

## Coveting vs. Contentment (Exodus 20:17) – November 5, 2023

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I'm so thankful for the ministry of music and AV team and especially recent weeks.

- I appreciate the lyrics we just sang 'The Law of God is good,' that comes out of Rom 7:

<sup>12</sup> *So the law is holy...and righteous and good... [and v. 22] I delight in the law of God, in my inner being...*

- It's been a joy in my soul to study God's law, but also convicting in my sin.

Rom 7:7 *'if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."* <sup>8</sup> *But sin... produced in me all kinds of covetousness...*

<sup>24</sup> *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* <sup>25</sup> *Thanks be to God through Jesus...*

That's our study today. We'll see our covetousness and wretchedness and deliverance in Jesus.

- My hope and prayer is that this will increase our thankfulness and contentedness in Him.

**But first, religious outwardly 'blameless' people like Saul need to see their need as wretches**

Those of you who read Jane Austen may know of one of her lesser-known works, Lady Susan.

- I watched a clip from it in the film Love and Friendship (I didn't read the book, FYI).
- A rich suitor named Sir James Martin is hoping to court Lady Susan's daughter.
- In the parlor he tries to impress her and the gentlemen there with how well read he is.

He brings up the Bible and in his own words "many such accounts one learns from childhood.

Perhaps the most significant in forming one's principles is that of the old prophet who came down from the mount with tablets bearing the Twelve Commandments, which our Lord has taught us to obey without fail."

"*Twelve* commandments?" the other young man asks. Sir James nods and smiles.

"Excuse me," a wiser older voice chimes in, "I believe there were only ten."

"Really? Only ten must be obeyed. Excellent! Well then which two to take off? Perhaps the one about the Sabbath. I prefer to hunt. After that, it becomes tricky. Many of the 'Thou shalt nots'--don't murder, don't covet thy neighbor's house or wife--one simply wouldn't do anyway, because they are wrong, whether the Lord allows us to take them off or not."

It's pretty funny the way he acts it out and funnier with a real British accent.

- But the sad truth is that's how many view Moses and commands they learned as a child.
- They'd like to take off what restricts their fun but most of the rest they think they keep

They don't murder and think they wouldn't disobey many of them and think that's impressive.

- But as we look at Ex 20, the command against coveting he quoted we all fail to obey.

Today is my 12<sup>th</sup> sermon on Ex 20, only 10 commandments but 2 on the Sabbath and an intro.

- Even if we could take off 2, we'd all be guilty of the heart of every commandment.
- The Lord is serious about all of them and we're in serious trouble with #10.

Look at Exodus 20:17 and this is God's Word from heaven: "*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.*" <sup>18</sup> *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off*

...

The 10th commandment stands out in many ways and should make us all fear, fall on our knees:

- Other ancient cultures have many laws like commands 6-9 but no laws against coveting<sup>1</sup>
- Also only this one repeats the double negative '*You shall not covet... You shall not covet*'

- It's an emphatic dramatic warning to never covet and only this one multiplies examples
- It also stands out from the rest by going straight to the heart (others start in physical acts)

Westminster Larger Catechism says we daily break His commands 'in thought, word and deed ... The tenth commandment forbids any dissatisfaction [defining coveting as 'discontentment'] with what belongs to us, envy and grief at the success of others, and all improper desire for anything that belongs to someone else...[this] command...requires that we be so completely satisfied with our own status in life ['full contentment'] and have such a proper, loving attitude toward others that we are naturally inclined to wish the best for them and all their possessions'<sup>2</sup>

**Outline:**    **1. Coveting in God's Law – our guilt**  
                   **2. Contentment in Christ – our gospel remedy**

Let's look at coveting in God's law in v. 17 phrase by phrase. It starts '***You shall not covet...***'

- That Hebrew root word OT Jews would know in Gen 3:6, Eve saw the tree as 'desirable.'
- This is part of the first sin, and starts with what we see and seek after apart from God.
- It can be translated 'desire passionately, take pleasure in, treasure, darling, beloved.'<sup>3</sup>

It's used of precious gold, think of 'my precious' (Gollum a picture of coveting the gold ring).

**Coveting makes us an ugly scary grasping grabbing sinner**

Original sin passes that down to little kids, when they see a toy another kid has and they covet.

- A toddler is content with his toy till he sees another kid's toy he now must have and grab.

Later in Genesis, Lot coveted the grass that was greener on the other side in the land of Sodom.

