

“THE TENTH COMMANDMENT: DESIRE”

I. Introduction

- A. The tenth commandment reminds us that God knows the heart and its motives.
 - 1. It shows us that outward obedience to God’s law is not complete without obedience from the heart.
 - 2. Because of this, the tenth commandment also serves as a summary of all of the commandments.
 - 3. As one commentator explains, “The tenth commandment is where the Decalogue ends, but it is, in fact, the point at which every breach of the law begins — when by our ‘own evil desire’ we are ‘dragged away and enticed’ (Jas. 1:14)... ‘Improper desire... is the root of all evil.’” [Motyer, 230]
 - 4. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism says that God’s will for me in the tenth commandment is “That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any one of God’s commandments should ever arise in my heart. Rather, with all my heart I should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.” [HC 113]
- B. As we study this commandment this morning, we will follow the same basic outline that we have used for each of the commandments in this sermon series.
 - 1. We will see how the tenth commandment exposes our sinful desires.
 - 2. We will see how it points us to Christ’s pure desires.
 - 3. And we will see how it gives us a picture of sanctified desire.

II. Our Sinful Desires

- A. The Hebrew term that is translated as “covet” simply means ‘desire.’
1. It can be used in either a positive sense or a negative sense.
 2. We find an example of a positive use in Psalm 19, where it says that God’s laws are more to be desired than gold. (v. 10)
 3. There is nothing inherently wrong with desire.
 4. God made us as creatures of desire.
 5. The problem is that in our fallen condition our desires are directed toward the wrong things.
 6. As C.S. Lewis wrote in his famous essay *The Weight of Glory*, “It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”
 7. Coveting is a matter of misdirected desire, desire for something that has a short-term appeal but is incapable of providing lasting satisfaction.
- B. One thing that we should note about the way the tenth commandment is expressed in Exodus 20 is that the term “neighbor” is repeated three times here.
1. This underscores the fact that the things we are prohibited from desiring are things that are not rightly ours, things to which we have no claim.
 2. The reason why it is wrong for us to desire them is because God has providentially placed them in the hands of somebody else.

3. When we desire such things, we are expressing discontentment with our own estate and envying the estate of our neighbor.
- C. The fact that coveting is an inward matter can make us think that it is not as serious as other sins.
1. What we need to realize, though, is that when we covet we are opening the door to a multitude of other sins.
 2. Just as some drugs are referred to as 'gateway' drugs because they often lead people to become addicted to drugs that are even more dangerous, coveting is a 'gateway' sin.
 3. We see a good example of this in David's sin with Bathsheba.
 4. Do you remember how that sordid episode began?
 5. It began with David walking on the roof of his palace, looking down upon a woman while she was bathing, and longing to have that woman for himself.
 6. David coveted another man's wife.
 7. Those few moments of illicit desire eventually led him to commit other sins, including theft, adultery, and murder.
- D. Think for a moment about why things turned out the way that they did in the story of David and Bathsheba.
1. They turned out that way because David was king.
 2. He had the power to act upon his covetous desires.
 3. The only reason why we do not act upon our covetous desires more often than we do is because we frequently lack the power to act upon those desires.

4. In God's providence, it is frequently the case that we are outwardly restrained from acting upon our illicit desires.
 5. We should be grateful for this, but we should also remember that it does not make our coveting any less sinful.
- E. The New Testament takes the sin of covetousness very seriously.
1. In Ephesians 5:5 Paul writes that "everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."
 2. And in Colossians 3:5 he instructs us to "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming."
 3. Paul's point in these passages is not that coveting and these other sins cannot be forgiven.
 4. His point is that those who unrepentantly live in them demonstrate that they are unregenerate.
 5. The thing that I especially want to point out about those verses is that of all of the sins that Paul mentions here, the one that he twice chooses to identify as idolatry is covetousness.
 6. When we covet, we are telling God that we could do a better job at governing our lives than he has done.
 7. In other words, we think that we could do a better job at being God.
 8. On top of that, whenever we desire something that we cannot obtain without transgressing God's law, we are putting that thing above God.
 9. When you covet anything that belongs to your neighbor — whether it is a spouse, property, possessions, life situation, reputation, position, status, privileges, or anything else — you make that thing

into your god.

III. Christ's Pure Desires

- A. Having seen how the tenth commandment exposes our sinful desires, we turn now to consider how it points us to Christ's completely pure desires.
1. One place where we see the pure and undivided heart of our Savior is in Psalm 40, where David writes this: "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'" (vv. 6–8)
 2. These verses are describing a life that is unreservedly and joyfully dedicated to doing God's will.
 3. David was the human author of this Psalm, but he did not live up to the perfect standard that it sets forth.
 4. This is why the writer of Hebrews puts these words on the lips of Jesus.
 5. Jesus accepted the book of God's law — "the scroll of the book" — as binding for him.
 6. God's law was written on his heart.
 7. His heart never lusted for anything that was outside of God's will.
 8. He only wanted to do what was pleasing to God.
 9. His desire was to do God's will.
- B. Think for a moment about the phrase, "I desire."

