

10th Commandment

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as you know, we've been working our way through the 10 Commandments and as you can see from your bulletin, and as I'm sure you'll all be aware, we have reached the 10th Commandment this evening. And we're going to study that commandment together tonight and then God willing, next week, we'll have a final sermon in this study just to look at the whole of the commandments in terms of a summary. But tonight our focus is on the 10th Commandment and we are going to continue with the framework that we've been using where we ask three very simple questions. What, how and why? What is the commandment saying?

How do we apply it to our lives? And why should God give it to us? And why should we follow it? And so we've come to the 10th Commandment which we have in Deuteronomy 5 verse 21.

And you shall not covet your neighbour's wife and you shall not desire your neighbour's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour. So our first question is what, what's this commandment saying? Well, the first thing I wanted to remind ourselves of is that you will remember that as we've been going through this study, the 10 commandments are generally split into two halves whereby the first four are described as our duty towards God and the final six are our duty towards one another. And so the 10th Commandment is the final one of this second group which in many ways is generally focused on our conduct towards those around us. But the 10th Commandment is a little bit different because commandments 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 are all fairly outward in their basic emphasis. Now you'll remember that as we've been going through them we've been saying that there are many inward implications for all of those commandments. But in terms of first impressions when you read commands like do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, they are all fairly outward in nature in the first instance. But the 10th Commandment is different. The focus of this command is not outward, it is completely inward. This commandment is not talking about how we act, it is talking about how we think and how we feel. And we'll think a little bit more about that as we go along. As with the other commandments the basic instruction is fairly straightforward, do not covet. And you will notice that in this command, particularly the reference to the Deuteronomy, two words are used. They are in red, you shall not covet and you shall not desire. The first word there, covet in the ESV, is actually translated desire in the authorized version. So if you have an eb in front of you, the desire will be the first one you see. It basically means, well it comes from a word that basically means to be pleasant or to be desirable. So the word covet in this commandment is pointing us towards the thought that we have an attitude whereby the attractiveness of an object leads us to a selfish desire that it would be our. Now this is really interesting and really important because the key point is that it is not necessarily the object that is wrong.

It could be something that is perfectly pleasant, perfectly desirable in and of itself. The problem arises with the nature of our desire. In other words, coveting is not necessarily wanting the wrong thing or wanting a bad thing. Coveting is wanting something in the wrong way and for the wrong reason. And that means that this command is not about the things around us, the things mentioned in this command or the things that we might see, it is about our own attitude. And the same word as this appears in Genesis 3, right at the very beginning, when Eve was tempted, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired. That's the same word that's used in the 10th commandment to make one wise. She took of it its fruit and ate and she also gave something to her husband who was with her and he ate. The significant of that is that the fruit was desirable, but it was Eve's selfish longing for it. That was wrong. It was not the tree that was wrong, not the fruit, not even God's command. It was the thought and the action that followed in terms of Eve's mindset. And so that means that there's a difference between recognizing that something is pleasant and then selfishly longing that it would be ours. It's the latter of these that is outlawed in the 10th commandment.

So first word is do not covet. The second word, desire, basically means to crave. And it's sometimes used to convey the idea of appetite. We've got that in Judea, verse 20, when the Lord your God enlarges your territory as he has promised you and you say, I will eat meat because you crave meat. You may eat meat whenever you desire. Now if you think about it, when you are hungry, really, really hungry, there is a void in you that you want to fill. Your stomach feels empty. You want to eat. You want to fill that void. That is exactly what coveting is like. We see an object and we desire it. We crave it because we believe that that will fill a void in our lives and it will satisfy us. I'm sure you can think of 101 examples of that in your own experience. The command itself gives us a list of examples.

[6 : 56] If you go back one, I should have put an extra slide in there. It gives us a list of examples there. Do not covet your neighbour's wife, house, field, servant, female servant, ox, donkey or anything that is your neighbour. Now I'm going to say three very brief but very significant things here. First of all, none of those things are bad. None of them are bad. They are all things that God has provided for us and that God wants us to have.

