Section: Commands (Law)

Wednesday, 11/29/2023

Steve Obert

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q54. Why does God give the tenth commandment: You shall not covet?**

So we will be content and satisfied with what God has provided, trusting in His plan.

**Exodus 20:17 “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.”**

**Let’s pray: Father, our desire as Christians should always be to you first and foremost. When we trust in, search for; pursue the world’s gifts above and beyond our pursuit of you, we have given our hearts over to covetousness. This is such a dangerous place to be and we are desperate for the work of Your Spirit in our hearts to reveal to us this dangerous and deceitful sin. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and convict our hearts tonight through your Spirit if we are found to be loving the things of this world above you! We are desperate for your gracious intervention here! Thank you Lord for this time together tonight in your word. It is in your Son’s name Jesus’ name we pray amen.**

**INTRO:**

What does COVET mean? *Yearn to possess or have (something).* *To desire something.*

Here are a few synonyms-

synonyms: desire, yearn for, crave, have one's heart set on, want, wish for, long for, hanker after/for, hunger after/for, thirst for

The easiest definition or word for covet in the English language is strong desire. Epithumia is the Greek word for covet.

The word epithumia does not translate 1 for 1 in the English language and that’s why you’ll hear me use multiple words like desire, lust, etc… Is coveting good or bad?

Is it wrong to have strong desires? The command here in Exodus is to not have strong desire for things that belong to your neighbor, and are not yours.

I want to do a little test and I’ll need you guys to participate by raising your hands. Ready? How many of you own a home? How many of you would like to someday? How many of you are married? How many of you would like to be someday? How many of you can legally drive a car? How many of you would like to someday? How many of you have children? How many of you would like to someday? How many of you have a good income? How many of you would like to have a good income one day? How many of you have something in your future you would like to have that you have not obtained yet? So by strongly desiring those things do you break this commandment? Listen carefully because I intend to unpack this clearly for you tonight.

One important note that I need to cover first. Your desires will never be for the things of God if you have not been given faith. Here’s why I am saying this; if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and you have not trusted into Him, His life, death, and resurrection, then you have no hope of obeying this command! Realize this: If every lust you have was fulfilled here and now you would never be satisfied! God alone can truly satisfy the relentless desires of your heart.

This is a famous quote from one of the richest men who have ever lived. It goes like this; when asked once, "How much money is enough money?" He replied, "Just a little bit more." That was J.D. Rockefeller. You may have all the desires of your heart fulfilled in this life but if the utmost desire of your heart is not God you will spend eternity suffering and this life will be the closest thing to heaven you ever experience. Do not let the deceitful lusts of this world draw your heart to thinking that there is one ounce of true fulfillment in them. What you truly need is faith in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Here’s what I aim to do with our time tonight;

I have 2 main points, 1st I will unpack what covetousness is and how it affects us, 2nd I want us to understand how to kill/mortify/put to death this heart centered sinful desire. So again, we’ll unpack what covetousness is and how it affect us, and how we mortify this sin?

**POINT 1:**

What covetousness is and how it affect us?

Covetousness, as it is used in this commandment, is your heart’s strong desire for something that belongs to another. Of course this commandment is a summary. The larger scope of this commandment could be defined as this: **Covetousness is your hearts over desire for something God has not given to you or given you the legal means to procure for yourself.**

So coveting can be you wanting something someone else has or wanting something you can’t get legally. When I say legally I mean according to God’s law (which also includes the law of the land). Coveting can also be the wanting of something too much, where it draws your attention day and night and drives every part of you until you have obtained it.

Let us also note though, you should see that there is an appropriate way to desire something. It is not sinful to desire to remain single so you have more devoted time and attention to God’s ministry, or (if you’re eligible to be married) to desire a godly spouse, or to desire to be fruitful and multiply with your spouse, or to desire sanctification, or to desire healthy employment opportunities, or to desire your daily bread, or to desire a helpful Sunday sermon………do you see a theme here? These are all things that GOD has told us are good. These are things that GOD has called us to enjoy or strive for in His word. So, desire, in and of itself is not sinful if it is for something God has given us the freedom to pursue and enjoy or commanded us to seek. Our desire for good things becomes sinful desire if we **over desire** them—when we long for it in an unhealthy way, when we idolize it, when we use improper means to get it, and so on.

