

Sunday, August 21, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:17 | "Our Neighbor's Gifts"

At the beginning of the summer, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten." This study unpacks the first commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide Christians today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). Idolatry, in all forms, not only **downgrades** who God is but also **diminishes** who men and women were made to be.

In the fourth week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ**. Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

In the fifth week, we unpacked the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And that while we, as Christians, no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in the O.T., we still obey the fourth commandment in principle by meeting on Sundays to remember Jesus' resurrection. Thus, not only do we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, but we also have Jesus for our Sundays, and, ultimately, we have God to thank for our entire weekend. **The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.** This is for our good because we were not designed to work all the time. Since the foundation of the world, human beings have been made to rest.

In the sixth week, we dove into the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother." And this commandment comes right after the commandments that dealt with our relationship with God and before the commandments that dealt with everyone else. This implies that a healthy relationship with God and others is forged in the home. How we treat our parents will impact how we treat God and those people who are around us. After all, if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mar. 12:31), who better to start with than those “neighbors” who are closest to us? And **when the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.**

We studied the sixth commandment in the seventh week: "You shall not murder." But this seems unnecessary. Murder is so wicked and awful that most of us don't need to be told not to do something so obviously wrong. But that assumption gives humanity far too much credit. All human beings, great and small, have the capacity to destroy life. To illustrate that principle, we

saw how the Bible speaks about five forms of murder: unintentional killing, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and anger. Somewhere in those five categories, we are all guilty. Unlike every other created thing, human life is sacred because we alone bear the image of our Creator (cf. Gen. 1:27). As a potter signs his work, every man, woman, and child has been stamped by the Giver of Life. And life is that mark, i.e., existence, consciousness, volition, etc. As such, life is a precious gift not to be thrown away or destroyed. **Whether literally or emotionally, we do not commit murder because human life is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.**

Two weeks ago, we unpacked the commandment regarding adultery. And like the prohibition regarding murder, the seventh commandment isn't so much an effort to stem the tide of sexual infidelity but a commentary on the importance of sexual fidelity. In other words, God is highlighting how much value he puts on sex and marriage. Marriage isn't a communal affair but one of exclusivity. The Lord elevates marital unions far above our base desires so that even though we may be tempted to go astray, we refuse to do so because the vow we made to our spouse in the sight of God is far more important than the feelings we might have towards some would-be adulterous partner. Thus, **whether physically or mentally, we do not commit adultery because, like marriage, sex is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, and special.**

We turned to the eighth commandment in the ninth week: "you shall not steal." Just like the sixth commandment wasn't so much a rule meant to mitigate murder and the seventh wasn't so much a rule meant to reduce adulteries (both commandments were also principles intended to highlight the importance of human life and marriage), the eighth commandment not only wants to discourage theft it also wants to elevate the importance of another's possessions and labor. And because all ownership is stewardship, stealing is not only a sin against our neighbor; it is a sin against our God. This also means we become thieves when we do not use our resources the way God wants us to use them. Thus, **we do not steal because a person's possessions and work are sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.**

In the tenth week, we turned to the ninth commandment: "you shall not bear false witness." And just as the sixth commandment wasn't solely about discouraging murder, the seventh wasn't strictly about dissuading adultery, and the eighth wasn't exclusively about deterring theft, the ninth isn't exclusively about keeping people from destroying their neighbor's reputation; it is also about emphasizing the importance of truth. After all, Jesus is the literal embodiment of truth (cf. Jn. 1:1) which means that all truth in every form is God's truth (cf. Jn. 14:6). So, when we present lies as truths, we are not only hurting our neighbor, we are also defiling the very essence of who Yahweh is. Therefore, **we do not bear false witness because the truth is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, and special.**

Allow me to begin by telling an all-too-common story. A boy is invited to their friend's birthday party. There are games, cake, and, of course, gifts. Eventually, the time comes to open those gifts. And, with the veracity of a dinosaur ripping into a plump Wayne Night in *Jurassic Park*, the boy's friend begins opening present after present, revealing some new trinket. Afterward, the kid turns to his dad on the way home and asks, "Can I have the same things my friend got for his birthday?"

