

God on Evil Desires

The Ten Commandments

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Well, we come this morning in our ongoing series on the 10 Commandments, we come to the 10th and final commandment. I'll have two messages after today on this most important commandment but you'll find it in Exodus 20 and I invite you to turn to Exodus 20 with me. As we introduce this commandment, as searching as all of the commandments have been, this one will prove to be the one that is even more searching above all of the rest. It is a remarkable expression of the righteousness and the holiness of God, the righteousness that God requires, the depths at which he examines the hearts and lives of all men and women, boys and girls everywhere throughout all the course of time.

In Exodus 20:17 we read this,

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Notice just on a surface reading that it is absolutely comprehensive, this command against coveting, this prohibition against inordinate desire, when it says "anything that belongs to your neighbor," after having spoken about human aspects of it of private property aspects of it, it goes and it embraces everything that could possibly be the object of the desire of our hearts.

This commandment, as we're going to see as we unpack it over the next couple of weeks, this commandment forbids us to even desire that which God forbids, stated differently, it commands us to actively desire all of the things that he desires, all of the things that he considers lovely and holy and worthwhile. It's important for us, it is essential for us to remember and to recognize that God is a God who looks on the heart. God did not merely create you in your outer man, in your human flesh and blood, when he formed you in your mother's womb, your very inner being is set by him, it is created by him; in that act of conception God communicated to you both a material and an immaterial aspect, and the God who is holy and the God who is invisible and the God who is spirit looks on the invisible spiritual aspects of your hearts and lives and evaluates you there. All of us are under the searching guise of the omnipotent and holy God.

So this 10th commandment addresses the inner man in a way that is utterly unmistakable. The 10th commandment with its inner desires, the 10 Commandments being a unit, therefore shows us that all of the inner desires that produce the sins of the prior nine commandments, all of the inner desires that prompt those are forbidden as well, and so we need to take this seriously as God looks at the one that is inside, God looks at you where no other man can see, and so this commandment comes and lays its demands before us. It forbids the inner sin of coveting and this word for "covet," this Hebrew verb for "covet" that is used here describes, and I quote from a standard lexicon, "an inordinate ungoverned selfish desire." This commandment is addressing uncontrolled selfish desires that are contrary to the law of God, and because God is holy, the inner man must be holy. Think about it this way: Scripture says in 1 Peter 1:16 and in other places, the Lord says that, "You are to be holy as I am holy." God is an invisible spirit, is holy throughout his unseen being, and so he's calling us to a like holiness that we can never meet, that we have never met and that we never could meet. He is holy. He is invisible. He is spiritual. He looks on your heart and that's the matter that we need to come to grips with, this recognition of the holiness of God, the fact that he looks on the inner man makes it impossible for us to think that we are actually perfect and righteous and good enough for him in his sight, as we will see.

Now before we dive into the true meaning of the text, I want to clear up a matter that has no doubt affected many of you in part of your background, and the first point here this morning, this is kind of a clumsy transition but that's okay, the first point that I want to address this morning is surprisingly the Catholic version of the 10th commandment. The Catholic version of the 10th commandment, or you could just say the Catholic version of the 10 Commandments taking it all together. This is an important matter for us to clear up and to address. The Lord has raised up our church in an area with a long history of Catholic influence. I know that there are many dear people in our congregation that have come out of the Catholic Church or have loved ones in the Catholic Church and it's very important for us to address this matter. If you read a Catholic catechism, you will find that the 10 Commandments are different than what we have expressed them to be during the course of our series and I want to address that and help you understand something about why they divide the commandments up as they do, show you the impossibility of that interpretation, and give you some implications of what all of that means.

So let's step back for just a moment and understand this, that we know from God's word that there are precisely 10 commandments, not 9, not 11, there are 10. The Bible interprets this section of Scripture and makes that very clear and makes it known to us. Look a few chapters over in the book of Exodus 34. What we're looking at right now is to understand that there are precisely 10 commandments and that bears on our understanding of what the Catholic Church has done to the moral law of God. In Exodus 34:27, "the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.' So [Moses] was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." Or literally translated "the ten words," but you know that it's talking about the 10 Commandments as we understand them because it's talking about the tablets upon which God wrote the 10

Commandments by his own power. Ten commandments described in the same book in which we find them in Exodus 20, the context shows that we are to understand them as being 10 commandments, no more, no less.