1. If you were to be completely honest, how would you finish the sentence, "I desire _____"?
 2. What is it that you desire?
 3. You should desire what it says in Psalm 40.
 4. You should desire to do God's will.
 5. The fact that that is not our heart's desire brings God's judgment upon us.
 6. That is why Jesus came into the world.
 7. He came so that he could desire what we ought to desire and thus fulfill the law in our place.
- C. Jesus' life was not about the suppression of his desires but about the proper ordering of those desires.
1. We are mistaken if we think of Jesus' desires only in terms of self-denial.
 2. His whole life was fueled by desire.
 3. As we have just said, he desired to do his Father's will.
 4. He prayed in his great high-priestly prayer, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." (Jn. 17:24)
 5. And the writer of Hebrews tells us that it was "for the joy that was set before him" that Jesus endured the cross. (Heb. 12:2)
 6. Jesus desired to obey God.
 7. He desired to bring all of his elect into communion with himself.

8. He desired to enter into the joy of the new creation.
9. Jesus acted upon those desires.
10. Those desires were what caused him to live the life that he lived and to die the death that he died.
11. He secured our salvation by desiring the right things and by putting those desires into action.

IV. Sanctified Desire

- A. As believers in Jesus Christ, we should be thankful that we are no longer condemned by the tenth commandment or any other part of God's law.
 1. We should also be thankful that this commandment helps us to see what sanctified desire looks like.
 2. While covetous desire is a sin, properly directed desire is a fruit that the Spirit works in the hearts of the redeemed.
 3. One passage where we can see this is 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, where Paul writes, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."
 4. Paul tells us that the love that Christ has for us controls us.
 5. When we are convinced that we are the objects of his redeeming love, that love prevents us from doing things that are against God's will.
 6. It constrains us.
 7. It causes us to grieve when we do sin.
 8. It gives us a desire to please and honor Christ.

- B. Another passage where we find something similar to this is 1 John 2:15-17, where it says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."
1. John tells us that God's love drives the love of the world and the desires of the flesh from our hearts.
 2. A person's supreme love, the thing that he loves the most, expels all rival loves from that person's heart.
 3. Jesus taught the same thing when he said, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Mt. 6:24)
 4. If the love of the Father is truly in you, then you will want to break with the world and its desires and do what is pleasing to God.
- C. As we fight the temptation to covet, we need to remind ourselves that all of the things that we are tempted to covet are earthly things.
1. They are impermanent things.
 2. If we set our hearts on such things, we are laying up earthly treasures for ourselves, treasures that will not last.
 3. But if our heart is set on things above, if we seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, then we are laying up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
- D. We should also remind ourselves that God did not create us with desires in order to leave those desires unsatisfied.

1. Our desires are meant to be satisfied, but they can only be satisfied if they are pointed in the right direction.
2. When Jesus calls us to himself, he is not calling us to a renunciation of our desires.
3. He is calling us to look to him as the only way to satisfy our desires.
4. When Christ is your heart's desire, you will join David in saying, "Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!" (v. 4)

V. Conclusion

- A. As we conclude our study of the ten commandments, I want to take a moment to offer some final thoughts on the place of the law in the Christian life.
 1. We are inclined to think of sin and righteousness merely in terms of externals.
 2. The reason why we think this way is because the externals are the things that can be seen.
 3. What we are so quick to forget is that God sees into every corner and every crevice of our hearts.
 4. As it says in Genesis 6:5, God saw not only man's wicked deeds but also "that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
 5. Even if we delude ourselves into thinking that we are outwardly righteous, we cannot hide our inward corruption from God.
 6. This is why John Calvin said in a sermon on the tenth commandment that God's law ought to be like a mirror in which we contemplate our poverty. [*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*,

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7. This is exactly how the apostle Paul uses tenth commandment in Romans 7, where he writes, "if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness." (Rom. 7:7-8)
 8. The tenth commandment sums up the whole law by showing us that God requires obedience in the truest and fullest sense.
 9. It exposes the sin that dwells deep inside of us, sin that may never even find outward expression.
- B. This is bitter medicine, but it is medicine that we need to swallow.
1. As John Newton put it, "The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious [Christ] will be to us" [*Letters*, 128]
 2. The point of allowing the law to expose our sin is not to drive us to despair and leave us there.
 3. The point is to drive us away from all self-confidence so that our confidence can rest entirely upon Jesus Christ.
 4. Here is one last thought from Calvin: "even if we should perceive a million sins within ourselves everyday, let us not become discouraged. For we must continually press beyond that. That is why Saint Paul, when exhorting believers to shun vice, does not say: 'Let sin have no place in you,' but says: 'Let sin have no reign!' Certainly he would have preferred for sin to dwell in no one, but since it does, we must not let ourselves feel overwhelmed. For when it is said that sin lives in us, its first purpose serves to admonish us of our miserable condition and then, realizing that every day requires combat, we should that much more ardently flee to our God for help, praying to him that he will fortify us by his strength and by the grace of his Holy Spirit which he has given us

in the name of our Lord Jesus." [*Sermons on the Ten Commandments,*
234-235]