

Guard Your Heart
Exodus 20:1-2, Exodus 20:17
3/21/21
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Now, we come to God's word as we come to the end of the Ten Commandments and this series called "Renewal in the Wilderness." This was God's word to His people as He was preparing them to follow Him and His leading as He was going to provide them a land and a place to prosper and to flourish. He knew what lay ahead of them. They could not. But He understood that if they were going to be His people, then what would it look like for them to walk in the wilderness in faithfulness to Him? And so He gives them this covenant teaching, what we call the Ten Commandments, what we call perhaps the moral law of God. And so it isn't to say that the rest of God's word is not moral and is not a command in and of itself, but it is how we understand this passage. And we've been through nine of these, and we come to the tenth.

What's tempting is that as you have been with us in the series, perhaps you feel as though there are times where you're like, yeah, I'm good. Like, you know. Yeah, that was interesting, but, you know, me and God, we're good on that one. And we kind of treat it like a to-do list, right? And so sometimes we get to the tenth, and we don't know what to do with it. It feels a little strange. It feels a little odd. So let's deal with the oddness and the strangeness.

There are some things here that had been really misconstrued that has not helped us in the church and what it means to grow and to be a disciple of Jesus. So I hope that we can correct that this morning and that we can hear His word to us as we consider Exodus 20, again, always beginning with the introduction verses 1 and 2, and then hearing the specific command. God gave all of these commands after He had already established that you don't follow these to get to me; you follow these because you belong to me. I have loved you graciously, not because of anything in you but because of my mercy and grace towards you.

And so this is His word again to us.

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Lord, we now ask that you would fill us with your Spirit, that you would help the teacher, and that you would glorify your name and show us how to live and how, O Lord by your word and Spirit, to guard our hearts. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Consider perhaps a couple of quotes this week. I found quotes again that I think are helpful for us to understand what is really being talked about in regard to this command. Augustine way back said, "My weight"—that is my substance, who I am as a person. "My weight is my love. Wherever I'm carried, my love is carrying me there." And then that great existential philosopher Winnie the Pooh said, "Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart."

At first glance, it seems as though coveting seems like such a small thing. What is being talked about there? And then when we try to memorize the commands, we shorten them. And then we get to the tenth, and we say, "Thou shalt not covet." We still use the old English. I don't know why. "Do not covet." The problem is when we shorten it to, "Do not covet," we've actually just done something that the

Bible doesn't teach. How do we understand that?

This morning as we consider this command, I want to do so with three things to consider. One is what our desires teach us, where our desires take us, and why the Lord cares about our desires. What our desires teach us, where they take us, and why the Lord actually cares about our desires.

First, of course, it is understanding itself what our desires actually teach us. Well, the Bible is very clear first and foremost about what our desires teach us. We get it from the book of Proverbs 4 when Solomon is writing to his son, and he says, "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life." And then he starts touching on just some of the things that spring from desires and our hearts when he says the following verses. "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil."

What he says is with regard to what's going on in our hearts and our desires is guard your heart because of the nature of desire. Our desires teach us that from our desires comes the rest of life, for from our desires come words, for "out of the mouth, the heart speaks." Out of our hearts come desire which then actually effects our decision making, and we decide, do I go to the left or to the right? My desires actually shape what I'm wanting and desiring, which has a lot to say about our optical nerves.

First and foremost, we must understand that what our desires teach us is this. And here I'm grateful for the work of James K. A. Smith. And I'm going to use more language than he does as a philosopher. And it's this. We are lovers before we are students. We are lovers before we are students. You see, the problem is not that we are lovers. The problem is not that we desire because to shorten it to say, "Do not covet," is actually not what the command is teaching at all. The problem isn't that we covet because it's another word for "desire" or "longing" or "loving." The issue becomes when it's in the wrong things and the wrong places.