Now, it's understandable that a child would want what he does not have, but this does not excuse his behavior. This is especially true in our tale because this boy wasn't poor. He had more than enough toys to play with at home. In fact, this boy just had a birthday a week before. Many of his presents lay unopened on his bedroom floor, not to mention the countless toys at the bottom of his toy chest that's lain untouched for weeks.

You see, the problem that the boy in our story had wasn't that he lacked toys to play with; his issue was that he lacked contentment. Just as his friend's father had provided good things for his son to play with, the boy's father had blessed his son immeasurably. However, rather than be content with such things as he had, the child grew to covet those things that he didn't have.

Ironically, this story is all-too-common for adults too. This is why "covetousness" is known by many names: envy, greed, lust, avarice, cupidity, craving, infatuation, etc. A child may want their friend's toys, but we, though grown, all too often want our neighbor's toys. In light of that, that last word in the Decalogue stands as a divine check to our selfish desires.

READ: Exodus 20:17 (ESV)

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.

There are three things I want you to know about coveting:

i. Coveting takes place in the heart.

The tenth commandment is unique among its brothers in that, rather than focusing on an action, it focuses on an *inward* state of mind. Coveting is the heart wanting what the hands should not have. This makes it nearly impossible to legislate or punish. How would someone be accused of coveting? Aside from God and the person who covets and assuming there's no confession, it would be impossible to prove that someone had transgressed the tenth commandment. It seems, then, that this commandment (not unlike those before but more

emphatically) highlights how our moral obligation to our neighbors is, ultimately, a duty to and therefore relegated by our God. He sees the thoughts and intents of the heart and knows what transpires in our secluded psyche as much as what occurs in the light of day (cf. Heb. 4:12; 1 Sam. 16:7). Thus, it bears repeating that God's primary concern in issuing the Ten Principles was not mere external compliance to some legislation but internal conformity to his will.¹ How intriguing that God ends the Decalogue by prohibiting something that only he can enforce. This is because every commandment (not just the first four) primarily deals with our relationship with God. In loving our neighbors well, we are really loving our God well.

Admittedly, some would argue against this approach, saying God prohibits the desire that leads to action rather than just the desire itself. For instance, Leon Kass explains that the Hebrew word used is *chamad*, which refers to a "'hard-to-resist" urge to do, spilling over into active planning to make the coveted object one's own."² But while this may be true in some passages (cf. Ps. 68:17), the Bible also forbids just the "coveting" aspect without any reference to the action (cf. Ex. 34:24; Pro. 6:25; Deut. 7:25; Josh 7:21; Mic. 2:2).³ Had God intended both desire and action, he would've supplied a second verb such as "seize" to help round out his meaning.⁴ The fact remains that this commandment is directed at the heart and head rather than the hands and feet. God forbids the feeling and not only the act that proceeds from that feeling.⁵ This is the point that Jesus himself made:

READ: Luke 12:13-21 (ESV)

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for

¹ Wright, Christopher J. H., *Exodus*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2021), p. 380.

² Kass, Leon R., *Founding God's Nation*, (London; Yale University Press, 2021), p. 332.

³ Sarna, Nahum M., *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, (Philadelphia, PA; The Jewish Publications Society, 1991), p. 114.

⁴ Durham, John I., *Exodus*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1987), p. 298.

⁵ Mackey, John L. *Exodus*, A Mentor Commentary, (Great Britain; Christian Focus Publications, 2001), p. 367.

many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.””²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Money is the means by which so many pursue their own happiness. But joy is not something we can buy from a store; enjoyment is cultivated through the choice to remain content in the things God has already given us.

ii. Coveting affects every part of our life.