The point is, not all desire is sinful—there is more we could say here but we’ll leave it there for the sake of time.

**Covetousness is your heart’s over desire for something God has not given to you or given you the legal means to procure for yourself.** So now that we know what covetousness is, let’s get to the meat of this first point. How does covetousness affect us?

To understand properly how our desires affect us we must understand where our desires come from. What is the active agent in coveting something? Your heart! This desire this wanting or longing for something, comes directly from your heart. I don’t mean the organ that beats blood through your system I mean the biblical use of the word. The Scriptures use the word heart to mean many things but mostly it is the inner self where our thoughts, desires, beliefs, and convictions come from. Your heart is the very thing that you will see displayed openly when you stand before the Lord. Why does this matter?

[**Revelation 2:23**](http://bible.knowing-jesus.com/Revelation/2/23)**b and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.**

Our hearts are the very thing that produces our actions. God searches the minds and hearts and God will give each according to our deeds. You see our deeds come from our hearts. Sometimes we can appear to have done good deeds to the rest of the world but in reality we do them for the wrong motivations, with the wrong hearts. For example, everything an unbeliever does is done with the wrong motives, for they never do it for God the very One who created them.

Indeed they cannot do things for God because they do not have saving faith in Jesus (Hebrews 11:66 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him). This corruption of heart in believers and unbelievers may get past people in general but it never gets past God.

Here’s an even scarier thought, our very words proceed from our hearts.

**Matthew 12:** [**33**](http://biblehub.com/matthew/12-33.htm)**“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.**[**34**](http://biblehub.com/matthew/12-34.htm)**You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** [**35**](http://biblehub.com/matthew/12-35.htm)**The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.**[**36**](http://biblehub.com/matthew/12-36.htm)**I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,**[**37**](http://biblehub.com/matthew/12-37.htm)**for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”**

You and I will be held accountable for every careless word we speak, and the reason we are held accountable is that our words come forth from our hearts; they are a direct reflection of our hearts.

By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. This should be terrifying for almost every single person in here. This is not a lecture on words or judgment but the root of covetousness is a heart issue and I want us to see that our hearts are a big deal here.

You could rightly say that a breaking of the first commandment is a breaking of all other commandments. I submit to you that you could also rightly say, the breaking of any commandment is a breaking of the tenth. For example, if you steal you have coveted something that belongs to someone else. If you bear false witness it is because you’ve coveted a certain reputation or the downfall of someone else’s. If you dishonor your parents it is because of your selfish desires (covetousness) for what you wanted instead of obedience to your authority. If you commit adultery this action began as a desire or coveting of someone else’s spouse or a spouse that was not yours. If you don’t love God above all things, you are coveting something. This is called idolatry, but the desire that led you to the action of idolatry was covetousness. You desired for yourself something God forbade and you placed that thing on the throne of your life as a god. When you sin you are coveting, your desires are the root of your breaking of any of God’s commands.

When you break the other commandments you break this one because you desire something God has forbid and that desire is what led to your sin. The point is all of the commandments reveal your heart, and your heart is where your desires come from.

There is a really neat illustration from an old dead guy that goes like this. This is my own edited or simplified version of the illustration.

“It is ok to use the world and its goods/gifts and to desire so much of it that you are not in poverty **Prov. 30:7-10** [**7**](http://biblehub.com/proverbs/30-7.htm)**Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:**[**8**](http://biblehub.com/proverbs/30-8.htm)**Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,**[**9**](http://biblehub.com/proverbs/30-9.htm)**lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.** In this sense it is ok to desire things of the world, it’s also ok to desire the things of the world to honor God with works of mercy through them **Prov. 3:9** [**9**](http://biblehub.com/proverbs/3-9.htm)**Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce;** But all the danger is when the world gets into your heart. Water is useful for the sailing of a ship: it is in fact impossible to sail a ship without water, but all the danger is when water gets into the ship; so the fear is, when the world gets into the heart. Thou shalt not covet.”

You see the heart is the point of the 10th commandment. The other commandments given in the second table of the law are addressing the physical doing of something.

Of course we have said all along that these laws are summaries, and they cover the state of your heart as well as your literal actions in your obedience.

