

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR

WANTING MORE

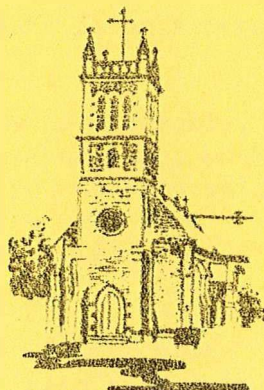
COMMANDMENT X

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's."

by

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COMMANDMENT X .. "WANTING MORE"

The Reverend Lance Shilton

God's final rule for life is "Thou shalt not covet". This does not mean that all desire is wrong. Without desires no one would have any incentive for what is right and good.

To covet means that I think of myself and what I can get for myself. The word 'covet' in the Greek means 'to grasp for more'. No matter how much a person gets, he is always discontent and wants more.

This 10th Commandment is quite unique. The other nine deal with specific actions; this alone forbids a state of mind. It deals with attitudes.

(1) Covetousness is an expression of PRIDE:- "I want more influence." St. Paul warns young Timothy of this danger (II Tim. 3:2) "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy." Pride is that revolting conceit which swaggers before men and struts in the presence of the Almighty. The Psalmist recorded God's words in Psalm 101 (R.S.V.): "The man of haughty looks and arrogant heart I will not endure."

Pride promotes superficiality. Secondary things are given a place of prime importance - how much a person earns, whom he knows, where he lives, where he went to school, what he wears, what his name is, where he travels, what position he holds.

Coveting for more influence for its own sake is an expression of empty pride.

Charles Kingsley has said, "If you wish to be miserable, think about yourself, about what you want, what you like, what respect people ought to pay you - and then to you nothing will be pure. You will spoil everything you touch. You will make misery for yourself out of everything good. You will be as wretched as you choose."

(2) Covetousness is an expression of AVARICE:- "I want more money". Listen again to what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy

(1 Tim. 6:10), "For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Covetousness was one of the first sins to raise its ugly head in the Garden of Eden. In Gen. 3:6 we read that, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the eye, and a tree to be desired, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat." This sin of avarice, the close relative of covetousness, is probably the parent of more evil than all the other sins.

Look through the pages of the Bible and see the trail of abject misery which the deadly sin of covetousness has made through human history. It was an unholy, unnatural lust for selfish gain that caused King Ahab to covet Naboth's vineyard and eventually to murder to achieve his avaricious end. But God's voice came to Ahab saying, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood" (1 Kings 21:19). Ahab could not foresee that the seemingly innocent seed of greed in his heart would bring forth such a harvest of death and judgment.

Joseph's brothers allowed covetousness to possess their hearts and sold their brother into slavery. As a result famine and misery came to themselves and so many others.

Judas, driven by avarice and covetousness, sold his Lord for 30 pieces of silver, but found out that life was not worth living without Him.

The Bible teaches clearly that greed is idolatry. A piece of silver can be held so close to your eyes that you cannot see the sun, and the love of money can so fill your heart that God will be crowded out. (Billy Graham: "Seven Deadly Sins", P. 93).

Jeremiah has written (6:13) "From the least of them even unto the greatest of them everyone is given to covetousness" (Prov. 21:25-26, T.E.V.).

The love of money corrodes the hearts of men, spoiling their happiness and setting them in conflict with one another. The powerful have, in every age, under the sway of similar motives,

plundered the goods and oppressed the persons of the weak. What about the big commercial interests in advertising, in spite of all the evidence of thousands of deaths, they continue to promote smoking in glamorous advertisements in T.V., radio and press.

It was the sin of covetousness which caused people in former generations to justify the suffering, misery and death which accompanied slavery.

The advertisement in our newspaper about the new gambling game 'lotto' bases its appeal on covetousness. The casino in Hobart bases its appeal on covetousness. Horseracing promotes covetousness; the office or workshop sweep promotes covetousness, and covetousness promotes avarice, and avarice promotes selfishness and unhappiness. Covetousness causes some Christians to restrict their giving to God. They take for themselves what rightly belongs to God. They spend on themselves what they should be spending on others. They refuse to take the teaching on the tithe and apply it to their own income.