They are perfectly legitimate items in and of themselves. The key point though is the second thing, that they belong to somebody else. They are perfectly valid in themselves but they are the possession of your neighbour. And so the sin of coveting arises from a selfish desire to have for ourselves what is the property of somebody else. And the key point is the third thing we're saying here is that none of these things can be shared. If you think about it, your neighbour's wife, your neighbour's house, your neighbour's field can only be yours if it stops being theirs. And that is why deciding anything that belongs to your neighbour, which is what we have at the end of this commandment, anything that is his is outlawed by this command. It's involving taking and depriving somebody else for our own benefit. That's why coveting doesn't just involve furthering our own wealth, it involves the impoverishment of our neighbour. And we see that it's got selfishness at the heart of it. Coveting is an uncontrolled, inappropriate, all-consuming desire for something that we don't have. It is a horribly selfish attitude. And I'm sure that in all of these things we're simply reminding ourselves of what we know that to covet is an inappropriate desire for something that we do not have. So that's telling us what coveting is. How do we then apply this to our lives? Well, as we've said, and we'll keep saying this, the key emphasis of this command is that it is all about what we are like on the inside.

It is aimed at our attitude. And it's a reminder of a great principle that God reveals in 1 Samuel 16 verse 7. Do not look at his outward appearance or on the height of his statue because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees, not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Now that reminds us and instantly tells us that keeping this command is an immense challenge for us all. We can all have a measure of control over our outward actions. And there are people who in an outward level could probably say that they've kept commandments 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. But controlling our thoughts, controlling our feelings is another matter altogether. And we see a fantastic example of this from somebody who we think would probably never have these problems. And yet we see that he does, the apostle Paul, if we go to Romans 7, we see fascinating words here. What does

Paul say? What shall we say then? That the law is sin by no means, yet 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. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. Now these verses are part of a great discourse that Paul is engaging in regarding the Christians' relation to the law. But for our purposes this evening, he makes a fascinating reference to the 10th commandment where he basically says that even if you just mention the words, do not covet. You immediately think of everything that you covet. You immediately think of things that you would like. Controlling our thoughts is so difficult. And so we think, well, this looks like an impossible commandment to keep. And in one sense it is, because that's one of the purposes of the commandment, to show us that we can't keep them, to show us that we are sinners. And I hope that we have all learned throughout the course of this whole study that none of us can stand before God and say, I've kept that commandment. Because when we really analyze ourselves, we see that we fall short. And that's indeed one of the purposes of the commandment. So in one level it is impossible to keep. But that does not mean that we don't bother even trying. And if you go to Romans 6 and Romans 7, that's the whole point that Paul is being made, is Paul is making. Because people are saying, well, if we're saved by grace and if we're freed from the law, then what's the point in trying to keep it? But if you go and read these chapters, you see Paul presenting a very clear case as to why we must, must follow God's commandments now that we have been delivered from the power of sin. So we must, must, must make an effort to keep this commandment. And there are indeed things that we can do that will help us. As I keep saying, the key issue here is how we think. We have to be careful about how we think. And that's a reminder that as Christians, we can never think to ourselves, well, I can think what I like as long as I don't do it. It's not easy. It's easy to come to that conclusion to think, oh, well, what goes on in my head is that can go on in my head. And if as long as I don't do it, it's fine. This commandment is reminding us that we cannot be like that. John Calvin has a beautiful phrase where he says that God wants us to have an exceptional composure of heart. God wants you and me to have an exceptional composure of heart. In other words, the way we think matters to God. Now, let's how we think about this together for a moment, because it's a very interesting topic to consider together. Coveting arises from a dissatisfaction with our own condition. Remember what we said? It's like hunger. You're hungry. You want something.

You feel like there's a lack. And this void needs to be filled. We see an object. We think that our non possession of that object is a great problem. And we desire we long and we reach the point of craving and even lusting that this thing might be ours. And you and I know exactly how that feels. It doesn't matter if it's a car or a house or a phone or a tractor or whatever it may be, we all know what it's like to see something and to think, oh, I really, really, really want and need that. It can be very, very common among children. Very often we see our children. For all that they have, they think about what they don't have. And very often they want things. And sometimes they can get really head up if they don't get it. Coveting is very common among children. But what must be said is that it's probably even more common among adults. And we are all aware of that in our own lives. And the 10th commandment is telling us to avoid thinking in these ways.

[15 : 03] The 10th commandment is saying avoid the kind of thinking that says see something, want it, get it. The 10th commandment is telling us to go in the opposite direction from that kind of thinking. Now, I hope you notice how incredibly significant this is because the 10th commandment is telling you and me to do the exact opposite of what modern Western society is telling us to do. The exact opposite. Now, let me explain what I mean. We live in a political age where economic growth is viewed as a non-negotiable essential. Everybody in terms of their financial policy, as far as I can understand, it seems to say our economy must always be growing. If slow growth or non-growth arises in an economy, it is seen as the ultimate failure in a government's financial policy. You never see an election manifesto that says we promise recession. Nobody says that because recession, non-growth in terms of your economy, is utterly, utterly unacceptable in today's Western world. And there are lots of probably very valid reasons why that is the case. However, in order to keep on growing as an economy, you have to make sure that people keep on spending. And how do you get people to keep on spending?

