

Exodus 20:17 - The 9th and 10th Commandments: Be content with God!

Pentecost 14 September 6, 2009 Children's talk: None, communion and baptism.

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God's Word to strengthen and guide our minds in Christ is written in Exodus 20:17

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Jesus, you are mine forever, dearer far than earth to me; neither life nor death shall sever those sweet ties that bind to Thee. All were drear to me and lonely if your presence gladdened not; while I sing to you, you only, mine's an ever blissful lot. Amen. (TLH #357 v.1,2 adapted)

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Today we are concluding our series on the Commandments by combining the 9th and 10th Commandments. In these commandments God is telling us to be content. Contentment doesn't come from what we have, but by how we view what we have. Two people can look at a glass of water with one saying it's half full and the other saying it's half empty. For some people, enough is never enough, while others are willing to be generous even if they have little. Today, we'll look at the negative side of the command, not to covet, but also focus on the positive theme:

Be content with God!

First, why is God so concerned about coveting? Through the last Commandments God urged self-control. But, coveting seeks to take away the controls with a desire for something or someone that God forbids. Is it coveting if we want a house, a spouse, or anything in general? NO! It becomes wrong when we want what belongs to others. Not only do we desire to take things, we begrudge that God has given someone else more than we have. When the Children of Israel wondered in the wilderness for 40 years, many of them were not satisfied with the Manna God had given them, even though it provided for their needs and good health. We can imagine how that would be – A husband asks his wife, what's for breakfast? She answers: Manna mush. What's for lunch? Fried Manna. What's for supper? Baked Manna! It was that way for 40 years. They could have asked God for a change in diet, but instead they coveted the different kinds of meats, fruits, and vegetables they ate in Egypt. Later in Israel's history in the Promised Land, the people noticed that the other nations had kings, but Israel just had God as it's king. So, they coveted having their own king, and after a few kings, they were sorry for their choice.

Coveting is rooted in our sinful natures. People have had to struggle with it since the first sin. We'd like to think that coveting can be turned on and off like a faucet, but our sinful nature won't give up that easy. It states in Proverbs, "*The wicked man craves evil.*" (21:10) We are wicked and our coveting is like hunger, it just won't go away. Solomon also wrote, "*Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.*" (Ecclesiastes 5:10) Another way to define coveting is a lack of satisfaction. Jesus said, "*Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" (Luke 12:15) So, another warning to us is: if we think that possessions make us important or great, we must be coveting.

If coveting were just an evil desire that was never acted on, it wouldn't be so bad. In reality, coveting is only the beginning. The Bible describes this in 1 John 2 as "*the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has.*" (1 John 2:16) So coveting starts inside, but eyes then see specifics, and then the mouth finds a way to get them. James 1 has a greater warning, "*Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*" (James 1:14-15) The devil attacks us with the same pattern of sin. First, we have a thought (temptation) about coveting someone's food. Then it turns to desire for the food. Then, it becomes selfish action, stealing the food. And

the wages of sin are shame, punishment, and eventually death and eternal separation from God. That is what awaits us if we let coveting take over our lives. Remember Eve in Genesis 3. It states, *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”* (v.6)

God’s command to us is specific in Exodus 20:17: *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”* The 9th Commandment had to do with land. When Israel settled in the land of Canaan, God specifically gave land to each tribe and clan. The land was to stay in the family for all generations. God used this land law to prepare the places for Jesus to use. Bethlehem was still in the tribe of Judah when Jesus was born. The people of Galilee were still in place to receive Jesus’ ministry. The hill outside Jerusalem was land that belonged to someone when Jesus was crucified and the tomb from which Jesus rose had been in Joseph’s family for generations. For the Jews, having property was as important as Americans having their rights as citizens.

In the 10th Commandment God forbids enticing away a family or workers that supported a person’s life. When David was told that he would be the next king of Israel, he did not try to steal away King Saul’s men or people. He had opportunity to take Saul’s life, but he refused. He waited until God provided a time for him to rule. He was content with his situation, even though his life was constantly in danger.

Second, what can be done to stop the coveting from controlling us, and how can we have contentment? We need to look at life the way God does in His Word. The Bible makes it clear that God is committed to us. He created us and daily blesses us, even though we are sinners. God knew that our evil coveting would end in eternal separation from Him. That’s why He sent Jesus. The devil put many tempting things before Jesus to get Him to covet and sin. But, Jesus remained innocent and focused on God’s will and so He could die an innocent death to save us from our sins. Through Christ, we have heaven, and we have God, who is greater than the entire universe, ready to help us if needed. What more do we have to have to be satisfied?

But, how can we stop coveting, when it is strongly a part of our nature? Paul wrote that we should remember the grace of God that *“teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our ... God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”* (Titus 2:11-13) Jesus will take us to heaven which has everything perfect. Why should we be held down to the temporary things here. The Bible states that since the time of our baptisms, we have been connected to Christ. Lexi Bormann and all others who have been baptized into Christ can say no to sinful desires. *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its ... desires.”* (Galatians 5:24)

God also promised, *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”* (Hebrews 13:5) We have that promise in the Lord’s Supper today, that Christ is with us to forgive and strengthen us. That’s why Paul could write, *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”* (Philippians 4:11-13)

So, when a temptation to covet is in our thoughts, look at it God’s way as something harmful to be avoided. We have the secret to being content: As Christians, we put our lives in God’s hands and relax in His peace, happy with life. A story: a man came to a Christian king and complained that he was always coveting whatever he saw around

town. The king had his servants fill a cup full of water and give it to the man. He told him, Walk all through town without spilling a drop. If you spill one drop my soldiers following you will kill you. An hour later the man returned with the full glass of water. The king said, you're alive! And asked him, As you walked through town, what did see to covet? The man said, I never saw anything. I kept my eyes on the glass I wouldn't spill any water. The king said, From now on keep your mind on Christ. He is the one who gives you life forever. Keep his Word in your mind as you walk about town and you will learn the discipline of how not to covet but be content. God help us to do the same in our walk of life. Amen.