So what we learn is out of the heart, out of our desires comes the rest of life. Therefore, we are first and foremost loving things before we are thinking things. Please note, it doesn't mean that the mind doesn't matter. It's that you can have all the correct intellectual furniture but not have a desire for actually living by the way you've ordered your furniture. I'll get to that in a moment as we consider one example in scripture. But we are first and foremost lovers before we are students.

Secondly, our desires teach us that our desires need discipleship and not just our intellect. Our desires need discipleship and not just our intellect. Again, James K. A. Smith writes in his book *You Are What You Love*, "Discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting after the right things than merely knowing and believing the right things." Jesus's command to follow Him is a command to align our lives and longings with His, to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after what God has set up as all and in all, a vision that is encapsulated in the shorthand as the kingdom of God. In other words, our hearts need to be disciplined into longing for His kingdom and not merely for believing Him as king.

Do you know that that's possible? It is possible to want Jesus as king but not be interested in His kingdom. It's possible to want the things that the kingdom brings but not want Him as king. You see, desire for peace and affluence and success and happiness and meaning is what the kingdom of God actually brings. But it can only be fully experienced in understanding first that He's the king. But when we try to seek out the things of the kingdom without Him as king, they go very errant because our hearts lead us there. We can want Him as king, but if we want Jesus to simply be in service of what we're already doing and what we figured out, then He's merely our servant and not our Lord.

Again, Smith says, "Jesus is a teacher who doesn't just inform our intellect but forms our very loves." Here's what he says. "His teaching," that is Jesus, "doesn't just touch the calm, cool, collected space

of reflection and contemplation. He is a teacher who invades the heated passionate regions of the heart. He is the word." And the word tells us that the word does what? It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit. He judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12.

To follow Jesus is to become a student of the rabbi who teaches us how to love, and to be a disciple of Jesus is to enroll in the school of grace. Jesus is not a lecturer in chief. His school of charity is not a lecture hall where we passively take notes while Jesus spouts facts about Himself in a litany of text-heavy PowerPoint slides. Jesus isn't a lecture hall, and the kingdom of God isn't a fill-in-the-blank to-do list. It is a full-orbed reality of being human, and Jesus sees all of it. The heavenly Father knows the very words on our tongues before one of them came to be, says the psalmist, for He is the Lord, and He has created us. He knows who we are. He knows what we are. He knows how we desire and why we desire it before we even understand it. And so what is in need of discipleship is not merely our thoughts and our belief systems. Those are important. We need all of that. But we also need our hearts and our loves to be reshaped by it.

Our desires teach us as the word tells us in Proverbs, "Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life." The issue isn't "Don't covet." That's impossible. In fact, if I don't covet, I don't understand the rest of the commands. The problem is what are you coveting? And what am I coveting? Am I longing and loving something that has not been given to me by my heavenly Father? Am I loving something that belongs to someone else?

So that leads us to the second point. Where do our desires actually take us? Let's unpack that for just a bit. Where do our desires take us? Desires are not neutral. They lead in some particular direction. And so our desires take us in one of two directions, either toward God and toward neighbor or towards self and competition or comparison with our neighbor. Do you see? What do I mean?

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 22. "Teacher," they ask, "which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" And He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Okay.

Now let's use the tenth commandment as a key to actually unlock proper longing and desire because the tenth commandment actually explains the whole. How do I know that my desires are leading me towards God and towards my neighbor? Well, we go back to the commands. And what do we learn? From the beginning, we learn that it is actually teaching us that first and foremost, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." Long for me first and no one else. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness or anything that is in heaven or above. You shall not worship or long for anything that is created. But worship me in your heart and your loves and desires alone.

"You shall not take the Lord's name in vain." You shall love the very sound of my name because in it is invested all of my character, and all my providence, and all my sovereignty, and all that I am. Guard my name with your lips because out of the mouth, the heart speaks. Long and love my name and no other name above mine.

"Honor your father and your mother." Love and long that they are cared for, and respected, and protected, and served, not for your good but for the image of God in them.

"You shall not commit murder." Taking someone else's life is the ultimate extreme of covetousness that belongs to someone else. Their life belongs to them, but for you to get what you want, you're willing to either take their name or to take their life blood are the same thing.