What's more, the tenth word in the Decalogue lists seven things that a person shouldn't only refrain from taking but shouldn't even long for. And, it behooves us not to rush through this list.⁶

- **house** ("Man, my neighbor has a beautiful home. In fact, it's better than mine."
"Welcome to another episode of Fixer Upper! Today, we'll be taking this old dilapidated, slapping some shiplap on there, and breathing new life into it.)
- **wife** ("Wow! My friend's wife is gorgeous! Why can't my wife look like that!" "Look at such and such's husband. He's so charming and talented. If only my husband were more like him.")
- **male servant, female servant, ox, and donkey** ("My job isn't nearly as prestigious as his." "I should've gotten that promotion instead of him." "They're always going on the most amazing vacations, and I'm stuck here." "Why can't my kids be more like their kids.")
- **anything that is your neighbor** ("If only I were as smart/talented/funny/handsome/beautiful as them, then I'd be happy." "My car is a piece of junk! I need a new one just like _____. "No one has it as hard as I do. I've got to work my butt off just to get a bit ahead. Everyone else has it so easy.")

The fact that God lists out seven things suggests two things. First, it bespeaks of a “completeness” in that, as he summed up, there is nothing that your neighbor has that you are allowed to want. And, secondly, to covet is sin in its purest form.

This is not to say that simply wanting something is “coveting.” John Dickson explains that this idea is more akin to Buddhism than Christianity in that Buddhists seek to be released from all desires entirely, a state they call “Nirvana.”⁷ In doing so, they seek to insulate themselves from

⁶ DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), p. 155-156.

⁷ Dickson, John, *A Doubter's Guide to the Ten Commandments*, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2016), p. 158.

pain, a sentiment we can all sympathize with. After all, you won't be disappointed if you expect to be disappointed or disassociate yourself from your own desires. But in insulating themselves from pain, Buddhists also protect themselves from pleasure. Scripturally, we are not souls in need of being released from our mortal vehicles; instead, we're beings designed with both mind and body intertwined and inseparable (cf. Deut. 6:4-5). God has given us a variety of desires, and he expects and encourages us to satisfy those urges, albeit in his way.

For instance, being hungry is not a sin. Or, desiring to improve oneself, be it for our physical or mental well-being, is a good thing. Wanting to meet a need is okay. However, what is *never* okay is when our wanting moves beyond meeting our needs to satisfying our greed. Wanting to eat is fine, but we ought to manage our appetite to avoid becoming gluttonous. Wanting to improve our station in life is a laudable desire, but when we make it the goal of our life to succeed at all costs, we'll quickly become uncharitable, prideful, and/or vain. And, especially when it comes to wanting our neighbor's stuff, that desire is never, under any circumstance, okay. As Kevin DeYoung puts it, "The Bible says our problem is not that we desire things but that we desire the wrong things or desire good things in the wrong way."⁸

iii. **Coveting is the seedling that produces every kind of sin.**

Since the tenth commandment is situated at the end of the list, it also has a bearing on all the other commandments that preceded it.⁹ For instance, seeing another nation's gods and desiring them for one's own will undoubtedly lead to forsaking the one true God (1st commandment), worshiping idols (2nd), and defaming God's name (3rd). If we see that way to get more things is to work as much as we can, it would naturally lead us to work seven days a week (4th). If our friends have parents who appear to be better, we could refuse to honor the parents we have (5th). And coveting, given its full reign, will enable people to murder (6th), commit adultery (7th), steal (8th), and lie (9th). "The tenth commandment is where the Decalogue ends, but it is, in fact, the point at which every breach of the law begins—when by our 'own desire' we are 'dragged away and enticed' (Ja. 1:14)."¹⁰

James makes the point that coveting is the first step to sinning.

READ: James 1:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are

⁸ DeYoung (2018), p. 159.

⁹ Durham (1987), p. 298.

¹⁰ Mother, J. A., *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; IVP Academic, 2005), p. 230.

dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Even Christians who are not walking in the Spirit become slaves to their own desires. So much so, that they are dragged away by them and force-fed temptation. We become slaves to the master we yield ourselves to (cf. Rom. 6:16). Eve's desire for the fruit in the Garden of Eden is an excellent example of how desire turns to covetousness if left unchecked by God's word. If she was not immune to its effects and she was perfect, neither will we be impervious to the allure of covetousness.

