

09.10.2017

The Ninth & Tenth Commandments
Genesis 3; Hebrews 13:5-6; Mark 10:17-31

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Okay, here we are—the end of the road. We’ve arrived at the last of the Ten Commandments—“You shall not covet”. If you think about it, all the other commandments deal with matters of the body.

To what god are you prostrating yourself in worship?

When God’s name is on your lips, how are you using it?

On the Sabbath, do you have your hands full, or are they open to receive God’s gifts?

Is your head bowed in submission to authority, or is it held high in contempt?

Have you raised your hand against your neighbor, or have you offered a helping hand?

Be careful how you use your body—are you saving it for marriage?

Do you find yourself grabbing from your neighbor, or sharing with them?

Remember what your mother used to tell you—“If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all”?

But then we get to today’s commandments, and instead of matters of the body, it sounds like they deal more with matters of the heart.

Think about it—when did Eve first sin? If you’d have said when she plucked the forbidden fruit you’d be wrong. No, even before she reached out her hand, she had sinned long before. The only reason the fruit—its color, its shape, its taste—became so tempting all of a sudden, was because it became her gateway to being a god. In her heart of hearts burned this desire to be like God, knowing good and evil. And that covetousness, which drove Eve to take her first bite, was itself sin.

I can’t help but wonder then if all of our sins start out in our hearts?

I mean, why is it that we choose false gods?

Why do we misuse God’s name?

Why do we sleep in on Sunday mornings?

Why do we rebel against authority?

Why do we hurt others?

How come we misuse our bodies?

Just why is it that we steal?

And what compels us to gossip about our neighbor?

Well, maybe it’s because there’s something in our heart of hearts we really, really want, feel we really need, and so, for us, the ends justify the means. We commit outward sins to feed the inward sin of coveting. But, if it wasn’t for such covetousness—that first sin in our hearts—chances are good we wouldn’t be reaching for any forbidden fruit at all, whatever it is.

Any J.R.R. Tolkien fans here today? You might remember from *The Lord of the Rings* the character Gollum. Well, as you may or may not know, he wasn’t always Gollum—the reclusive, obsessive monster, lurking around in caves. No, before all that he was once a hobbit named Sméagol. Now, Sméagol had a friend named Déagol, and one day they both set out to go fishing. Something would happen during that fishing trip, however, that would change the course of their lives

forever. That day, Déagol found a ring at the bottom of the river, and this ring was no ordinary ring, but it promised great powers to whoever wore it. Seeing the ring, and sensing it was special, Sméagol instantly coveted it, and when Déagol refused to give it up, Sméagol was willing to do whatever it took to get it for himself. So, Sméagol got Déagol by the throat and strangled him, thinking only of the bright and beautiful gold ring.

Now, what would make him do something like that? Well, what makes us covet the way we do? When we first began this series, and we covered the First Commandment—“You shall have no other gods”—we talked about *love* as being the great motivator for all of our actions. We look for love in all the wrong places, trying to find it in everything else but the actual source of love—God, who *is* love—and so we commit idolatry. We erect idols, hoping to win their approval, and finally feel loved. But why do we covet? Many psychologists say that other than love, *fear* is the great motivator. Maybe we chase after all kinds of people, things, achievements, because we think if only we get it—just one more—we’ll be safe, secure, comfortable, have all that we need. In other words, we live in fear that without it, we’re doomed. And so, out of fear, we covet, and commit other sins to get what our hearts desire.

Ever seen the movie *Jaws*? You might remember that one scene, when a marine biologist arrives from Woods Hole. In a desperate attempt to find out what’s gone awry with the sharks in the area, a large shark is caught and brought into the laboratory. The marine biologist lays the shark up on the table and proceeds to do an autopsy. As he slits open the shark’s belly, out pour fish, one after another—dozens of them. But after all these fish are extracted, there’s a further surprise. In the belly, there’s actually a kitchen blender . . . and then a Florida license plate. It’s like the shark’s truly an eating machine—biting indiscriminately at whatever comes its way, in a frantic search to find something, *anything* that might satisfy.

If we split open *your* belly—or should I say, your heart of hearts—what would we find? What is it that you think will finally do the trick, fulfill your wildest dreams, what gives you hope and security? Or let me ask it another way—what are you afraid of losing, what is it that you just can’t go without, what can’t you ever stop pursuing? Whatever it is, that’s what you covet. And if there’s ever the threat that this security blanket is going away, don’t be surprised when you do some squirrely things to hang onto it.

See, interestingly enough, just like that shark, we also move from one thing to the next, go through one after another, in hopes that we’ll find some lasting peace and security. But do we ever? Is there any lasting security in anything? That’s why we keep on consuming, inhaling whatever it is we think will make us safe. But it’ll never work.

