

***The Big Ten: All I Want Is Everything***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Ecclesiastes 4:4-8; James 4:1-8a; Deuteronomy 5:1-21***

Friends, our final Scripture reading today is Deuteronomy 5:1-21. I invite you to turn there in your Bibles and to take out the study guide from your bulletin to follow along. Let's listen to the Word of God. "Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Last week, we learned the origin of the phrase, "Liar, liar, pants on fire." As it turns out, the Ten Commandments have a lot to do with catchphrases and clichés we all know. This week it's "keeping up with the Joneses." Who are the Joneses? I always thought that Jones was simply a common name in the English-speaking world, and so the Joneses were just the neighbors next door. That's what the phrase means now.

But in the mid-1800s, the Joneses were an extremely important family in New York that became rich due to their marrying into the family that started Chemical Bank. In 1853, Elizabeth Jones had a 24-room villa built called Wyndcliffe, which her niece called a gloomy monstrosity. Nevertheless, it inspired their contemporaries to spend their fortunes building even more lavish homes. They literally were trying to keep up with the Jones.

As we reach the end of our series on the Ten Commandments, we've learned these ten words from God hold far deeper meaning than we normally think. The last one is the most unique of all. We aren't surprised by the words – many of us have heard the Ten Commandments our entire lives. But the tenth commandment goes beyond law. God has never just been interested in our actions. He's interested in our hearts. The tenth commandment proves it.

The tenth commandment teaches us not to covet anything that belongs to our neighbor – his wife, his home, his servants, his animals, anything! So...what does it mean to covet? The Hebrew word means desire. It's not common; we only come across the root twice as an adjective before it shows up here as a verb. In Genesis 2, God made every tree that was desirable to look at. Then when the serpent tempts Eve, right before she eats the forbidden fruit, she sees that it is desirable. Wrong-headed desire is what got us into this mess!

But we have to be careful not to shorten this command to “do not covet.” That's not God's command, either. God built us with natural desires – and some desires are genuinely good; they were a part of us before our fall into sin. We were made to desire God, to desire relationship with Him and knowledge of His ways and obedience to Him. He built us to be happy, really and truly joyful, when that desire is fulfilled. God does not say, “Do not desire.” And because God made us with needs for food and drink and shelter, He gives us natural desires for things that sustain us. Those things come from Him, and we need them to survive.

We can't shorten the command because we aren't to covet what belongs to our neighbor. Take a look at the list. Some things on there, we have to have – a home of some sort at least. Others in the ancient world were necessities – an ox or donkey for plowing, land for growing crops, even if just a little. Without a family, you'd have no heirs. The list ends with, “anything else your neighbor's got.” So it's not about the universals. It's about the particulars.

God doesn't say, “You can't have a house. You can't have a family. You can't have this or that or the other thing.” Not at all! It's not even bad to see something your neighbor has and recognize its value. In the ancient world -- could having an animal shorten my time in the fields so I have more time to study the Scripture, spend with my family, do the things that God asks of me? Having one, if I have the means for it, is a good thing desired for the right reasons.

The chief factor is wanting your neighbor's things. I have a nice house, but I want my neighbor's bigger, nicer house. My old, spotted sheep isn't as nice as my neighbor's newborn lamb with spotless wool. I'd love his oxen that don't tire out plowing. His wife sure is prettier, smarter, better than mine. His outfits are better-made than mine; I wish I had his. Why does he get all the good stuff? Those thoughts turn to envy and jealousy and anger, even hate, all because of stuff. That's the kind of thinking that the commandment is really talking about.

In a sense, all of the last five commands are about not taking what belongs to another. The sixth – his life; the seventh – his wife; the eighth – his property; the ninth – his reputation; the tenth – his blessing. Despite all the hardships and lack of blessings we may perceive in our lives, God blesses us with all sorts of things, both spiritual and physical, both eternal and temporary. They are God's choices for us, for our benefit, for our use, for our encouragement, and for us to use to the benefit of others. They don't belong to anyone else.

God made you with a certain temperament, certain skills, certain talents and abilities, certain weaknesses, and those are intentional. The things that God has allowed you to own are blessings, too – not necessarily permanent ones, and not everything we own is something God wants us to have. Nevertheless, those blessings belong to us. The blessings God has given to others belong to them. For us to envy their blessing by God is to tell God that He messed up, that He got it wrong, that He made a mistake giving that blessing to them rather than to us.

Our lives would be greatly enhanced if we would rejoice with someone else's blessing rather than coveting it. We hear that somebody is taking a cruise through Europe or bought a new RV or got a new television set. Do we genuinely rejoice with them in that blessing without envying them? That's godliness; that's what the command requires of us. And wow – it's hard! I think of the old slogan – “my parents went to Florida (or Las Vegas, or wherever) and all I got was this lousy T-shirt.” That's our normal attitude.

In a sense, the American dream was built on breaking the tenth commandment. There's nothing wrong with seeing something you need and buying it. God even allows us things simply for our enjoyment. But we've made the latest and greatest into the driving factor of our lives. Nobody who has an iPhone 5 needs an iPhone 6. Nobody with a 50" TV needs a 60" TV.

Christians are not immune. I was a part of a forum called Praise and Worship Gear Talk. Praise and worship musicians discussed all the pedals and amplifiers and whatnot they'd bought to get the perfect sound. These guys post pictures of pedalboards worth several thousand dollars and guitars and amps worth thousands more. I eventually stopped going there because I was coveting stuff! God should be praised everywhere, in every church, at the highest level each church can, but does it require a musicians to have \$10K in equipment? No; it's covetousness.

