

TEN | Do Not Covet

Rob Rogers August 8, 2021

Introduction

Each week of our series on the Ten Commandments shows us from a different angle that the Law of God is not evidence of God's anger or a demand for obedience—the Law of God is evidence of God's **LOVE**.

Let's read through the Ten Commandments together.

Exodus 20:3–17

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

Today is the final day in our series *TEN*, and we will discuss the final commandment:

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.

Another way to put this is, "If God has given something to someone else but hasn't given it to you, you should be okay with that." Covetousness is an inordinate desire for something or someone without regard for the rights and feelings of others.

Covetousness is a sin rooted in discontentment. When we are not content with the life we have been given, we begin to think it would be nice to have something else. When this turns into inordinate desire coupled with the belief of entitlement, we believe we won't be fulfilled or whole without that something else, and we justify all kinds of malicious and sinful behavior to get it.

Look at what James says:

James 4:1–3

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- James is saying the reason there is fighting among us is because we are not content with the life God has given us. We are not content with the circumstances God has placed us in.

Things we covet

Consider some of the things we covet.

POSSESSIONS

Boats, houses, phones, tablets, clothes, stuff. We covet possessions. The commandment specifically says, “Don’t covet your neighbor’s donkey or ox.” How many of you have coveted your neighbor’s donkey this week?

We covet possessions.

PEOPLE

It’s not just, “I’m attracted to that person.” Coveting is saying, “I will have that person.”

See, coveting is much deeper than just a feeling—it’s such a strong desire that you’ve already determined what you’ll do to satisfy it. This is what Jesus is referring to in the Sermon on the Mount when He says murder and adultery begin in the heart:

Matthew 5:21–28

You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

We also covet certain kinds of relationships: “I wish we had a marriage like that,” or, “I wish we had those kids instead of our kids.”

PHYSIQUE

We want a fitter body or thicker hair or clearer skin or whiter teeth. The health, beauty, and fitness industries equate to hundreds of billions of dollars each year. There’s nothing wrong with that, but one of the primary reasons people buying into these industries is a deep dissatisfaction with the way they look and an even deeper desire to look “better.” It’s not simply about wanting to be healthier.

POWER

We covet power, position, status, and control:

“I won’t be happy unless I’m in charge.”

“If I had that level of influence and power, then I’d be happy.”

People will do anything—they will justify crossing all kinds of ethical and moral lines—to get what they think they deserve. Even professing Christians will destroy people and tear lives apart in order to get the power and control they think they’re entitled to.

How not to covet

Hebrews 13:5–6

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.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

- **Covetousness is rooted in the fear of man.**
 - “Let your conduct be without covetousness.” Why? Because God will never leave you, He is your helper, and what can man do to you? Rich or poor, lots of possessions or none at all, you can go through your whole life without coveting because you fear God, not man. You care about what God thinks about you, not what people think.
- **The cure for covetousness is contentment.**
 - You have to replace covetousness with contentment, which is the ability to say, “I have enough. I want for nothing.”
 - Contentment is to be at peace, at rest. It’s reflected beautifully in **Psalm 23**.

Questions—How is this possible? How can I be content in a culture that daily tries to convince me that I have every reason *not* to be content?

Philippians 4:12–13

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

- The context of these verses is all about contentment, not “If I just believe hard enough in Jesus, I will have superhuman powers,” as v. 13 is so often applied.
- These verses tell us we can be content in every circumstance because Christ gives us strength. Paul gives us a vision for contentment, and he tells us how to get there in verses 4–9.

Philippians 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Six Keys to Contentment from Philippians 4:4–9

1. REJOICE ALWAYS

We are commanded to rejoice twice in Philippians 4 and about 70 times in total in the New Testament. The fact that we are commanded to rejoice means that it *can* be obeyed!

Personal—My family and I recently sold our home and moved into a rental, and with a family of six people, moving is a bit more challenging than it used to be. There’s also a lot going on right now—ramping

up for the school year and sports, signups and registrations for all sorts of clubs and activities for the kids, and our dogs terrorizing the new neighborhood. Thankfully, we're starting to get settled again and back to a normal rhythm, but I love that Scripture doesn't say, "Hey, when things are calm and you're in a predictable routine, then you can rejoice." The passage says, "Rejoice always!"

Romans 5:3

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance . . .

James 1:2

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials . . .

**In the successes and sorrows of life, and in everything in between—
Rejoice!**

2. BE REASONABLE

Philippians 4:5

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

- The word that is translated *gentleness* is *epiaches* (ep-ee-ah-case). It means willingly to receive less than you are rightfully and apparently due, and to do so gladly, not begrudgingly.
- If there is any ounce of pride, entitlement, or covetousness in you, you're incapable of being reasonable. Why? Because the devil has poisoned your mind to think that you are above everyone else—that somehow the same rules don't apply to you.
- Now, this command is not talking about being a doormat, but it is saying that you cannot walk in the ways of Jesus and simultaneously be entitled or covetous.