In many ways affecting oneself, others and God, covetousness is an expression of avarice.

(3) Covetousness is an expression of IMPURITY - "I want more permissiveness". Covetousness has been rated in Rom. 1:29 with the more open and vicious sins: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness and maliciousness". In Rom. 13:9 it is mentioned with murder, immorality, stealing and lying. This sin, which has stunted the spiritual development of so many people and has appeared so harmless, is considered in the Word of God as one of the most hideous and destructive of all Satan's tools. In fact, the Bible states clearly (1 Cor. 6:10) that a covetous man and a man guilty of avarice cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

Hear the Apostle Paul's strong words in Col. 3:5 (R.S.V.): "Put to death, therefore, what is earthy in you; immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these things the wrath of God is coming."

In so many places in the Bible covetousness and impurity are linked. Impurity is one of the most revolting of sins because it

twists and distorts one of God's most precious gifts to man - human love - and drags it down to the level of the beast (sometimes quite literally, as in "Last Tango in Paris"). It claims our attention in films, T.V., magazines and in the theatre in the form of filthy shows, vulgarity, four-letter-words, suggestive remarks, sexual deviations. But there is some sound advice for Christians in Eph. 5:3: "But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting amongst saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this; that no immoral or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater) has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God."

Covetousness entered into the heart of King David when he lusted after Bathsheba. This well-known author of the 23rd Psalm with the double sin of adultery and murder on his conscience, cried out to God in Psalm 51 for forgiveness: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness and according to the multitude of Thy mercies, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." That should be the prayer of each one of us, so that we may receive from God the cleansing He alone can supply and His strength to face every kind of temptation.

Has covetousness entered into our hearts? Do we want more influence to satisfy our own pride? Do we want more money to satisfy our own greed? Do we want more freedom to satisfy our own lusts?

But the covetous person can never be satisfied. The more he has, the more he wants.

I remember reading years ago a short story by Leo Tolstoy entitled "How much land does a man need?"

A peasant was offered all the land he could walk around in a day. So the man started at sunrise, hurrying to get around as much as possible. But in his greed he realized that he had grasped too much and the fear that he would not complete his journey before sunset made him more breathless. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so

that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. As the sun began to disappear on the horizon the chief who had made the offer was there at the end to meet him, laughing and holding his sides.

"Ah! that's a fine fellow" he exclaimed as the peasant fell at his feet. "He has gained much land." But blood was flowing from the peasant's mouth. He was dead!

A servant picked up a spade and dug a grave long enough for the peasant to lie in, and buried him in it. How much land does a man need? Six feet from his head to his heels.

What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul? Thou shalt not covet.

The Ten Commandments were summarized by Christ in a positive form expressing our total duty to God and man:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself".

But we all stand condemned: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet has offended in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Let me now introduce you to an eleventh Commandment from Acts 17. Paul preached to the Greeks at Athens from Mars Hill, who were worshipping an unknown God. He indicated how God's Commandments had come to the Gentiles, even before the Ten Commandments were given to the Hebrew people. Then he stated the Commandment which applies to all, Jews and Gentiles alike:

"Now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent"
(Acts 17:30)

Every word is important. "Now" stresses the urgency. "Now is the day of salvation". "God" gives the command. "Command" indicates that it is not something about which we may please ourselves. 'ALL' need to obey this command. 'REPENTANCE' is essential.

Paul remarked to the Galatians: "Knowing that a man is not

justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."
(Gal. 2:16)

Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man, fulfilled the demands of the Law. Now those who turn to Him in faith experience freedom from their condemnation and enter into the new life which comes from Him.

The hymn writer put it simply:

"He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by His precious blood."

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