

Ten!

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now as we close our study in the Ten Commandments we're going to look naturally enough, I hope, at the last one that's in our Bibles. Well, I suppose that's up for debate really, isn't it? Because Jesus spoke about a new command that he was going to give us, that we love one another. But I guess that's encapsulated within these Ten Commandments. And in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17 we have this last summary of God's mind and God's will for us in covenant relationship with Him. And we have these words on page 78, You shall not covet your neighbour's house, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his man-servant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. Now just very briefly by way of introduction we remind ourselves that these commands are given into a specific historical situation, covenant people of God in the Old Testament. Now many of us will have a problem I don't imagine with coveting our neighbour's donkey, but there is a much wider principle that is encapsulated in the words of this command. As I hope we've seen in all of the commands. But it's interesting, you know that I think sometimes subconsciously we possibly think, okay I can do this, I can do the commands, I can at least really make a strong stab at them, particularly the not murdering, keeping the Lord's day, the not stealing, the not committing adultery. And you know we've talked about how all of these commands Jesus takes in the New Testament and that He broadens them into our thoughts and into our motives. But for some reason we easily forget that here right in the core of the Old Testament the commands move beyond the outward. And if you thought you were close to obeying any of the commands up till now, or now you're nailed completely, because you have no chance, because here God is reminding even the Old Testament people of God. And

I think we often forget this, we often think the Old Testament religion was very outward, was very ritualistic, was very about obedience, outward obedience. But here God reminds us right at the heart of his mind and will that his standard reaches right into our hearts and right into our desires and what we're thinking about. And that's what's so challenging for us and encouraging as well because the gospel is all about God being able to change our hearts and our desires. So we come tonight and we think this is far too difficult and it's far too troubling and far too problematic. And I can't deal with these things. And the great thing is that that's exactly at least partly what the commands are about. They're driving us to the foot of the cross and to the Savior Jesus himself. It's easy for us, isn't it? It's much, much easier for us to just stick with outward religion. It's much easier for us just to just go to church on a Sunday, even just to read the Bible or be morally upright. It's much easier to do these tangible things, things that we can at the end of the day say, okay, I've had a decent day today. I haven't, you know, I haven't done things that are wrong. I've done my best. I've tried my hardest. And it's easier for us to think like that. And Satan would have us think like that so often so that we're self deceived and we think we don't need Jesus Christ on a daily basis. The difficulty,

I think, and the problem sometimes with their understanding of the Ten Commandments is that they can in us lead to legalism. We can be ticking boxes as to which we obey. It can also lead to judgmentalism. We like to tick the boxes other people are obeying or not. And it can lead us to a deception about ourselves that we don't need changed in the inside and we don't need to be born a new. That's a really bad place. The worst person in the world is their religious hypocrite, isn't it? The worst person in the world is someone who is religion but doesn't have the Savior, doesn't have Christ, doesn't have redemption. That's the most horrible place to be. It's the most kind of cold, icy, lonely, difficult place to be.

It's the most frustrating place for us to be. But the great thing that we're reminded of here is that this is a window into God's mind. It's a window into God's will and God's desire for us. We're going to just slowly move through this commandment together this evening. It's a very interesting

commandment. I think in some ways it's last. And this is simply a kind of visual picture. It's kind of last because in many ways it holds up the other nine. It's like the veins of this command reaching to all the other nine commands. There's an interesting book by a pastor in London called, he's called Jay John. And his book on the Ten Commandments is called, I think, Ten, originally. But he interestingly, and it is original, he works through the commandments from the end. He starts at the tenth and works forward. He's not trying to be smart. He's not trying to be different. And he's not trying to say he knows better than God, obviously. But it's just interesting because there's much that is true in recognising the tenth command, the desire of our hearts and the wrong desiring of our hearts. It reaches into all the other commandments. And it's a reminder, isn't it, for us, that God, the painful truth, every time we come to school, I sometimes wonder why you come back every week, you know that. You don't get spiritedly rubbed in the back and told lovely things every time you come. But each time we come to God's word, there's painful truth, isn't there? And the painful truth that the commandments remind us is that

God requires perfection. It's not just what we look like. It's not just how we act outwardly. But it's inward perfection also, our desires. This commandment's all about coveting, which is wrong desires. And so he's saying that you need to have perfect and right desires and right intentions. We come to church tonight and God is saying, I don't just see, it's an remarkable fact that God is saying, I don't just see what you're like on the outside.