Been visited by any ghosts lately? Well, Ebenezer Scrooge has. Every year just around Christmas time, my family and I had a tradition of seeing Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol.” And my favorite part was always when the ghosts arrived. It was exciting to watch as, with each ghost, Scrooge’s security blanket was slowly stripped away.

The first to visit him was the Ghost of Christmas Past, where Scrooge was forced to see what he’d given up for the false security he had in riches. He relives the moment his fiancée breaks it off with him, after she realizes Scrooge doesn’t love her as much as he loves his money. Then, he’s visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present, who shows him how his miserliness affects others. Because Scrooge can only think about his own personal welfare, his employee, Bob Cratchit, and the rest of Bob’s emaciated family celebrates a meager Christmas dinner in poverty. And then, the third and final visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future really puts it in perspective for ol’ Ebenezer.

The scene takes place at the death of a much-disliked man. The only people willing to attend his funeral are local businessmen, on the condition that lunch is provided. Then, his servants and the local undertaker, steal some of his possessions and sell them to a pawnshop. When Scrooge asks the ghost if anyone feels any emotion over the man’s death, the ghost only shows him a poor couple who was in debt to the man—there they are, rejoicing that because the man died, so did the debt they owed him. Finally, when Scrooge asks to see some tenderness connected with any death the ghost shows him Bob Cratchit’s family mourning the loss of Tiny Tim. Just when it’s too much for Scrooge to bear any longer, then comes the big reveal—the ghost shows Scrooge the name on the dead man’s neglected tombstone—it is none other than his own.

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In the face of death, we are given the sobering reminder that nothing—not a person, not a thing—can give us ultimate security. When that time comes, we will lose it all—not just our wealth . . . but even our health. Nothing—and I mean *nothing*—can give us any lasting comfort. As Ben Franklin once said, “nothing is certain, except death and taxes.”

Now we know how Adam and Eve must’ve felt in the Garden of Eden. After coveting, then sinning, they must’ve found themselves in death’s cold embrace. For in the day that they ate of it, they would surely die. How sad—they sought some lasting security with that forbidden fruit, but could it save them now?

Maybe you and I find ourselves standing with this first couple, feeling the effects of our own covetousness. We thought the things in our lives could help us, save us even, but where are they now? When the chill of death blows through and rattles us, what security do we have?

Well, “With man it is impossible . . . but with God, all things are possible!” Just like Adam and Eve, God takes our drooping heads and says, “Chin up! I’m sending you a Savior! He is none other than Jesus Christ, and by His cross He will defeat the serpent, and with His empty tomb He will put an end to death’s dark shadow. Yes, in Him, you have a salvation that will never end, total security, peace that surpasses all understanding.”

And if you and I have a Savior like that—and *we do*—tell me, what’s the worst thing that could ever happen to any of us? What do we have to fear? Death?! Thanks to Jesus, what is there about death to be scared of, *hmm*? Life with God that will never end? Total freedom from all covetousness and sin? Access to every treasure in heaven? Sounds like it’s *death* that should be crying “Uncle!” Hands pinned behind its back, death can’t possibly hurt us now, no it just lies there on the ground for us to step over into everlasting life!

So let’s throw away those security blankets we’ve been clinging to—they’ll just let us down anyway. No, we have the real thing in our Savior, Jesus Christ! “He will never leave us nor forsake us.” We can confidently say, “The Lord is our helper; we will not fear; what can man[—or *anything* for that matter—]do to us?” You and I, we are invincible, impervious, impossible to destroy!

So, what are we supposed to do with this covetousness inside of us? Well, the Bible actually talks about a *right way* to covet! See, what you and I are really after—what will truly satisfy the deep longing within us—is God. Ultimately, He’s what we’re grasping for, grabbing onto, trying to gather up and keep for ourselves. Anything else—all other covetous desires—are inherently counterfeit, misguided efforts to seek after God. But our hearts were meant to hunger for God, for only in Him are we at peace—He alone is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.

Y’know, lately I’ve been jealous of my son Jude—Oh, to be a kid again! Not a care in the world. Never has to worry about a thing. “Feed me,” “Change me,” “Hold me”—he even gets a nap every day. He can rest easy knowing he’s got everything coming to him. “Jude’s got it so good—that’s the life!” I find myself saying.

But then again, is Jude the only one with a Daddy who takes care of him? If Jude can rest easy with a fallible sinner of a Daddy like me, how much more can we relax? Y’know, God has a name for us—He calls us His children. And He wants us, His sons and daughters, to call Him, “Our Father.” And because He’s given us Jesus, you and I have true, lasting security; because of Him, we’ve got it pretty good. Since we know what’s in our future, we haven’t a care in the world, not a thing to worry about. Rest assured, you and I, we’ve got everything coming to us. Now that—*that*—is the life!