

COMMANDMENTS, TEMPLES, AND US

Today's readings we have just heard contain 1) a familiar story of Jesus in the temple, which has been depicted in a number of paintings, and 2) the Ten Commandments, which we have all dealt with at one time or another. There is enough material here for many sermons to come; however my desire is to focus in on one commandment, and its devastating effects on our lives and the lives of others. The wording may seem antiquated, but the practice of it is up to date and widespread today! We may attempt to sanitize, romanticize, or make it enticing, but the meaning never really changes!

Remember God gave us the Ten Commandments as standards to be kept and built upon once Jesus' work on the cross was complete. He spoke in Matthew 5:17 "*don't suppose for a minute that i have come to demolish the scriptures—either God's law or the prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete it.*" The law, the Ten Commandments, remain, however, we live under grace and when we stumble, there is a loving and forgiving heavenly father that by grace picks us up, dusts us off while pointing us forward on our spiritual journey.

The word "commandment" in Hebrew does not mean *a fixed rule*. It has a different meaning entirely. The word commandment in Hebrew means *a signpost*. This is important because it is a much more meaningful way to understand the **Ten Commandments – as the ten signposts**.

They are signposts that point you in the direction of a more spiritual, healthier, longer, and happier life. In this sense, they are like arrows on a signpost that point you in the right direction so you do not become lost.

The Ten Commandments are a way to gauge a person and a society. The word "commandment" in Hebrew also can mean *a type of gauge*, much like the gasoline gauge in an automobile. You can use the Ten Commandments as a way to gauge or a measure of how well you are living your life. This is hard to do sometimes, because those who live a simple, honest, clean life do not always come out "ahead" in society's terms with such things as wealth and "success". However, following the Ten Commandments is still a good way to gauge your life. You can also gauge or measure an entire society by noting how well that society and its people, in general, practice the Ten Commandments.

The Commandment that we will focus on this morning is Number Ten - *"you must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."* A newer translation says it this way – *"no lusting after your neighbor's house - or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don't set your heart on anything that is your neighbor's. Do not desire anything or anyone that does not belong to you. Comparing yourself to others and longing to have what they have leads to jealousy, envy and other sins. Be content by focusing on the blessings God has given you and not what he has not given you"*. Don't be jealous of anything your neighbor owns – a car, a pool or even their cell phone! Remember too that as a disciple our neighbor is anyone, not just the person next door.

The word used in this Commandment is a word we don't hear or use much – **"covet"**, **defined as to desire without regard for the rights of others: in a general sense it is to have wrongful or strong desires for something that belongs to someone else.**

There is something to be said about the hearing of God's word over and over, because when we do we are not in the same place on our spiritual journey when we heard His word the last time.

That is one of the amazing qualities of the *"living"* word – it was alive when Moses brought it down from the mountain and it remains alive for us today. His word applies as much to our lives at this very moment as it did to the lives of the Israelites so long ago.

Then how does this Tenth Commandment apply to me? What pitfalls are there for me in my life? How can I be prepared to deal with these temptations when I am face to face with them?

First of all, if we are honest with ourselves we have all since a young age coveted, desired something that was not ours. How many times do we observe little ones wanting the toy brother or sister has or maybe at Christmas wanting the present someone else received? It seems the older we get the bigger those items become. A friend has that new car, a bigger tractor, a bigger house or even a better looking wife!

Psalm 139 tells of how God knows us so well, inside and out. God knew in the free will He has given us that, at times, we will chose to want that which isn't ours. Down through the history of the world, people have wanted that which is not theirs. Go all the way back to Cain and Abel. Cain's want for the favor his brother had with the Lord. In the New

Testament even the disciples' mother desired for her sons to sit on either side of Jesus in heaven. Coveting has a long history and to believe we are exempt from it is only "deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us".

We have come up with sayings to describe coveting, like *"the grass is always greener on the other side"*. **Then there is the seven deadly sins of which three of them are lust, greed and envy which fit well into our Tenth Commandment.** Another way to look at coveting is "we are not satisfied with what we have"!

Let's modernize "coveting" and put it into today's world, our world. How many men want the physique of their youth, women's desire for that slim body and a cute outfit that goes with it, workers wanting a faster computer than someone else has, parents wanting their children to "be like other kids"?

You say *"that's not coveting, besides it's natural to fantasize about things"*. We can buy into three huge lies 1) everybody wants stuff, so it must be all right to want, 2) when you get what you want, it satisfies your cravings, and 3) wanting stuff is just my competitive nature to get ahead!, really???

Proverbs 6 talks about things that the Lord "hates" and one is the heart that comes up with evil plans. Strong words, "yes", because much of the culture today wants to water down personal responsibility. How many stories have we read about politicians, criminals, or maybe even you or me using the phrase *"it wasn't my fault, it was..."* or worse nobody is accountable for that which happened! I chuckle when I heard in a trial where the party accepted the finding but admits to no wrong doing!

The Tenth Commandment is the only one that begins inside us, points to motives and brings home the verse in Mark where Jesus says that it is not what you put into your body but that which comes out of the heart.

This commandment though last is that signpost to cautions us of a doorway which we can step through and put our thoughts into action. "Coveting" is really being discontent – the signs:

When you do a lot of grumbling and complaining (1 Corinthians 10:10).

When you become jealous and envious of what others have (2 Corinthians 12:20).

When you're filled with anxiety and fear (Philippians 4:6-7).

When you have a preoccupation with your possessions (Luke 12:16-21).

When you become stingy with what God has given you (Proverbs 28:22).
When God is getting your leftovers (Malachi 1:6-14).
When we love things and use people rather than using things and loving people
(Romans 13:8-10).

The opposite of covetousness – “ **contentment**” – Paul in prison writing to the Philippians in 4:11-13 “ *for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*”

When we follow this direction Paul gives us in these verses, “coveting” will not come to an action! **Contentment** is the key and just like joy we can never find it except through Jesus Christ! Here is a very pertinent and thoughtful poem...

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 that I wanted; the warmth and the blossoming of nature.*
I was a child, *but 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-age I wanted; the presence of mind without limitation.*
My life was over; *but I never got what I wanted.*

In closing here is one of the best examples of how breaking the Tenth Commandment by coveting can lead to “other things”...let’s look at King David...

David broke the 10th Commandment coveting his neighbor’s wife.
That led to adultery, which broke the 7th Commandment.
Then in order to steal Bathsheba, he broke the 8th Commandment.
He committed murder and broke the 6th Commandment.
He broke the 9th Commandment by lying about it.
This brought dishonor to his parents, breaking the 5th Commandment.
He didn’t put God first, breaking the 1st and 2nd Commandments and thus
dishonored God’s name, breaking the 3rd Commandment.

I would say that David was so “busy” breaking all these Commandments that he likely didn’t have time to observe the Sabbath, thus he was breaking the 4th Commandment!

May we be content with that which God has blessed us with and not covet that which we have not been given? Amen