

Part 11

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Now I want us to look this evening at the 10th commandment which is in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17. It's the last of the commandments that we are going to look at from Exodus, Exodus chapter 20 and verse 17 where it says, you shall not covet your neighbour's house, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Remember the commands are written into a specific time, very different culturally, very different to our situation but the principles we recognise for ourselves.

But just by way of introduction can I ask a few questions. Can we keep the law of God? Do you think that we can? The 10 laws, the 10 words, can we keep them?

We try and keep them, we make an effort to keep them but we absolutely, categorically, can't even begin to touch the hem of the 10 commandments.

We can't look at obeying them. There's no chance that we can obey the 10 commandments. It's impossible. So let's remember that, that our any religion that says that Christianity is just about keeping the 10 commandments is completely and utterly misguided because it's impossible for us so to do.

[1 : 41] Is it a tornado that goes up some of the streets including Goat Hill Road in Stornoway last week following the start of a Sunday service ferry crossing?

Is that God's judgement for a people breaking God's law? Categorically I would say not.

Unless we think that before the tornado or before the first Sunday sailing all who ceased to use that or all who've agreed with the thought of it where those who obeyed God's law were pleasing God, were satisfying God someone who chose not to sail on a Sunday was satisfying God's demands for them was pleasing God was in favour with God because they chose outwardly not to sail on the Lays Day.

I'm not talking about the merits or demerits of Sunday service, Sunday sailing on the island of Lewis but it came into the public arena this week as if previously to this we were pleasing and satisfying God and now we're under God's wrath. Is that our understanding of the Gospel?

Is that our understanding of the word? Have we got our theology and our witness in a twist? By simply demanding of people morality, moral obedience, outward obedience have we given people the impression that if they just try their hardest to obey the commands by their best to do what God requires. That's all that he asks for.

[3 : 33] He doesn't demand anything else because if that's the case we've entirely lost sight of biblical teaching and we've entirely lost sight of what the commands are.

The commands expose our need and they make clear to us our falling short of the demands of God.

We don't simply believe in a moral code, we're not simply legalists and I think most people outside of the church have that impression of us that we're legalists, that we want to fight just for the Ten Commandments or for God's law because that's what will make society good. That's not what will make society good is Christ.

Christ's salvation, Christ's Gospel, Christ's grace and then obedience to Christ in His grace and in His strength and in His power.

Over these few weeks we've looked at the Ten Commandments and I hope we've looked at them through the prism of the cross and I hope we've seen that the Ten Commandments aren't what we can live up to but that they break down our morality and they break down our self-reliance and make us see how much we need Jesus Christ and how much we need the cross.

[4 : 58] How are the commandments summed up that we love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, all our mind and we love our neighbour as ourselves.

That is an awesomely high standard and it drives us to our knees, our legs buckling in prayer to say Lord Jesus Christ, help me to have a different heart, a heart that loves you and isn't enslaved to sin and to ritualism.

And this commandment is really like the knockout punch altogether. This is the last commandment and it exposes God's painful truth.

It really is an amazing command. Sometimes you think the commands are just a set of rules, outward rules and I know people say that the law of the land should be moulded on them and to a degree that's the case, at least some of them.

But there's never been a law ever that exposed the motives and the desires of our hearts or demanded purity internally and that's what this command is all about.

[6 : 12] It moves from outward legalistic or outward obedience into what we are like inside and it exposes every one of us at that level.

God says He requires of us inner purity, not just Sunday observance, not just that we don't murder and we've seen that it's more than murder, it's about hating and desires from our heart.

Not just that we're faithful outwardly in our marriage, but that we have purity within and we see this command specifically go straight into the heart and it talks about coveting.

It speaks about our desires, it speaks about our intentions, it's speaking about what we think, what we are thinking about God and what we're thinking about the Gospel.

What? More than just outward realities? Absolutely. And in an instant the command removes from us the temptation simply as people to measure our goodness along somebody else, by somebody else.

[7 : 34] I'm as good as them, I'm better than that person, I do my best and I'm probably the best around here and so we feel good about ourselves because we look at everyone else outwardly and we measure and judge ourselves against them.

But God says He's not interested in a sense in how we measure ourselves against others which can lead to legalism and self-righteousness, but rather He's intimately interested in our inner desires because He sees into our hearts, we sung about that in Psalm 139, He knows our inmost thoughts before we express them, before they eventually bear fruit in how we act.

