

## The Ten Commandments: Yesterday and Today

# You Shall Not Covet

“You shall not covet. . . .” (Exodus 20:17).

“. . . and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).

WE come now to the last of the Ten Commandments. This one is different from all the others. The other commandments deal with *actions*; this one deals with *attitudes*. The other commandments deal with *deeds*; this one deals with *desires*. In order to enforce this commandment, we will have to take the policeman off the corner and put him in the heart.

The commandment forbids covetousness. Covetousness is a horrible sin. It is probably the hardest sin to get someone to admit. I have heard many confessions of sin over the years. Yet I cannot recall having someone confess this sin more than once. What does it mean to covet? It means to desire that which belongs to someone else. If I look at your house or car and say, “I wish I had a house or car like that,” that is not covetousness. But, if I look at your house or car and say, “I wish I had *that*,” that is covetousness because I would be depriving you of what is yours. This commandment clearly states, “Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor’s.”

Let me clearly state that this commandment does not forbid desire; it forbids inordinate desire. Paul once said to the Corinthians, “Covet the best gifts.” It is right to covet good health, a good education, a good name, kindness, a sweet spirit, and a Christian character. It is all right to covet the privilege of work, the opportunity to serve God, a chance to help others, etc. This command forbids coveting that which belongs to someone else or having an inordinate desire.

### I. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT COVETOUSNESS?

Notice these Scriptures:

And He said to them, “Beware, and be on guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5).

We are told two truths in these verses. First, a covetous man is an idolater. He may not worship a graven image, but he worships some material object. Second, a covetous man will never enter heaven. Why? A covetous man has set his heart upon earthly things, and in order to be saved, the heart must be set upon heavenly things.

Specifically, what does the tenth commandment say? You are not to covet your neighbor’s

house—real estate. You are not to covet your neighbor's wife—a person. You are not to covet your neighbor's servants—a service. You are not to covet your neighbor's ox or ass—personal property. The commandment ends by saying, "You are not to covet anything which belongs to someone else." This covers the whole field. God does not say it is wrong for you to wish for the better things of life, but sin comes in when you wish for that which belongs to someone else. Look now at 1 Timothy 6:9, 10. This sin will cause one to lie, steal, cheat, or kill.

A rich man who had been in the restaurant business lay dying. His family leaned close to hear his last words. He said, "Remember, slice the ham thin. Slice the ham thin." This sin had kicked his soul to death.

## II. WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF A COVETOUS MAN?

A man is covetous when *his thoughts are wholly taken up with this world*. This man never thinks of God, never reads his Bible, never goes to church, never prays, never thinks about the fact that he must meet God in the judgment. He gives all of his time, thought, and attention to material things. The world today is full of such men. They are continually craving the things of the flesh. They never look up to God, they seemingly never have a spiritual thought, and they forget that the soul must live on forever. Maybe this covetous man does come to church on Sunday morning. But he does not think of the gospel in a sweet song or a good sermon. He is thinking of business. He is making plans for the following week. He is thinking of some business trip he is going to make. Many today are so taken up by business, pleasure, amusement, sports, and social life that they have not time for the things of the soul. Jesus said, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Judas was this kind of man. Are your thoughts taken up with this world only?

A man is covetous when *his conversation is all about the world*. Some men talk only about sports. Some only talk about business, stocks, and bonds. For years they never mention God, Christ, or the Bible. There is something wrong with the man who talks only about secular things. A man was in the hospital. He has a serious surgery. The

preacher went to see him; he asked him if he would like to have prayer. The man said, "I don't care. You can if you want to." That man's thoughts were never on God. All of his thoughts, all of his life, and all of his speech were on the things of this world. A real Christian likes to think and talk about the goodness of God and his hope in Christ.

A man is covetous when he is *willing to exchange his soul for material things*. Consider this story:

And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I kept all these things from my youth up." And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property (Mark 10:17-22).

