

The Desire To Acquire

Exodus 20:17

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Exodus 20:17 says, “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.”

With this Tenth Commandment, we come to what is perhaps the most convicting and most searching of all the Commandments. That's because all the Commandments basically deal with outward actions, but this Commandment deals with inward attitudes. The other Commandments deal with our deeds; this Commandment deals with our desires.

And this Commandment is the one that leads us to break all the other Commandments. The Commandments are all broken by us when we covet or desire.

In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul tells us, “The love of money...”—which is covetousness—“...is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

God has given us His Laws, His Ten Commandments, the Decalogue for our good and for our liberty. God wants us to be liberated. In Romans 8, Paul says that the righteousness of the law can be fulfilled in us “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” There is no way in our strength and in our own power that we can keep these laws. Nor can we keep these laws for salvation. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23. “There is none righteous, no, not one.” The only way we can be saved is by trusting Christ. So the Law is intended to drive us to Jesus—for salvation, to condemn us and to show us our need for the Savior.

If you've gone through these Commandments, and up to this point you say, “I've covered the first nine Commandments, and I'm good, I'm in, I've got it down, just one more to go,” buckle your seat belt. That's because the Bible says that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” “There is none righteous, no, not one” and “If we say that we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So if you've been good in following the first nine Commandments, for sure you've broken the Tenth Commandment.

The proud Pharisee, Paul of Tarsus, became Paul the Apostle. In Romans 7:7, he said, “I would not have known covetousness unless the law...”—this Commandment—“...had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” He thought he had all the Commandments down, had them all covered, but when he realized that lust was sin, and God said, “You shall not covet,” it slew him and “sin revived and [he] died.”

First, I want to ask, “What is coveting? What does it mean to covet?” The word “covet” by itself, alone is not a bad word. It simply means “to desire.” There is good coveting and there is bad

coveting. But the context of this Commandment is about bad coveting. It has a negative connotation: "You shall not covet," lust after or desire.

The word itself in the Hebrew means "to fix your desire upon." It's talking about an inordinate desire for what is not yours and belongs to someone else. It is a desire to have more, a consuming compulsion to possess more and to possess, specifically, what belongs to someone else. "That's a nice house; I want it" rather than "That's a nice house; I'm glad for you, that's a blessing. Praise the Lord! I have a house God provided, and I'm content." Or you covet someone else's car, husband or wife.

Verse 17 says, "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." I appreciate it that this Commandment says, "...nor anything that is your neighbor's." We're not to covet his Ferrari, his Porsche, his swimming pool, his place, his possessions or his status. We're not to desire anything that belongs to our neighbor.

The counterpart to covetousness is contentment. Be content with what you have. You either go through life wanting more and more, never being satisfied, or you find in God what you need and have soul contentment.

James 4:1-2 says, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 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." James says that wars come from your lust. "I want it. I'm going to get it. I'm going to take it at any cost." You desire it but you don't have it because you don't ask God.

If you look to God, trust in God and know that God meets your needs—not your greeds, but your needs—and that He takes care of you, you learn to rest in His provision, learn to pray for what you need and He will guide you.

Someone said, "The man who is covetous is a man who thinks only of this world. He is a covetous man who talks only of this world. And a covetous man lives only for this world." He thinks about the world, talks about the world and lives only for the world.

But Jesus said, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" And 1 John 2:15-16 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world....For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh..."—that's covetousness—"...the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." So John is talking about your passions, your position and your possessions; that is worldliness.

And sadly there are some professing Christians who only think about the world. All they talk about is the world, and all they live for is the world. They aren't thinking about things in heaven. In Colossians 3:2-3, Paul said, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

So when you become a Christian, you die to the world and all its affections and lusts, and you come alive to God. You realize that this world is not your home. You're just passing through, a pilgrim and a stranger, and heaven is your real home. You're like Abraham: "He waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That's what Paul wants us to do and what God wants us to do in our text.

The second point I want to make is that God condemns covetousness in the Bible. "Covetousness" is "the desire to acquire." It comes in two categories: either to acquire things—they may be legitimate, but you are consumed by your desires—or things, possessions, people or power that are not yours to have—they belong to someone else.

Psalms 10:3 says, "The wicked boasts of his heart's desire; he blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord." The Lord abhors covetousness. This shows us God's attitude toward this sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and in Ephesians 5:5 it says "nor covetous will inherit the kingdom of God." Along with all the other listed sinners, the covetous won't inherit the kingdom of God. In Mark 7:21-23, there is a verse in which Jesus describes the sins that come from the heart of man. And if anyone knows man's heart, it's Jesus. Among the sins He includes is "covetousness." He said that covetousness comes from the evil heart of man.