"You shall not commit adultery." Sexual desire is beautiful and ought to be celebrated in the confines of what God has given to us in the beauty of the marriage bed. It is a beautiful thing. But when it gets disordered, brokenness and the desire for somebody else that is not your spouse is abhorrent to God,

and it causes pain and brokenness.

"You shall not steal." Again, covered by the tenth commandment. It's taking that which has not been given to you. Love what I have given to you and provided for you.

"You shall not bear false witness." You shall love the goodness of another's name more than your desire to be right.

How do our words, how do our desires impact the lives of others? You see, loving the right things actually is what the ten commandments are really all about. Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is what proper desire and coveting looks like. But when it is not towards God and love of neighbor, it ultimately then will lead towards self or competition and comparison against our neighbor.

This is the point that we must always remember in the tenth commandment. It's about your neighbor's stuff. It's theirs, all of it. Their name, their house, their horse, their Volvo, their degrees, their obedient children, their green grass, their higher-paying job. Because left unchecked, our hearts that are not being disciplined in the love of God in Christ will set ablaze our entire life, and our lives will become what many others can't see, which is one giant Pinterest dream board of what is not ours but gets our attention. And we want it, and we want it now.

Our desires lead us in one or two directions. The commandment that is the tenth is saying this commandment must be headed because breaking it is breaking it all. It's a good summary. It doesn't end with a whimper. It ends in some ways by taking us all the way back to the beginning. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." He is a God who is gracious, who knows that we are desiring things and have desired everything else but Him. And yet in His grace and mercy, He comes to us to show that his desire is set on us. And while we were yet His enemies, Christ died for us. Thanks be to God. While we are false and fickle lovers, God is ever faithful, ever true, and His word is eternal, and His grace is sufficient and made new every morning. This is the message of the gospel.

Jesus is inviting us not to be do-good isms, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." No. That is also set inside the whole picture of what He's come to do. He's come to rescue us from our desires that lead to destruction unless they are reshaped by the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. Instead of being in competition and comparison against our neighbor, we can say, the Lord has given me food to eat, clothes, and this life today. And I can say, thank you, Lord. And how can I use what I have to give to others and give back in thanksgiving to you? Because all of it is yours. All of it is of grace, including every single breath that I take.

First and foremost, it's not about theft. It's not about sex. It's not about relationships and murder and words. This is about lordship. Who gets to define who we are and who we're not? Who gets to say what I am and what I'm not? It is either the Lord of all and of all things, or He's the lord of nothing. He is the Lord who has made us by the very word of His breath. He has formed us in our mother's wombs before one of our days came to be. Even though I settle on the far side of the sea, even though I try to make my bed in the depths of Hades, even there, says the psalmist, "Your right hand will guide me."

Thanks be to God that our loving gracious Father will love us to the very ends of the earth, even to the point of death through His Son. He is the Lord, and He says, you are beautiful in my sight, and my song over you is love. My face towards you is not of hatred and of wrath but of invitation and mercy. You want? I know you want because that's the way I made you. You love? I know you love because that's the way I made you. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my burden is easy, and my yolk is light. For I am gentle and humble in heart." This is a God who sees the true nature of the brokenness of our desires, and He says, "Come to me," because He means to not just forgive us. He's restoring us. He's remaking us so that our hearts are disciplined, and our minds are changed. And this is why the Lord cares about our desires.

Listen to what Paul says in his letter to the Colossians. "For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Thanks be to God, people, that our Savior has come to bring the healing power of His grace as far as the curse is found, even if that is in the very crevices of my desires. As far as the curse is found. And he says,

"And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you as holy and blameless and above reproach before him. And if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven of which I, Paul, became a minister." [ESV]

He is restoring us to present us. Amen.

So how do we then cooperate with the Spirit of the Lord our God and our Savior and His heavenly Father? How then do we hear this word of the tenth commandment? To be very on guard of your hearts because it might lead you to desiring that which is not yours. We first and foremost must do two things. Examine our hearts and address them. Examine them and address them.