[7 : 35] I know what you're thinking. I know your desires this evening. That's what he's saying. And he's saying, I judge your desires. And I judge them and they are found wanting. That's what he says of each of us. Our secret thoughts expose for all of us our huge need of a redeemer, because he is the Revealer, the judge and the Revealer of our thoughts. We sit here this evening and we're clothed and in our right minds, most of us. But God sees beyond this exterior that is life that we live. And it exposes our deep seated problem. And what's your deep seated problem? And my deep seated problem this evening, in the remaining, if we're Christians in the remaining sin that's in our hearts and if we're not Christians at the very core of your being, is you wish you were someone else. That's at the very core of your, and that's the core of wrong and sinful desires. You wish you were someone else. You wish you lived somewhere else. You wish you did something else. You wish your life wasn't yours because you want, you covet something you don't have. And it's at the very, can you see what I mean when I say that it's the core of maybe all the other commands?

You know, we read about that in James. You don't have because you have the wrong desires and you want to spend them on wrong things. And it causes grief and anger and jealousy and division. And you could take it to the first table of the law, to the first early commandments and apply them because in a sense, wasn't it coveting that that was the great sin of, well, you could talk about pride or you could talk about independence or different things, but maybe coveting was what Adam and Eve did, was it not, in the garden? Was it not the root of their great sin? I want to be God. I don't want Him to rule over me.

I want to listen to what Satan says and I want a bit of God. I want that independence. I'm not going to die. You too, Satan said, you too can be like God. He provoked a covetous spirit within them that they could be what actually, of course, they couldn't be sinful desires. And it's that powerful force that we fight against within us as Christians, wishing we were someone else, somewhere else, doing something else, not where we are, not where God is places, not the person that God made us. We want to be something else and it can be a hugely destructive force within us, uncontainable, unhumanly unchangeable, unstoppable. And it enslaves us because we can never be released, we can never be free as we are, as God intended us to be by grace, always looking over our shoulder, always wanting something else, always desiring what we don't have, always looking away from Christ. And of course, the reality of that is the deception of sin and the deception of those who have not yet fallen in with Christ. So number 10, coveting. It's really legally and outwardly.

It's unenforceable. You couldn't put this on the statute books of the New Scotland if we were to gain independence. You couldn't do it. You couldn't have the 10th commandment as a command that was enforceable by law, even though we know that many of the commands or many of the or our legal system is based on these, at least some of these commands.

But it separates us out from just a legal obedience, doesn't it? It's a reminder that God's law is different, that God is different, that God knows our hearts. And tonight, I think that's a really, in many ways, it would be good just to stop for five minutes and just let you think about that as, you know, meditate on that for a moment, that God, we can't hide from God. Wasn't that the most

absurd thing about the garden? Wasn't it that Adam and Eve, having known who God was and understanding who God was, thought that they could hide from Him, from what they'd done, behind a bush? Isn't that amazing that they thought that they could hide from Him? And don't we do all the time by not praying, by being busy in our work, by doing a myriad of different things, hiding from God? You know, it's like the little child who's playing hide and seek and who covers his eyes and thinks that no one can see them because they're covering their eyes. Of course, everyone can see them unless they hide properly. And sometimes we're like that with God. We think that we just don't look at Him or don't pray to Him or don't deal with Him. Somehow you can't see what we're doing. And He's one who knows intimately our lives and knows our hearts.