Now I won't have you turn to these next two passages, you can just jot down the references and look them up later. In the book of Deuteronomy 4:13 it says this, it says that God "declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone." That's Deuteronomy 4:13, 10 commandments just as we see in Exodus 34.

Then finally in Deuteronomy 10:4 it says this, "He wrote on the tablets, like the former writing, the Ten Commandments which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly." Ten commandments. Ten commandments. Ten commandments. Ten. Ten. Ten. That number is important for understanding what God has said and understanding how to interpret what the Roman Catholic Church has done to the moral law of God.

If you grew up in a Roman Catholic church, you probably learned a different version of the 10 Commandments and you can see this expressed, I want to be very specific here because whenever you say things like this and get so direct and plain about matters, people accuse you of not representing them fairly or accurately and that's not the case here this morning and it never has been from this pulpit when I've spoken on the Roman Catholic Church. The second edition of the catechism of the Catholic Church published by authority of the Roman pope, published in 1997, omits the second commandment in its teaching about the 10 Commandments. You can see this on pages 551 and 552 of that edition of the catechism of the Catholic Church. They lay out what they call the 10 Commandments and they pass over the central part that I'm about to explain to you in a moment.

What they have done, if you turn back to Exodus 20, here is what they pass over. Here is what they make no comment on in the 10 Commandments. In Exodus 20 beginning at verse 4 it says, God's word says, the Bible says, the 10 Commandments say, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." What you'll find when you read the catechism of the Catholic Church is that that is tucked away and hidden and not considered a commandment at all.

Why would they do that and how do they account for 10 commandments if they ignore what we know to be the second commandment? Why would they do that? Well, if you know anything about the Catholic Church, you know that it is a system that is built on idolatry, it is built on false worship, and so a commandment against idolatry, a commandment against all of the visible images that they rely on in the course of their worship, a commandment against idolatry would destroy their entire system. If they made

that know and they taught it and called people's attentions to it, it would undermine the very foundations of everything that they do and practice. And so for centuries, if not for a millennia and a half, rather than repent of their false worship, Catholics prefer to tamper with God's moral law in order to keep their system. And beloved, if they will tamper with the holy moral law of God, it's no surprise that they find no compunction about tampering with the souls of men because if you're willing to do the greater sin of tampering with the moral law of God, it is no small thing, it is no great thing, I should say, to tamper with the souls of men, to tamper with young children and all of the other things that have been so well reported over the past several decades. There's a reason why that kind of corruption is allowed to flourish and it is shown in the fact that they reject the law of God for the sake of their system.

You say, "Well, how do they ever get to 10 commandments then? If they take out a commandment, what do they, you know, how do they get to 10?" Well, that's where the 10th commandment in verse 17 of Exodus 20 comes in. This 10th commandment found in Exodus 17 is a little bit longer. Look at it there again with me. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." What do Catholics do with the 10th commandment? They divide it in two. They take that single verse and they turn it into two commandments so that they have a separate commandment, "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and then a second commandment based on this verse, "you shall not covet your neighbor's goods." Okay? So they divide it up into two and say there are two commands here, one against coveting your neighbor's wife, another against coveting your neighbor's goods as if that distinction covered up the, you know, what they have done.

Well, beloved, we can easily see that God did not intend that false division to be understood as one of the commandments. This commandment, if you look at verse 17, it addresses physical property at the beginning of the command, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house," it covers physical property at the end of the verse, "you shall not covet his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Physical property is commanded at the beginning and at the end and in the middle is the command against coveting your neighbor's wife. And so the structure of the verse shows that by addressing physical property at the beginning and physical property at the end, it's a bookend to be considered as a single commandment rather than something that is to be divided into two.

