Contentment With What's Your's
November 22, 2026

Introduction
What is something that you've wanted so bad that you'd do anything to get it? When iPhones were still rather new, maybe 3 or four generations in, my dad offered to get me and Kari each one. I remember the feeling I had. I love techy things and am often tempted to be an early adopter. However, I usually can't afford to be, but I like to stay on top of these types of things.

So we went to the store and thought we'd be exiting with a new iPhone and all the cool things it could do, but, more importantly, all the status it affords. I don't remember the details, but I do remember that for some reason we weren't able to get them. The disappointment washed over me and I remember being short with Kari in the car after. The ugliness of heart revealed by the elusiveness of a tiny piece of glass, metal and plastic. Everyone else had one; why couldn't I?

Exodus 20:17

Covetousness…The Definition
What does it mean to covet? It's not really a word we commonly use outside of the context of church and religious teaching a lot. We know we shouldn't do it. It carries with it a certain negative connotation. If I said that I covet your car or your truck, you might imagine an unhealthy desire to acquire it; a heart green with envy. That interpretation is completely reasonable considering the word "covet" isn't used in positive connotations in the Bible or culture. Leonard Greenspoon of Creighton University defines it as, "*to desire (someone or something) obsessively, wrongfully, and/or without due regard for the rights/feelings of others.*" (Do Not Covet: Is It a Feeling or an Action?) Coveting is more than mere desire, but an overwhelming desire that draws us into sin. One commentator observes that the tenth commandment is, "*...a general safeguard against many other sins, particularly commandments six through nine.*" (Walvoord, John & Zuck, Roy; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, pg. 140)

In the text, we are provided with the scope of the prohibition, i.e. your neighbor's house, wife, servants, ox, donkey and if the scope doesn't send the message clearly enough, it finishes with the phrase "*or anything that is your neighbor's.*" In Deuteronomy 5:18, your neighbor's field is added. I think it's safe to say that no coveting of any kind is allowed. Have you ever considered, however, that our entire American economy is built on the sin of covetousness? This coming Friday is Black Friday. The ads are already rolling everywhere. Shopping is the name of the game. Ads lean into this quality of wanting what others have. They carry this connotation that if you want to be happy like your neighbor is happy then you need to have what your neighbor has. We make jokes about keeping up with the Jones', but the adage rings true because it hits at the heart of something in us. You don't have to raise your hands, but it's likely that all of us have seen something that someone else has and we've wanted it. We don't have to respond like Gollum with his precious, but we've all thought that the answer to something in our lives could be found in the acquisition of something or in a modeling of our circumstances after our neighbor's lifestyle.

Covetousness…The Danger

It is God's kindness that warns His people of the corrosive power of covetousness and forbids it. What makes covetousness so dangerous, though? I think a quick comment about structure may be warranted here so please indulge me a brief moment. For a quick explanation, let's just borrow from gotquestions.org. It says, "*A chiasm (also called a chiasmus) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a "mirror" effect as the ideas are "reflected" back in a passage. Each idea is connected to its "reflection" by a repeated word, often in a related form. The term chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like our letter X. Chiastic pattern is also called "ring structure.*" It is an ancient memory method or mnemonic device. One author describes chiasms as, "*a construction of parallelisms that must open a theme, develop it, and round it off by bringing the conclusion back to the beginning.*" (Douglas, Mary; Thinking In Circles, pg. 12) This isn't unique to Biblical texts. Mary Douglas observed that this method of writing appears across the ancient world in Homer, the Bible, Zoroastrian literature, ancient Chinese writings and Persian writings. (Mary Douglas quotes taken from Jim Hamilton's book, *Typology*) There's pretty strong consensus that the Ten Commandments is a chiasm. One author breaks it down as a pattern following our relation to God in thoughts, words and deeds and then following a pattern of our relation to man in deeds, words and thoughts (Thomas, W.H. Griffith; *The Pentateuch*, pg. 94). Why might this matter? Because it highlights the danger of covetousness when viewed in parallel with the first commandment: "*You shall have no other gods before me.*"

What is that danger, then? The ESV Study Bible note on this verse helpfully says, "*Because of the way that coveting values a particular thing over trust in and obedience to the Lord as the provider, it is also a breach of the first commandment…*" In fact, in Ephesians 5:5, the Apostle Paul flat out calls it idolatry. "*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.*" He repeats this in Colossians 3:5, "*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*" In case it's not clear, the danger of covetousness is more than simply wanting a new phone or a new car or even a different wife. Covetousness is the sinful expression of our idolatry. "*Covetousness places one's ultimate allegiance in the acquisition of the possessions of others, which often leads to other grave sins (e.g., 1 Kings 21:1–19). Paul says this is tantamount to idolatry (see also Col. 3:5).*" (ESV Study Bible Note…Ephesians 5:5)

Covetousness…The Delight or The 'Dote

This brings us to the antidote. Do you remember the story of Ai in Joshua 7? The people of Israel experienced a miraculous victory at Jericho where God delivered their enemies into their hands by causing the walls to fall so that the Israelite victory was assured and the fame of the Israelite God went throughout Canaan. If Jericho was a great defeat, Ai was a miserable failure because God had given instructions on what to do with all the people and the animals and the gold and silver and idols, but Achan disobeyed God. So when Joshua sent the people to Ai, a podunk town that didn't even require all of Israel's men, they routed Israel and struck fear in their hearts. Achan's disobedience is described by Achan in this manner: "*when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50*

shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath." (Joshua 7:21)

If the source of our covetousness is an ungodly distrust of God's ways or an unholy lack of confidence in God's provision, then the answer would be to find our delight in Him. Psalm 1 presents to us the picture of the godly man. Listen to the words of Psalm 1:

> *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.* (Psalm 1)

The answer to covetousness is satisfaction with God and God's provision. The writer of Hebrews tells us to, "*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.*" (Hebrews 13:5) Even in persecution and trial, Paul was able to find contentment (Philippians 4:11, 13) because he found his strength and belonging in Christ.

Conclusion

As we conclude this morning's sermon, we also conclude our series in the Ten Commandments. The aim of this series isn't to reinforce your own self-righteousness or elevate your own sense of ability to please God. In fact, the weight of it all should leave you feeling a bit overwhelmed. The law, Paul tells us, was given in order to reveal our sin and need for a Savior. The law has taught us our deep need because of our incapacity to fulfill it. It was through this very command regarding covetousness that Paul saw his sinfulness. He tells us in Romans 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. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* (Romans 7:7–12)

So, this morning I hope that you hear that you need rescue and grace because you can't be good enough, but that in your redemption, as you're being changed into the likeness of Christ, you find in the law a guide toward your sanctification. Jesus kept the whole law and imparted to us His righteousness and, by the power of the Spirit, we are called to be holy as He is holy. John Calvin said, "*It will not now be difficult to ascertain the general end contemplated by the whole Law—viz. the fulfilment of righteousness, that man may form his life on the model of the divine purity. For therein God has so delineated his own character, that any one exhibiting in action*

what is commanded, would in some measure exhibit a living image of God." (Calvin, John; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pg. 356)