

THE LAW, PART 11: You Shall Not Covet

Exodus 20:1-17

And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

This morning we will be finishing our series on the 10 commandments, but before we talk about the 10th/last commandment, lets remember where we’re at in the story of Israel.

God has miraculously delivered Israel from slavery and has lead them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, to Mount Sinai.

The people are getting ready to enter into the promised land, with Yahweh God as their King, and God is making a covenant with the people, so the question is this:

What does it look like to live as God’s covenant people in this land that He is leading us into?

So God gives his people the law.

The first purpose of the law is to show the people how they are to be different from the peoples around them.

That’s what it means to be set apart, or holy...to be different than those around you.

You might be thinking, this guy sitting next to me, he’s kind of different, does that mean he’s holy? Well, here’s what we can’t miss. To be holy means to be different, but God is the one who sets the standard for what this “different life” should look like.

So holiness is living differently than the world, according to the standards of God, for the glory of God!

So the law was given to show Israel how they were to live differently than the people around them.

And Jesus reiterates this in the SOTM.

Jesus has come proclaiming that God's Kingdom is here, and because of that, this is how members of that Kingdom should live. That's the SOTM in a nutshell.

If you are one of God's people, then your life should look radically different than the people around you!

But there's another major purpose of the law, and that is to reveal to us our sinful nature, and to show us our inability to keep the law.

The first thing we should notice about the law is our inability to keep it.

And if I can't keep the law there are 2 options. 1) I suffer the just judgment of God. 2) Someone saves me.

So the law helps reveal our need for a savior!

God gives His people these 10 commandments and he ends the 10 with a command not to covet.

So the questions we want to answer this morning are:

1. What does it mean to covet?
2. Why is covetousness harmful?
3. Why is the commandment given last?
4. What does this command mean for new covenant believers today?

The Hebrew word for covet means to desire earnestly; to long after; or to set one's desire on.

It's a lot more than admiring something...I can admire your new car or your home or the career you have.

But to covet means I won't be happy or fulfilled until I have that!

So God is saying, you shall not set your desire on/long for/yearn for anything outside of what I've given you to enjoy.

There are many examples in Scripture of covetousness, for example, the story of David and Bathsheba.

We hear the story of David and Bathsheba in 2nd Samuel 11, and we talk about David committing the sin of lust, and murder and deception...but first and foremost this is a story about coveting.

David desired something that God hadn't given him. And that unchecked desire resulted in numerous other sins committed.

But an even better example of covetousness comes at the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis Ch 3.

Genesis 2:15-17

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

God gives Adam and Eve authority over the creation, and He gives them everything in the garden to enjoy, except one thing.

God gives them everything and withholds 1 thing (and he withhold it for their good).

But Adam and Eve weren't content with all that God had given them. They desired the one thing God had withheld from them. They coveted that which had not been given to them.
And we know how the story goes from there. Rebellion. Fall. Curse.

God says, if you are going to be my covenant people, then you will not covet anything that is your neighbors. You won't covet his wife, his property, his possessions...anything.

It would have been common practice in the cultures around Israel for the strong to pray on the weak. If you see something you want and you have the power to take it, then you take it.

But God makes it clear, that His people must be content with what He has given them.

You see, a heart that covets, demonstrates a lack of trust in God.

When we covet, when we desire something that is not ours, we are essentially saying, "God, I don't believe that what you have provided is good enough for me."

Or, God, I don't trust you. I don't trust your plan, your intentions.

Adam and Eve had been given everything, but they didn't trust God that what He had given them was enough. They wanted more. They wanted what wasn't theirs.

So covetousness demonstrates a lack of trust in God, and what He's given us, but it also demonstrates a lack of satisfaction in God.

When we covet we're not only showing that what God has provided for us is not enough, but we're essentially saying that God Himself is not enough for us!

So to covet means that we seek fulfillment and satisfaction outside of God.

God is not enough to satisfy us, and so we seek to be filled by other things.

For Adam and Eve it was the knowledge of good and evil.

For King David it was a woman that wasn't his wife.

For the Pharisees in Jesus' time it was the praise of men.

And when we seek something besides Jesus to fill us up and satisfy us, that's called idolatry!

Ephesians 5:5

For you may be sure of this, 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.

Colossians 3:5

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Story of Caty and me dating?

You shall not covet (the last commandment that God gives His people). Why do you think God puts this commandment last?

Why make the command not to covet the grande finale?

I believe that God had a purpose in giving this commandment last, and that it wasn't placed at the end by coincidence or random order.

First, I would point out that the command not to covet is a reiteration of the first two commandments.