In fact, when Jesus delivered the sermon on the mount, He left us no doubt about the laws having just as much to do with your heart as with your literal actions.

However, the 10th commandment specifically addresses the heart. Here is the point, what you covet or desire is what leads you to sin.

**James 1:**[**13**](http://biblehub.com/james/1-13.htm)**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.**[**14**](http://biblehub.com/james/1-14.htm)**But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.**[**15**](http://biblehub.com/james/1-15.htm)**Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

Let’s unpack this verse for a second. You are tempted by the desires you have, your desires will entice and lure you toward this temptation. When your desire conceives with the temptation, when your desire joins temptation 9the opportunity to sin that is present), then sin is the baby that is born from this union of desire and temptation. Just look at the language here from James, your desire literally unites to or conceives with the said temptation and it gives birth, like a husband and wife who have conceived or joined themselves in a one flesh union can bring about the miracle of life, when your covetousness and temptation conceive it brings about the opposite child and it’s name is sin. What does this child bring when it is fully grown? **DEATH!** Oh Christian would you see that the battle for your life begins way back here at the desires of your heart instead of merely trying so hard to kill the baby of sin after you’ve been deceived by your OWN coveting.

This 10th commandment is where the battle begins! You see your desires- your coveting- is what lures you to temptation and when the two join you to break these other commandments.

**ILL: I have a favorite lure, I love to fish and I love to take people fishing. A few years back I went on a trip with my then future father in law to Mammoth lakes for a weekend of fishing. We stopped in Bishop at a local tackle shop and the guy behind the counter said you’ve got to buy this particular lure. This particular lure is often called a spoon style lure and I never liked these types of lures. I stuck with my panther martins and my foxtails but something in this guy’s eyes told me I need to try it out. I have never had so much success with a lure in my life, in fact I began buying an extra one of these lures every time I saw them at the store because what kept happening was that others would see me doing so well when I was fishing and they would inevitably ask what I was using. I had literally grown so used to this question that I would take this lure out unopened and hand it to them.**

**Here’s the unique thing about this lure. When a fish is not hungry, it won’t eat. So no matter what kind of lure you have when a fish is not hungry it will simply watch your lure go by. I’ve seen this happen many times where I can literally see the fish and I nearly hit it with my lure but it does not care and shows zero interest in chasing it. However this lure looks like an injured fish and fish desire to eliminate their competition even more than their desire to fill their bellies. A fish will strike at an injured fish even if it is not hungry. The key to this lure is finding out what the fish desired most! When the fish’s desire connects to the temptation of this lure it leads to their death.**

**This is the way we are tempted, when our desires find the thing they want the most they lure us to the temptation and when we enter into the temptation we join our desire with the temptation and it produces sin and ALWAYS aims for death.**

In the James passage, the word desire is from the Greek word epithumia, it is the same word used in exodus for the 10th commandment. You will and do live your life by the desires you have. If I desire attention from others I will do what gets me that attention. I can show you what you desire by watching what you do. Every time we sin we are proving that our hearts desired or coveted something above our desire to obey and honor God. Your desires will give you up through your actions. What you do will reveal what you desire. That is why this commandment is so important. Address your desires before they join to temptation and give birth to the baby of sin. **This warning in the law of God to not covet is God’s gracious way of pointing us to where our battle starts.**

The 10th commandment seems to me to be a sort of bookend to the commandments. **You cannot keep the first while breaking the 10th and you cannot keep the 10th while breaking the first. They both seem to get right to the heart.** Let’s look at the Exodus verse again

[**17**](http://biblehub.com/exodus/20-17.htm)**“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.”**

There is a really interesting thing going on in this commandment, notice the focus here is not toward actions but towards desires. This is huge! The verse does not say do not do anything sinful out of your covetous heart, no it actually says do not covet. Now clearly this does not mean just have no desires! But rather the point here is do not wrongly desire that which God has not given to you (for example, that which belongs to someone else). This type of sinful desire or coveting is what ***leads*** to sinful actions. The reason we are not to long for what is not ours, or what our God has not given to us, is because it reveals our dissatisfaction in God.

Your heart will find a way to get that thing you’re coveting. It will lure you toward temptation and if sin has its way it will end in your death. In John Owens book on the nature and power of temptation he hits on the deceitfulness of the heart and the danger of the deceitfulness that is inside of us. This is a paraphrase of John Owen.

