

Command 10 - Do Not Covet

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It is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This summer at CrossWinds, we are studying the Ten Commandments. Today, we are at the tenth commandment. What will we do after this?

Next week, we start a four-week series on the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. That will take us through the summer. The game plan is for Pastor Jordan, our Spencer campus pastor, to preach the first two messages of the series and cover both campuses while my family enjoys a staycation. That will give me time to have an elbow surgery to repair a broken tricep. I will cover the last two weeks of the series across both campuses while he takes a little staycation with his family. The reason we chose that order is because Krystal, his wife, is pregnant. His time off should coincide with the birth of their third child. The problem is his third child hasn't agreed to this schedule. If the baby comes early, you will see me in the pulpit sooner than expected. I told Jordan he is not allowed to drive Krystal on bumpy roads to make the baby come early.

The title of our series in Habakkuk is "When God Doesn't Make Sense." Habakkuk is a great book to help us understand what to do when life falls apart and we can't make sense of what God is doing. I know you will love the series because all of us face times in life where we cannot figure out what God is doing. If you haven't faced a time when God doesn't make sense, just wait. They are coming.

As we begin our study on the final commandment, I have a little exercise. I want you to close your eyes and remember what comes to mind when I ask these questions.

- If I could have any car, what would I drive?
- If I could have someone else's lake home whose would it be?
- If I could have the mental abilities of someone else, who would I want to be able to think like?
- If I could have someone else's look or physique, who would I want to look like?
- If I could be married to anyone in the world, who would I want to be married to?

Open your eyes. What I just awakened in you is called coveting. If you answered any of those questions, you are a coveter. If you claim you didn't answer any of those questions, we have another commandment for you because you are a liar. Coveting is looking at what we don't have and desiring what God has provided for someone else or desiring what is forbidden. Coveting is a matter of fanning the flames of our thought-lives toward wrong desires.

Let's read this commandment and see what God says about it.

"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." Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

This morning, our study will break into four parts. First, we will learn what this commandment means. Second, we will learn why God gave it. Third, we will learn how coveting leads us to sin. Fourth, we will learn how to beat coveting in our lives. Let's dive in.

What does it mean to covet?

The Hebrew word for covet simply means to desire something or take pleasure in something. In the Bible, the Hebrew word for covet is occasionally used in a good sense because it can refer to positive desires.

The Hebrew word for covet can be used in positive ways.

As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow... Song of Solomon 2:3 (ESV)

This was a young lady who loved being in her man's presence. It is the same Hebrew word for covet. There was nothing wrong with her desires. She had good desires. She wanted to be around the man she was to marry.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Psalm 19:9–10 (ESV)

The Psalm tells us that the words of God are incredibly desirable. It is the same Hebrew word for covet but used in a positive sense. We should desire God's words. We should long for God's words. They are good for us. We should desire them more than gold in our hands. We should desire them more than honey in our mouths. A deep desire for God's Word is a good desire in our lives.

I point this out so we realize this commandment is not telling us to cease having desires. That is Buddhism, not Christianity. God made us with desires. There are many good desires in this life we should long for. A desire for companionship and intimacy is a good thing. It is what leads to marriage. A desire to do something useful in life is what leads to work. This commandment is not warning against having desires. It is warning against allowing our minds to entertain wrong desires.

The Hebrew word for covet can be used to speak of sinful desires.

For example, while the desire for the woman that is your wife is good, the desire for a woman that is a prostitute or another man's wife is bad. This is the same Hebrew word.

Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes... Proverbs 6:25 (ESV)

In this commandment, it is specifically talking about indulging your thought life in forbidden desires, not positive desires. Let me give you two definitions of this command. The first will be a complete definition. The second will be short so you can put it on Twitter.

Coveting is refusing to be content with the good gifts God provided for my life. It is fixating on what God says is off limits or fixating on what God provided someone else instead of being grateful for what God provided for me.

A tweetable way to say this is... *Coveting is wanting what I want for me instead of wanting what God wants for me.*

Coveting is refusing to be content with the spouse God provided for you. It is desiring someone of the opposite sex that is forbidden for you or someone that God provided as the spouse of someone else. Coveting is refusing to be content in the state God has you or content with what God has provided for you.

We can covet all types of material things, like a bigger house or a nicer house, because it seems everyone else in our age bracket has a bigger house or a nicer house than we do. We can covet cars because other people like us have better cars or nicer cars than God has provided for us to enjoy.