If you look, we won't take the time to do this but if you look at Deuteronomy 5:21 you'll find where the 10 Commandments are restated that these are actually listed in different order and that's important enough, as I think about it, for us to turn there. Deuteronomy 5 which is a restatement some 40 years later of the 10 Commandments by Moses. So in Exodus 20 we read, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house," as the opening line. Verse 21, in Deuteronomy 5:21 we read, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field or his male servant or his female servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." Beloved, what you can see by the way these commandments are both presented under the inspiration of

the Holy Spirit, is that the sequence of these things are interchangeable. The reason that they are interchangeable is because they are meant to be viewed as a unit, not separately. And so the elements are listed in different order in Deuteronomy 5, in Exodus 20:17 you have property, wife, and then property, showing that there's not a change of intention as it moves from property to wife to property on back. Beloved, if the distinction between coveting your neighbor's property and coveting your neighbor's wife were so critical, the commands would not be interchangeable like that. But they are. The unity of the subject, the repetition of the verb shows that what is being addressed is the sin of coveting in the heart. That's the key. That's the unifying principle, not the objects of the illicit desire.

So there is no basis for dividing this commandment in two, and particularly when you take that reasoning and hold it up and see how they utterly avoid and dismiss the text of the second commandment, the three full verses there in Exodus 20, you should just look at that and say, "You're up to something there. You're doing something there. You're doing something that's not right. You're doing something that's not righteous. You shouldn't need to play with it like this." You say, "Why would you do that?" And you say, "Oh, you've got this whole system of idolatry to protect." And then it all becomes plain.

So it is not without basis and it is not an unfair statement to say that Catholics, and when I say Catholics I'm talking about the established Roman Catholic system, the Catholic authorities, the pope and their corrupt leadership, and I recognize that many Catholics don't bother reading the catechism and they're ignorant of these things, many lay Catholics, so to speak. I speak with sympathy to them. I call them and invite them to look at these things for themselves to see that what is being said here is true but the Roman Catholic system has openly tampered with the moral law of God in order to keep their system of idolatry in place, and the condemnation, the ultimate condemnation of those that are responsible for this will be entirely just. No man should feel the freedom to tamper with the law of God as the Catholics have done in this manner. And I say with sympathy and I say as a word of warning for those Catholics that may come across this message in future times, that those who follow that leadership without searching the Bible for themselves to see whether these things are so, they will have no excuse in the end as well because, you know, these things and I'm not the first person to say this, these things have been said and known for centuries, these things have been pointed out. Ultimately there is no excusing someone even if they were born and raised in the system, there is no excusing a blind trust in the leadership of men without seeing what Scripture says for itself.

We have to know the Scripture for ourselves. Even here in this room and going beyond the issues of the second commandment and the Roman Catholic catechism, you need to know the word of God for yourself. You need to be reading the Bible for yourself. You need to read it yourself and it's no excuse to say, "I'm too busy." It's not excuse to say, "You don't know what it's like for me." None of that matters. God has given you an eternal soul for which you will give an account and in his word, in the 66 books of the Bible, he has made plain what he requires and so it's incumbent upon each one of us to know the word of God for ourselves, to read it, to be familiar with it, to gather when it is

being taught so that we would seek out what God has to say in his word about such critical matters as these.

So for those of you that grew up in the Catholic Church, that's why we're addressing these things differently, that's why we've talked about them in the past, and it's why we come now to consider the text of the commandment itself in Exodus 20:17. We have addressed the Catholic version of the 10th commandment and now we need to come and see what this commandment actually means and what it actually requires, what it reveals to us about the nature and the character of God, how it applies to us in our own lives. So we come to our second point here this morning and we realize that this is a commandment against discontent. This is a commandment against discontent. Scripture in the New Testament tells us to be content with what we have. The 10th commandment expresses God's judgment on those that are discontent and want more than what he has provided to them.

So we're sobered by the warnings of God's word, we realize that we all have trampled against a commandment like this but, beloved, you must understand this, what I'm about to say has very far-reaching implications. Just because it is uncomfortable, just because it is convicting does not give us license to ignore it. It does us no good to silence the word of God by rejecting it or ignoring portions of it that cut against the grain of our character. It does us no good to do that. That's no better than a Catholic system cutting up the 10 Commandments to preserve themselves; it's the same kind of motivation that causes people to put their fingers in their ears when they hear the word of God and it starts to convict them and say, "I don't want to hear that." Well, how are we ever going to stand before a holy God in judgment? Do you think we can claim ignorance of his law when we willfully refuse to hear it and to heed it? You know, there's no escaping these things. Far better for each one of you to deal with the reality of what Scripture says, of what God has said in his word, and to come to grips with it, and if it convicts us as lawbreakers and shows us that we are guilty and have no excuse, then so be it. Better to acknowledge our guilt before a holy God than to deny or to ignore his word.

