



The Tenth Commandment, Part 1
Wrong Desires and Wrong Objects

Exodus 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”

Although it may not appear so at first, this tenth commandment is perhaps the most difficult of all the commandments to keep. It is probably the one we break the most in the course of a day, and has the capacity also to be the most destructive – for the violation of this commandment naturally leads to the violation of others:

I covet my neighbor's money, so I become a thief and violate the 8th commandment
I covet my neighbor's wife, so I become an adulterer and violate the 7th commandment
I covet my neighbor's lot in life so I grumble at God's providence and wisdom and violate the 1st Commandment

The great difficulty behind this commandment is that to desire is natural; you were created by God to desire things. As Wilhelmus A'Brakel, the Dutch Puritan wisely observed -

Man is not self-sufficient; he cannot satisfy himself with himself. He is but an empty vessel, only capable of receiving something. He must find his fulfillment by matters which are exterior to himself—both according to soul and body. He must have food, drink, air, and light, will it be well with his body. According to the soul, he must have something spiritual and infinite—that is God Himself—in order for his infinite desire to be satisfied.

Now as long as man was in a state of innocency in the garden there was nothing wrong with these desires. When he was hungry he naturally desired food, and he had only to extend his arm and take from the abundance of lawful fruit that God had provided for him in the garden, he could eat and satisfy his desire with no problem. If he was thirsty and desired water, rivers flowed through the garden that he could drink from. When he needed a companion, a helper suitable for him, for it is not good that man should be alone, God gave him a wife. And for the longings of his Soul his desire was directed toward God and was continually satisfied in having fellowship with and finding delight in His creator.

In the Garden Man had right desires directed to right objects in the right manner.

But sadly man did not remain in the estate of innocence, he fell and that fall was a result of coveting – in this case a wrong desire directed to a forbidden object. The Devil appeared to Eve and lied to her at length about God and the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He lied, and built up a

desire within her heart for something that she should not have: *Gen. 3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

From that point onwards because of the resulting inclination to evil and rebellion in the hearts of men the original equation regarding desire: *right desires directed to right objects in the right manner* has been shattered. Now man frequently has wrong desires directed to the wrong objects in the wrong manner. Sometimes he can even have right desires, as for instance the desire for worship, for love, and so on are all right desires put in his heart, but these right desires are no longer directed solely to the right objects in the right manner – they are more frequently be directed to the *wrong objects in the wrong manner*.

Hence men desire to worship things other than God and become idolaters or they desire to love things other than wives and a host of adulteries and sins results.

We expect to find this covetousness in the natural fallen man, of whom Paul said they are amongst other things "filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness" The natural man's heart is filled with covetousness which is idolatry, his gods are money or food or power or sexual desire and all of these things he covets and pursues above all else.

One of the reasons I think that sincere Christians so often fail to understand the unregenerate, and correctly anticipate their actions is that we fundamentally fail to understand what drives them. Because an insatiable questing for money or power or fame at heart strikes us as vain or stupid or empty it never occurs to us to consider what someone who makes these things their idol will do in the long run. I think that is one of the reasons that so many Christian women in particular end up getting unequally yoked to unbelievers. Their worldview simply doesn't encompass the true situation.

On at least two occasions I can think of, I've had a conversation along these lines - "*But he (the unbeliever) loves me*" No, respectfully miss, you are the idol du jour. You are currently occupying a place in his heart that should be reserved for God, and it is very likely that in time, his heart will move on to another idol once he possesses what he is currently coveting. It may well be also that you have allowed your own desire for him to become an idol of your own heart. You know that he is like the forbidden fruit, the Lord has said "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14) and has warned about the terrible peril and heartache involved in entering into this union but you are saying "*I am not content to listen to the Lord in this, I will do what is right in my own eyes, this time is different, I'll change Him.*"

But they don't change him; too often it is they who end up changing, compromising, and dimming their own light in order to dwell with darkness. If any of you are considering being unequally yoked, please for your own sake don't. If the clear commands not to be in 2 Cor 6:14-18 are not compelling enough. I would implore you to think on three things:

- 1) To what extent are you coveting, expressing a right or wrong desire towards a wrong object? Is this not idolatry?
- 2) Read 1 Cor. 13 on the nature of true love and then ask yourself, how on earth will someone with an unregenerate, stony heart ever be truly capable of that kind of love?
- 3) Read Ephesians 5 on the nature of the biblical love husbands are to have for wives and the respect wives are to have for husbands and the necessity for believing in Christ before either of these are

possible. How can an unbeliever do either of these things and what will happen to you when they can't? *More than that, what will happen to your children?*

As I have already hinted though, covetousness is not merely something that believers have to deal with in unbelievers, it is something that yet lingers even in the regenerate heart and which saints have to be actively watching for and praying against. For all too often discontentment begins to swell in the heart of a professing Christian and soon a questing after the dust of this world leads them to make utter shipwreck of their faith.

The world is your great enemy; it is constantly looking for ways into your heart, for it despises the thought that Jesus should be your single-hearted desire. The believer is like a ship and the world is like water, it is right, fine, and natural for the ship to be in the water – but when the water begins to get into the ship beware.

The Bible tells of many members of the visible church who were overcome with the desire for the world and the things of the world, allowing it to fill their hearts and lead them to destruction, we can think of Achan, and Gehazi, the rich young ruler, and Ananias and Saphira, and of course Judas. But I am always compelled by the story of one man who seemed to be doing well, who had a wonderful teacher, and yet who at the very end made shipwreck of the faith. His story is not well known, it is told in three verses from three different letters from Paul all of them written in Prison:

Col. 4:14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.

Philem 1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

2 Tim. 4:10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica

Sadder words, who can find? What did he gain? He may have gained the whole world, though I doubt it. But what did he lose? His own soul. What contentment do the covetous gain from anything in Hell? Ask the Rich man what he would give to go back and change places with the crippled but believing beggar Lazarus who sat at his gate.

Brothers and Sisters, remember, the only way you can avoid foundering, having your heart filled by the water of the world is not by adopting a policy of bailing. You will eventually find that you tire and the water gets ahead of you and soon it is over your head. Rather you must make sure that your heart is so full of Christ that the world can find no room there for itself.

This sounds difficult but it begins simply with trusting resting and depending on the Lord Jesus, let me give you three ways you can do this:

- 1) Pursue Godliness and be contented with the great gifts you have. Have right desires towards right objects in the right manner.

Faith alone in Jesus will deliver these things to you. For only if you have faith in Christ will you be enabled to trust him. Faith tastes and sees what the unbeliever cannot -

Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

9 Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him.

10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

Heb. 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

2) Consider what the end of all the this worldly things of dust that we pursue really is:

1 Tim 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

3) Desire Christ and his Spiritual gifts MORE:

1 Cor. 12:31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Mat. 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

The apostles left all to follow Christ, they took up the cross, did they lose anything by not coveting the things of this world?