[13:14] The prohibition is coveting. And it's interesting, isn't it, the second table of the law, the second set of commands that we've seen before, that's love your God, Lord your God with all your heart, soul, your strength and mind, and your neighbour as yourself, the second table of the law is all about our neighbourly response to one another, you know, honouring our parents, not murdering, committing adultery, stealing, false testimonies, your neighbour, you shall not cover. And this is very much in the context of covenant community, you know, you covet your neighbour's house. It's our attitude, isn't it? It's not just our internal attitude, but it's our attitude to one another. It reveals itself, not just absolutely privately and internally, but it reveals itself externally in how we think about and treat our neighbour. So at one level we say, well, the word of God and the eye of God is in our hearts, it's very private, it's very secret, that's true. But very often what is in our hearts is revealed by how we live with our neighbour. So our actions sometimes reveal the intentions of our heart. And so it's phrased and it's moulded in the context of community and in the context of how we treat one another and becomes therefore so often the motive, as I say behind what causes murder and adultery and stealing in community with others. So it speaks about not coveting, I think not just in a focused obviously way in this commandment, but generally not coveting material things, not coveting your neighbour's house as is summarised here. So always wanting materially what we don't have, desiring what maybe we don't have because thinking that will bring us happiness, that will bring us contentment, that will bring us fulfilment, that will bring us ultimate meaning in life so that we look at our neighbour and we say, oh man, they've got a great house, I wish my house was like that, they've got a great car, I would love to have a car like them or they've got a great job or whatever it might be in material, maybe more material terms, a great, it's a challenge about greed, isn't it? Greed, covetousness can also be translated greed and it's this prohibition of wanting all the time what we don't have, wanting more clothes, wanting new clothes, wanting bigger and better, envious of what other people have, living our lives in other people's back pockets, wishing we were like them, constantly discontented with what God has gifted to us, what God has given us, ultimately grumbling against him because we think you're treating other people better, God, I wish I were like them, why is their life so good, why is my life so poor? And it's coveting, it's thinking badly of our neighbour because we're thinking we would rather what they have, they don't deserve it, I do. So not only does it, I've agreed within our own hearts but it instills a bad, a bad, bad thoughts towards others who have because we regard ourselves as being more worthy of what they have than they are. And so there's this great, it causes discontent and it causes friction and it causes unhappiness and it causes disc greed in our thinking, in our life.

So material things, but interestingly also you shall not covet your neighbour's wife. So it's not just illegitimate desires for material things but it's illegitimate desires for other people. Always being discontent with the relationships in which God has placed us, seeing someone else's wife say, well, or husband, and thinking that person would really be far better with me, I would understand them better, I would treat them better, I would be better with them, thinking that other person doesn't deserve them, I deserve them, I wish I had them. And so there's this, a great, so isn't it, can you see it as it works, it's so self-centred because the world revolves around us, that's mine, they should be mine, I should have that person, I should have this. And so it's replacing God's rightful place and saying I'm at the centre of the universe and this is what I deserve and this is what I ought to have and this is what I ought to be like. And it ultimately is hugely ugly. It reveals a misunderstanding about relationships, that they can be quick and move on as if illicit relationships can provide what steady relationships don't. And it can have all kinds of wrong implications for what we think of each other in community and in church even, revealing a discontent for God and a disregard for others. And just at that very basic level it reminds us, doesn't it, of just our great need. Sometimes we covet because we loathe ourselves, we can't believe God loves us and we can't believe God cares.

Sometimes we covet because we love ourselves, because we think God should care far more because we're worth it. And he is not at the centre of the universe, we are. And we covet because we want self-service, we want it now and we want it our way. And it leaves us thinking, well how can I change? How can I change my desires? How can I purify the undefinable?

How can I not covet? I guess we step out of here and every day we covet. We might not think we're lawbreakers but every day there'll be elements in our thinking and our desires that remind us that we covet, that we don't want to be who we are and we don't want to be what we're doing or slaves to that. But the great redeeming hope of the Gospel is that Jesus says, I give you a new life. You know, that's why it's so important that we understand being born again. You know, I know a lot of us are brought up in the church and it's been a gentle, a gentle movement into the kingdom and it hasn't been a radical rebirth. But the theological truth behind it is so absolutely crucial for us to understand that He gives us new desires and He works in us and we cooperate with Him to fight, to see these new desires, transforming us to be like Jesus Christ and it is a fight, it is for us a fight. But Jesus Christ is up for that and is victorious over death and the grave and is absolutely willing us and He's not condemning us. He's not exposing us as a tyrannical God. He is dealing with us because He loves us and He says, look, be honest. Be honest with one another and be honest with me and come to me on a daily basis to help transform that coveting heart so that it desires you. Why is our worship so significantly important?