Here, I'm grateful for my colleague and fellow minister John Yenchko when he said, "Consider the life of Judas. Consider that. Is it possible to sit close to Jesus Christ, very close, and still not love him? Judas did for three years."

So how do I begin to examine my heart? I begin to examine my heart not merely alone but in a community of faith with those with whom we've given ourselves to the word, and we're asking honest questions of ourselves, and we allow others to ask us questions. But we examine our hearts to ask, Lord, is there any offensive way in me? Said another way, what do we daydream about when we're ironing, when we're at the stoplight, when we're on the bus or the train, when nobody else is at home? What are we dreaming about? What do we long for? That's a good place to prayerfully ask, Lord, help me by your Spirit to examine, are my desires leading me to you or leading me away from you?

And once we've examined it, then the second part is to address it, to say, Lord, help me to address what is going on in my heart. First, let me confess and be honest with you and with at least another person to say, I need to tell you about what I am really wrestling with. And I need to confess that to you, and I need to confess that to the Lord. Lord, forgive me, but reshape my desires. So we don't have to live in shame and guilt that we long and desire for stuff. As the great Thomas Chalmers said, "We need to ask the Lord not for a reduction of desire or to kill it off, because that's impossible. We need to ask the Lord for the expulsive power of a new affection." "The expulsive power of a new affection." How, Lord, in my confession to you, how, Lord, in my honesty and examination of my own heart, Lord, how can you replace this with desires that will overpower these others? Where do my loves need to be disciplined by your word?

You might be coveting if you hurt others in order to get more for yourself. You might be coveting if you are preoccupied with making or accumulating more. You might be coveting if you are unwilling to give up what you have because you want more. You might be coveting if you're frequently grumbling about your house, your spouse, the quality or quantity of your possessions, the lack of a spouse, and the general state of your life. Friends, what do we love? What are we chasing? What are we daydreaming about?

And so if that is the case, if we're willing to ask ourselves these questions, then let us ask those questions in the presence and proximity of the power of God's word the Holy Spirit uses to begin to give us the expulsive power of a new affection. Consider these brief words as we close. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up. Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Being wealthy and having lots of stuff and having lots of

success is not the problem, but it can be the place where very subtly we realize that we want more than the word and the power of the gospel. Do we see the value of the love of God in Christ as more valuable than all we have?

Secondly, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in serve of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had, and he bought it." What is value if we gain the whole world, yet we lose and forfeit our souls? The kingdom of God is not measured in numbers or square mileage, but it is measured by the love of God and His mercy, which is sufficient, which will go down to the very heart of who we are as human beings that He has designed. And He knows us, and He welcomes us into the great pearl of His kingdom, and He says, look what I have done for you. Look what I have given for you. All that you have is from me. Be grateful and thankful. But rest in me, for I am the treasure. Jesus is our Lord.

Finally, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Our hearts, our desires, our minds, all that we are has been bought with a price, the price of the body and life of our Savior that we might find identity and longing and purpose in what it means to be human in Him alone. And everything else will flow from that.

Guard your hearts, dear brothers and sisters, as I seek by God's Spirit to guard my own. Let us pray for one another. Let us be willing to listen to one another and to hear one another without judgment, and to pray and to uphold one another to strengthen one another and encourage one another as long as it is called today. For aren't we weary? Don't we long for something more? The Lord is it, and we need His grace. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. And we pray that you would help us by your Spirit to be reshaped in our desires and our hearts and our longings, that we would not be drawn away from you because of them, but because of your Spirit and word that the gospel itself would actually help us to see that desiring and longing and loving is a great thing to be celebrated, that has actually been meant for us to be drawn to you. For you are the Lord. You have redeemed us. You have rescued us. Lord, we ask you, by your Spirit, remake our hearts and loves that we would not love that which is not ours, long for that which does not belong to us, but rather we would rejoice in what has been given to us in Jesus Christ, life and eternal life itself. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.