You get them to covet. You get them to covet. And that's why you are bombarded by adverts every day.

That's why even if you have nothing to spend, you can borrow more so that you can keep on spending. And that's why every year we move to the next fashion and to the next piece of technology and to the next gadget and to the next toy so that people keep on spending. At the heart of all of that is the aim to make people like you want the very thing that you don't have. Now the conclusion of that is our economy is built on covetousness. Our economy is built on covetousness. That's why websites like Facebook are worth billions. How can something that is free to use be worth billions?

Because of advertising. That's what makes Facebook and Google and all of these things worth phenomenal amounts of money because there are means whereby advertising can be done and whereby we can even target products to people in terms of the searches that they've made and the things that they've clicked on. Now all of this means that keeping the 10th commandment means that you and I have to think in a way that is completely counter-cultural. That is the complete opposite of what our world is doing. And that's a great but a magnificent challenge for us to take up. And in order to do so we must guard our attitude in two ways. We have to be careful about how we view our own possessions and we have to be careful about how we think regarding other people's possessions.

And once again this is summed up wonderfully for us in the short of catechism. What is required in the 10th commandment? The 10th commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with our right and charitable frame of spirit towards our neighbour and all that is his. In other words be happy with what you have and don't resent what your neighbour has. What is forbidden in the 10th commandment? The 10th commandment forbid all disappointment with discontentment with our only state, envy and or grieving at the good of our neighbour and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his. And these statements from the catechism sum up very very well how we have to approach this commandment. Contentment with our own condition and a respect and an acceptance of our neighbours. When we covet we are lamenting our own perceived poverty and we are envying and resenting what we perceive as the wealth and success of our neighbour.

[20 : 19] Both of these are the reflection of our wrong attitude. Therefore the answer is to change the way we think. We need to change the way we think. And the key point is that the issue here is not what we have but how we think. We are not saying that it is wrong to have possessions.

That's not what the 10th commandment is saying, that's not what the catechism is saying. The Bible never says that. If we work hard, if we are blessed, we thank God for that. And we should never think that it's wrong for us to have things. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. What this commandment is saying is that we should remember the words of Jesus.

Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Wise wise words. And so this brings us to our third and final question that we'll spend maybe a wee bit more time on. Why? Why should we keep this command?

We've just said that God is asking us to do the exact opposite of what the world is doing. Why should we do that? If everybody is going that way, why should we go this way?

Well, let's see. And in order to answer this question, I want us to say three things. The first thing I'm going to say is this. The 10th commandment is essential for your personal happiness. I'm going to say that again. Keeping the 10th commandment is absolutely essential for your personal happiness. Now, that's a very, very big statement to make, and I will have to justify it, but I believe that we can through what the Bible says. We all want personal happiness. Well, essential to that is keeping the 10th commandment.

[22 : 44] The Bible gives us a very clear commandment that we should be content. Various places will emphasize that. We just quoted Jesus who told us to not to think that our life consists of the abundance of his possessions. The Catechists have told us to be content.

Hebrews 13.5 is another example. 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. Now, the Greek word for content is a really, really interesting word because it basically means to have enough.

The word basically means to have enough. We see the same word being used by Philip in John chapter 14 verse 8 where he says, Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us. Same word referring to having enough, referring to be content. Now, this is immensely significant.

Contentment means thinking, I have enough. Covetousness means thinking, I don't have enough.

And the simple logic of these two statements is that covetousness is the exact opposite of contentment. And if contentment means to be happy, which I'm sure you would agree that it is, covetousness is the opposite. Covetousness is a guarantee of unhappiness. So when the world is telling you and telling me that if you get more stuff, you will be happy, it is telling you perhaps the biggest lie that the world is currently facing. Because we are seeing everywhere this statement, if you get this, if you buy that, if you have this, you will be happy. And it's not true. The world keeps telling us that if you have a little bit more, you'll be happier. And we all think if I was just a little bit richer, I don't think I don't think like that. Of course I think like that. I think if I had a little bit more, it would be great. If we just aim a little bit higher, if things were just a wee bit less tight, it would be so much better. We all think like that. The world is saying having more stuff is better. And the radical thing that the Bible says is that having more stuff isn't better.