Covetousness is an insidious sin and can lead us to breaking all the other nine Commandments. I want to point this out. Exodus 20:3 says, "You shall have no other gods before Me," Commandment number one. When you are covetous, you are creating an idol; it is taking the place of God. Anything you desire more than God becomes your god and violates this Commandment.

Commandment number two, in verse 4, says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image." You worship your car, your house, your stereo, your TV, power, position, prestige—these become your idol.

Verse 7 says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain," Commandment number three. What we do is profess to be believers, followers of Christ, but we practice hypocrisy when we "take the name of...God in vain," because we're living for the things of this world.

Commandment number four, in verse 8, says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." When you're covetous, what do you do? "I don't have time to worship God. I don't have time to go to church. I can't go to church today; I'm too busy making money." That's your god.

Verse 12 says, "Honor your father and your mother." This Fifth Commandment is from the second tablet of the law. But when we covet, we dishonor and disobey our parents.

In verse 13, it says, "You shall not murder," the Sixth Commandment. Sometimes we kill or murder to get what we want, because we covet it.

"You shall not commit adultery," verse 14, is the Seventh Commandment. How many people

have committed adultery because they have coveted their neighbor's wife or husband? It happens a lot.

Then in verse 15: "You shall not steal," the Eighth Commandment. How often people steal things that are not theirs and they shouldn't have because of covetousness.

And in verse 16 we have, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," the Ninth Commandment. We covet what belongs to our neighbor, we steal it and we lie about it to cover up our sin.

So everything flows from the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet." This is a deadly, deadly sin. We can covet possessions, people, positions, power and popularity.

I don't know when we will ever learn that money can't buy happiness. For some reason, when we see these huge lottery winnings happening with people winning millions of dollars, we think, "Oh, that would be nice! \$10,000 a week for life—Oh! Praise Jehovah! Wouldn't that be awesome! Of course, I'd give it to God." We just have this eating away at us.

"If I just made a little more money, if I just had enough to retire, if I just had a little bigger nest egg, if I just had a little more so I could rest." Oh really? There will never be enough; you're never satisfied. You're never satisfied when you covet by seeing something or hearing about something and believe it is okay to have it.

Solomon actually said that he had all his heart desired, yet he called it "emptiness" and "vexation of spirit." He said he hated life. So you can have everything you want but not be satisfied. Suicide is actually more common in the well-off, well-to-do and highly educated than in other groups. It's because they have what you're looking for, but it doesn't satisfy them. They reached the pinnacle but it's emptiness, so they take their life in despair. Many times we're searching for what cannot satisfy. Only Jesus Christ can give you lasting satisfaction and fulfillment.

I want to note a third thing here. Paul the Apostle said some things about covetousness in 1 Timothy 6 starting at verse 5. He said, "...useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." This verse comes in the middle of a passage. The context is that Paul is warning Timothy, this young pastor, that there were false teachers who were teaching that godliness is the way to get rich. He calls these false teachers "men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth."

Even today, a lot of TV and radio teachers are preaching that if you are truly a godly Christian, God will make you rich. That's not what the Bible teaches. He may make you rich, but there is no guarantee or promise.

Then Paul continues, in verses 6-12, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing,

with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich..."—or are covetous—"...fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. It often goes unnoticed, because it is kind of tucked away in 1 Timothy in this pastoral epistle. But here Paul is dealing with the dangers of covetousness, because there were false teachers saying that if you're really godly, you'll get rich. Godliness is a way to get gain. But that's not true.

So what Paul does is warn us, in verses 9-10. "Those who desire to be rich" is the classic definition of those who are covetous.

"What do you want?"

"I want to be rich! I want money! A big house! A nice car! Things, things, things!" And you can die and leave it all behind. "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" It profits him nothing.

So those who desire to be rich, verse 9, fall into "temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." And the reason for this is in verse 10: "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." Money, in and of itself, is not evil, but it can be used for evil purposes. They have coveted after money. "...for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Notice the statement, "pierced themselves through with many sorrows." So be warned; covetousness is dangerous. Let me give you some examples from the Bible.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden when Satan came to tempt Eve and told her the fruit was good to look upon, "it was pleasant to the eyes," and it would make her wise. So that's lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. So Eve coveted the forbidden fruit.