Notice what this young man had: He was *eager*—he came running. He was *humble*—he knelt. He was *courageous*—he did it in public. He had *discernment*—he called Jesus, "Good Master." He was *spiritually interested*—he was not coming to be healed. He was not coming for more money or power. He was morally clean. He kept the commandments. Jesus saw that this young man had a fatal flaw—he was eaten up with covetousness. I do not think the young man even knew he had a problem. See how it ends: He walked sorrowfully away. This is a sad story.

Now let us look at Luke 12:15-21:

And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required

of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

I know men today who would like to be saved and go to heaven, but they love the things of this world too much.

A man is covetous when *his heart is so set on the world that he will do anything to get it*. He looks upon something and greatly desires it, his mouth waters for it, and the time comes when he is willing to do anything to get it.

This reminds me of the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard in the Old Testament. Ahab wanted that vineyard and offered to buy it. But Naboth could not sell it. Ahab's response was to go to bed and pout. When Jezebel saw this, she got it for him. Oh, what a covetous person will do to get the things of this world!

There is also the story of David, the man after God's own heart. He coveted the beautiful wife of one of his soldiers. His covetousness led to his stealing her and placing her husband in the front line of the battle so he would meet death. He was guilty of both murder and adultery. A great sin was born out of a covetous eye. But God did not allow this sin to go unpunished.

Other Bible characters were guilty of covetousness: Adam and Eve coveted the forbidden fruit. Cain coveted the acceptance which God gave Abel. Lot coveted the best land and lost everything. Achan coveted gold, stealing the forbidden treasures. Judas coveted the money bag and sold Jesus for money. In every case, covetousness brought suffering and sometimes death.

### III. HOW DOES COVETOUSNESS CAUSE US TO BREAK THE OTHER NINE COMMANDMENTS?

Go over the nine and notice how covetousness causes us to break them. If a man is covetous, if he breaks the tenth commandment, if he loves money, all of this may lead to the breaking of any or all of the other nine commandments. No wonder God brings the Decalogue to a close by saying, "Thou shalt not covet."

### IV. HOW CAN I OVERCOME COVETOUSNESS?

We can overcome covetousness by making a *commitment to Christ*. He will give you a new heart. Paul said, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Think of all you have in Christ! I feel sorry for people who have everything but Christ. Did you know that not wanting something is just as good as owning it? In fact, it is better. You do not have to maintain it!

We overcome it by a *containment of Christ*. Get Jesus in you. Learn to think as He thought and act as He acted. If you keep Him within, you can overcome covetousness. With Christ in you, what a difference!

### CONCLUSION

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds (Matthew 16:26). You will never find satisfaction until you find it in Jesus.

—J. Wayne Kilpatrick

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## *Illustrations*

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### *The Meaning of Life*

The novelist Peter De Vries makes one of his characters say, "They feel that life is like a great safe; it has a combination, but the combination has been locked inside and there is no way to get at it."

### *Faith and Evangelism*

Dr. Elmer Homrighausen, former Dean of Princeton Seminary, notes that "a decline in evangelistic zeal is always the result of a loss of dynamic faith in the Gospel."

### *Keeping Full*

D. L. Moody used to say, "I am a leaky vessel, and I need to keep under the tap."

### *The Evangelism Equation*

The great apostle to the Islamic world, Samuel Zwemer, once wrote, "Evangelism is a collision of souls. We may measure its effect by an equation:  $mv = i$  or mass x velocity = impact." If we let *mass* stand for the truth of the gospel, then the *impact* of the gospel on the world will be in direct proportion to the *velocity*—the urgency—with which it is delivered.

*The Christian Persuader,*  
Leighton Ford

### *An Educated Bad Man*

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "An ignorant bad man may steal from the freight cars on the rail-

road. If you educate that man without changing his heart, all you're doing is making it possible for him to steal the whole railroad."

### *No Royal Road*

According to ancient historians, the great Greek mathematician Euclid wrote a formidable thirteen volume text for the study of geometry. But Ptolemy I, King of Egypt, wished to learn the subject without laboring through so many books. As a king, he was accustomed to having his way made easy by his servants, so he asked if there was a shortcut to mastering geometry. Euclid's reply to the throne was terse: "There is no royal road to learning."