

Exodus 20:17 – The tenth commandment: covetousness

This is the final command. God's law is very big; it teaches about our doings (e.g. murder, adultery, theft), our words (e.g. blasphemy, false witness) and now even our thoughts. Actually the whole law goes right down into our hearts. The first command – no other gods – was a command that God must reign in every part of us, heart, mind and soul. Perhaps someone thinks they have kept commandments 1-9. Now God makes himself very clear. He gives a law about our thinking and desires, and shows us how impure we are and how much we need Jesus Christ.

1. True contentment: in Christ alone

This commandment is about contentment. To “covet” is to want something too much. It is related to envy, greed and discontent: when we are unhappy because of what God has not granted us. So let us think about true contentment. True contentment is found in Jesus Christ alone. Without him, we have nothing: we cannot keep anything we gain in this world, and without him we have nothing except our things in this world. Our hearts and souls need much more. We were made for God: to know him and enjoy him. This is only possible through Christ. Christ satisfies our true needs because his death on the cross brings forgiveness for our sins and makes it possible to enter God's family and enjoy fellowship with God, now and forever. In Christ we can be accepted and loved eternally. He brings true happiness, even in sufferings.

2. Covetousness: what it is, and why God hates it

Coveting is desiring beyond the limits of God's law. It is a sin of our hearts. It is seen by God, who made our soul as well as our body. The command tells us that God has given some things to our neighbour for him to enjoy, and we are to respect that. Covetousness leads to many other sins and ruins relationships (James 4:1-2). It is a kind of idolatry (Ephesians 5:3). A person desires his neighbour's goods or gifts so much that he is restless without them; they have become like a God to him and he is not content with the place God gave him. Even spiritual matters are forgotten or become less important than the thing desired (Luke 12:13-21, 18:18-27). The command tells us to respect everything that is our neighbour's, and to rejoice with him in what he has, and desire for him to enjoy it. Our hearts must desire that our neighbour should be blessed, without anyone taking it away from him.

3. Contentment in this world: how to get and keep it

To get true contentment, first you need to be converted. Jesus said, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). You must know that you are a great sinner, who has broken all the holy laws of a righteous God. God is rightly angry, and will certainly punish sin, even in hell. But Jesus Christ has died for sins, to be the Saviour of all who repent and believe in him. His death at the cross paid the whole price, and those who turn to him alone are saved. Then we can learn that in this life, we are simply travellers. We are going to heaven, and this world is where we are strangers and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11). Therefore, we should be content to have food and clothes; and more only if God sees it as good (1 Timothy 6:6-10). With Christ, we can learn to be content in every situation (Philippians 4:11-13). We should look to Christ and the coming glory of heaven. Then we can be content, and get on with serving Jesus without complaining or being discontent whilst we are here!