

Sermon 81, What Is Required in the Tenth Commandment, Exodus 20:17

Proposition: The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own lot, joy in our neighbors' good, and satisfaction with Yahweh and His law.

- I. Attitude Toward Your Own Lot: Contentment
 - A. Work
 - B. Sufficiency
 - C. Heaven
- II. Attitude Toward Your Neighbor's Lot: Delight in his good
 - A. This is what loving your neighbor means
 - B. This virtue is radically opposed to all forms of Marxist class warfare
- III. Attitude Toward God's Law
 - A. Always Loving to Keep It
 - B. Never Desiring to Break It

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you look at the text before us this morning, you will see that the Ten Commandments begin with God and end with neighbor. That is intentional. When you have been brought out of the land of Egypt, that not only sets you right with Yahweh your God; it ends up putting things right between you and your neighbor as well. This final commandment sums up the rest by addressing the thoughts and motivations of the heart. In forbidding covetousness, it requires contentment with your own lot, joy in your neighbor's good, and satisfaction with your God and His law.

I. Attitude Toward Your Own Lot: Contentment

The first and most prominent thing required in this commandment is contentment. 'Thou shalt not covet' means 'thou shalt be content.' Brothers and sisters, we have spoken before about how God has actually hardwired this into the human brain. Certain experiences — sugar, methamphetamine, porn — trigger the craving for more, for endlessly more. The release of pleasure chemicals in the brain makes it desire more and more pleasure. But the normal activities of human life, the things that God designed us for — exercise, married sexual intercourse, eating healthy food (as opposed to junk food) — these things trigger a contentment circuit, one that allows us, satisfied, to say "That's just what I wanted, and it's all I need. I am content."

This commandment therefore forbids us to get involved with the addictive substances that constantly trigger cravings for more. It also requires us to practice the attitude called "contentment," and to engage in the activities that produce contentment. Contentment is by and large a side effect of doing what you should be doing. In other words, if you've kept the first nine commandments, the tenth is going to be a cinch. And if you're breaking, or even wanting to

break, any of the nine, then this tenth one will be the first place where you'll spot the trouble. The rich young ruler didn't dare to say that he had never coveted, and Paul found this commandment the hardest one to keep.

For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. And this is said in disparagement, whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have. (Steinbeck, *The Pearl*, pg. 25)

There is indeed something in us that always quests and strives for more. We are not like the animals; we were made to rule the cosmos with the Son of Man and we are not content until it is ours. Like Alexander, who wept that there were no more worlds to conquer, so human beings strive for more and better and larger and greater. New larger size! New larger economy! New larger paycheck! That is what we often want to live for.

So how do you find contentment when you are a fallen creature whose desire is infinite? Once again, I suggest that we return to the basics. Contentment is a side effect of faithful obedience in your place and calling.

A. Work

Brothers and sisters, the first and best way to find contentment is to work for what you have. The instant you get something for free, you want more of it. People abuse and waste free stuff. But if you put in the work to build it, you are well acquainted with how much work and cost it would have been to make it a single square foot larger. If you had to pay every dime of the cost, you are content with what you purchased far more easily than if it was given to you and you didn't have to pay any of its cost.

Contentment is largely driven by whether you are doing your work and, yes, experiencing success in it. If everything you do fails, you will likely be discontent. Sometimes you need to work smarter, not harder (pardon the cliché). But the reality is that you were made to fill the earth and subdue it. If you're not taking part in that great task of the human race, you are leaving yourself wide open to grumbling, discontent, and envy.

Part of work is working out — aka exercise. This is another huge piece of contentment. When you drive your body physically and make it work hard, you become more content with life in general. The brain chemistry is there.

B. Sufficiency

The second part of contentment is sufficiency. You can only be content when you have enough. But what is enough? "Just a little bit more," like the billionaire said? The truth is that Christ is enough. He is more valuable than billions of dollars. He is more valuable than choice land in Manhattan. He is more precious than rubies and oil wells. Nothing you desire can compare with Him.

You can work 17-hour days and be content with that; or you can work 17-hour days precisely because you're not content and you covet more. Work can help with contentment. But ultimately, only having enough can truly content us. And only in Christ can we find enough. He has set eternity in our hearts; He has made us for the world and for Himself.

So there is a holy discontent, whereby you recognize that the world is not enough. That is a good discontent, provided that it drives you into the arms of Jesus Christ. If you find enough in Him, hooray! Praise God. He is enough. And if you don't find enough in Him, keep trying. Keep learning. The Christian life is about learning to find satisfaction and sufficiency in Jesus. Objectively, He is enough. Life is about learning to taste His sufficiency.

How do you do that? Get to know Him. Spend time with Him. Get to know people who love Him and spend time with them. In other words, read your Bible, pray, come to church, and spend time with people who you think are godlier than you are.

C. Heaven

Heaven is the third part of contentment. To demand everything now is, as Samuel Rutherford pointed out long ago, to ask for two heavens instead of one. The truth of heaven is the truth that everything you could ever need or want is coming. God will be all in all. All that God has will be yours when you get there. You are an heir of the world, and you will take possession any day now. Can you sit here and long for a little boat when God's own yacht will be yours?

One of our friends has a mountain cabin, and he occasionally invites us to go up and share it with him. Every time I go, I say, "This is the best way to have a mountain cabin!" We enjoy it, and we don't have the bother of owning it. Guess what, brothers and sisters: When you dwell in the house of the Lord forever, He will worry about maintenance. He will worry about bills. He will worry about getting meals served. To put heaven into this-worldly terms, it's like becoming a child once again. Remember that heavenly time when your parents cared for your needs and all was good? That will happen again, for you will spend eternity living on God's dime.