We can covet non-material things. Maybe we were hoping for a promotion but someone was promoted instead of us. That twinge of resentment we feel toward the person who was promoted instead of us is coveting. Maybe you and your roommate are single. You are both tired of being single. Your roommate meets someone and gets engaged. They are walking around floating over the ground because they are so excited. That envy and jealousy you feel because you are still single and they are not is coveting.

How is the tenth commandment different?

1. This commandment starts with internal thoughts, not external actions.

While the other commandments dealt first with external actions, like murder and adultery, and only secondarily with the internal attitudes that lead to those external sins, like hatred and lust, this commandment starts in the heart and stays in the heart. It is a commandment that exclusively refers to what we think about and what we dream about. It is about internal sin in our thought lives. It is about private sin that only you and God are aware of. If coveting is not repented of, it leads to external sin. It is the way we think about things. God cares very much about not just what we do in our lives but how we think in life.

The importance of guarding our thought lives is not just talked about in the Ten Commandments. Paul also referred to it in the New Testament when it comes to our relationships with Christ.

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ... 2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)

God wants us to take every thought captive, making them obedient to Jesus. Our thought lives matter!

2. This command is unprecedented in other moral codes.

Sometimes people talk about other moral codes in the ancient world, such as the Code of Hammurabi. They claim the Ten Commandments are like other ancient moral codes. Some people go so far as to claim the Ten Commandments are based on other moral codes. That is not true. No other ancient moral code addresses people's inner desires. They only address outward actions. The Ten Commandments are unique because they come from God. The focus of other ancient moral codes is external crime. The focus of the Ten Commandments is internal sin. God cares about our internal desires, not just our external sin. That is what makes the Ten Commandments unique.

Why does God tell us to avoid coveting?

Most of us think of coveting as a minor sin. Who doesn't covet? Every advertisement is intended to incite us to covet. Advertising is designed to create discontentment. The glossy catalogues that come in our mailboxes show us what we need that we didn't know existed. The entire American economy is geared around getting us to covet, to buy what we don't need and to spend money we don't have. Why is coveting that dangerous?

Coveting is where other sins begin.

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden, where we find Eve and the forbidden fruit.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from any tree except for the tree in the center. Satan tempted Eve. He told her that if she ate from the tree, she could be like God and know good and evil. Eve coveted that knowledge. She desired what she knew was forbidden. She desired knowledge that God had not given. Eve didn't spontaneously reach out and eat the forbidden fruit. She thought about it. She dreamed about what it would be like to be like God. She imagined how good it would be to have knowledge she didn't have. It was after she spent time coveting that she convinced herself to move forward in sin and eat the forbidden fruit which plunged the entire human race into sin and death.

If she hadn't engaged in the sin of allowing herself to covet what she knew was forbidden, she wouldn't have fallen into the act of sin. Coveting is always where sin begins. That is why we must be careful what we think about in our minds, not just what we do with our hands.

Another example is David and Bathsheba. When David saw Bathsheba bathing on her roof, he could have turned away. He didn't. He began coveting his neighbor's wife. He imagined how good it would be to touch her. He imagined the thrill of being with her. It was after coveting her and fantasizing about her in his mind that he moved forward with inviting her to the palace where he pursued an adulterous affair. His coveting of another man's wife was where sin began. What we do in our fantasies are only one small step removed from our realities. This is why not coveting is one of the Ten Commandments.

Coveting leads us away from the kingdom of God.

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. Ephesians 5:5 (ESV)

Why are those who continually practice coveting not part of the kingdom of God? The reason is because those who covet end up worshipping an idol of their own making. The idol they make is what they covet that they think will make them happy.

When I think about covetousness that leads to idolatry, I remember what it was like to be a child at Christmas. I remember telling my parents that to have a good Christmas, I really wanted to have a particular present. For me, it was electronic football. I just had to have it to be happy. I couldn't imagine life without it. I dreamed of that toy. I cut out pictures of that toy from magazines. All I could think about was that toy. That toy completely occupied my thoughts and desires. It is what I worshipped in my life.

My parents bought me electronic football for Christmas, but like all idols, it disappointed me. What I couldn't live without on Sunday morning I was bored with by Sunday afternoon when I learned how to beat the game and score at will.