**Your heart is deceitful and tricks you from within. Like a fort that is fortified and has all its walls strong and thick, it will be impenetrable from outside, however if there is corruption inside the fort it will fall. You must address your heart’s desires because even if you have put up all the barriers in the world to protect you from sin if your heart desires sin it will already be inside of the defenses you put up and those defenses will be useless.**

**Owen writes there are traitors in our hearts, ready to take part, to join with every temptation and to join with all of them; yes, to solicit and bribe temptations to do the work as traitors incite an enemy. Do not flatter yourselves that you should hold out; there are secret lusts that lie lurking in your hearts, which perhaps now do not stir, but as soon as any temptation comes to you, this untiring lust will rise, it will riot against you, cry, disquiet, seduce, and NEVER GIVE UP until it has either been killed or it has been satisfied.**

**Owen goes on to say, we would not trust anything that has proven to be deceitful or guile. However, we trust our heart which is “deceitful above all things” Jer. 17:9. It has a thousand shifts and treacheries that it uses when it comes to the trials it will chase after every temptation. Generally, men’s hearts deceive them no more often than they trust in them, and they never fail to trust in them again and again.**

You have no doubt heard these sayings, follow your heart, trust in your gut, do what makes you happy. This is worldly wisdom that leads you to death, this happens because your heart covets the things that God hasn’t given you. If a known liar was telling you to go into a dark alley with him and he was promising joy and riches but you knew him to be a liar there is no way you’d follow him. Know your heart to be a liar, do not follow it into that dark alley.

Don’t trust the wisdom of a deceitful world when it screams to you to follow your heart, rather trust in God who will never leave nor forsake those whom He loves.

For all of mankind, covetousness is as dangerous as an enemy already inside your defenses so that you’re hopeless to stop it. The boxer who gets inside the other boxer’s reach and is able to still work is the boxer who wins. Covetousness is inside your reach. Leave it there and it will be victorious. This is what covetousness is and how it affects us.

**I can’t think of a greater illustration than the Trojan horse…The only way to break a fortified city is to be let in and do it when you’ve already passed the protection. Your heart is already past your defenses and you need to be aware of it!**

So, what do we do, what hope do we have? If we’ve already let the enemy in how do we stop it now?

**Point 2:** How do we kill this heart centered sinful desire?

We must again begin with FAITH, apart from faith you will never kill this. Since it is impossible for you to generate faith on your own I implore you to plead to God. Ask Him, beg Him, chase after Him and it may be in His sovereign will to give you faith. In fact Hebrews 11 says something very applicable to this point.

**Hebrews 11:1-7 1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. 4By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.**

If you do not trust into God then the rest of this will not be able to help you. When I implore you to seek Him earnestly it is because this Hebrews passage says you must believe God exists (that is have a true trust of Jesus) and that He rewards those who seek Him.

For those of you whom God has saved, those whom God has caused to be born again, you should start with focusing your eyes towards Him. Notice Christ and how in His life His focus was almost always toward eternal things, towards the heavens where His Father reigns. We likewise should intentionally focus our eyes toward God and the things of God. Our only true defense against the covetousness of our hearts is to be so fully satisfied and content in God that these other desires are choked out.

There is an excellent old hymn titled, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”. Some of you may know the original hymn, or perhaps some of you may know the more modern version of the song. Perhaps some of you don’t have a clue of what I am talking about. I want to read the first verse to you from the hymn because it gets my point across so well.

O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see?

There’s light for a look at the Savior, And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.

Christian may your heart would be so enamored, so consumed by the beauty of the glorious grace of God proven to us in and through the finished work of Jesus, that no deceitful desire could ever convince you to turn your eyes from Jesus the giver of life, to the world and sin the giver of death. You must desire the spiritual things of God more than the deceitful desires of the world. Pray for a mind that focuses on God. Yes believers, plead with God as well that he would give you a heart and mind focused on Him and His Glory! Lord, let the power of the Spirit draw our hearts upward. Lord, dig the world out of our heart; teach us how to be in the world, and not love it: how to hold it in our hand, and not let it pour into our hearts.

