

The SIN Virus: Coveting

Luke 18:18-29 Exodus 20:17

To understand the 10th commandment we need to go back to the story of the fall into sin in Genesis. The tenth commandment says: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or boyfriend, or husband, nor should you set your desires on anything belonging to your neighbor.

In the nine commandments that come before this one we hear words about things we should or should not do. They are all action related. Do not make an idol, keep the Sabbath, do not kill, do not steal. These are all commands about outward actions. This last command, however, has to do with the heart, with our inner being, our emotions, our desires and our dreams.

Jesus taught that out of the heart come the issues of life. The heart shapes the actions of our lives. It is what comes out of the heart that condemns a person or saves a person or shapes the character of a person. Not what comes into our mouths or ears or lungs, but what come out of our hearts makes the person. This last commandment encourages us to check the pulse of our lives. To check how our heart is doing, how is inner being is functioning. What makes us do the things we do?

You see, behind every one of the nine commandments is an attitude of the heart. Making idols comes from a heart that loves something more than God. Keeping the Sabbath is an issue of trust. Killing is a matter of hate. Stealing a matter of greed. Adultery a matter of lust. Each one of the commandments has an attitude of the heart associated with it, underlying it, motivating it. And it is in the heart that we obey or disobey the commandments first. It is in the heart that the battle for justice and goodness and innocence and wholesomeness is fought.

This tenth commandment says: do not covet. That Hebrew word for coveting is translated in the bible in many ways. Coveting can be greed, envy, desire, love, lust, cravings and wants. These are all words that translate the word we find in this commandment – do not covet. Coveting as one dictionary says is uncontrolled selfish desire. And coveting is at the root of all disobedience to the nine commandments and is at the root of our separation from God.

Niel Plantinga tells a story that shows how coveting works. A few years ago two young women - both striking beauties - found themselves going after the same boyfriend. Lisa and Laurie had grown up together, went to the same school together, and had competed in local contests together. Sometimes one would win; sometimes the other. Laurie, for instance, became Miss Dairy Princess while Lisa was named Miss Homecoming.

But the main competition between these two women was in the area of romance, in the area of their deepest desires. Both of them were in love with Bill. Both dreamed of a future with him. We have no idea what Bill thought of two women fighting over him. Bill chose Lisa. When Laurie heard the marriage announcement, she felt as if she had

been stabbed in the heart. She felt spasms of pain and envy and rage, as if Bill and Lisa were trying to twist a dull knife between her ribs. Laurie was used getting what she wanted, she wasn't used to disappointment and she had no idea where to get the vaccine for what she felt growing in her heart. It was bad enough to lose Bill, but what really infected Laurie was the thought of her friend walking off with the prize. Knowing that her rival was happy and satisfied became a tumor in her heart that she couldn't stop from growing. So one night Laurie strangled Lisa with a leather belt and left the whole community choking with grief.

Coveting, desiring is the virus, hate is the tumor, and the disease is fatal.

In Genesis 3 we see the virus of coveting first come to life in the human heart. In the garden of Eden the first couple walked with God and enjoyed the blessings of God. They loved God and they trusted him. They walked in step with God's word. But then the serpent of sin entered the garden. This serpent alerted Adam and Eve to the desirable qualities of God. God is wise, God is eternal, God knows good and evil. And when you eat from the tree of Knowledge you will be like God.

So when they looked at the tree again the virus of coveting metastasized in their hearts and they saw that it was good for food, for their needs, it was a delight to their eyes, it had potential for their future, and they saw that the tree was to be desired - coveted, that is the word that is used here - coveted to make one wise. It was this virus of desire, this virus of coveting that grew into that tumor of disobedience, and made Adam and Eve eat from the tree. They desired to be like God, they coveted God. And their infection was fatal.

To covet means to see something as good, something that you need, and to let the eyes of your imagination feast, delight in that goodness and to desire it for yourself for pleasure or wisdom or comfort or security for revenge. Our coveting is like a virus. They are so small, so insignificant, so normal these desires we have in our hearts. But their infectious results are fatal. They cause us to break covenant with our God.

And so the bible says: do not covet. Do not let the selfish desires of your heart get out of control in your lives. In Genesis 4 we meet Cain and Abel. They are two brothers who give an offering to the Lord. When Cain gives his gift he realizes somehow that God accepted Abel's gift and not his. Cain desired to be accepted by God. He desired to be a leader in worship. But his younger brother maybe because he was more gifted was more acceptable to God. And in the frustration of his desires, in his coveting Cain's virus multiplied into a tumor of anger. And God came to Cain in his anger and said: "if you do well will you not be accepted? But if you do not do well, sin is lurking, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it.

You see, often we do not do well in our lives. Our desires and our plans and our longings and our ambitions are often frustrated. We don't get what we dream about, what we covet. We experience disappointment. These are the times when the demon of sin multiplies the virus in our hearts. And we get angry, or lust, or get greedy. And

disobedience to the law is close at hand.

But God comes to us and says: do not covet. Those desires in your heart can destroy you, they can destroy your relationship with God and your neighbor. You must master these desires. Control them; keep them in check.