As all perpetual coveters do, I needed to find someone else to turn into an idol to covet, which would turn around and disappoint me once I obtained it. The whole time, my heart and affections were given to idols of my own making instead of the God who loves me and died for me. This coveting pitfall shows up many ways in real life.

If you are single, you may covet marriage. Many young people let relationships and marriage become the one thing in life they dream about and

they feel they desperately need to be happy. After a while, they feel they cannot survive if they are single. They have made the opposite sex, or a relationship, an idol of their own making. The problem is that once they get a relationship, they quickly learn it is not all chocolates and roses. A relationship is a lot of hard work and sacrifice. That idol disappoints, like all idols do.

Learn to be content with what you have. God is a good God. He will provide. Worshipping and dreaming for what God has not provided instead of being grateful for what God has provided is idolatry. Those who persist in it will not be part of the kingdom of God.

This morning, what are you coveting? What do you need to repent of turning into an idol so you can be satisfied with what God has provided?

Coveting leads to debt.

Debt is our national disease. Debt is almost always the result of coveting. What I see something, I didn't know I need it but now that I know it exists, I need to buy it. None of us are immune to the pull of the enticing poster, the glossy catalogs and the advertising on Amazon. Jesus warns us.

Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Luke 12:15 (ESV)

Consumerism is believing that our identity is based on what we possess, what we drive, or what we wear to prop up our identities, so we spend beyond our means to get it.

In all seriousness, long ago shopping was like going to the car parts store. You went to the store and you told the owner what you needed. The owner went to the back of the store and brought out one or two choices. At that time, you only

went shopping when you needed something because shopping was to supply your basic needs.

Then came the department store. Everything was on display. It was in glass cases. It was under bright lights. You could touch it. Before you came in the store, you didn't even know some of these gadgets existed but now that you see them under bright lights, you must have them. You can't wait to buy them.

This created a problem. People weren't shopping with enough money for impulse purchases so they created the credit card. Now you can buy things with money you don't have. It is an instant loan with the risk of paying high interest if you can't pay it off in full within a month.

Next came the Internet with Amazon and a host of other shopping providers. Amazon is constantly tracking us and suggesting other products to us so we can buy them on credit with money we don't have. You see, coveting our neighbor's stuff leads to debt.

Jesus said it well when he said life is not about stuff. We covet because we think life is about stuff. That isn't true. I have yet to see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. When we die, we don't take it with us.

Coveting leads to broken relationships.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:1-2 (ESV)

James said it well. Most of the breakdowns in relationships and fights between people have coveting at their root. We want something that we don't

have but somebody else has it so we murder to get it. We could see this in the first Gulf War.

In the first Gulf War, why did Saddam Hussein invade Kuwait? A lot of people believe it was because Kuwait was a wealthy and defenseless neighbor. In addition, Saddam Hussein was in debt to Kuwait. Kuwait had the money. Saddam Hussein wanted the money. He coveted the money, so he attacked and killed them to get their money. That is James 4 in action!

The same is true in an interpersonal sense. If you are in a newly married group, as the group ages, couples in the group start conceiving children. Over time you begin to realize that some couples in the group are struggling with infertility because they don't conceive. At that point, the relationships in the group get hard. Many of the relationships break down because those who can't conceive are covetous of those who can conceive. Instead of focusing on being grateful for what God has provided, those without children are jealous of their neighbor who has children. Soon it is a struggle to maintain what were once solid, Christ-honoring friendships.

Some of us struggle with this on social media. In the bitter cold of an Iowa winter, when it is -40, one of your friends has the chance to get away for a week in a tropical paradise. He or she starts posting on social media a picture of his or her feet in the sand and his or her tanned body while you are shivering and whiter than a penguin. What rears its ugly head in your soul is coveting. Instead of gratitude for what God has provided, you covet what God has provided your neighbor. Soon, it is hard to have a conversation with your well-tanned friends.

The Bible tells us it shouldn't be like that. This is how the Bible tells us to act as Christians.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Romans 12:15 (ESV)

We are to be happy for others when they enjoy a blessing from God and to be sad with others when life is difficult. Today, a big application for you may be to simply rejoice with those who rejoice; don't be covetous, jealous or envious of what they have. Be grateful for what you have.

Coveting comes from pride.

Sometimes God blesses others more than us or in ways different than us. Rather than being content with where God placed us or with the gifts God has given us, we want to think of ourselves as more important than we are. Rather than accepting the more humble position in life God has given us, in pride we covet the success of our friends and we go into debt to live like them and act like them.

