

"Learning To Be Content"  
THE TENTH COMMANDMENT  
Exodus 20:17; Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:11  
Mililani Community Church  
Pastor Rick Bartosik  
August 10, 2003

In U. S. News and World Report a few years ago, John Leo wrote: "These are dark days for the Ten Commandments. It's not just that people go around breaking them all the time (nothing new there), but that so few of us seem able to remember what these oft-broken rules actually say. In 1994, a survey of 1,200 people, ages fifteen to thirty-five, found that most of those polled could name no more than two commandments, and as the essayist Cullen Murphy writes, "They weren't too happy about some of the others when they were told about them." (John Leo, "Thou shalt Not Command," *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 November 1996, 16).

When we began this series on the Ten Commandments we explained that in spite of what people think, God gave the Ten Commandments out of a heart of love – to people he had just delivered from slavery. These are not words of restriction, but words of liberation! They are one of the greatest expressions of God's love in the Bible. Ron Mehl has called them "A Valentine Written In Stone." They are God's Moral Law to tell us how to live with each other and how to live in fellowship with God. They are a measuring stick for life. They are like a mirror reflecting God's Holy character. They provide the foundation on which human society must be laid if justice, wholeness, and peace are ever to be achieved.

Today in America we live in a culture that is dying, because more and more it is rejecting God and His Word. Our entire judicial system was originally designed to enforce the Ten Commandments; but just this past week the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court was ordered by a federal judge to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama Judicial Building (He refused and will appeal to the Supreme Court).

Another evidence of our cultural decline was the vote this past week by the apostate bishops of the American Episcopal church who approved the election of a practicing homosexual as the new bishop in New Hampshire. One of these priests was interviewed on the Bill O'Reilly Show. He explained how these church leaders could make such a decision in clear violation of the teaching of the Word of God: "We Episcopalians do not regard the Bible as the final authority for the church." A note of hope came in the report from World Magazine that the Anglican archbishop of Nigeria, whose 17 million members outnumber those of England, Canada, and America combined, declared that

churches that disobey the Bible's teachings about sexuality are heretical and that he will withdraw fellowship from any such Anglican church. Other bishops from Africa, Asia, and Australia have joined him. ("Southward Shift," World, July 26, 2003).

The cover of your bulletin this morning says, *"The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life."* The opposite is also true – when we reject the Lord and His Word we are sentencing ourselves and our culture to death. *"Keep the commandments and keep your life; despising them means death"* (Proverbs 19:16 LB). If we ever needed Christians to stand up for the "word of truth" we need them now – not only believing the truth but living the truth before a dying world.

Today we come to the tenth of these life-giving commandments: Exodus 20:17: *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

## **I. WHAT IS COVETOUSNESS?**

The Hebrew word for "covet" simply means "desire." But here in the tenth commandment it refers to an evil desire. So when the OT was translated into Greek the translators used a word that means not simply desire, but *"lust" or "passionate longing."*

So we understand that the tenth commandment means we are not to lust after something that belongs to our neighbor. Specifically, we are not to lust for another person's "house" which means his possessions. And we are not to lust for his wife.

It is interesting that in Deuteronomy 5:21, where this commandment is repeated, it places lusting after someone else's spouse as the first thing forbidden. *"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife"* – because a person's wife or husband is the crowning possession of any man or woman. *"A wife of noble character is her husband's crown..."* (Prov. 12:4).

We need to be sure we understand that this commandment does not say that we are not to desire to have a wife or a husband or a home! but it forbids desiring the someone else's husband or wife or their furniture or their clothing, their appliances, or their boat or their car, or anything else that belongs to them.

This commandment is different from any of the other commandments because instead of simply forbidding an ACTION, it forbids an INNER ATTITUDE. This commandment goes down into our hearts where no other human being can see. "You can be living out an orgy of covetousness, and no one will know it. It is an easily camouflaged interior sin" (Kent Hughes, Disciplines of Grace).

So this commandment uncovers a tendency that lies deep within all of us to desire things that we have no right to have. A covetous person says, "*I want what YOU HAVE because I feel that is what will satisfy me and make me happy.*"

The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains well what this commandment requires:

Q80: What is required in the tenth commandment?

Answer: The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor, and all that is his.

Q81: What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

Answer: The tenth commandment forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

Jesus said the Ten commandments can be summarized by two commands: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind, and ... love your neighbor as you love yourself.*" Covetousness is directly the opposite of "loving your neighbor as yourself."

The book of Proverbs sees covetousness as the dividing line between righteous and evil people: "*All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing*" (Proverbs 21:26).

The Bible condemns coveting in strong terms: Micah 2:1-2: "*Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.*"

In Colossians 3:5, Paul said to the new Christians in Colossi, "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and COVETOUSNESS, which is idolatry.*"

So God's Word is telling us to root out this deadly desire that lies deep within all of us – the desire to have something that belongs to someone else.

We can distinguish four stages of this evil desire called covetousness:

**FIRST STAGE:** The **CONCEPTION** of a wrong desire in our heart. We have all had the experience of some improper desire springing up in our heart. This can be called the first stage. We recall how Achan conceived a wrong desire in his heart for something he had no right to have. He saw those beautiful Babylonian garments and that wedge of gold and he coveted them.