Brothers and sisters, contentment is forward-looking. Rather than focusing on the needs and problems of today, it focuses on the surplus and riches of tomorrow.

My Dad's favorite question is this: If you could have everything you wanted, what would you have? The answer is the New Jerusalem. And guess what: It's yours. You will take possession before you know it.

How often do you think about heaven? How much do you long for it? How certain are you that you will enjoy it? What heavenly activities (worship, fellowship, prayer, praise) do you engage in here on earth?

If you're working hard, if you have a sufficiency to meet your needs, and if you have the limitless riches of Heaven just around the corner, what's not to like? What else do you, could you, need? When you know you need and want nothing else, you are content.

II. Attitude Toward Your Neighbor's Lot: Delight in his good

When you are, when you've mastered the secret of contentment with your own lot, then you will be able to have a right charitable frame of spirit toward your neighbor and all that is his.

A. This is what loving your neighbor means

This is what loving your neighbor means, brothers and sisters. Loving your neighbors means being glad about every good and wonderful thing that befalls him. It means frankly delighting in his possessions and achievements as much as in your own. "You are more beautiful than me, and

I'm glad you're so beautiful. You have more romance and adventure than me, and I'm glad you have so much romance and adventure. You have more money than me, and I'm glad you have so much money. You have fewer cares and health problems than me, and I'm glad you have so much leisure and health." Wanting what's best for your neighbor and being genuinely delighted when he gets it is the definition of loving your neighbor. This is why, in a certain sense, this tenth commandment strikes more closely at the heart of loving your neighbor than any of the rest. You can refrain from committing adultery with your neighbor's wife while still begrudging that she is way hotter, more organized, and nicer to talk to than your wife. Your outward actions may be OK, but your heart is a seething mass of envy. If that's true, you don't love your neighbor or his wife. You hate them both because they have something better than you do.

B. This virtue is radically opposed to all forms of Marxist class warfare

Allow me to just point out that this commandment is radically opposed to any and all forms of Marxist class warfare. Brothers and sisters, Marxism is built on the material base of human cupidity, aka covetousness. Those who truly believe "Thou shalt not covet" can never be Marxists, because Marx teaches that coveting is not only OK, but that it is the most moral of all passions. Covetousness drives the capitalist and makes him oppress the proletariat — but, says Marx, wanting what the capitalist has and taking it from him to share with the oppressed is the best and most righteous thing a man can do. In Marxism, equality is the ultimate moral value.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. In reality, love is the ultimate moral value. We do not live to rip off our neighbors and redistribute their wealth more fairly. We do not agree with Bernie Sanders that "There's plenty of money; it's just in the wrong hands." We love those in classes and oppressed groups different from our own. According to God, proletarians are supposed to love the bourgeois. According to God, black people are supposed to love whites. According to God, the poor are supposed to love the rich and women are supposed to love men, even patriarchs.

Are you really going to tell me that a world where blacks hate whites, where women hate men, where poor hate rich, and proletariat hate bourgeoisie, is a better, more righteous, more just world? Give me a break. Marxism works by appealing to human envy, by stating what we all kind of want to believe — that the worse off have a right to hate those who have it better. If I'm struggling to pay my water bill and my neighbor has a huge lawn and a giant swimming pool, it's right for me to be envious toward and hate him for what he has. Right? Wrong.

Yes, God's law addresses the superiors and the wealthy and the men and the whites and everyone on the top of the heap too. It tells them in no uncertain terms not to oppress those with less power and wealth. But it tells us all to love our neighbors regardless of social status, class, race, sex, and so on — even sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression don't change the reality that we are called to love our neighbors.

"Thou shalt not covet" is an atomic bomb dropped by God right onto Marxism. This commandment stops communism and all its children in their tracks. We love one another, and therefore we do not envy and fight one another. The rich are not my enemies. Black people are not my enemies. Women are not my enemies. And I'm not the enemy of any of these groups

either. My goal is to be a friend to them all, to love them all and welcome them just as Christ has welcomed me. I don't covet what they have, and they are called to not covet what I have either. This is the law and the prophets: Love your neighbor, and do not be envious against him.

III. Attitude Toward God's Law

Finally, this command against coveting covers the other ten commandments. In forbidding all morally faulty desire, it demands that we always love the law of God and never desire the least thing contrary to it.

A. Always Loving to Keep It

"Oh how I love thy law!" exclaims the psalmist. That, my friends, is a heart which is keeping the tenth commandment. Desire has been tamed, subordinated to the commands of God. Who can say this? Who never wants anything the least bit wrong, and not only recognizes that the law is good but deeply feels that goodness in every desire of his heart? The answer, this side of heaven, is that only Jesus Christ is such a one. Only He has kept and keeps this tenth commandment perfectly.

B. Never Desiring to Break It

"I know I need to get control of my emotions!" someone said to me once, in such a bitter tone of voice that I couldn't help responding, "Do you want to?"

That was the question. Clearly, this person knew the law and partly wanted to keep it, but her heart wasn't in it during this particular conversation.

We don't love the law enough. At least part of us wants something contrary to the law pretty much constantly. All the time, we desire things that are contrary to what God wants for us. We may not desire them very strongly, but who can say those desires are absent?

As we'll discuss next week, only the death of Jesus can remedy envy. His sacrifice is the literal opposite of envy; rather than hating what we had and coveting it for Himself, He saw what we lacked and gave of Himself to fill that need for us. He saw how riddled with covetousness and envy we actually are — and He still came and died for us. Brothers and sisters, Jesus knows what envy is, hates it, and has taken steps to conquer it in us.

Trust Him. Believe Him. Don't walk in covetousness, but in contentment — contentment with your own lot, your neighbor's lot, and the law of God. And I'll see you in Heaven. Amen.