

The 10th Commandment: “You Shall Not Covet...” Living Contentedly *Coram Deo* in an Age of Discontentment and Greed

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Summary Statement: True contentment comes when we become “selflessly self-satisfied” in Jesus Christ, and meditate upon all of his benefits and the riches that are ours because of his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

FCF: We complain. We are discontent as much as anyone else in the world. We think about what we do not have, rather than the blessings that are ours. We are so rich, yet act so poor.

Introduction

“Imagine there’s no heaven
It’s easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today”- J. Lennon

The world’s offerings (the constant buzz of voices around us, like the crowd at a college basketball game) sell to us – appealing to our discontentment.

Magazines - -> Telling us what we do not have!

Advertisements - -> (Some 3000 a day!) Telling us what we do not have!

Thomas Clapp Patton, in his book *Envy Politics*, gives us the staggering figure that Americans are exposed to about 3,000 ads a day. Seventy to 90% of big-city newspapers are ads rather than news. The subliminal message is always the same: ***Whether you really need it or not, don't be without what other people have.***

THE HUNGER FOR MORE: Searching for Values in an Age of Greed. By Laurence Shames. (Times Books, \$18.95.) "Among democratic nations, ambition is ardent and continual, but its aim is not habitually lofty; and life is generally spent in eagerly coveting small objects." Toqueville's observation was written more than 150 years ago, but it still applies today, Laurence Shames asserts in his suggestive study of contemporary American mores, "The Hunger for More.

Socrates says in the dialogues that Greed and coveting more luxury are the elements that push some people to attack their neighbors and take their belongings.

I. **THE 10 COMMANDMENT AS THE COMMANDMENT THAT SUMMARIZES ALL THE OTHER COMMANDMENTS!**

- A. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house:
- B. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey...
- C. ...Or anything that is your neighbor's."

- D. **What is Coveting?** Desires or wanting something is not wrong; it is *inordinate desires*, wanting something too much- -whatever that may be money, more possessions, etc.

- E. *Coveting is wanting things or stuff, sometimes good things or stuff, but wanting it too much, and particularly things that we do not have that belong to our neighbor.*

- F. Coveting begins with our desire to have *more, more, more*, not truly relying upon God, and trusting God for anything we might want. Coveting is rooted in unbelief and doubt that God cares for us and loves us.

- G. **How are coveting and greed related?** Very similar, but perhaps a distinction: greed seems to be merely out for more, a sort of condition (greedy for money, greedy for lust, greedy for power, privilege, and possessions, etc).

Where coveting is the actual act of not only being out for more, but specifically the more that belongs to your neighbor. Coveting or envying his specific possessions, privileges, power, etc.

According to Scripture, coveting is idolatry and has implicit in it the breaking of all the commandments:

James 2:8-12: If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ ***For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.*** ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

What Does Scripture Teach Concerning the Definition of Coveting/Covetousness?

^{ESV} **Mark 7:20** And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² **coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.**

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:3** But sexual immorality and **all impurity or covetousness** must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or **who is covetous (that is, an idolater)**, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

^{ESV} **Romans 1:29** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, **covetousness**, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips...

^{ESV} **Colossians 3:5** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: **sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**

Greed by Secular People:

Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction." - Psychologist Erich Fromm

Origin of All Coveting and Covetousness

Genesis 3:6: So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Comment: Eve sinned in her heart by coveting before she actually sinned in taking the fruit...

James 1:13-15: Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ **But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.** ¹⁵ **Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

H. An Inward Commandment *from the Heart!*

Romans 7:5-13: [The Law is good and holy, but the Law reveals our sins and the need we have of a Savior. When we were "in the flesh" or "in Adam" we were in a state of death (cf. Eph. 2:1-3), but now "in the Spirit"

or “in Christ” we can bear good fruit from the heart because the Law of God is written on our hearts. Coveting is the commandment or Law that caused Paul to truly realize his sinful condition]. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! ***Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”***⁸ ***But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.*** Apart from the law, sin lies dead.⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

I. The Commandment that Damns/Condemns Us All!

Luther writes in his Larger Catechism: “This last commandment, then, is addressed not to those whom the world considers wicked rogues, but precisely to the most upright- -to people who wish to be commended as honest and virtuous because they have not offended against the preceding commandments....Such is nature that we all begrudge another’s having as much as we have. Everyone acquires all he can and lets others look out for themselves.