Jesus was a human being and the virus of coveting was in the air. And he too breathed them into his system. Jesus had desires. Jesus had ambitions and plans and longings for relationships in his life. And he experienced frustrations and disappointments. Jesus experience the virus of his desires multiplying. And in the desert of his temptation Jesus master his desires. He said "no" to sin crouching at his door. He had the opportunity to make the stones of his frustration into loaves of bread to feed his needs. He had the opportunity to grasp Glory for himself and security and comfort and power. He had the opportunity to take the fruit from the tree he desired.

But each time sin crouched at his door Jesus said "NO": It is written, live by the word and the will of God. Worship God alone. Give yourself to God alone. And do not put God to the test. Jesus mastered his coveting. Jesus governed the selfish desires of his heart by trusting and giving his life over to the will of God.

We too are asked not to covet. We too are being asked by the tenth commandment to keep our desires in control.

The tenth commandment tells us not to covet. It tells us not to take what our selfish desires dictate. But how do we do that? How do we live a life that is not infected by our coveting? The bible tells us it is done through power of the Holy Spirit, by Spirit of God producing the fruit of contentment and generosity and joy in giving. People who do not covet; they give. That is the action that comes out of a heart of contentment and thanksgiving.

Instead of taking all the time; they give. In the OT many of the laws teach the people how to give. Give the poor in your society dignity. Give them a chance to glean from your field. Give a tithe for the upkeep of the priest. Give the temple tax to pay for the sacrifice. Give freedom to your slaves after seven years. Give respect to your elders. Give money to the poor without interest. Give your second coat to those who have none. The righteous give without sparing, without holding back it says in Proverbs.

After Jesus wrestled with the temptations of his desires and mastered them in the power of the Spirit, he left the desert to begin his ministry. He knew the coveting temptation would come again. And so he began to give himself for the lives of others. To give himself to God. He gave till he could give no more. He gave his life. The righteous give without sparing.

Giving is how we fight the virus of coveting. And we begin by giving ourselves and our hearts, our desires and our dreams and our longings to Jesus. He becomes the focus of

our hearts. His spirit over takes our hearts.

The Alcoholic Anonymous people know it is not a matter of will power; it is not a matter of me deciding at some point not to covet. It's a matter of letting go and letting God.

The rich young man asked "what can I **DO** to be set free from coveting. And the answer Jesus gives suggests it is not a matter of doing certain things or devising certain plans. It's a matter of giving your heart to a certain person. Jesus invited the young man to put aside the idols of his heart and to come to him and that's where eternal life is found. That's where God is found. But the objects of his desires kept him from finding that abundant eternal life.

The opposite coveting is trusting and being content at the core of your being, in the heart. Being happy with who you are and what you have. This satisfaction, this joy, this contentment is a gift of the spirit when we let go of the things that bind us to our earthly treasures and follow Jesus.

In concluding this series on the Ten Commandments let me suggest four things we can do indirectly to deal with our coveting and to help us obey all the commandments. Something we can do to create a heart for the spirit to grow in us the fruit of trust in God and holy contentment and gratitude.

Paul in Phil 4:11 says; "I have learned to be content in all circumstances. I know what its like to be overcome with desires for food and riches and a good reputation, and good family and a good job. But I have learned the secret of being content in every situation by following Jesus, living in him, and focusing on his cross.

This learning of contentment is a process which the bible says has four ingredients.

One: worship.

In worship we give our heart, soul, and mind to someone else. That was the first commandment. Worship YHWH alone. When we worship, we are training our hearts this is not about me. In worship I become less and Jesus becomes more. As we worship Jesus, the spirit of God begins to take the coveting desires away, just like the power of God can miraculously take away the desires for alcohol or drugs. Coveting can only be removed from our hearts by a higher power, when Jesus takes over our hearts.

Second: when Jesus and spirit of Jesus take over our hearts several things begin to happen to counter act the spirit of coveting. Through the power of the Spirit we begin to desire to give instead of always take and getting, we begin to want to share rather than to cling to our possessions. Generosity and the joy of giving are the fruit of the spirit working in our hearts. The foundation of Jesus' teaching, Paul says in Acts, is that it is better to give than to receive.

As we give our tithes and our offerings, as we share our wealth with the poor the spirit miraculously creates in us a new heart. A generous heart, a heart that takes joy in giving.

Do you want to glorify God and enjoy him forever, than share with the poor and give generously to the mission of Jesus?

Third; when we follow Jesus this generosity of the heart spills over in the way we treat others. Things no longer are the most important but people and relationships begin to take priority. We embrace people, we begin to show hospitality and love for others. Our cheapness and fear of being taken advantage of, and protecting what we have, slowly disappears through the power of the Spirit.

And finally we will fast.

We will give up things for the sake of Jesus. Not because we have to but because we want to. We live in a luxurious and tempting environment. Our culture is founded on coveting and greed and the accumulation of wealth and achieving the American dream. Our society and our media continually bombard us with things, and they tell us we need them. We can't live without them. In the power of the Holy Spirit we can resist this temptation. Pray, confess your sin. Fast from the spoils of our consumer society. Admit the covetous desires of your heart, and make a conscientious effort sell everything you have give to the poor and follow Jesus. This is life in the promised land. This is how we give our heart

Dealing with a Coveting heart



Saying: Lord you have my heart.

**Lord, You have my heart And I will search for Yours
 Jesus, take my life and lead me on Lord, You have my heart
 And I will search for Yours Let me be to You a sacrifice**

**And I will praise You Lord And I will sing of love come down
And as You show Your face We'll see Your glory here**