When this happens it is possible to **NOURISH** that desire or to seek God's grace immediately to **BANISH** it from our hearts and minds. This is the **SECOND STAGE**. Achan nourished his wrong desire.

If we decide to **NOURISH** the desire and submit to it, we move on to the **THIRD STAGE** – we begin to **DEVISE** a plan to satisfy that wrong desire. Achan devised a plan to take those things and hide them in his tent and he got his whole family in on the plan.

When that plan has been conceived, if there is still no inner cleansing of the heart and mind by a work of God's grace, then we arrive at the **FOURTH STAGE** when a sinful act is committed. The fourth stage involves committing one of the sins specifically mentioned in the Ten Commandments, such as adultery, stealing, murder. In Achan's case he followed through and stole the items God said were off limits.

You may remember reading a few years ago of a Texas cheerleader's mother who deeply desired to see her daughter win a spot on the high school cheerleading squad. She coveted that position for her daughter so much that it led to a death wish for her daughter's main rival. She ended up hiring a hit man to take the other girl out of the competition. That mother is now serving life in prison for murder.

What is the difference between coveting and envy? To covet is to **WANT** somebody else's good so strongly that you are tempted to **STEAL** or do anything else to get it. **TO ENVY** is to **RESENT** somebody else's good so much that you are tempted to **DESTROY** it. the covetous person has empty hands and wants to fill them with somebody else's goods. The envious person has empty hands and therefore wants to empty the hands of the person he envies.

One of Aesop's fables tells the story of an envious and covetous man to whom the Greek god Zeus granted any wish his heart desired – on one condition. The condition was that his neighbor would get twice as much. He was unable to bear the thought of his neighbor having twice as much as he had, so he wished to lose one eye.

Now we come to the question...

## **II. WHY DID THE LORD GIVE US THIS COMMANDMENT?**

### **1. FIRST God gave us this command because he knows that covetousness is so DESTRUCTIVE**

(these points are helpfully made by Ron Mehl in his book, The Ten(der) Commandments, 234 ff).

Paul made this very clear to Timothy in I Timothy 6:6-10: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain....People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction...."*

Paul is telling Timothy that people who long to be rich soon begin to do all kinds of wrong things to get more money ... things that bring them and their families great hurt.

They work and scheme and squeeze themselves dry to get what they think will bring them happiness. But in the end, they don't have any time or energy for the people who are truly important ... the people they love the most.

David found out from personal experience how destructive covetousness can be. In Psalm 51 David coveted his neighbor's wife. And because he was in a position to take whatever he wanted, he took her.

Psalm 51 was written afterwards. These are the words of a broken man, a man who longed with all his heart to turn back the clock but he knew he couldn't. He wrote: *"I admit my shameful deed – it haunts me day and night. It is against you and you alone I sinned and did this terrible thing. You saw it all ..."* (Psalm 51:3-4).

For the rest of his life David watched his family sink into heartbreak and ruin. His sons were involved in rape, murder, incest, disgrace, betrayal and rebellion ... it never stopped.

David had thought – "There is an empty place inside me, and if I could just possess Uriah's wife, I think I would be satisfied and fulfilled."

But it didn't work out that way. What he thought would bring satisfaction really turned out to bring only ruin to his family.

## **2. SECONDLY, God gave us this command because He knows that covetousness is so DECEPTIVE**

In Luke 12:15 Jesus says, *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

We live in a consumer society. There are people who spend billions of dollars and work around the clock for one purpose: to make us unhappy and dissatisfied with what we have. They use all of their skill and talent and training to convince us that if we would just buy this or that we would find greater happiness and meaning and security in this world.

But that is deceptive. Because our value does not come from what we wear or what we drive or where we live. Our value does not lie in what we possess.

Our value is wrapped up in the wonderful fact that Jesus Christ, the Almighty Son of God and the Creator of the world, loved us enough to die for us. Jesus is the one who gives worth and value to our lives.

As I was for this message this past week the words to two songs came to my mind: One is a secular song by a fellow named Tiny Tim, entitled *"Then I'd be satisfied with life."* The other is a sacred song composed in the last century that says, *"Only Jesus! Only he can satisfy!"*

### Then I'd Be Satisfied With Life Tiny Tim

All I want is 50 million dollars  
And seal silk to protect me from the cold.  
If I only knew how stocks would go in Wall Street  
And were living in the mountains built of gold.  
If I only owned Pennsylvania Railroad  
And if Tuesday Weld would only be my wife  
If I could only stay sixteen forever  
Then I'd know that I'd be satisfied with life.

All I want is wheat germ for my breakfast  
A Champagne fountain sizzling at my feet  
While Rockefeller waited on the table  
And a barrel's band playin' while I eat.  
If I only owned Western Union cable  
And if Tuesday Weld would only be my wife  
if I could only stay sixteen forever and ever and ever  
Then I'd know that I'd be satisfied with life.