So we need to come with this and let it speak to us and say everything that it has to say as God's word searches us in our hearts, and as we come to this command in particular, we are sobered by the warnings of his word. Look at it there again with me in verse 17 where it says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Now just some observations here. In comparison to the recent commandments that we have looked at, especially beginning in verse 13, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Notice that this is a long commandment by comparison. This is an extensive command compared to the relatively brief ones that we have studied in recent weeks. You'll find that it forbids seven different objects of desire when it says, "You shall not covet." What is it that you shall not covet? Your neighbor's house. Your neighbor's wife. His male servant. His female servant. His ox. His donkey. Anything that belongs to your

neighbor. You know, and so as you're driving down the neighborhood and you see a house that you wish was yours, boom. You see, you're driving down the freeway, you see a car, "I wish that car..." Boom. And just on and on it goes.

And you say, "But I can't help that. Those desires just pop up and so I can't help that." Well, do you think that the fact that you're helpless to control the desire excuses you from what the commandment requires? All that this shows is how corrupt we are, how desperately dark our hearts are that we desire things and that we can't control our desires. God looks at the desire, at the source of the desire and says, "Do not do that." And as our Creator, as our Maker, as the lawgiver, he has the authority and prerogative to command whatever he wishes. We can't object that this is unfair. This is righteous and the fact that we so easily violate it with the motions of our heart at any given moment simply shows how far short we fall of the glory of God.

So the 10th commandment has a unique role in the moral law. It goes beyond sins of tongue, it goes beyond sins of deed and goes to the very source of where those sins come from in the first place. This commandment governs and exposes our very disposition to life. It governs our orientation. God judges our desires even when we cannot control them, and so this command shows us the depth of our corruption in a way that is very sobering indeed.

Now let's take a New Testament perspective on this for a moment. Turn over to the book of James with me in your Bible, just after the book of Hebrews which we read earlier in the service from the book of Hebrews. In James 4 you see a New Testament commentary on this matter. James 4 beginning in verse 1, he says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" There is outward division and arguments and quarrels among you, where do those come from is the question. And he says, "Is not the source," in other words, do these not come from "your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." Now after all of that discussion of inner sins of inward sins and rebellion in the heart and recognizing that these outward sins are simply a manifestation of what's taking place inside the heart, he goes on to say, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." This discussion by James of the inner sins of lust and envy and covetousness being expressed in outward conflict, he leads immediately into the fact, the outgrowth of that, the culmination of that is he says you're adulteresses and you're exposing your friendship with the world in your hostility toward God.

So this is very very serious and so what do these wayward desires, what do these sinful desires reveal about the hearts of men? It shows that they do not want God to rule over them because they have desires that are contrary to him and his law, and so they rebel from the heart against him and it manifests itself in conflict and disputes and so forth. And then horizontally on a human level it shows that we're not content with what we

have. We want more and so we lust after more, we desire more than what we have, and at that very point God's word convicts and says, "Stop. No. That desire is illicit. That desire is illegal. The very aspect of your heart is wrong." And so it shows up in our desires for material possessions, it shows up in our desires for popularity, it shows up in men in ministry when they want ministry opportunities that have not been given to them, all of this, all of this exposing the corruption of the heart. There was nothing in our Lord Jesus like that. There is nothing in the word that commends such desires or excuses them. Instead we are convicted at every level.

Look at Matthew 5 with me. Matthew 5. We've pointed this out in the past, we need to point it out again. In Matthew 5:22 after having said in verse 12, "You shall not commit murder," Jesus says in verse 22, "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court." The inner sin, the inner man being in conflict with the law of God expressed in his commandment to love, that inner anger being a violation of God that creates guilt before the court, guilt before the Supreme Court, guilt enough to go into the fiery hell. Outward morality, beloved, outward morality is no substitute for an inner righteousness that conforms to the character of God, that conforms to the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Outward morality is no substitute and so a man could be a perfectly pleasant neighbor in your neighborhood, he can be a perfectly pleasant person to spend time with, but that says nothing about what he is like in his inner man. It says nothing about what you're like. External morality does not satisfy the law of God because the law of God looks upon the heart. So as is well-known there in verse 27 from Matthew 5, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has committed adultery with her in his heart already.