Yet we all pretend to be upright. We know how to put up a fine front to conceal our rascality. We think up artful dodges and sly tricks (better and better ones are being devised daily) under the guise of justice. We brazenly dare to boast of it, and insist that it should be called not rascality but shrewdness and business acumen. In this we are assisted by jurists and lawyers who twist and stretch the law to suit their purpose, straining words and using them for pretexts, without regard for equity or for our neighbor’s plight.”

J. The “Cult of the Next Thing”!

Mark Buchannan refers to GREED as, **“The CULT of the Next Thing”** and he warns us that it is dangerously easy to get enlisted. In fact it happens by default—not by choosing the cult, but by failing to resist it. He writes,

“The Cult of the Next Thing is consumerism cast in religious terms. It even has its own litany of sacred words—words like: ‘more,’ ‘you deserve it,’ ‘new,’ ‘faster,’ ‘cleaner,’ ‘brighter.’ It has its own deep-rooted liturgy: ‘charge it,’ ‘instant credit,’ ‘no down-payment,’ ‘deferred payment,’ ‘no interest for three months.’ It has its own preachers, evangelists, prophets, and apostles: ad men, pitchmen, celebrity sponsors. It has its own shrines, chapels, temples, Meccas: malls, superstores, club warehouses. It has its own sacraments: credit and debit cards. It has its own ecstatic experiences: the spending spree.

The members of this cult spend more time with advertisements than with Scripture. ***The Cult of the Next Thing’s central message proclaims: ‘crave and spend for the Kingdom of Stuff is here.’ Sanctification is measured by never saving enough, for the cult teaches that our lives are measured by the abundance of our possessions.’***

Richard Foster in his book, *Money, Sex and Power*, suggests that all who follow Christ are called to a vow of simplicity. For him simplicity is marked by contentment and trust. Having an **attitude of detachment** from all of the things of the world that try to seduce us into thinking they will make us happy and having the where-with-all to reject the prevailing belief that more is better, requires constant vigilance.

Foster says, that “the great moral question of our time is how to move from greed to generosity and from vengeance to magnanimity” and from violence to shalom. The vow of simplicity points the way.

Simplicity gives us the perspective and courage to stand against greed, vengeance and violence.’

II. THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE OF THE 10TH COMMANDMENT: JESUS’ TEACHING ON COVETOUSNESS AND WHAT WE ARE TO LEARN IN CHRIST

Luke 12:13-32: [Jesus teaches the disciples the principles of contentment in God’s grace, mercy, and goodness toward them, especially in him giving them the Kingdom of God in Christ. He tells them a story so that they would understand where the focus of their lives should be: in heaven]. ***Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”¹⁶*** And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your

soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." ²² **And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.**

A. Antidote for Coveting is Contentment in Christ.

- i. **Watch of Worry or Anxiety (it usually means you are coveting, not trusting God in your circumstances and wanting the circumstances of others)**

B. We Learn Contentment in Christ.

- i. **Contentment is Learned.**

C. What Happens when we are discontent?

- ◆ When we are discontent, we are blind to the needs of others, because we are concerned about ourselves. We are not considering others better than ourselves and thinking about others first as Phil. 2 teaches. We are thinking about what we **DO NOT HAVE, RATHER THAN WHAT WE DO HAVE.**

If all of our energies and attention is on finding contentment in our own lives – finding one more thing that might bring peace, we are not looking around to see the needs of others. We are self-centered and blind. We will go about a day missing all of the needs and hurts of the people around us. If the Philippians had been worried about what they did not have, they would have never been concerned with Paul's needs. And Paul in prison,

if he had merely been looking out for himself in trying meet his own needs and to get out of prison, he would have never seen the needs of the Philippians in penning his epistle and encouraging them to rejoice in their faith!