The first two commandments say "You shall have no other gods before me" and "You shall not make an idol and you shall not bow down to it".

To the Israelites this would have meant, don't worship the gods of the nations around you...the baals and the asheras.

But the command not to covet takes this a step further. It expands on what the first two commandments mean.

Worshiping an idol doesn't just include making a wooden statue and bowing down to it. It doesn't just mean praying to the god of a neighboring nation. Worshiping an idol means looking for anything other than God himself to fulfill you.

All of a sudden those commands got a lot harder to keep!

How many of you have a little wooden statue in your garage that you pray to?

How many of you have ever treasured something in your hearts more than God?

So the command not to covet begins to redefine what it means to obey or keep the law.

Keeping the law isn't just about avoiding certain behaviors! Keeping the law is a heart issue!

Because coveting is a heart issue. Coveting is when our hearts desire something above Christ!

Think about it. I've never murdered anyone.

I've never cheated on my wife.

I've never stolen anything. Maybe a candy bar when I was a kid, but that doesn't really count.

I've never borne false witness against my neighbor.

I mean, I'm doing pretty good here!

And then we get to the end...don't covet. Don't let your hearts desire anything above God.

Well...now I'm in trouble. And now the law takes on a much fuller meaning.

Don't murder becomes don't be angry at your brother.

Don't commit adultery becomes don't lust in your heart.

Don't steal becomes don't rob God of His glory.
Don't have any gods before me becomes don't delight in anything above me.

Oh man...if we look at it like that, then I've broken all of them, a lot of times! So have you.

So if living a life that is pleasing to God is not just about avoiding certain behaviors, but is about having a pure and righteous heart...then what hope do we have?

If living a life that is pleasing to the Lord requires a pure and righteous heart...then I need a new heart!

And that's one of God's purposes in giving the law...to show us that we need a new heart!

Imagine a pt who needs a heart transplant. And imagine their doctor tells them, "you just need to try harder to make your heart work". No, they don't need to try harder...they need a new heart!

And this is the human condition. We need a new heart. We need a savior to give us a new heart.

This is exactly what Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied about.

Jeremiah 31:33

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So the command not to covet, not to desire anything above the Lord, was given to foreshadow our need for a better covenant, and not just that...our need for a new heart.

And guess what?

2nd Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

In Christ, you have been made new. God has given you a new heart, and through His power you are able to live a life pleasing to Him.

So...do not covet.

What does that mean for believers in the new covenant today?

Well, here's something we need to understand about the law.

The law doesn't just tell us what we shouldn't do.

It also implies what we should be doing!

So the command not to murder is also a command to love our neighbor.

The command not to steal is a command to be generous.

And the command not to covet is a command to be content!

You shall be content! How content are you?

Christians should hands down be the most content people in the world, but we live in a culture, especially here in the US, that spends billions of dollars to make you discontent.

Turn on the TV, get on social media for a few minutes and you will be bombarded with ads whose sole purpose is to make you discontent with what you have.

My car I bought 3 years ago that I really liked at the time...all of a sudden I don't like it so much because it doesn't have all the features that the newer ones have. And if I had the newer model I would be happier.

I used to love my iPhone 24, but now they came out with the 25 and I can't be happy until I have it.

On and on it goes, but here's the thing. Discontentment is a disease. It may start out seemingly innocent (what's wrong with wanting a new phone?) but discontentment always spreads. It always grows.

So your discontentment may start with your possessions. But left unchecked we start to become discontent with other areas of our lives.

Discontentment will spread into your marriage. I've been married to this person for a long time now. They don't look like they did when I married them. They don't really treat me like they did when we were dating. Maybe it's time to trade them in for a newer model?

Discontentment spreads.

Discontentment is rampant in our churches. Our worship team isn't quite as good as they used to be...our pastor is pretty good, but I heard the guy down the street the other day and he was a little better. Well this church has a star bucks and an indoor playground...

Discontentment will eat you up and leave you empty, but here's what God's Word says:

1st Timothy 6:6

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

You see, contentment is so much more than having a good attitude about life.

True contentment is the result of being satisfied in Christ!

So let me ask you this church. If we have Christ, what else do we need?

The greatest treasure of all has been given to me and can never be stolen from me, so what could I possibly lack?

The cure for discontentment is not getting more stuff; it's not working harder on your attitude;

You shall not covet means that God's people will be satisfied in Him!

When life is good we are satisfied in Him.

When life is wearisome we are satisfied in Him.

When life is heart breaking we are satisfied in Him.

Psalm 73: 25-26

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Communion