Well, there's a million answers to that. But because, or what should be important in our worship is that it reveals a transformed heart. You know, just as coveting reveals itself in our attitude to our community, into our neighbors, into selfishness and pride and all these things, so a heart that's been transformed should be revealed in our worship and in our ongoing attitude to one another. Selfishness is being dealt with by Jesus and you will go from here and you will be tempted to speak about people and think about people and act towards people in ways that Satan will come in and say, it's okay to think that way, it's okay to live that way, it's okay to deal that way with one another. But what we really want to impress on each other is the Holy Spirit transforming power for every day and every part of our community living as Christians. What then, as we close, do we have to do other than fall on our knees before Christ? Well, we simply need to put Him first, don't we? That is what

[22 : 56] He asks in Matthew 6, 33, where He's often kind of elucidating going through the commandments again and with this incarnate New Testament understanding and application. He says, seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

Isn't that great? He's just saying, please just put me first. When we covet its other things we put first because we think they will bring us happiness. We think they will change our life. We think they will bring us joy and we are all battling with these things and He says, please just put me first. I've gone to the cross for you. I love you with no greater love, not even a greater, even if it was just the greatest human love it would be amazing, but this is the greatest divine love and He says, I've gone to the cross for you and He says, I can't do any more, put me first and I'll give you the things you need. I'll give you the things that will bring you blessing and joy because I love you and I'm your father, I'm your brother, I'm your friend and I'm the holy God, yes. But seek me first. Put my kingdom and my righteousness first in your life and these things will be added to you as well. That is so crucial to us, isn't it? He's reminding us when He says that we can't, in Luke 16, 13, we can't serve two masters.

We simply can't do it. No servant can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money and so there's the challenge that we covet, what we don't have, we wish we had a bigger bank account so we could buy more things and be happier and maybe impress other people and get them on our side and He says, look, it's all about understanding the desires that come through grace and the sins that we need rescued from and the wholeness that He has come to give us. So the great gospel message, the great message of the command is that good desires, which we all want, don't we? We all want good desires. We all want our good desires. Sometimes we quibble about what maybe these good desires will be but we all recognize that we want good desires to come from our hearts and if we acknowledge God then we acknowledge that He is good God and we can take comfort that we can get our good desires from God. That He can give us a vibrant heart-beating Christianity because

He's done major heart surgery spiritually and we don't therefore have this massive tension always of looking like one thing on the outside. I'm supposed to be a Christian, I profess to be a Christian.

This is how I should act but I'm miserable. I'm miserable inside because all my desires are wild and dark and they're different from what I'm supposed to be because we've kept Jesus out here and we haven't taken Him in here and we haven't let Him do this radical reworking, remoulding of what we are from the inside out because that's what He wants to do. That we can have a thirst for God and a desire for God and that comes from our ongoing relationship with Him in prayer and seeking His will primarily first and foremost to work within us. Prayers may be always to be Lord change everyone else.

Please change the church. Please Lord change the minister. Please change my circumstances. Please change my relationships. Lord please change me. Please change me. And that enables us as we wrestle with Him I believe to learn contentment. Paul spoke powerfully of that in Philippians chapter 4, from his prison cell. Philippians 4 verse 11. I am not saying this because I'm in need for I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

[27 : 25] I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. And in a favourite verse of the athletes is the wind or race and lift up their vest and they've got another vest underneath which says I can do everything.

Through Him gives me strength. I'm not sure how often they lift their vest when they've got beaten. It's usually when they've won. But you can lift that vest when you got beaten as well. See I can do everything through Him who gives you strength. And we have learned contentment because we've found our identity in Christ. We don't want to be the great people that we look up to. We just want to be who He has made us because we are uniquely His and we have learned contentment. I just want to finish by reading some verses from 1 Timothy 6 which speaks about godliness. Godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. You know here the pastoral concern here. But you people of God flee from all of this and pursue righteousness, godliness and faith. Love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which we were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. A great gospel we have. A great God and a great Savior. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God we thank you for the commandments of God. We thank you that they are so utterly relevant to us that they both break us down and then through Christ build us up. We thank you that you lived that life. I never touched on this at all tonight.

But you lived this perfect life where you didn't covet unbelievably. That you lived this perfect life not just outwardly but that you had no wrong desires. That you didn't covet what anyone had or any other person in any wrong way. That enabled you to face the crosses, our substitute and be punished for all our coveting, our greed, our selfish, ugly, misguided and deceived thoughts about ourselves and others. Lord help us we pray.

Forgive us when we think wrong and act wrong and live wrong. Help us to be renewed by your Holy Spirit to love you from the inside out and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Forgive us for our often unkind and self-centred words towards one another. Our covetous spirit for what they have as if you are treating them differently from us and in an unfair way. Lord may we recognise our uniqueness and also our identity in Jesus and may we be content where we are with what you have done knowing that we are your children and that we have eternal life guaranteed through your finished work on the cross. Bless us we pray and hear us as we sing together a returning of our thanks to you for who you are. In Jesus' name, amen.