

The Words of a Covenant

Part 11 - The Tenth Commandment

July 5, 1998

Exodus 20:17

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." NKJV

- **Review and Introduction**

As we come to the end of our study of the Ten Commandments, let's review the foundational principles we discussed in the prologue:

- The Law is summarized by the command to love; - Romans 13:9
- The Law contains the words of a covenant document;
- The Law of God is liberty;
- Calvin's Three Uses of the Law

A tutor for the unregenerate

A restraint of the degenerate

A pattern for the regenerate

- **Definitions**

- Covetousness is an ungodly desire to obtain that which belongs to another. Notice we are not speaking of imitating others in their faithfulness; this is commanded and esteemed in the Scriptures. Covetousness is a desire to possess something by causing another to dispossess it.
- As we will see, covetousness is closely tied to greed, discontentment and idolatry. Both of which begin in the heart and manifest themselves in debasing actions. This commandment primarily pertains to an attitude of the heart, not just an external conformity to the law. When this sin is full grown, it manifests itself through stealing, worship of that which is not God, laziness, abrogation of responsibility by chasing after fleeting riches.

- **The Basis for the Commandment**

- **Covetousness is Enmity With God** - *¹Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.⁴ Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:1-4* At the heart of covetousness is a denial of the sovereignty of God. It denies that He is sovereign over all things - large and small. It refuses to give thanks for the current station in life as though God was not neither merciful or generous. The covetous one believes that he deserves better and this attitude is indicative of poor theology.
- **Covetousness is Idolatrous** - *²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.⁵ Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.⁶ Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,⁷ in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. Colossians 3:2-7* When desire for something consumes someone to the point of disobeying God, by their actions they have elevated the importance of the thing above God. When we attribute that level of importance to any created thing it then becomes the recipient of that worship to which God alone is due.
- **Covetousness is Characteristic of the Non-Elect** - *⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor sodomites,¹¹ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11* Frequently, we think too lightly of this prohibition and give covetousness different names like "ambition" or "frugality" and we candy-coat that which really is hated by God. As Paul says in Ephesians 5:1-7, this sin (among others) should

not even be named among Christians.

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- **Application**

- Covetousness is a refusal to give thanks. Not only a refusal to give thanks for that which God has given us or spared us from, but also (and primarily) a refusal to give thanks for that with which God has blessed your neighbor. Yes, this means we are to give thanks for that which God has given or done for our neighbor.
- It is possible to covet almost anything. The Lord gives us a list of things in the commandment and then gives a blanket prohibition against coveting anything which belongs to your neighbor. This can include coveting their spiritual gifts, their reputation, their kids, their occupation, or even their appearance. Covetousness is nothing that we as Christians should coddle. Rather, you who are spiritual, should go and correct a brother or sister caught in this sin. If they persist in their grumbling, greed or refusal to give thanks and don't respond to church discipline, then they are to be put out of the church and avoided (1 Cor 5:9-13). By refusing to gently, lovingly correct, we are dwelling amongst evil and fall into idolatry ourselves by worshipping that which looks like keeping the peace but is really hatred toward God and our neighbor.
- We must be wary of allowing ourselves to play with this sin. Those who are condemned by this sin are those whose hearts have been trained to covet. (2 Peter 2:12-17) Refusal to confess, repent, believe and give thanks are characteristic of those whose end is destruction. (Psalm 10:3)
- We should be characterized as the most thankful of people. As those who hold dear the truths of God's absolute sovereignty, and our total depravity apart from Him, we should be the most thankful of all because we have been given eternal blessing when we deserved death.
- Hard work is frequently a deterrent for covetousness. The man who works hard, knows what it means to see the fruit of his hands and that God has built the world in such a way that (in His customary providence) we are to be producers. Some men are blessed with an abundance of fruit, others are blessed with a smaller harvest. The lazy man wants the abundance without work. Proverbs 21:25-26
- Rejoice and give thanks for the disparity that God has given the world. To some, He has given great abundance of riches for which they will give an account. To others He has given less for which they too will give an account. Give thanks for the God-given disparity that exists and be faithful in whatever you have or do. Avoid ungodly egalitarian tendencies that will march before the throne of God and accuse Him of misbehavior by not being fair.