

“You Shall Not Covet”
(Exodus 20:17)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This evening we’re going to finish our look at the Ten Commandments. By way of review:
 - a. The first teaches us to love God as our God: with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.
 - b. The second to love Him publicly: to worship Him as He loves to be worshiped.
 - c. The third to show our love by respecting His name.
 - d. The fourth to devote an entire day to nurturing our love and devotion to Him.
 - e. The fifth to love Him by respecting the authority He has placed in this world.
 - f. The sixth to love Him by respecting and protecting His image in the lives of all men.
 - g. The seventh to love Him by promoting the purity of all men.
 - h. The eighth to love Him by respecting and protecting what He has given to my neighbor.
 - i. The ninth to love Him by speaking the truth about all men.
2. We come now to the tenth commandment: 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 belongs to your neighbor.”

B. Preview.

1. The tenth is like the other five (5-9) in that it requires us to love God and man.
 - a. It teaches us to love God by being content with what He has chosen to give us.
 - b. It teaches us to love man by not wanting what God has given to him.
2. Does this mean that we aren’t supposed to covet anything?
 - a. No. The word means “desire,” or “to take pleasure in” something.
 - b. It’s can’t mean that we’re not to desire anything:
 - (i) If that happened, we would cease to move. Jonathan Edwards writes in his *Religious Affections*:

Such is man’s nature, that he is very inactive, any otherwise than he is influenced by some affection, either *love* or *hatred*, *desire*, *hope*, *fear*, or some other. These affections we see to be the springs that set men agoing, in all the affairs of life, and engage them in all their pursuits: these are the things that put men forward, and carry them along, in all their worldly business; and especially are men excited and animated by these, in all affairs wherein they are earnestly engaged, and which they pursue with vigor. We see the world of mankind to be exceeding busy and active; and the affections of men are the springs of the motion: take away all *love* and *hatred*, all *hope* and *fear*, all *anger*, *zeal*, and affectionate *desire*, and the world would be, in a great measure motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever. It is affection that engages the covetous man, and him that is greedy of worldly profits, in his pursuits; and it is by the affections, that the ambitious man is put forward in pursuit of worldly glory; and it is the affections also that

actuate the voluptuous man, in his pursuit of pleasure and sensual delights: the world continues, from age to age, in a continual commotion and agitation, in a pursuit of these things, but take away all affection, and the *spring* of all this motion would be gone, and the motion itself would cease. And as in worldly things, worldly affections are very much the spring of men's motion and action; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions is very much religious affection: he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is *engaged* in the business of religion.

- (ii) The thing that moves us to choose the things we do are our desires.
- (iii) This commandment doesn't teaches us to stop desiring altogether, but not to desire certain things.
- (iv) This is what we're going to look at this evening.

II. Sermon.

A. First, with regard to spiritual things: there are things we are to desire and things we are not to desire.

1. We are to desire that which is *good*.
 - a. The Hebrew word translated "covet" here appears in other contexts.
 - b. It is used to express what our attitude should be to God's Law, "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether. They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" (Psalm 19:7-10).
 - c. And to God's wisdom, which is the application of His Law, "She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her" (Prov. 3:15).
 - d. There are things we will desire as Christians, that the Spirit will work in us – righteousness, justice, godliness, peace, the advancement of God's kingdom, the glory of God and Christ, our own and our brothers' and sisters' growth in grace, that the greater spiritual gifts should be given and exercised for God and Christ's glory (1 Cor. 12:31), that God's kingdom would come in power (Matt. 6:10).
 - e. More than that we will desire God: The psalmist writes, "Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26).
 - f. David writes, "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1).
 - g. These are expressions of the greatest desire. There's nothing wrong with that, but everything right. We are to desire what is good: God (Mark 10:18).
2. But obviously, there are things we must not desire: Sin, wickedness, evil. In short, we must not desire anything against God's commandments, against His nature.
 - a. To have any other God, than or besides the true God.
 - b. To worship Him in any other way than commanded.
 - c. To use His name in vain.
 - d. Not to keep His Sabbaths holy.

- e. Not to submit to authority.
- f. Not to protect life.
- g. Not to protect purity.
- h. Not to protect property.
- i. Not to protect truth.
- j. When God destroys the wicked, the righteous will say, “Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches *and* was strong in his *evil* desire” (Psalm 52:7).
- k. Any desire for evil is sin.

3. To put it in perspective:

- a. Every good desire we have comes from the Spirit, which is why God approves it.
- b. Every evil desire comes from the flesh/sin, which is why God forbids it.
- c. “The desire of the righteous is only good, *but* the expectation of the wicked is wrath” (Prov. 11:23).

B. Second, with regard to material things, there are things we are not to desire: the things that belong to our neighbor. To put it another way: we are to be content with what the Lord has given us.

1. We are expressly forbidden to desire what God has given to our neighbor.

- a. This includes his house, his wife, any of his possessions.
 - (i) Ahab coveted Naboth’s vineyard to the point where he was sick (1 Kings 21:4).
 - (ii) Nothing satisfied Haman as long as Mordecai wouldn’t bow down to honor him (Es. 5:13).
 - (iii) If we desire things too much, it becomes idolatrous.
 - (iv) Paul writes, “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Col. 3:5).
- b. This doesn’t mean that we can’t appreciate what they have, agree that it is good or a blessing, or want to have something like it for our own, if it’s the Lord’s will.
- c. But it means that we aren’t to desire his, or be jealous and unhappy that God gave it to him, or to be unhappy that we don’t have the same thing.
- d. This applies to things we have and to the abilities God gives us, both natural and spiritual.
 - (i) Some have nice houses, cars, clothes, luxury items.
 - (ii) Some are great thinkers, wise, strong, fast, handsome, pretty.
 - (iii) Some are great servants, preachers, teachers, evangelists, givers.
- e. We need to beware: the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence; what we don’t have always looks better.
- f. Be warned: once lust takes hold, it is never satisfied.

2. The only way to deal with it is to kill it: put it off and put on its opposite.
 - a. Stop lusting; be content. Evil desire is the root of all sin: Put it off.
 - b. Be glad that the Lord has blessed you neighbor with what He has. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).
 - c. More importantly, be thankful that He has given you what He has.
 - (i) No matter how bad off we are here this evening, we’re still the rich man on the hill compared to most in this world.
 - (ii) We have food and covering (with this we are to be content; 1 Tim. 6:8), but we have much more: houses, cars, computers, luxury items that most people in the world only dream of.
 - (iii) Be thankful that He has made you in a way that pleases Him.
 - (iv) Be thankful that you have spiritual life in you at all: none of us deserve salvation.
 - (v) Your brother or sister might have more than you do, but be content with what you have.
 - d. There’s only one place for discontentment: godliness.
 - (i) In one respect, we need to be content and patient even here: God has His time frames and His purposes in our growth.
 - (ii) In another, we need to desire it so badly that it feels like a hunger and thirst.
 - (iii) Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6).
 - (iv) When we have this, along with contentment, we have all we need.
 - (v) Paul writes, “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. 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 griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:6-12).
 - e. We must learn to be content.
 - (i) God will take care of us. If we have Him we have all we need.
 - (ii) The author to the Hebrews writes, “*Make sure that* your character is 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,’ so that we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?’” (Heb 13:5-6)? Amen.