In humility, let us accept the position in life God has given us to glorify him like Jesus accepted the position God the Father gave him when he went to the cross for us. Coveting the position of others comes from pride and thinking of ourselves as more significant than we ought.

How does coveting lead us to sin?

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:14–15 (ESV)

James told us the way coveting works. I like this verse because James talks about coveting from the perspective of fishing. He said each person is lured and

enticed by his own desire. This is the way a fish bites the bait. When we throw a lure into the water, most of the time the fish recognizes it as a lure. The more action we give the bait, the better we make it look. If we can get the fish looking at the bait, desiring the bait, dreaming about the taste of the bait, the fish will talk itself into biting the hook. It is lured and enticed to its own death by coveting the bait.

It works the same way for you and me. When we see something that is attractive, but we know it is off limits or God has provided it for someone else and he has not provided it for us to enjoy, we have a choice of what to do in that moment. We can turn away from those forbidden desires or we can think about them, dream about them and sample them in our minds. What we do, like the fish, is build up in our minds an imaginary level of satisfaction that forbidden desire will provide. We start to think we cannot be satisfied without meeting that forbidden desire. Now that we have developed an insatiable appetite for what is forbidden in our minds, we move forward into sin because we have talked ourselves into it in our minds.

This is why the tenth commandment exists. It is sin to grant ourselves the opportunity to mentally entice ourselves with things God has forbidden and things God has not provided. Doing so leads to death.

A case study on coveting — Naboth and Ahab

There are many stories in the Bible that show us coveting in action. The juiciest of them is the story of Ahab and Naboth. Ahab was king of Samaria. He had all the finer things in life. One day he noticed a vineyard outside his palace. It

was well-manicured and a quaint place for grapes. As Ahab thought about it, he imagined how nice it would be to turn it into a vegetable garden. Imagine that, a vegetable garden right outside the palace. He could just taste the fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots and lettuce he would have for a salad every night for dinner. The more Ahab thought about transforming that vineyard into a vegetable garden, the more he wanted it. He coveted that vineyard with all of his heart. He decided to make a proposal to Naboth, the vineyard's owner. It was a fair offer. Ahab offered to either buy the vineyard or trade the vineyard with Naboth for another vineyard of equal worth. This was a chance for Naboth to make some extra money because Ahab was so desperately coveted his property. Instead of accepting King Ahab's offer, Naboth immediately declined. Why did he turn Ahab down so quickly? Naboth turned him down because he knew his Bible. The laws of Moses didn't allow the buying and selling of property. Naboth was not allowed to sell the family farm, even if he wanted to sell the family farm. Ahab should have known better than to even ask Naboth to consider this real estate offer.

The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from one tribe to another, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. Numbers 36:7 (ESV)

Unfortunately, this wasn't a casual offer on Ahab's part. He was seriously coveting what he knew was forbidden. Even though he had so many things as king, he was consumed with acquiring this little vineyard to grow some fresh vegetables. When he realized his real estate venture was slipping through his hands, the Bible tells us that even though he was a grown man, he acted like a child. He pouted. He lay on his bed, turned his face to the wall and refused to eat his dinner. In essence, he was a grown man acting like a 5-year-old.

As soon as Jezebel, his wife, saw her husband's sorry state, she took matters into her own hands. She bribed some unscrupulous men to accuse Naboth of blasphemy. Since there were two witnesses, Naboth was taken outside and stoned to death. This cleared the way for Ahab to acquire the vineyard and plant his precious vegetables. Remember that coveting is the beginning of sin, it certainly isn't the end. In this case, Ahab's coveting led to cold-blooded murder so a man who already had everything could have a fresh salad with dinner.

God is not mocked. When the king arrived at the vineyard, Elijah, the prophet, was waiting to meet him and to speak words that would chill Ahab to the bone. Elijah said, "In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up your blood." Elijah promised that the dogs wouldn't just lick up the blood of Ahab but they would also lick up the blood of Jezebel, his wife. As you would guess, God's word proved true. That is the way coveting works. We think it is not a big deal, but in this case, a little coveting over a neighbor's vineyard led to cold-blooded murder and the death of a king and his queen, all over a few vegetables.

Ahab already had most of the finer things in life. Rather than giving thanks to God for what he had, he became obsessed with one thing he didn't have, and it lead to his death.

How can I replace my coveting with contentment?