Covetousness drives many churches and churchgoers. People leave a church because they want a better youth group, a better choir, a better praise team, a better preacher and pastor, a better Bible study, where less is required of us and more is given to us. But if God has blessed you with a good church home, why leave? There will always be other churches with better offerings. But if your blessing is here, why not make the most of it and bless others through it?

Coveting the blessing of others is a big deal. It's also the key to understanding the Ten Commandments as the way into relationship with God. The tenth commandment is a fantastic ideal – it's proof that God cares what goes on in our hearts and minds. The Tenth Commandment is the lynchpin to the teachings of Jesus, where He moves all of the Old Testament law into the realm of relationship. He's not changing the teachings of the Old Testament; He's explaining God's original intent in giving them, to convict us that sin goes beyond just external actions. The direction of the tenth commandment was to be implied in the nine that came before it.

It's a fantastic ideal that also shows that the Ten Commandments aren't meant to be legal standards. They can't be. Because as a written law, the Tenth Commandment is terrible. That's because it cannot be measured or enforced in any way. Sacrificing to other gods and making statues of God, not keeping the Sabbath, stealing – all of those things can be clearly discerned and punished. But how can you possibly have a law against desire, something that's only clear to you and God alone? You don't.

This isn't a law. It's a word, a command, a precept by which God knows we must live in order to have a strong relationship with Him and with others. It's important. And it can't be a legal code. If you have any doubt that the commandments were handed down by God, this should clear that up. It's a mandate how to live that can only be judged by the Supreme Judge, the authority beyond all others, who will judge our hearts and minds.

Here's why the Tenth Commandment is so important, beyond not desiring what belongs to our neighbors. It reminds us that there is a good desire, a great desire, a desire that God intended for us that I mentioned just a little while ago. God desires for us to desire Him. He wants us to be truly happy, not just momentarily happy, not just happy with petty little things, but really and truly and completely and eternally, permanently happy. And that comes from one thing: relationship with Him.

C. S. Lewis, author of the Narnia Chronicles, said, "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." Our strongest desires are perfect when they are perfectly satisfied in Him.

The Westminster Catechism, the instruction book for over 400 years in the Presbyterian Church, asks one question right off the bat: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." The authors of the Catechism were really smart guys. Do you want to know how smart? They didn't say the chief *ends* of man, plural, which would make the most grammatical sense. They said the chief end of man, singular. They knew that our great purpose was to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and those two things are inseparable. You cannot glorify God and truly and not enjoy Him. You cannot really and truly enjoy God and not glorify Him in the process. As pastor John Piper put it, we glorify God *by* enjoying Him forever.

God intends for us to desire Him more than anything else. In Psalm 19, the author writes that God's judgments are more precious than pure gold and honey straight from the honeycomb. Psalm 119 – "the law of your mouth, O Lord, is better to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." In Matthew 13:44, Jesus teaches, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." In Matthew and Luke both, Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be too." The reverse of coveting is not to eliminate desire. It's to desire God so much that we stop thinking that anything else will satisfy us.

Some of us have lived that. I don't know that I coveted a lot of what my friends had, but my desire has often been on the next great thing to come. In my teens and early 20s, it was the next album coming out from my favorite bands. It was the next film in a series I really liked or novel by a favorite author. There's nothing wrong with enjoying those things. But that desire is always followed by a letdown. No matter how wonderful the movie is, no matter how great the song or book, nothing can fulfill that deep desire that God placed in us for Himself. Coveting never works because even if we do manage to get the thing we want, it doesn't satisfy. Only God can fulfill those longings we all have.

The Christian life isn't easy from an earthly perspective. We aren't to desire what doesn't belong to us, the blessings given to someone else. But God gives Himself to us in the pages of Scripture, in the daily practice of prayer, in the worship of His people in fellowship together, in Bible study groups...real contentment is found through Him. James told us this morning, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." We do not have to wind up like the man in Ecclesiastes who is never happy and never satisfied with what he has. God gives believers the ability to find contentment, joy, and happiness in Himself.

Rich Mullins was one of the top artists in Christian music throughout the 80s and 90s, and his song "My One Thing" encapsulates the concept of the tenth commandment as it can be seen through Jesus. Let me read you the lyrics to ponder this week:

Everybody I know says they need just one thing  
And what they really mean is that they need just one thing more  
And everybody seems to think they've got it coming  
Well I know that I don't deserve You  
Still I want to love and serve You more and more  
You're my one thing

Save me from those things that might distract me  
Please take them away and purify my heart  
I don't want to lose the eternal for the things that are passing  
'Cause what will I have when the world is gone  
If it isn't for the love that goes on and on with  
My one thing  
You're my one thing  
And the pure in heart shall see God

Who have I in Heaven but You Jesus?  
And what better could I hope to find down here on earth?  
I could cross the most distant reaches  
Of this world, but I'd just be wasting my time  
'Cause I'm certain already, I'm sure I'd find  
My one thing  
You're my one thing  
And the pure in heart shall see God

Next week, we're going to talk some more about what it means to desire God with all we have and what that looks like heading into thanksgiving. But for now, I invite you to consider this week the whole of the Ten Commandments that we've studied together. God gave them to us so that we might celebrate life together, a life worth living, a life centered on Him and devoted to sharing His love. Will we live by them – not just by the letter of the law, but of the spirit in which they were given, in order to glorify God and enjoy Him forever?