So Scripture is plain about this. What I want to do in the rest of our time here this morning as we've seen the nature of the commandment and how it applies to the inner man, I want to as our third point, I want to look at some Old Testament illustrations about this point and then for our final point to look at some New Testament illustrations of this point as well so that we see the commandment as it is stated and we see how it is played out in the lives of men recorded for us in Scripture, these things in Scripture recorded for our instruction and recorded for our benefit to help us understand. And beloved, when you look at the Old Testament illustrations, that's point number 3, the Old Testament illustrations, you find that the Old Testament certainly warns against a covetous heart.

Look at Deuteronomy 7 with me. Deuteronomy 7:25 as the people of Israel were getting ready to go into the Promised Land, Moses speaks this sermon in the book of Deuteronomy to them to warn them about what is to come, to promise blessing for obedience and curses upon their disobedience, and he says this in Deuteronomy 7:25, he says, "The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, or you will be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God." Notice how he says that covetous desires turn out to be a snare. How many times have greedy people gotten themselves into financial trouble because they overextended themselves? How often do companies fail because they expand too quickly in order to capitalize on what they think is a

favorable market and the insatiable lust and greed for more and more leads them to ruin. It proves to be a trap to them. Moses here warns the people on a personal scale, "Don't covet. When you go in and you start to win victories and you start to see the things that these foreign lands have, don't covet."

Now as you read on in Scripture, turn to the book of Joshua 7 and I'll remind you of a place where a man did exactly what Moses said not to do and see what the outcome of it is. You know, in our materialistic age and in our superficial age that cares nothing about Scripture and the things of God, it would be easy for many to think, "Well, how bad can it be? What does a lustful look hurt anybody? What does a covetous desire hurt anybody? It's not illegal according to the statutes of men, how can it be so bad? How can this be such an issue?" Well, you see as you read on in Scripture and it exposes it to you. You may remember the sin of Achan in the book of Joshua. God had commanded the people not to keep the spoils of war, and in Joshua 7:1 you see that there's a problem that comes up. Joshua 7:1, "the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel." Achan had violated the ban. He took that which was not his and he kept it and he hid it, as we're going to see, and as a result of that the anger of the Lord burned against them and his sin led to a military defeat. God disciplined the army because of the sin in the camp, and as a result of that we read this in verse 19. After the army had been defeated God said there's sin in the camp, they had to identify it, they draw out lots and it falls to Achan and Achan is pointed out by lot as the guilty man, summarizing obviously a lot in a short amount of time here.

Look at verse 19 with that background in mind, "Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.'" You can just kind of picture Achan trembling in his sandals. This is a fearful moment because he knows he's been found out and he makes a confession. In verse 20, "Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.'" Beloved, his covetous heart had ensnared him. It laid a trap for him and he fell into it. The covetousness led to the sin that he is about to describe and led to the consequences that we are about to see, and all of the awful progression of it started with an evil desire in his heart that he had been specifically warned against, and the outcome of it was bad, the outcome of it was terrible from a human perspective.

In verse 22, "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD. Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor.

Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.' And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. They raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day." He died. His family died. His name was erased, as it were, from the book of Israel as an act of judgment from God upon him for the acts that he had done which started with a covetous desire in his heart. Beloved, what you and I must recognize, a couple of things that we must recognize is this, one is that God forbids sinful desires and we have to reckon with that, we have to come to grips with that. That alone should be enough to puncture any sense of self-righteousness that we have, and alongside of that we realize that judgment ensues upon it. And so a sinful heart leads you into places of danger and places of sin.

Look at the book of Proverbs 6 with me. Proverbs 6 in verse 20, Solomon is encouraging his son to take the word of God to his heart and to treasure it therein. In Proverbs 6:20 he says, "My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you." So take this word into your heart and if you do, the word of God will shape your desires in a way that protects your life.