What are we to do with our desires to covet? The Bible tells us that God calls us to replace our coveting with contentment. Let me give you four ways to cultivate contentment in our lives.

Remember that if I need something to accomplish God's will for my life, God will provide what I need.

The truth is that if God wants us to have anything to accomplish his will for our lives, he will give it to us so we can accomplish that will. If we need more money to glorify him with our lives, God will provide. If we need different gifts to serve him, God will give us those gifts. If God wants us to have a different job to glorify him, he will open that opportunity. If we are supposed to be in a different life situation, God will change our current life situation. Contentment means accepting where God places us. It means accepting the gifts and the limitations God has given us as part of his good plan and amazing wisdom. God perfectly shaped us to accomplish his will for our lives, and he will perfectly provide us with everything we need to accomplish his will for our lives.

We may not like our situation in life, but if God wanted us to be in a different one, he would put us there.

Contentment is saying, "My father loves me. He has a good plan for me. I can trust the way my father made me and that my father will provide for me so I can do what he wants me to do with my life each day of my life. I don't need to covet what others have. I can be content with what I have knowing it is enough to please Jesus."

Remembering my underserved eternity through Jesus brings contentment in place of coveting.

Psalm 73 tells us about Asaph. Asaph was a worship leader who didn't like his position in life. He coveted the life of the wicked rich.

For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in

trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. Psalm 73:3–7 (ESV)

In their wickedness they were so fat with the good life that their eyes were bulging out of their heads. While the wicked, rich, fat people were living their lives in luxury, the Psalm implied that life was hard for Asaph as he followed God. Asaph coveted their good lives.

When Asaph got to the middle of his Psalm, he came to a realization.

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Psalm 73:16–17 (ESV)

In other words, it doesn't matter how prosperous people are in this life. The only thing that matters is what happens to people in the next life. It is better to be a bum on the street with Jesus in your heart than a billionaire without Jesus. It is better to be in a crippled body wracked with pain and suffering in this life than to be a healthy Olympic athlete that doesn't know Jesus. You may have many good things in this life, but if you do not have Jesus, those are the only good things you have.

In Ephesians 1:3 Paul described Christians as the most blessed beings in the universe who are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heaven. Nobody can be more blessed than we are for all eternity. No matter what someone's earthly prosperity, it is nothing compared to the blessings that await the sons and daughters of God in eternity.

Remember that Jesus will give me the strength to handle the trials of prosperity and the trials of poverty.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:11–13 (ESV)

Paul said he was content when he had nothing. He also learned to be content when he had everything. People who are poor think they will be content when they are rich. People who are rich think they have too much stuff and if they could just get rid of it, they would be content. Contentment does not come from what we have or what we don't have in our hands. Contentment comes from who you have in your heart. There are trials and temptations that come with poverty, such as thinking that riches will make you happy. There are trials and temptations that come with prosperity, such as thinking you are better than others because of your wealth.

God in his wisdom has made some poor and some rich, and neither are immune from the unique temptations that come from their financial state. How do we live in the financial states God has placed us? We trust in Christ.

This is what means when Paul said in Philippians 4:13, that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. He could have riches and he could live in poverty with contentment as he walked with Christ. Contentment comes from walking with Christ, not from our financial states.

Remember that no matter what people do to me they cannot thwart God's good plan for me.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Hebrews 13:5–6 (ESV)

Notice that the writer of Hebrews doesn't say to keep our lives free from money. We are to keep our lives free from the love of money. Our security in life is not our money. Our security is that God has promised to watch over us. God has promised to never leave us. God has promised to provide for us. Nobody else can ruin your life. Nobody else can thwart God's good plans for your life. God is watching over us. God promises to provide for us. Whatever we need, God promises to provide. We can be content. God is our security who will never leave us. Money will leave us.

Conclusion

My friends, coveting is a dead-end road. It is the beginning of all sin. It leads us to idolatry. It leads us to debt. It comes from our pride. This morning, God call us to replace our coveting with contentment that we can have through Jesus. We know that whatever we need to accomplish God's will, our good God will provide that for us, and many times he provides us with much more than we need. We know that even if we do not have much in this life, we are rich beyond our wildest dreams in eternity with Jesus. We know that our contentment does not come from the security of our money but from the God who loves us and who promises to care for us and never leave us.

My friends, let us stand out in a world of coveting as a people that are content because we have a good God and a great savior named Jesus. They are more than enough.



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