We don't know what kind of fruit it was. Some say it was an apple, so the poor apple got a bad rap. It could have been a cumquat. But Eve lusted, she took and she sinned by disobeying God. That's where all the sin, all the sickness, all the death, all the disaster in our world comes from—because of covetousness.

How about the devil, who wanted to be like God? He wanted to exalt himself above the throne of God. He had covetousness in his heart, and he rebelled against God Himself.

What a contrast there was between Lot and Abram, in Genesis 13. They had to split company because the land wasn't big enough for the two of them. Abram told Lot to look over the land and pick his choice of land to live on. He had first choice. Lot looked around and saw the well-watered plains around Sodom and Gomorrah. Nice place to live; right?

So Lot looked down and said, "That's where I want to live." He looked, lusted and pitched his tent toward Sodom. Next we find that he's in Sodom, and then he's living among them in Sodom. God has to bring him out forcefully. He pulls Lot out with his wife. Then God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Right now we live in Sodom and Gomorrah. America cannot survive without God and His Word. What we're seeing in our culture today is the death of America as a nation. Billy Graham said that if God doesn't judge America, he owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology.

And when Lot's wife was walking away, she turned around and looked back to see the city being destroyed. Then she was immediately turned into a pillar of salt. Jesus actually said, "Remember Lot's wife," or don't look longingly, lustfully, don't desire the things of this world. Lot is a picture of a man who coveted.

Then we have the story of Achan, in Joshua 7, who saw a Babylonian garment and silver and gold when the Israelites took Jericho. Achan confessed and said, "I coveted them and took them." As a result, he and his family were destroyed.

And in 2 Kings 5, there is the story of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who also was a leper. One of his Israeli servant girls said to him, "If you go to Israel, there are prophets of God there who will pray for you, and you would be healed." So this proud Syrian commander loaded up his donkeys and horses with money and went to the prophet Elisha's home. And Elisha didn't even come out to talk to Naaman, which humbled the commander and infuriated him. Elisha just said, "Go tell the commander to go to the Jordan River and wash in it seven times, and he'll be healed of his leprosy." But Naaman was furious and said there were several rivers in Syrian he could have washed in without having traveled to Israel. So his pride lead him to rebel, and he went away in a rage, going back to Syria.

On the way back, one of his servants said to Naaman, "If the prophet had told you to do something difficult, you would have gladly done it. But because he told you to do something humiliating and humbling, you rejected it. What have you got to lose? Go back and wash in the Jordan and see what happens." So Naaman was persuaded and went back and washed in the Jordan River seven times and was cleansed of his leprosy.

So Naaman was excited and returned to the prophet Elisha and thanked him and wanted to give Elisha a gift. But Elisha refused. Elisha said that it wasn't him who healed Naaman but God.

But Elisha had a servant named Gehazi. He was watching the interaction between Naaman and Elisha and thought, Yes, take it! But when Elisha refused Naaman's gifts, Gehazi overtook

Naaman as he was returning to Syria and said to him, "My master has changed his mind. He'll take your gifts." So Naaman gave Gehazi two talents of silver and two changes of garments.

When Gehazi got back to the house, he buried the gifts in the ground. When Elisha looked at him, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been?"

Gehazi said, "Nowhere."

Elisha said to him, "Is it time to buy vineyards, plant vineyards, to buy land and houses, to gain things, to get money and clothing? The leprosy that was on Naaman will now be on you and your descendants forever." And immediately Gehazi was struck with leprosy.

That tells us what God thinks about covetousness; it is a very heinous sin. Gehazi was judged by God because of his covetous heart.

Then I think of King David. He was the king of Israel, had a beautiful palace and many wives. He stood on the roof of his palace one day, looked over to the next courtyard and saw Bathsheba taking a bath. The Bible says that he looked and saw, he longed for and coveted her and took her. David was told that Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, one of David's soldiers, but David coveted her and took her anyway, and in doing so, David broke all the other Commandments before God.

I also think of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, the Son of God, for 30 pieces of silver.

Covetousness can captivate your mind and sabotage your soul. When we covet, we get too busy for God, for the Bible, for prayer, for fellowship, for family or for serving others. Those who covet actually forsake the faith. They say, "I don't want to read my Bible; I have to work and make money." In Colossians 3:5, Paul says, "...covetousness, which is idolatry." It becomes your god.

In the story of the rich, young ruler, this man had money, position and power. But he felt something lacking in his life, so he came to Jesus. He asked Him, "Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "You know the Commandments."