"I've Found A Refuge"  
Avis M. Christiansen

I've found a refuge from life's cares in Jesus,  
I am hiding IN HIS LOVE DIVINE;  
He fully understands my soul's deep longing,  
And He whispers softly, "Thou art Mine."

*Refrain*

*Only Jesus! Only Jesus!  
Only He can satisfy;  
Every burden becomes a blessing,  
When I know my Lord is nigh.*

Two people: One trying to find satisfaction in the temporary possessions and circumstances of this world; the other finding her satisfaction in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger hosts the most listened to secular talk show dealing with personal moral issues. Recently she said to her listeners: "I have envied all my Christian friends who really, universally, deeply, feel loved by God...and that was a mystery, feeling connected to God. To me that was a mystery, and I was very sad about that and very envious of my friends.... In doing the research for my most recent book, called Bad Childhood - Good Life I asked some questions: "What was terrible?"..."How do you think it impacted you? What problems do you think you have as an adult? How do you think it has harmed you?" and "How have you struggled out of it, if indeed you have struggled out of any part of it? What's been that which got you into a better place?" "...now mind you, I'm not lying, [the stack of response mail is] TWO FEET high...I've got to tell you, ninety-nine percent of the people who felt they were getting better, got better through religion. ...I was particularly moved by how time and time again I heard, 'I joined a church and I felt loved by God, and that was my anchor.' Very powerful." (ANS News Story, August 8, 2003)

We would of course explain to Dr. Laura that it is not simply joining a church that enables you to feel loved by God, but entering into a personal relationship with Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It appears that the "Hound of Heaven" may now be on her trail. May she soon come to personal faith in Christ!

This leads us to the final point of this message...

### **III. HOW CAN WE FIND TRUE CONTENTMENT**

#### **1. The Bible teaches that contentment is a PROCESS**

In Philippians 4:11 Paul writes, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."* He LEARNED contentment from the Lord. It didn't happen overnight

(The two points in this section are made by Ron Mehl in his book, The Ten (der) Commandments, 238 ff)

J. B. Phillips paraphrased Paul's words like this: *"I know now how to live when things are difficult and I know how to live when things are prosperous. In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either plenty or poverty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me"*(Philippians 4:12-13)

Do I have to have that ACCOMPLISHMENT, or that set of CIRCUMSTANCES, or those particular POSSESSIONS to make me happy? No. Every experience that we face is an opportunity to learn and practice contentment in the Lord.

Hebrews 13:5 *"Be content with what you have. Why? For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you"*.

Our times of need become opportunities for God to show us how He will fill those empty places in our hearts. That's why the children of Israel wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. God was teaching them that they could find Him adequate for every need. READ Deuteronomy 8:2a, 3.

When Paul says, "I've learned" he is saying, "I remember the time when I wasn't very content. I had to learn contentment. I wasn't always patient and content. But I learned!"

When Paul finally found the true source of lasting contentment satisfaction, everything else paled in comparison: *"I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage."* (Phil. 3:7-8 NLT).



## 2. True contentment brings PEACE

People lust after possessions and success. They pay a tremendous price for these things in their family and their home. They want more and more. But they are never satisfied.

Is it wrong to want success in life? No. But if that is the aim and goal of your life, then when you get there it won't be enough. True contentment is found in a personal relationship with God.

The Psalmist learned this truth in Psalm 73 (Psalm 73:23-26).

### CONCLUSION

Let me close by sharing with you the testimony of David Robinson, the superstar center for the San Antonio Spurs. He spoke about watching Michael Jordan holding the Chicago Bull's first championship trophy. He thought, "Here I am, with five cars, two houses and more money than I ever thought I would have. What more could I ask for? But there is Michael Jordan, and he has more than me! Boy would I like to have some of the things he has!" Commenting later on his feelings at that time he said: "What I had should have been plenty. But no matter how much I had it didn't seem like enough because material things can't satisfy your deepest needs. That is when I started to realize that I needed the Lord." (David Hubbard, Faith in Sports: Athletes and Their religion On and Off the Field, 1998)

As David Robinson found, nothing this world offers will ultimately satisfy our deepest longings. That's why covetousness is a dead-end road. Come to Christ. He can truly satisfy! When you become a child of God through faith in Christ, God is committed to supplying your every need. As you surrender your selfish desires to him you learn that true contentment that comes from knowing Him and having Him as your highest priority in life. God had only the very best in mind for you when he said "*You shall not covet...*"

**THE TENTH COMMANDMENT  
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**  
(From *Decision Magazine*)

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17)*

**OBSERVE**

1. What message does Jesus give about covetousness? (Luke 12:13-15)
2. What should be our motivation to be contented? (Hebrews 13:5)
3. What does the Apostle Paul say is the result of pursuing money or of not being contented? (I Timothy 6:6-10)

**INTERPRET**

1. Read Colossians 3:5. Paul calls covetousness "idolatry." What is the relationship between covetousness and idolatry?
2. Why will someone who loves wealth never be satisfied? (Ecclesiastes 5:10-14)

**APPLY**

1. What are some ways that covetousness manifests itself in your life?
2. Pray that God will give you a contented heart?

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