Verse 23, "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life." With what outcome? Verse 24, "To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress." Verse 25, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, Nor let her capture you with her eyelids." Don't let it happen in your heart. It's not simply stay out of bed with her, don't even desire that in your heart. And the word for "desire" here in verse 25, the exact same verb that is translated "covet" in Exodus 20:17. Do not covet her. Do not even desire that in your heart. And the reason is that that desire will take you places that you did not set upon, but by not dealing with the evil desire in your heart, it takes you and like a hook in the mouth of a fish and takes you places that you never wanted to go beforehand. And you have to deal with the desire in your heart.

So he continues the warning to his son premised on the danger of the desire, the wickedness of the desire. He says in verse 26, "For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, And an adulteress hunts for the precious life." Notice that the woman is held responsible as well as the man. "Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry; But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, And his reproach will not be blotted out. For jealousy enrages a man, And he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will not accept any ransom, Nor will he be satisfied though you give many gifts."

Beloved, you see that awful outcome at the end of Proverbs 6 as it traces back, let's reverse engineer it, you see the results at the end of the chapter that follow from the act of adultery that is described there, and that act of adultery was rooted in the evil desire at the start where Solomon posits a man who has an evil desire for a woman that he doesn't repent of and it drags him away. The same thing with Achan in the book of Joshua. You see the awful judgment on him and his family being traced back through his thievery and his disobedience to the command of God, all of it starting in the heart. They didn't foresee the outcome, they didn't foresee what would come in both places, however the evil desire proved to be the spark that set off the forest fire that destroyed everything around it.

That's the Old Testament, what about the New Testament illustrations that we should look at or that we should consider? We could look at Acts 5 with Ananias and Sapphira, but I want to take you to a different place and show you how penetrating this commandment is and how far-reaching it is. Turn to the book of Romans 7. It was this very commandment which convicted a self-righteous Pharisee named Saul that he was not the righteous man that he professed to be or that he thought himself to be. In Romans 7:7 he says this, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" He said, "I thought I was innocent and then I saw what the law of God and what the elevated righteousness of the law of God was, that it applied to my inner man and said, "Do not even covet. Do not desire the wicked thing." And this externally righteous, this externally blameless Pharisee was utterly convicted and crushed by the commandment that we are considering today 2,000 years later.

He says in verse 8, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead." He said, "I thought I was righteous and then I saw the law of God and it exposed me. And what the law being righteous and good said not to do, my sinful heart was revealed by the fact that I wanted to do in my heart the very opposite of what it required. It said don't covet and I started coveting everywhere about me."

Verse 9, "I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." The problem: the wickedness was not in the law which said do not covet, the perversion was in the heart that saw a good law and turned it into something bad and started to violate it at every turn of his desire.

So Paul vindicates the holiness of the law in this concluding statement in verse 12, "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." This law punctured his self-righteousness and exposed the sin that had been there all along. It lay dormant for a time and then the wind came and stirred the dust up, not a problem with the wind, the problem was that the dust had settled and the wind stirred it up and showed what was there.

One other passage that I want to take you to this morning in the book of Colossians. Turn past the Corinthian letters, Galatians, and Ephesians and Philipians, you'll come to the book of Colossians. You'll find this in Colossians 3:5, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry." Then look at what he says in verse 6, perfectly consistent with everything that we have seen in other parts of Scripture this morning. Verse 6, "For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them."

Beloved, how serious is this matter of evil desire? Paul lists it with other sins and says, "It is because of these things, these things that I have just been talking about, these things of immorality and impurity and passion and evil desire and greed, it's because of these things and these inner sins that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience." Evil desires incurs the wrath of God, that's how serious it is. And so it becomes incumbent upon us not to settle into a vague sense of self-righteousness because we're more, you know, because we're better than the next guy. "I've never killed anyone." Some could say, "I've never committed adultery." Some say, "You know, it's not like I'm Hitler or Stalin or Putin." Big deal. Let God judge them. What about your heart? What about your heart in the presence of the brilliant white light of the law of God that forbids even evil desire in addition to a whole host of other spoken sins and words and deeds of unrighteousness? What about your heart, beloved? And what we find is this, is that this command shows us something, it reveals something to us of the unspeakably high standard of God, the unspeakably great righteousness of God, and it shows us something of the righteousness that he requires. God does not look as man does. He doesn't look on the outer man, he looks on the heart, and when he looks on the heart as that, it convicts us as lawbreakers who are guilty and who deserve eternal judgment. Judge not by the world's standard but by God's.

