been willing to die for Jesus. But do you know what I fear? When I go to bed at night what keeps me awake and what actually terrifies me is a thought that God might ask of my wife and my children what I have already willingly given him.

how can he ask it? Tell me how could God ask this of my wife and children? Scared half to death Ripken who had suffered the loss of his own son in the mission field felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to say this in response I personally cannot answer your question but I would ask you another question that I have had to ask myself is Jesus worth it?

Is he worth your life? Is he worth the lives of your wife and your children? And this toughest man that he had ever met began to sob and then he wrapped his arms around Ripken and buried his face in his shoulders and wept and then when he finally stopped stepped back and wiped away his tears and he looked into his eyes again and nodded and declared Jesus is worth it He is worth my life my wife's life and he is worth the lives of my children I have got to get them involved in what God is doing with me with that he said goodbye turned around walked out of the room brothers and sisters that's what contentment in Christ looks like

[40 : 01] Jesus is worth it Jesus is worth losing everything over and so even when we are weak insulted even when we are suffering even when we are persecuted let's declare to the world by our contentment that Jesus is enough let's pray Jesus you gave your all which is much to us how can we not give our little all to you

Jesus you are worthy you are enough help us to live in a manner that shows that reveals your surpassing worth help us to treasure you more than anything and anyone for your glory in Jesus name we pray amen well yeah you you you