So He exposes us with this knockout punch in the command which is going to drive us to Jesus Christ in our day-to-day living because He does expose our problem, doesn't He?

His eye digs deep, it's a very piercing and sharp eye, the eye of God because it looks beyond just simply how we've measured ourselves against other people and it sees into our own very core, our own very heart.

It's more more fundamental, isn't it? Than just do's and don'ts. And just as an aside, isn't God absolutely amazing that He's very different from anyone else in the universe as we all make judgments on what we see and our interaction with people but He sees immediately into every heart and into every single soul and into every being.

[9 : 09] An amazing God He is. And our sinful desires that lie within us rock us to the very core of our being and manipulate our identity and break our identity so that it isn't what Christ wants it to be for us.

Coveting is what this command is all about. What is coveting? It's the illicit desire really, isn't it? It's the desire for something that we don't have, something that we don't possess, something that's not ours, something that belongs to another and something that we wish we could have but we don't have.

It can be very kind of simple and basic, I guess, but it can also become all-consuming and it can become very deep-seated. And I think even more importantly than wanting something else or even wanting someone else because the command speaks about wanting our neighbour's life or wanting our neighbour's possessions or goods or lifestyle or everything else.

It's not just, I don't think, primarily about wanting other things or even wanting other people but it's very core and it's most basic. It's wanting to be someone else.

It's a deep-seated unhappiness with what we are, with who we are. And we want to be someone else. We're not happy with what we are. We're not happy with how God has made us.

[10 : 39] We're not happy with our position in life. We want to be somebody else. And that goes right to the very first rebellion against God with Adam and Eve. Ultimately it was coveting that they were doing because it's not that they coveted the apple or the fruit, sorry, the fruit was.

Whatever it was, it's not that they coveted each other's position or anything else. They actually coveted God. The devil knew that and he said, you too can be like God.

And they immediately thought, well, yeah, I'm not so keen to be a creator. I would rather be the creator. I would rather be God. And so they were coveting the preeminence that God had for themselves.

They were wanting to be in control and they weren't wanting to be under His Lordship and under His grace and under His love. Somebody else is what they wanted. And that is the root of covetousness.

We're not content with what we are. We want to be somebody else. We want somebody else's beauty. We want somebody else's wealth. We want somebody else's relationships.

[11 : 46] We want somebody else's power. We just don't want to be ourselves. We're sick and tired of what we are, of the ordinariness and the drabness and the dullness of our life.

We simply want what isn't ours and are looking for satisfaction and completeness in illicit areas and in ways that will never satisfy us and will never give us peace and contentment.

So coveting is within us all. It's deep within us all. And it's a heart problem that we can't deal with on our own. And our motives can be, I guess, very different for wanting to be someone else.

I think because of the brokenness of society and the brokenness of our hearts and the brokenness that sin has brought in, our motive can be self-loathing. We can sometimes want to be someone else or something else or have something else because of self-loathing.

We hate ourselves. We hate what we are. We don't like what we are. We look in the mirror and we think we're ugly both inside and out. We think we're unloved that nobody cares for us.

[13 : 08] But if I was different, then everyone would love me. Then people would take note of me. If I had more to share, then I would be at the centre of attention. It's a self-loathing that drives covetousness.

A worthlessness that Satan beds deep within us and whispers in our lives and our hearts that we have no value and you should want to be something or somebody else.

You are unlovable and unlovely, a self-loathing. But I guess it can also be a self-love. We absolutely adore ourselves.

We want to pamper ourselves and we feel a bit hard done by because we don't have what we think we deserve and that other people might have. We think we're worth it.

We're worth these things. We're worth that person. We're worth that relationship. We're worth that job. And it's because we love ourselves and we have a very high opinion of ourselves that we may be coveted what we don't have.

[14 : 11] Or I guess it could also be self-service that we've become as sinners tremendously independent and this driven, go-getting mentality is ours.

We say, well, I'm in charge. I don't care who I hurt and I don't care who I step over to get what I want. I know what God says because these are relevant in my life and my thinking. And his perspective is of no concern for me.