- ◆ When we are discontent, we are not only blind to what others do not have, we are blind to what we do have- -our own blessings.

Illustration: Rainy day, having to go out of the house....you have a house! Traffic jam and all of your heart is being vocalized and pressed through your lips in comments and thoughts you would not have anywhere else- - you complain, wish you were somewhere other than this traffic jam...you complain that you have to be in traffic, yet you have a car!! You wish you had a better job, somewhere else, doing something else, etc. At least you have a job!

- ◆ When we are discontent, we are not only blind to what others do not have and blind to what we do have, we are blind to the great riches of being united to Jesus Christ and his inheritance which is to be received by all those who love him.

III. THE GREAT CONFLICT WITHIN US ALL!

James 4:1-8: [We have conflicts with one another sometimes, but the real and true conflict is within us, in our hearts. Our conflict is a lack of humility to God and others, desiring or coveting what we want from others, instead of asking God and seeking him prayerfully for what we need. James calls this behavior of covetousness “murder” and “adultery”, or “friendship with the world” in summary]. ***What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.***

A. Coveting Causes Conflict

B. Within Us

- i. "I deserve it!" ("I'm worth it" even before L'Oreal)
- ii. "I will strive until I get the possessions, power, and position that I think should get."
- iii. "I got it coming to me!"

C. With Our Neighbors

- i. **Clenching our teeth when something good happens to our neighbor- -rather than rejoicing with them (possessions, position, power).**

D. With God!

- i. **Angry at God when he doesn't give the same to all of us; blind to the reality of what he has given to us.**

IV. THE LESSON IN CHRIST FOR ALL TO LEARN IN THE CHURCH TOGETHER!

I. Providence : Where or what has God called you to? What has he provided to you? (Not someone else's providential circumstances!

II. Purpose : Who is calling you and giving purpose to your situation and life? (Not someone else's purpose in life, but your own!)

III. Power, Position, Possessions : What do you have that you have not been given? (Not someone else's power, position, or possessions!)

IV. Potential : What gifts has God given to you to use to love God and neighbor? (Not someone else's gifts- -brains, beauty, body, abode, boat, ability to play ball, etc.)

Philippians 4:4-13: [*Learning contentment is the answer to our covetous hearts. We must rest in the Lord's sovereignty and goodness toward us, learning the secret of contentment in Christ*].
 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of

praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me- practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ ***I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.***

1 Timothy 6:6-12, 17-19: [Paul gives instructions on how to have godliness with contentment, knowing that God provides all we need, and that this is not our ultimate destination or home here. He counsels Christians to be content, thankful, and avoid greediness before our Great King and God]. ***Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. *It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. ¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.**** Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses...

¹⁷ ***As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.***

We must learn the secret of contentment “in Christ”!

Charles Swindoll Poem (quoted from ‘Preaching the Word: Exodus’ by P. G. Ryken, pg. 673):

*It was Spring, but it was Summer I
wanted:
The warm days and the great outdoors.*

*It was Summer, but it was Fall I wanted:
The colorful leaves and the cool, dry air.*

It was Fall, but it was Winter I wanted:

The beautiful snow and the joy of the holiday season.

It was Winter, but it was Spring I

wanted:

The warmth and blossoming of nature.

I was a child, and it was adulthood I

wanted:

The freedom and the respect.

I was 20, but it was 30 I wanted:

To be mature and sophisticated.

I was middle-aged, but it was 20 I

wanted:

The youth and the free spirit.

I was retired, but it was middle-aged I

wanted:

The presence of mind without limitations.

My life was over,

And I never got what I wanted.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 13:5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

The Bible teaches us that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ***grasped at being like God, and seeking immortality through disobedience, covetousness, their own inordinate desires; wanting something in their own time and their own way, rather than obeying God.***

Yet Christ, did not grasp at equality with God but made himself nothing for covetous people like us! Philippians 2:5-11 teaches us:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ ***who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,***⁷ ***but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.***⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

3 John 2-15: *Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.*