- God sent men to deliver Lot later but sodomites coveted those men and became violent.
- The family had to be dragged away from wrath but Lot's wife looked back covetously.
- She turned into a pillar of salt as a warning for how coveting the sinful world can turn us.

On Abraham's side, Sarah coveted a son and set up Hagar (Ishmaelite conflict ever since).

Gen 30:1 *When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"*

- Envy or jealousy for what you see others have and you don't is the heart of coveting.
- It's what you think you can't live without or will make life worth living,
  - o whatever you say 'I must have' (and want to die if you don't)

Coveting is a corrupting and controlling 'I need.' Watson: 'an insatiable desire for getting...'<sup>4</sup>

- It's being possessed by what you don't possess.

DeYoung: 'If only I had \_\_\_\_\_, I would finally be happy' ...the person, place, or thing we think we can't live without...What's in the blank?'<sup>5</sup>

- Coveting is desiring what God hasn't given us, an excessive or obsessive desire.
- It's not a sin necessarily to want *some thing*, but this is wanting *someone else's things*.
- This is a longing or lusting after someone else's people, possessions, position, etc.
- Another word for coveting is craving, especially craving too strongly or wrongly.
  - o The issue isn't desire, it's discontentment.

It's not wrong to want a house, spouse, etc., but this is wrong way, wrong time, wrong reason.

**At what expense? Credit card debt so your family can live outside your monthly means?**

In the original context, Moses is writing to Israelites who showed their coveting by grumbling.

- They were in Egypt because their forefathers coveted silver and sold Joseph for 30 pieces
- Like him they were slaves there but as God delivers them they covet food back in Egypt

- They coveted a different leader than Moses, and even coveted dying in Egypt instead
- They were discontent with miraculous manna, coveting leeks, garlic, onions, meat pots
- In Ex 16:3 their cry was ‘If only we had...’ When we complain like that, we’re coveting
- Grumbling reveals what we’re coveting. What you’re grumbling about, you’re coveting

*It can be health you used to have or others have, or help around the house you crave*

1 Cor 10 says of the days of Moses ‘*these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave...as they also craved... Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer [this is a destructive sin]. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction... Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall* (v. 6, 19-12 NAS). In context, coveting, grumbling.

*1 Jn 2:15 ‘Do not love the world or the things of the world...cravings of flesh, desire of eyes...’*

Look at Ex 20:17 again: *You shall not covet your neighbor’s house...*

- Not just physical structure, ‘household.’
- The grass only looks greener on the neighbor’s side of the fence.
- You like what you see but you may not like to see their mortgage bills or other issues.
- A family looks great on Sunday, but you don’t see how bad it is behind closed doors.
- You don’t want your neighbor’s household conflict or crisis or credit card balance.
- Don’t covet by comparing your lot in life to HGTV.

Don’t covet by complaining that you live in a dump, not a decorated designer home you desire.

*So much of what we see on a screen is fake and false and fuels discontentment*

v. 17 adds don’t covet ‘*your neighbor’s wife...*’ Same word in Pr 6:25: *Do not lust after her beauty in her heart.*

- Coveting someone else’s spouse isn’t just visual, it can be craving verbal affirmation.
- She may crave more conversational stimulation she doesn’t get from her husband.

Men often want more physical intimacy from a wife, wives often more emotional intimacy.

- Some crave connection or appreciation that you perceive in another marriage but not yours.
- I wish I my wife was like \_\_\_\_\_. Or a wife: ‘I wish my husband was like \_\_\_\_\_.’

One imagines: Look at her husband...he helps around the house. He fixes things, not just breaking them. Why am I stuck with my husband...<sup>6</sup>

Craving your spouse be what he/she’s not is sin, coveting a better spouse makes you a bitter one

Conflict in marriage or family has coveting at its core. James 4 says the cause of quarrels is this: ‘*your desires...You want something but don’t get it.* [‘want’ there is the Greek word used in 10<sup>th</sup> commandment. James goes on, you] *covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight...* [coveting is behind our quarrelling. James 4:15] *Instead, you ought to say “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that”* NIV. To stop coveting there needs to be a humbling of ourselves before God and His sovereign will.

- James 4 says resist the devil, submit to God, ask Him to cleanse your heart as you repent.

*Among other sins, Col 3:5 says ‘Put to death...covetousness, which is idolatry’*

Ex 20:17 adds servants and oxen, which most of your neighbors don’t have

- Cliff and Sue did have a donkey but I can say I never coveted).