I want to accumulate because I am at the core and the center of my own universe. And so coveting wells up within us when we have these attitudes and particularly that, you say, well, I matter more than anybody else.

I matter more than my neighbour. I should have what my neighbour has because I'm more important than them. I'm more significant than them. I deserve what they have.

I simply want to be them because I'm not happy with who I am. And very often this cancerous attitude and desire that is within us, it can lead to outward manifestations and lying or deception or cheating or hurt, or stealing, brokenness, and many ways it lies behind all the other.

[15 : 34] It's the foundation of which all the other commands reveal themselves. But maybe sometimes it never outwardly surfaces. But within our hearts, within our souls, there's deep-seated unhappiness, deep-seated bitterness, sometimes bitterness against God, bitterness against our neighbour, bitterness against others who seem to have what we don't have, bitterness against their beauty, against their wealth, against their prosperity, against their blessing.

And it can lead to tremendous heart trouble and brokenness. That is the command that God says we shall not covet.

But it's a massively powerful desire from within us that we can't quell on our own. We can't deal with. We have an inability because we're enslaved on our own.

So the commands bring us to Christ. The commands bring us to God. The commands bring us to God's outstanding response to our need. The commands show us what He wants, they expose that we can't meet His perfect requirements, and they drive us to the Christ who has met God's perfect requirements and yet has been punished on the cross for our failure so that we can be renewed and be given life and given hope.

I can't change my fundamental desires, nor can you. I can't change my heart around to loving God as He wants and loving others before ourselves.

[17 : 24] That's what we need to change. And so we rejoice in what Christ has done and Christ is doing for us on a day-to-day basis. John 3.16, for God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish under the weight of these commands but shall have everlasting life, that we come to the Christ who changes our heart and who enables us to begin to live our lives with a new perspective and with a new ability from within, with a heart of love.

We see the tremendous difference between trying to look and obey the commands without the cross, harsh, legalistic, heavy, burdensome, miserable, oppressive, enslaving, and then seeing it entirely differently when we have Christ in our hearts transforming our lives and forgiving our sins, that we see His commands as life-giving, refreshing and directional and achievable by grace.

If you love me, you will obey my commands. Why? Because He's changing what we are in here and our desires. It's the new priority of grace for us that we see that Christ is beautiful and His commands are not burdensome but a pleasure.

We begin in Christ as Christians to put Christ first. When Jesus says, Seek me first and all these things will be added to you, that is a direct corollary to this command, where we covet, we try to get and we can't, and we are always straining to have what is not ours.

Jesus completely turns it on His head and says, Seek me first, put me first, come to me for salvation, put your trust in me, seek me first and my kingdom, and then all these things will be added to you.

[19 : 41] In other words, He's saying, don't worry about it, it's a whole new priority, the priority of grace. He changes us from within and as He has the preeminence, then we begin to see a different spirit developing within us that opposes the spirit of covetousness. Why? Because we are loved.

Why does a Christian always look for something better? Why is a Christian always wanting something more? Why is a Christian dissatisfied with themselves only if we misunderstand grace?

You see, self-loathing, imbalanced self-love and an independent spirit is dissolved and dealt with in Christ.

I'm not saying easily, we can have deep-seated self-loathing that is hard to work through and work out as is self-love. But can you see when we've come to Christ, the sovereign God of the universe, the Lord who made us, who sustains us and who judges, says, my friend, I love you, I love you as you are, I love you, I made you.

Don't loathe yourself, don't loathe what you are, don't always want to be someone else because I've made you in my image and as you come to me, I will transform you from the inside out to be as you can be in Christ, to be all that you can be and to have life to the full, without coveting what everyone else is and what everyone else does.

[21 : 17] And that is an ongoing process in our lives and it's very tough to put Him first, to give Him the preeminence and it's impossible if we don't do it in our hearts with desire and with love.

It's impossible to put Him first just legally, legalistically or self-righteously because it will lead to further bitterness. It can only come when we see what He has done for us, the cost of our salvation and the depth of His love.

And when we do so, it enables us to recognise His work in us, which is to change our heart. See Ephesians 2 talks about that, talks about what you once desired, what you once coveted, and it says, now what you desire, your desires change.

If you're a Christian and you don't have any different desires or changes, if you have no love or attraction or commitment to Christ from the heart, then there's heart work to be done.