READ: Genesis 3:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ 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.

The Bible says Eve looked at the tree and saw it "was good for food." The initial desire for the forbidden fruit may have been prompted by an evil being—i.e., the snake and reinterpreting God's word—but it did not take root in Eve's heart because she had evil desires. Eve, at that point, was perfect. Unlike us, who were born bent, her nature had yet to be broken. The issue at play here was that Eve was hungry. Her attraction to the forbidden fruit began because she saw that the fruit was ripe for picking. **Temptation is always dressed as a trojan horse.** It comes to us disguised as something good even though death is at its core. And had Eve allowed God's word to rule her life rather than her urges, she would've turned to another tree and gotten fruit from it. But, as we know, her innocent wanting turned into an intense coveting. The Bible says that the fruit became a "delight" to her eyes. **Gaze long enough at anything, and you will, eventually, make a move to take it no matter what "it" may be.** Thus, after wanting turned to coveting because looking turned to gazing, Eve took the fruit. Not only that, but "she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). There's an old saying that goes, "misery loves company," which refers to how unhappy people like to make happy people unhappy. How many of us know someone who loves to rain on someone's

parade? The same is true for those who sin. It is in our nature that when we sin, we want to be affirmed that what we've done is okay. And so, to quiet our conscience, we'll invite others to share in our mistakes. **Thus, the only thing that loves company more than misery is sinfulness.**

So, what's the takeaway?

We do not covet our neighbor's stuff because God's provision is sacred-i.e., set apart, unique, and special.

When we covet what God has not given us, we resent something that God has done for our neighbor. This is the polar opposite of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Or, as J. I. Packer explains,

"The contentment that the tenth commandment prescribes is the supreme safeguard against temptations to break commandments five to nine. The discontented man, whose inner itch makes him self-absorbed, sees other people as tools to use in order to feed his greed, but the contented man is as free as others are not to concentrate on treating his neighbor rightly. "¹¹

But not only are we, in a way, hating our neighbor when we covet, but we are also snubbing our noses at the very things that God has given to us. Therefore, the admonition to not covet is, conversely, an encouragement to be content. If the Lord has so blessed our neighbors, then we can rest assured that the Lord will likewise bless us since he is not only ***their*** helper but ***our*** helper (cf. Heb. 13:5-6).

READ: 1 Timothy 6:6-11 (ESV)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. ¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Covetousness is like an open wound we inflict on ourselves. Scratching, cutting, and bruising ourselves until we cannot help but relieve the pain of it, for a season, by taking what is not ours

¹¹ Packer, J. I., *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2007), p. 102.

to take. The only remedy for the mind that is so unhinged is contentment. It is the salve that soothes the restless heart. And once a person has learned contentment, very little in this life can disquiet him (cf. Phil. 4:11-13). The problem is, as CS Lewis put it in his book *The Weight of Glory*, is that we are far too easily pleased:

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Video Description

Ten | Week 11 | "Our Neighbor's Gifts"

TEXT: Exodus 20:17

"Covetousness" is known by many names: envy, greed, lust, avarice, cupidity, craving, infatuation, etc. It is something every child exhibits. However, though a child may want their friend's toy, we, too, though fully grown, often want our neighbor's toys. In light of that, the last word in the Decalogue stands as a divine check to our selfish desires: "You shall not covet...anything that is your neighbor's."

When we covet what God has not given to us, we resent something God has done for our neighbor and snub our noses at the very things he has already given us. We think we'll be happy if only we had _____. But the irony is that our wishes pale in comparison to things that God wants for us. The Lord knows what's best for us. And we know very little about what would truly make us happy. Therefore, we do not covet our neighbor's stuff because God's provision is sacred-i.e., set apart, unique, and special. Contentment is a form of thanksgiving for the things the Lord has given us.

Pastor's manuscript can be found [here](#):