Now let me just say this. To the extent that this shocks us, surprises us, or for some perhaps even offends us, beloved, that reaction simply shows us that we do not understand the holiness of God. If we understood the holiness of God and the perfection of his spiritual being, we would have no quarrel with this. We would say, "Well, yes, of course. God is holy in all of His ways." It's only because we don't see the great holiness of God that we would object to a commandment like this. God tells us that we are to desire what he desires, we are to love what he loves, we are to hate what he hates, and when we reject that for something else, we have turned against his law, we have violated it, and we have made an idol of whatever it is that we pursue. You say, "I want that more than I want the God of the universe."

And I realize, you know, these desires pop up in us in a way that we weren't necessarily seeking and there's a whole host of people that say, "You know, then I'm not responsible for it. I was born this way. I was born with same-sex attraction," someone might say as if that excused desiring that which God clearly forbids. This has massive implications personally and on a societal level. The 10 Commandments are holy but we cannot keep them. We can't even change our own hearts in order to not be like that, you know, and that's why people have given in and even people in the church on this whole matter of

same-sex attraction, "Well, what are they going to do? That's who they are. They constantly feel that way." The awful statement is made, "Well, God made them that way." No. No, they were born with a corrupt heart and their corruption is shown by their continual desiring of that which God forbids. Now look, we've all violated this commandment. I'm not singling out homosexuals in what I'm saying here, just using it as an illustration that the fact that we do it by nature does not make it right, does not excuse the violation of the command. God doesn't bend his law to our unrighteousness.

So what are we to do? We're powerless to change the desire, we see these things attack us and well up within our hearts, what are we to do? Well, if it does nothing else, beloved, it should show us this, is that if we are going to be delivered from the controlling power of sin, if we are going to have new desires in keeping with the holiness of God, it has to come from outside us. We do not have the power to change our own heart. We do not have the power to keep these desires from happening within us. This shows us how weak and how fallen and how guilty we are, and if there is to be the kind of inner righteousness that God requires, it must come from outside of ourselves. This is why the gospel calls us to forsake sin and to look to Christ. This is why the gospel tells you that you must be born again, you must be born from above. You cannot undergo moral reformation and take care of your heart in these ways that matter, you are helpless, we are all helpless apart from Christ. We are all condemned by the law of God apart from Christ. There is nowhere to go. We are guilty and we do guilty things and we say guilty things and we desire guilty things. We're utterly lost. That is why, that is why the gospel is such good news that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners, as the Apostle Paul said, "among whom I am foremost." Beloved, you don't need external moral reform, what you need is far more than that, you need a new heart, you need to be born again. And the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ made a blood atonement for sinners just like you, and one of the things that he does for those that he saves, for those that turn to him, he gives them a new heart. He changes their nature. By a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit, he takes this one who was dead in greed and evil desires and makes him new, places his Spirit within him, and new desires start to come by the power of God, not by the power of man, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, not by self-effort. And the wonderful news of the gospel sent out to everyone, a promise made without qualification to everyone that would hear, Jesus Christ will save everyone who calls on his name. Jesus Christ will change everyone who calls on his name. Jesus Christ will guard and guide and keep to the very end everyone who calls on his name.

So if you find yourself trapped in sin, trapped in evil desire, trapped in drunkenness or sexual sin, realize that it starts with evil desires in your heart and realize that the only solution is found in calling on Christ who came to seek and to save sinners of every stripe, sinners just like you.

Let's pray together.

Father, be gracious to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, even as believers we struggle and war against temptations and things that bubble up within us. Father, we long to be delivered from it all and we thank You for the reality that one day we will be utterly

delivered, we will be made perfect in righteousness. For now, just help us by Your Spirit. Those of us that are in Christ, Father, purify us all the more and sanctify us even more and more in the truth. For those that are lost and bound in sin, those where sin has been awakened to their conscience by the preaching of the law of God, Father, thank You for that initial step of mercy and now by mercy take them further and lead them to Jesus Christ crucified and risen for sinners just like them that they might repent and forsake their wicked heart and turn to Christ for newness of life, forgiveness, and an eternal home in heaven. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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