[25 : 30] And having more won't make you happy. And you and I know that the Bible is right. Because every single one of you and me also can think of times in our lives when we have longed for something and thought if I just have this, and then we get it, and five minutes after we've have it, we realize that the satisfaction we expected has not materialized. I'm sure you can think of examples when that has happened. I can think of examples of that all the time, all the time. The problem is that we deal with this dissatisfaction by going on to the next thing, and going on to the next thing, and going on to the next thing. Oh well that wasn't as speedy, but if I get this, or if I get that, we just keep on moving. The 10th commandment is telling you and me that the real solution is to change our attitude. And the amazing thing here is, it's so simple, but I think it's remarkable, we can categorically say that coveting is the exact opposite of contentment and happiness.

Therefore, all God is saying in the 10th commandment is this, don't do the very thing that is guaranteed to make you unhappy. That's all God is saying. He's saying this will make you unhappy, so don't do it.

And we realize, and we are reminded once again, that the 10 commandments are for our good.

God gives us them because he knows best. That's why we could sing in Psalm 19 saying, the fear of the Lord is clean and during forever. The rules of the Lord are through and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and drippings from the honeycomb. That's what Sam is saying, listening to the 10th commandment is better than having gold, because it is. Because when you listen to the 10th commandment, you realize, I don't need gold to be happy. And so we can see it can transform our lives.

Covetousness leads to bitterness and sadness. God graciously gives us this commandment because he wants you and me to avoid the very thing that is guaranteed to make us miserable.

[28 : 27] That reminds us that God is good, and it should make us far more determined to live by the words of the 10th commandment. So that's our first reason as to why we should keep it.

It's essential for our own personal happiness. But secondly, the 10th commandment is essential for how we are to live as God's people. And we keep returning to this, but I want us to keep on emphasizing the fact that God wants us to live as a collective people. We live in an age that is individualistic. And again, we have to be counter cultural here, because God does not want us to be individualistic. He wants us to be a collective people. And the 10 commandments are not just guidelines for how God wants each person to live. They're guidelines as to how he wants his society to be, how he wants people to live as a whole. And that principle still applies. We are still God's covenant people if we are trusting in Jesus Christ. And God wants this principle of a collective solidarity to shape our day to day behavior. Coveting is outlawed because at the heart of coveting is self. And that is the opposite, the absolute opposite of how God wants his people to be. Selfishness has no place in God's kingdom. We are a collective people. We are, we are to be, to be thinking of ourselves in that collective sense. It's a fundamental theological reality that is emphasized by scripture. We are one family. We are born again and adopted as God's children. Those great doctrines of regeneration and adoption are culminating in the fact that we are one family collectively sharing together. We are one body whereby we are all part of this body with Christ at our head. And we are fellow members. We are one building the church of Christ.

The church is not these four walls and this ceiling above our heads. It is you sitting here as the people of God. That is the church. We are a collective people. We are Christ's bride. That's why Paul writes the Ephesians saying we are members of one another. And God is highlighting this theological reality that we are a collective people. And he is saying I don't want you just to be aware of that on paper. I want it to shape the way you live your life. And that's why the New Testament tells us to share our possessions. That's why it tells us to give to those who are in need. That's why it tells us to put the needs of other people before our own. And we read all about that in Colossians chapter 3. We are going to read verse 5 and then pick up again at verse 12. And think in terms of covetousness and selfishness as we read these words. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolatry. And picking up at verse 12. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another if one has a complaint against one another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you. So you also must forgive. And above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. You see the comparison in these lists. The things that we are to put to death are all have a selfish desire at their heart.

Immorality, impurity, passion, covetousness. It's all about satisfying our own sinful cravings whereas the list of what we are to put on all involve putting other people first, showing compassion and kindness. Humility is putting ourselves lower than others. Having patience with those who are in difficulty bearing with each other. There is such a collective emphasis. God wants us to put each other's needs before our own. To think unselfishly and to remember that we are one family.

And this is reminding us that covetousness is going against everything that we now are as God's people. It's going against everything that Christ has made us. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 5 3 covetousness must not even be named among you. It's an unspeakable sin for the people of God.

[33 : 37] It should not be there. The key point is that faith in Christ makes us different to the world.