Maybe you covet a neighbor’s Dodge pickup. Or instead of his oxen, his awesome property.

- Or instead of his servants, you covet his sweet pool.

v. 17 ends with anything another has, that could include envying vacations they take

- when you only get to go to grandmas.
- You open Instagram and instantly covet the fun others seem to have

*Or Spotify to ‘I wish I was a little bit taller...I wish I had a girl, I would call her,’ etc.*

- You scroll through Facebook jealous of the smiling faces and friends you're not with.
- We covet likes, comments, followers or friends more than being a real friend in person.
- Internet or TV ads are designed to make you covet and they make money because you do.
- Your smartphone screen tempts you to covet, and be discontent without a newer phone.
- I can covet watching highlights of a sport I love more than talking to loved ones nearby.
- We covet our little world and miss the world around us and those needing our presence.
- God help us to not let small screens control us.

**We're consumed with small dreams and lesser things that are addicting and crippling**

Ryken says what we 'usually call "chasing the American dream,"...the Bible calls it coveting... [Someone] asked the billionaire Nelson Rockefeller how much money it takes to be happy. Rockefeller answered, "Just a little bit more." The [rich Solomon] says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income" (Eccles. 5:10)... Coveting is what causes that little twinge of disappointment whenever someone else gets what we want...always comparing ourselves to others, and frankly we resent...what they have...age, looks, brains, or talents...their situation in life: marriage, singleness, children..."If only I had a different body type...If only I didn't have this...If only people would recognize...If only my spouse would do a better job of meeting my needs"...we do not learn to be satisfied right now

It was Spring, but it was Summer I wanted: The warm days and the great outdoors.

It was Summer, but it was Fall I wanted: The colorful leaves and the cool, dry air.

It was Fall, but it was Winter I wanted: The beautiful snow and the joy of the holiday season.

It was Winter, but it was Spring I wanted: The warmth and the blossoming of nature.

I was a child, and it was adulthood I wanted: The freedom and the respect.

I was 20, but it was 30 I wanted: To be mature and sophisticated.

I was middle-aged, but it was 20 I wanted: The youth and the free spirit.

I was retired, but it was middle-aged I wanted: The presence of mind without limitations.

My life was over, and I never got what I wanted.'<sup>7</sup> Coveting leaves empty, discontent, dissatisfied

Piper tells the story of a couple who 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.'"...Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: "Look, Lord. See my shells." That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that...Don't buy it...I plead with you...Here is a desire for something infinitely great and beautiful and valuable and satisfying...God-centered Christ-exalting scripture... [to] set you free from small dreams and send you for the glory of Christ into all the spheres of secular life and to all the peoples of the earth.'<sup>8</sup> Don't waste your life coveting the American dreams!

### **This takes us from coveting – our guilt – to #2. Contentment in Christ – the gospel remedy**

Ps 22 is a prophecy of Christ on the cross

- it says afflicted will be satisfied and seek Him, v. 26.

Even without going to the NT, this word in the law for *covet* is used in OT prophecies of Jesus.

- In Isa 53:2 Messiah has '*nothing in his appearance that we should desire him*' (NIV, or covet).
- For our ugly utterly undesirable sin He became our substitute guilt offering in our place.

Jesus on the cross took the crushing wrath I deserve for my coveting wrongly. He says in Isa 55 ‘*Why do you spend your money...and your labor for that which does not satisfy?...Listen...delight yourselves... come to me...Seek the LORD...*’ There’s abundance in Him to satisfy souls that seek Him, we can go out with joy

*Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Psalms say God ‘*satisfies your desires with good...he satisfies the longing soul...abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house...You give...from the river of Your pleasures*’ (103:5 NIV, 107:9 ESV, 36:8 NKJV).

Jn 6:35: *Jesus said... “...whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*

- He offered the woman at the well not only living water but the love she craved and hadn’t found in men
- Jesus satisfied the thousands when He fed them bread till they were all satisfied with abundant leftovers
- He’s the Lord who is my shepherd so I shall not want or lack and He fills my cup full till it overfloweth
- If He is your portion, you can say to Him Ps 73:25 ‘*there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you*’
- Jesus calls us to seek Him first, His kingdom and His righteousness, and all we truly need He will add
- Jesus calls you to turn from the sin you covet and trust Him alone, treasure Him as Lord and Savior

*He is most glorified in us when we’re most satisfied in Him (Desiring God)*

Jesus came to a wicked generation craving signs. He came to a sinful world where men coveted ‘*the approval of men rather than the approval of God*’ (Jn 12:43 NAS). Lk 12:15 ‘*be on your guard against **all covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*’<sup>16</sup> *And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,<sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself...I will tear down my barns and build larger ones...<sup>19</sup> I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God...*

Fully God, Jesus was also fully man and fully tempted to coveting, He knew this experientially.