3. GIVE THANKS

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God . . .

A study¹ done by Stanford a number of years ago found that if you complain or are complained to for 30 minutes or more, your hippocampus—that part of your brain that affects problem-solving and intelligent thought—begins to shrink. In other words, *complaining makes you stupid*.

In **Numbers 14** Joshua and Caleb are the only two out of the twelve spies who bring back a good report of the land to Moses. They come back, and even though the land is occupied by the Canaanites who have military power that the Israelites don't have, they say, in effect, "We can do this! God's with us! Let's go!" They can be this confident in the face of such daunting odds because God had proven Himself to them over and over again, miracle after miracle. God had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians, the strongest military power in the known world. There was no human wisdom or strength that possibly could have brought that about, and Joshua and Caleb knew it.

See, ingratitude, discontentment, complaining, and covetousness blind you to God's goodness and graciousness toward you.

¹ [https://www.cell.com/cell/pdf/S0092-8674\(16\)30558-X.pdf](https://www.cell.com/cell/pdf/S0092-8674(16)30558-X.pdf)

**Giving thanks for what God has done
enables, emboldens, and empowers you
to trust in God no matter what you face.**

4. REQUEST & RELEASE

Philippians 4:6–7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

- When most of us pray, we try to manipulate God into doing what we want. As a result, we don't have peace because we don't trust God to give us what we're asking for. Paul says this is asking amiss, with wrong motives.
- The primary purpose of prayer is not to get what you want. The primary purpose of prayer is to reconnect you with the God you can trust.
- Prayer is not about trying to get God to bend to your will but about making your requests, and then trusting in His will. You can't control the outcome, and as long as you try to, you'll never have peace.

**The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
when you make your requests
and then release the outcome into His hands.**

5. THINK ON GOOD THINGS

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

- This is about where your focus is, what your heart and mind are set on. You intentionally fill your mind and heart with truthfulness, righteousness, honesty, purity, and whatever is praiseworthy.
- This will never happen by accident. This has to be an intentional, disciplined effort.

Colossians 3:2

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

- If you do this consistently, you'll find yourself bearing the fruits of the Spirit even in interactions that are contentious and difficult. You'll be a person filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Why? Because your mind is set on things above.

6. IMITATE GODLY CONDUCT

Philippians 4:9

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

- What Paul is saying here is don't just listen to a person's words. Watch their life. Watch how they conduct themselves. If their conduct is in alignment with the ways of God, listen to them, learn from them, and follow their example.

**Follow a person with godly character.
Imitate them as they imitate Christ.**

Conclusion

Did you know that during Jesus's 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan *NOT* with everything He was **apparently** due; He was tempted with everything He was **rightfully** due. The devil tempted Jesus with everything He **DID** deserve:

1. You're the Son of God and without sin—You don't deserve to suffer hunger. Turn these stones to bread and eat.
2. You're the Son of God and without sin—You don't deserve to be treated as a common man. Throw yourself from the Temple and people will know who You are, and they will fall down and worship You in the way that You deserve.
3. You're the Son of God Incarnate. As the Word of God, You created all of this and then gave dominion over it to Adam. When Adam became a slave to sin, that dominion was passed to me because I became his master. Bow down and worship me and I'll give it back to You. You 'deserve' it.

Our God in human flesh never caved. He never gave in. Instead, He accepted infinitely less than He was due.

Why? Because even though He deserved food, worship, and dominion over all the earth, He went without because He loved you. He wanted you.

**He gladly rejected what He rightfully deserved
so that we could have *far* more than we ever deserved.**

Forgiveness for the past, power for the present, and the hope of eternal bliss with Him in heaven—that's available to you in Christ Jesus because He gladly and willingly accepted far less than He was due.

Let's pray.

Discussion Questions

1. What is covetousness? How is it rooted in discontentment?
2. What are some things we covet? How has covetousness showed up in your life over the years?
3. What does Hebrews 13 teach are two fundamental truths about covetousness?
4. Discuss: The cure for covetousness is contentment. How do Psalm 23 and Philippians 4 reflect this? What other passages from the Bible offer support for this statement?
5. Discuss the six keys to contentment in Philippians 4. Which is the most challenging for you? How can you apply these to your life?
6. What is so significant about Jesus's denial of temptation in the wilderness as it relates to coveting? How can you find joy and hope in what Jesus did?

NOTES