The rich, young ruler said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

Then Jesus said, "One thing you lack....Sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

But the rich, young ruler turned sorrowfully away and left Jesus. And when Jesus saw that, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Then Jesus gave a parable of the rich fool, a farmer who built bigger barns and stored all his goods and said to himself, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease;

eat, drink, and be merry.

But he went to bed that night “And God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’”

This parable was precipitated by someone saying to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

But Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

So Jesus warned of covetousness, in 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

Now I want to ask and answer, “What is the cure for covetousness?” What is the cure for desiring what someone else has that is not yours? Number one, godliness with contentment. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 says, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”

What does it mean to be “godly”? It means “to be like God.” And how can we be like God? God says, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

If you want to cure your covetous heart, it starts with being born again. Be born of the Spirit of God, have a new heart, become a believer in Jesus Christ. “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” He gives you a new heart. The things you used to love, you now hate. The things you used to hate, you now love.

Contentment is the opposite of covetousness. Covetousness is the desire to have more, or you are fixing your desire upon something. Contentment is not just the absence of desire; it is being content with what God has allowed you to have. You are resting in His providence and provision. You pray, God takes care of you and you are content.

Contentment cultivates an attitude of gratitude. It is being thankful for your husband, being thankful for your wife, being thankful for your job, being thankful for your income, being thankful for your bank account, being thankful for the car that won’t start. Paul said, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”

So covetousness is the desire to have more; contentment is “I’m trusting the Lord. I’m resting in His provision. I’m content with what He has given me.” How marvelous that is.

So in 1 Timothy 6, verse 6, godliness brings contentment; and, verse 7, wealth does not last. I like this verse. “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

I heard the story that Alexander the Great, the man who conquered the world, gave instructions

to his servant that when Alexander died, his body was to be laid in the casket, two holes were to be cut in each side of the casket and his hands were to be put through the holes and extend outside the casket. That was so everyone could see that although he conquered the world, he took nothing with him when he died.

I was at the birth of all four of my children. Naked they came into this world. None of them were wearing a Rolex watch. None of them were wearing expensive tennis shoes. None of them had any fine clothes on. They came in naked; they'll go out naked.

Job said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." So we bring nothing in.

In 1 Timothy 6:8, it says that our basic needs are easily met. This is a great verse to read before you go shopping with your wife. Guys, the next time you go shopping with your wife, just quote this Scripture; that's all you have to do. "Sweetheart, we have food and clothes; let's be content." Try to read these verses and then go to Costco. My wife says, "I'm not taking you to Costco, because we spend too much money when you're with me."

"Oh, look at that! Look at that!" That's because I only go once every eight years. "Wow! Look at that! We don't need it but it's cheap, so let's buy it! This is awesome!"

"Instead, let's stop and pray about it, think about it."

"What is there to pray about?! It's awesome! It's cheap. Let's buy it! It's Costco!"

Contentment is being able to walk through Costco with your hands in your pockets and whistling a tune. "I don't need anything. Bye; I'll see you later. I'm going to get a \$1.50 hot dog and soda and go my way." We brought nothing in and we'll take nothing out. If we have food and clothes, let's be content.

I like what Paul says in Philippians 4:1: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." It's something we have to learn.

In the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition, Hebrews 13:5 says, "Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]; for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]"

Then the writer of Hebrews goes on to say, "So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper.' He says that the Lord is his provider and takes care of him. He doesn't need what man can provide.

So when we are free of covetousness, we experience godliness with contentment.

The second step we need to take to cure covetousness is in our text, 1 Timothy 6:11-12. We need to flee, follow and fight. "But you, O man of God..." This is in contrast with the false teachers of verse 5, who are "men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth." Verse 11, "Flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

First question, "What do you flee from?" Verse 11, you flee from covetousness and worldliness. In the Hebrew it is, "Keep on fleeing from these things." They're dangerous.

The second question is, "What do you follow after?" It's not enough just to flee from sin; you must follow the Savior. Verse 11 gives us six things we should follow after. Righteousness is being like God. Matthew 6:33 says, "See first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Godliness means holiness. Faith is trusting God for His provision. Love means to "love your neighbor as yourself." Patience means to "remain under" or "abide, endurance." Gentleness is power under control. So you surrender your life to God.

So you are born again, which brings godliness and contentment; you flee "youthful lusts" and covetousness; and you follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and gentleness. And what you fight for is "the good fight of faith." So there are three steps: flee, follow and fight. We "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."

This is why Paul, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, said, "The time of my departure is at hand." He knew he was going to die. He said, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."