You must deal face to face with God and you must ask Him to change your desires again, your love again. We can change everything on the outside. Come back here next week and you'll all have a new set of clothes and I'll have painted the walls and we'll have changed the lights and they'll be flashing.

[22 : 37] Everything will be changed on the outside if you come back next week. But it wouldn't make a hoot of difference if we aren't changed on the inside. We could have a band up the front, we could have Frank Sinatra's, well that would be pretty impressive, but as soon as it's dead.

But, you know, we could have all kinds of outward changes and we could have all kinds of outward things happening. But if you come in, if you wake up with the same desires or the lack of desires for Christ, no amount of outward changes will bring them to us.

We need to deal with Christ and God as people and ask Him to change our hearts. And I think we often fall short of that and I think it would reflect very often in how we describe it.

If anyone asks you to describe what is a Christian, I wonder what we would say. I certainly know what the world says and what the newspaper says and what the media says. Legalistic laws, self-righteousness, judgmental spirit.

Do we ever think of describing our Christianity in terms of our heart's desire for Christ? That I'm just an ordinary person whose life has been transformed from the inside by Christ, who loves me and who died for me and who has helped me to see how important it is, and has given me the ability to love Him and to love our neighbour.

[24 : 03] And that's a great key to it, isn't it? That we love not just Christ, but we love our fellow Christians and our neighbours. It changes our desire. What is covetousness? It's wanting what our neighbour has.

It's being unhappy with what their happiness is. It's wishing the worst on them and the best on us. It's wishing their judgment not ours, but Christ changes us so that we love Him and we love our neighbour.

And we want the best for them by serving them and by following them. It's a radical change of heart. And that gives us a new contentment.

First Timothy 6 speaks about that new contentment. And with that, I just about finish. Mordo, could you see someone there looking to get out?

Can you let it open the door? New contentment. First Timothy. And I just look at that very briefly before we finish this evening. First Timothy 6.

[25 : 08] And from verse 6, Godliness with contentment is great gains from page 1194. We brought nothing into the world and we'll take nothing out of it. Isn't that a really radical and challenging thought when we spend so much of our lives coveting for a whole lot of things that we can't take with us anyway?

But if we have food and clothing, we can be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires and plunge men into ruin and destruction for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

That coveting, what money can give. And I'm not saying we can't live without money, but it's about contentment. It's not always about looking to what we can't have or don't have. Not always about accumulating, wishing our lives away.

Look, Christ loves you and Christ loves me and he will change us in a way that money and ambition and relationships and fame and popularity will never change us.

Because he changes us from within. He's only the one with the ability to do that and make us content from within to love ourselves from within because we are indwelt by Christ and love by him and forgiven by him and redeemed by him and saved by him.

[26 : 26] And that makes progress all the more beautiful in our lives. I'm not saying that we never want to better ourselves as Christians. That's not what the command is about. It's not about progressing in life.

It's not about just being kind of unambitious in a sense. But it's about progressing with Christ's mentality, being all we can be in Christ's strength for His glory.

And it's using and developing the gifts He's given us to the full extent in His strength and with the right motives, with a love for Him, humbly allowing Him to lead us and guide us.

There's just no saying where we'll end up in Him. So the command, the 10th command in very many ways brings us right back to all the commands and reminds us that they are there to point us to Jesus Christ.

Please don't think in any way that observing Sunday or not murdering outwardly, not committing adultery or whatever the command is that you choose, is enough to satisfy God.

[27 : 45] The commands are there, covenantal commands are there to show us His perfection and our need of Christ and the model as Christians that we can seek to follow in His strength and with His grace in our lives.

If you love me, you will obey my commands. Amen. Heavenly Father, we pray that Your blessing would be on us and that You would help us. We recognise that there's so many things about God that is tremendously challenging and that we forgive us for so often living in a shallow, outward understanding of Your gospel, not allowing Your lights, Your love, Your grace to touch and transform the rottenness that is so often at the very core of our beings.

Self-loathing, self-love or that self-service spirit. All of which deny Christ and God access to our hearts.

All of which become self-reliant and all of which are the deceitful and destructive lie of Satan. So bring us healing and bring us hope and keep us from coveting and wishing we were someone else and being dissatisfied with what God has made us and what God promises for us.

We ask it in Your precious name. Amen.