- After 40 days of fasting in the desert, He’s tempted to wrongly satisfy His hunger.
- He replies ‘*It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone...”*’
- He lived by the sufficient word of God so we can, too
- He didn’t covet the kingdoms of this world in the wrong way when Satan offered them
- Phil 2 says instead of grasping, Jesus was content to humble Himself and empty Himself
- He gave up heaven’s riches to live in poverty and obscurity, single, siblings against Him
- The Son of Man had no place to lay His head, if you have one, be content and praise Him
- In Gethsemane, Jesus is tempted to desire another way, but submits to the Father’s will
- That night He was betrayed by Judas who coveted the moneybag and 30 pieces of silver
- On the cross He said He thirsted as He drank the cup of wrath but said ‘*Father, forgive...*’

Turn to 1 Tim 6 and we’ll see how Jesus through the gospel can transform a coveter.

- I started in Rom 7, Paul says the law revealed ‘*all kinds of covetousness*’ that killed him.
- Law is a schoolmaster leading to Christ and amazing grace for wretches like him and me.
- Grace can transform us who’ve coveted to be contented in Christ.

1 Tim 6:6 *godliness with **contentment** is great gain,<sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.<sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, **with these we will be content.**<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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...<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.<sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be **generous and ready to share...***

Being generous is a gospel remedy for the covetous. Those ‘*ready to share*’ avoid the riches snare.

The content love neighbors, not their money. Our great gain is in godliness with contentment.

- God can change our wrong greed to righteous giving.
- Pr 21:26: *He covets greedily all day long, But the righteous gives and does not spare* (NKJV)
  - o ESV *'All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives...'*

Change comes in His Word and prayer. Ps 119:36 *Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to covetousness*<sup>9</sup>

**Turn back to Phil 4 and listen to how the Lord is present and sufficient to help us**

Heb 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."*<sup>6</sup> So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper..."

- Paul learned this and the Lord helped him be content even in prison awaiting possible execution.

Phil 4:11: *Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.*<sup>12</sup> *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need* (NIV 'secret of being content').<sup>13</sup> *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

That's often taken out of context, but it means I can be content in all things by Christ's strength.

- In the context of v. 19 it's trusting He'll provide all we need, strengthening, sufficiency. Apart from Christ we can do nothing, we are nothing, but in Him we have everything we need.

- Jeremiah Burroughs wrote on v. 11 in 1642 The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment.

He calls it 'a sufficient portion between Christ and my soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition ...Christian contentment [he defines as] that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition...[he says to complainers] will you be above God? Is this not God's hand and must your will be regarded more...? Keep under the sovereignty of God, the power that God has over you...You must say, "Good is the hand of the Lord"...Name any affliction that is upon you: there is a sea of mercy to swallow it up. If you pour a pailful of water on the floor of your house, it makes a great show, but if you throw it into the ocean, there is no sign of it. So afflictions...we think are very great, but let them be considered with the sea of God's mercies we enjoy, and then they are not so much, they are nothing in comparison...Oh, the Word holds forth a way full of comfort and peace...[content] lives in the midst of all the storms and tempests in the world. There is an ark that you may come into and no men in the world may live such...cheerful...contented lives...'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century*. DeYoung adds 'we've yet to find another law code from the ancient world that enshrines a prohibition against inordinate desires of the heart' (*The Ten Commandments*, p. 162).

<sup>2</sup> Modern English version, wording from original old English in brackets.

<sup>3</sup> *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT*, and Concise Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Banner of Truth, 1965 reprint of 1692 edition), 174.

<sup>5</sup> DeYoung, 165.

<sup>6</sup> DeYoung, 156.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 203-212.

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, p. 45-48 (see also his video message online on this from Passion Conference 2000).

<sup>9</sup> NKJV.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Banner of Truth, 2005 paperback), 18-19, 33-34, 209, 227-28.