Faith in Christ makes us different. That's why we're saying the world might be going that way but we're going that way because faith in Christ involves repenting, turning, changing and no longer are we heading for death. We are heading for life. And so if there is supposed to be a difference in the Christian, the key indicator of that is love for one another. And coveting basically says I love myself and I'm going to have whatever I want. The way of life for the Christian is I love God and I love my neighbour. And we must, must keep these things in our minds when the temptation to covet attacks us and arises. The 10th commandment is essential for our personal happiness. It's also essential for how we are to live as God's people. I remind you also that sometimes you see people, they can almost drift into a sort of spiritual covetousness where sometimes you can see blessing in one area and not in another. And sometimes you see friction between the groups where people think, oh well why aren't we getting that? And why is that happening there? And well I'm not so sure about that. And you can see this tension. I don't even need to see how inappropriate that is. We are one and what God does in one place he's doing for the whole kingdom and we collectively rejoice in all of these things. The 10th commandment should shape us as a church. But the third thing I'm going to say this is the last point of this evening is this.

The 10th commandment is essential for our relationship with God. Did you notice the word that Paul used to describe covetousness? Did you notice what he used? It's in that text there.

I'd love to get you to put your hands up but I won't. What does he say? Covetousness is idolatry. Covetousness is idolatry. It's the same thing in Ephesians 5. You'll be sure of this that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous that is an idolater has no inheritance in the kingdom of God. To covet is an act of idolatry because it's making a God out of something else.

It's basically saying I don't have enough and therefore it's making an idol out of this material thing that we must have and it's pushing God into the background. Do you notice here the significance of this? The 10 commandments have come full circle because the first commandment says you shall have no gods before me and the 10th commandment is do not covet which Paul is telling us is do not have an idol, do not have any other gods before God. The whole thing has come full circle.

[37 : 23] You break the 10th commandment, you've broken the first. And that's how serious covetousness is. Covetousness is a lack of satisfaction in God and not only that it's displaying a lack of trust in God because God has promised to provide for you and God as he was sending his people into the promised land when he gave these commandments he promised to provide for them and he still promises the same thing Jesus tells us about that. Do not be anxious in what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear for the gentiles seek after these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you and so we have been reminded that God has promised to provide and we simply trust him and lean on him for all of these things but more than anything else this is reminding us that we should be remembering what we have when we are in Christ Jesus.

It's so easy to forget that. It's so easy to be caught up in all the different things that are going on that we forget just what we have because the gospel is a message of abundant grace. The gospel is where we find riches that are beyond measure not material riches but spiritual riches, eternal riches, treasure in heaven. That's what we have when we trust in Jesus Christ and one day in eternity we will look back at our time on earth and everything that we had and everything that we didn't have and we'll say that is nothing. It's nothing because what we have there will just be beyond anything that we can grasp or understand. This is what Paul speaks about in the words that we quoted at the very start. We know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose for those who he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and those who he predestined he also called and those who he called he also justified and those who he justified he also glorified. What shall we say to these things if God is for us who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? If God is for you then no material lack is in any way against you. If God is for you then what else do you need? If God is for you then what does it matter whether you have or you don't have? If God is for you nothing, nothing can be against you and this means that if we are trusting in Jesus we don't need to covet anything because we have everything that really matters. If you are a Christian you have everything you have the fullness of God's redemptive plan through his son Jesus Christ. You think of God from eternity to eternity planning every detail of salvation and filling in every single component that builds up this marvelous plan and picture of a salvation that is perfect in every single aspect. You go through the Bible you go through the doctrines of Scripture and you will see that at every corner and at every location and at every piece of it is utterly astonishing with the fullness and the magnificence of God's grace and mercy and love throughout every detail of it. The whole package is phenomenal and it's huge all huge if you are trusting in Jesus and so we definitely don't need to covet we definitely don't need to covet and so often our problems don't arise from what we lack our problems arise from forgetting what we have so covetousness is this give you the tenth commandment and avoiding covetousness is essential

for our own personal happiness it's essential for how we are to live as God's people and it's essential for our relationship with God you can see so clearly why God would give this command the Christian has no need to covet because they have riches beyond measure the amazing thing is that if you are not a Christian yet you can have it too you can have it all you can have it all let me ask you a question if you are still not yet sure of your salvation do you covet salvation do you look at Christians and think I wish I had that do you covet salvation you can answer that in your own mind but I'm going to ask another question is it right to covet salvation I've spent the whole evening saying don't covet is it right to covet salvation well what do you think you might say to yourself well of course it's good to covet salvation because it's the greatest need that we have we want it what what more could you want and surely it's a good thing to covet salvation but you know

I am going to say that it is not right to covet salvation and the reason I'm going to say that is because you don't need to covet it you can have it you can have it right now if you simply ask Jesus for it you do not need to look on with a longing in your heart because all this can be you you