**Our best remedy for covetousness is contentment.** The best way to be content is to trust that the condition, which God by his providence has carved out for you, is the best condition for you. If God had seen fit for us to have something more or something different we would have it. Perhaps if God had given you whatever it is you so strongly desire it would have led to your destruction; it is hard to carry a full cup without spilling! Oh how hard it is for a rich man to enter into heaven (Matthew 19:24). Too much of a good thing can be a trap and a good thing at the wrong time can ruin you!

The boat loves its sails for they catch the wind and allow it to move, however too much sail and too much wind could cause the boat to be overturned. By trusting in God, by believing that the position God has placed you in is the best for you; it will cause you to be content.

**Romans 8:28-30 28And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29For those whom 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.**

**30And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**

Christian do you believe God’s word?! Do you believe what God declares here in Romans chapter 8? This passage isn’t just for extreme moments. Christian God works everything for your good. This reality should, it must, cause us to be satisfied that the One who holds all things together by the word of His mouth has you in the very place you’re in for your own good. Sinfully desiring something God has not given you and desiring it in such a way that you’d be willing to disobey God to get it reveals that you do not (or at least in the moment are not) fully trusting Him.

A content person does not desire things that are not theirs for they are satisfied with what they have. A content person is satisfied with the riches of the glory of God even when according to the world around them they truly have nothing else.

Christian, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1). There is no better antidote against coveting that which is another’s than being content with that which God has given us as our own. There is no better example of this in scripture than we find in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Turn to Phil 4 now with me!

While you’re pulling up this passage I want to tell you we will read a very familiar and regularly misused verse here in this passage. Please pay attention to the content when you study your bible because taking things out of context will lead to all sorts of false understandings. The verse that finishes the passage we will look at has been grossly misused and misunderstood.

Philippians 4:10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 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. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

You see Paul was thankful for the Philippians’ desire to support him perhaps financially or in some other necessary way, and you can be thankful for good gifts and enjoy them so long as you enjoy them to the right ends. But Paul said you need not worry about me, I am content in every situation that God has placed me in because my contentment or strength is in Christ. I can endure suffering, hunger, and need **because I have Jesus**. I can enjoy plenty and abundance **because I have Jesus**. If all the treasure of the world were at my feet I’d want Jesus and if all the weight of the world and suffering of sin were on my chest I HAVE JESUS.

This verse does not tell you that God will give you the strength to be a professional sports player. This verse does not tell you God will give you the strength to do anything you desire. That would take this verse out of context, no Paul is saying I’ve found the secret to contentment, and **it is Jesus**!

Are you looking for something to fill a void in your heart? Look to Jesus. Are you looking for something to give you worth value meaning? Look to Jesus. Paul’s contentment, the secret to avoiding lusts and desires that lead to sin and death, is the strength of enjoying Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. This is why we focus on the gospel. This is why we constantly remind you who you are and who God is and what God has done for those who trust in Him. When your desire for something that is bad arises put it to death by reminding your heart **what you already have in Jesus**. Preach the gospel to yourself!

I really like how Young’s literal translation reads for this verse:

11 not that in respect of want I say [it], for I did learn in the things in which I am -- to be content; 12 I have known both to be abased, and I have known to abound; in everything and in all things I have been initiated, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want.13 For all things I have strength, in Christ's strengthening me;

Be strengthened against your heart’s desire to covet by your satisfaction in Jesus. Replace you lusts for things that lead to death with the desire for the giver of life. Paul said, “it is the strength Jesus gives me that brings me contentment.” I am satisfied because of Jesus, I am satisfied in Jesus. The gospel truth is that God gave His only son to save sinners from their deserved wrath! If we would trust in the finished work of Jesus on our behalf we would get the eternal rewards of the perfect Christ. If you have been saved, you have all the treasures of heaven waiting for you. The eternal treasure of being in the presence of the thing your heart desires most: JESUS.

Eternity with God what other treasures could possibly outshine this?! The things of this world will rot and die one day. The things of this world, its treasures and gifts will end. Hebrews encourages our contentment in the God who never leaves you nor forsakes you.

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.”

Are you tired of being let down and left empty by the desires of your heart? Then trust in God, turn the desires of your heart toward God, He will never leave you nor forsake you. He is the only all satisfying fulfillment to your desires.

Oh that our hearts would be so in Love with Jesus that all other affections would be strangely dim!

Let’s pray: