

Sermon for November 12, 2017 – 9th and 10th Commandments

Exodus 20:17 (NIV84)

Theme: Keep your heart in Check

- 1) Coveting breeds many evils.
- 2) Be Content in Christ

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The November holiday to which almost everyone is looking forward is almost here: and, sadly, my greedy, sinful heart can't wait. Can you guess what it is? Thanksgiving? Unfortunately, no. It's black Friday – with all its wonderful sales on TVs, cellphones, computers and electronics! And if that doesn't float your boat, then there are those other sales on clothing, kitchen appliances . . . you name it?

Isn't it ironic that the biggest shopping day of the year – filled with reports of people pushing, shoving, arguing and fighting over merchandise - follows on the heels of giving thanks for what you already have? Worse yet: this "shopping holiday" is even encroaching on Thanksgiving Day itself?

"But Pastor," someone might be thinking, "didn't you just say that you are looking forward to black Friday yourself? How can you condemn it?" You're right I did say I was looking forward to it. More precisely, I said that my greedy, sinful heart is looking forward to it. You see - just like everyone else - I also struggle with coveting: imagining that if I had this, that or the other thing, I could be truly happy.

And advertisers know this about us. Most of the 5000 ads the average American sees or hears every day claim that we can find happiness if we have their product, because it will make us look better, live healthier, be more productive, and give us more joy than what we already own. These ads all have the subtle purpose of making us discontent with what we have,

And social media doesn't help foster contentment either. As we see all the smiling faces of our friends and their families – reading about the awesome things their kids did or the great experiences they had – we begin to compare our miserable life with theirs. We become envious: wishing to be like they are: carefree and always happy – not realizing that most of the things we read about people on "Facebook" is just a façade.

So what do we do when we read or hear about all the wonderful experiences and new toys our friends are enjoying. Outwardly we might offer our congratulations, but inwardly we are jealous. We want to have what they have. And when our thoughts start becoming consumed with desire for these things, we covet, which, left unchecked, can lead to many other great and shameful sins.

As we will learn today, that is why God gave us the 9th and 10th commandments: **to keep our sinful hearts in check.** Why? Because coveting breeds many evils, and the only way to overcome sinful coveting is by finding our contentment in Christ.

Part One: Coveting breeds many evils.

Our sermon text records the last two of God's commandments. They are essentially the same, and can be simply summarized by saying: "Do not covet."

If this is the case, why did God give us two commandments regarding coveting? Truth be told: I can't say for certain; but I do know that repeating something often emphasizes its importance. And God's command against coveting is very important because, if left unchecked, coveting often gives birth to all kinds of evils – replacing our love for God with lust for created things.

This invites the question: what exactly is coveting? Luther explains it as scheming to get either someone or something that belongs to our neighbor through otherwise outwardly legal means. The Bible, however, seems to go even further than that – defining coveting as a sinful desire to possess people or things that God either doesn't want you to have or keep for yourself.

For example, even before committing adultery with Bathsheba, King David coveted her in his heart: wanting to have her as his own, even though she belonged to someone else. I know that Hollywood often portrays someone's secret love for another person who is already in a relationship as romantic. But it's not: it's coveting. It's a sin. And such coveting often leads to all sorts of other sins, evils and hurts, as our Old Testament lesson clearly revealedⁱ.

Another example of coveting is found in our Gospel lessonⁱⁱ, where we encountered a rich farmer coveting his own wealth. "But how can that be wrong?" someone might ask, "Doesn't his great harvest belong to him anyway?" Humanly speaking, it does belong to him. However, God is the one who gave it to him, and he gave it for a purpose. And what was that purpose? To honor God by using it to help others and not just himself. You see, then, that it is even possible to sinfully covet the things that belong to us by greedily planning on keeping those things for ourselves which could otherwise help a brother or sister in need.

Coveting may not seem like that big of a deal to the world– especially if a person doesn't act on his desires. "No one is getting hurt if I only fantasize about owning the car my friend bought, or being married to that wonderful guy my friend is married to, right?" But this is not true: someone is getting hurt through your fantasizing without your even realizing it. Who? You yourself!

You see, fantasizing about people and things that God does not want you to have, keeps you from finding contentment in the blessings he has already graciously given you. It moves your focus off of Christ and onto the things of this world – making them your gods, as you begin to love these things above all else. And even though coveting may seem harmless, it rarely is. Again and again experience teaches that a person's continual desire for something seldom remains a matter of the heart, but – as our Epistle lesson showedⁱⁱⁱ – often gives birth to outward evils.

Understand, then, the seriousness of coveting: it is the source of almost every evil, as St. Paul says regarding monetary greed: *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*^{iv}

The apostle John also writes: *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*¹⁶ *For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world.*¹⁷ *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*^v

Brothers and sisters in Christ: can any of us claim to have kept these last two commandments perfectly? I already confessed that I can't. None of us can. Our sinful hearts make it impossible. So where does that leave us? I hope it leaves you the same place where it leaves me: at the foot of the cross – looking to Christ in repentance and faith for forgiveness, life and salvation. Why? Because it is only in Christ that we find our rescue – not only from the eternal consequences our sinning against this commandment have merited, but also as our power to say no to the sinful desires of our heart – being truly content in Christ.

Part Two: Be Content in Christ

Jesus perfectly kept his Father's command to never covet. Even though the devil offered Jesus the entire world with all its wealth if he would just bow down to him once, our Savior didn't take time to daydream about it but answered without hesitation: *"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'*^{vi}

Jesus lived his life selflessly – desiring only to accomplish His Father's glory by saving us. And this is exactly what he did – offering the once-and-for-all sacrifice that paid for the sins of the entire world. Yes, Jesus died with the guilt of all our sinful lust and desires laid upon him; only to rise again – thereby not only showing that our sins are forgiven, but to also give our lives new purpose and power to live for Him as he lived for us.

Jesus is the secret to keeping our hearts in check so that we don't covet. How so? Because, as we focus on him and all the blessings we receive through faith in him, our lives take on new purpose and meaning. With the Holy Spirit's aid, we begin to realize that our lives on this earth are not about us and all the happy experiences and pleasures we can obtain. Our lives are about God and how we can glorify Him.

And how do we glorify God in our lives? By using the time, talents and treasures He has given us to fulfill all the wonderful duties and responsibilities He has placed in our lives to help others as: mother, father, daughter, son, husband, wife, single person, student, factory worker, farmer, stay at home mom, etc. . . We glorify God loving others out of thanksgiving for the love He showed us – putting their needs and happiness ahead of ahead of our own. We do this – trusting that the

LORD will keep his promise to provide for us and our needs to such a degree, that we never need to worry about ourselves.

Yes, we keep our hearts in check by focusing on Jesus and his love. And as we, guided by the Holy Spirit, keep his Gospel promises before our eyes, we begin to understand what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote: *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*¹³ *I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*^{vii} Why could Paul have such confidence? Because he trusted the promise God has made with every believer in Christ: *“I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.”*^{viii}

We have no need to covet anything, for God provides us with everything we need and more: food, shelter, water, family, friends and love. And when any of these things are lacking, all we need to do is turn to Christ in prayer. He promises to both hear and give us every good gift that we need.

And, as we focus on the love God has for us in Christ, let us not forget to thank him for all the wonderful blessings we enjoy now. Open your eyes and look around you: God has given all of us so much! Instead of focusing on the few blessings God has withheld from you for your good, rejoice in the many people, opportunities, experiences and things God has placed in your life. Find your joy in Christ, prayerfully considering how you can use all your physical blessings and relationships to glorify him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: my favorite November holiday is almost here! Black Friday? Absolutely not, for that's the holiday with which my sinful flesh tempts me with all sorts of selfishness and greed. How can I love that day? No, it's Thanksgiving – the day upon which I spend time with my family and friends reflecting upon all the wonderful blessings God has given us in Christ. Such reflection breeds genuine contentment. And with contentment comes peace, knowing that, because of Christ, God still loves us and provides everything we need – all to the glory of his name. Amen.

ⁱⁱ Cf. 2 Samuel 11:1-17, 26-27

ⁱⁱ Cf. Luke 12:16-21

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. James 1:12-15

^{iv} 1 Timothy 6:9-10 NIV84

^v 1 John 2:15-17 NIV84

^{vi} Matthew 4:10 NIV84

^{vii} Philippians 4:12-13 NIV84

^{viii} Hebrews 13:5 EHV