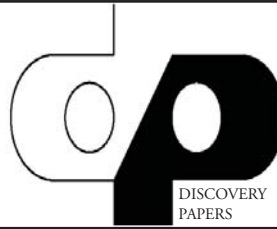


# 'ALL THAT IS MINE IS YOURS'

SERIES: LOVE GOD, LOVE PEOPLE



Catalog No. 20140831  
Exodus 20:17  
10th Message  
Scott Grant  
August 31, 2014

After the passing of my maternal grandparents, who died within a few days of each other, the extended family gathered in their apartment to sort out their belongings. Each of us, in turn, would select any items that we wanted to keep. I have heard that such gatherings can turn ugly, but I had confidence in my family (we get along well), and I was determined to do my part to honor my grandparents.

My grandparents had a collection of porcelain figurines that were quite valuable. As the choosing began, I felt a little anxious. Something within me wanted to capitalize on this opportunity and make sure that I didn't miss out. When it came my time to choose, I selected one of the figurines, not because I wanted to display it or because it held any sentimental value but simply because it was worth the most. I picked it in order to sell it, and when my turn came around again, I planned to pick another figurine and sell that too. Something was happening inside me, though, that was quite unsettling.

It seems to me that we live in a part of the world that unsettles us by making us want what we don't need. Then again, there's the tenth commandment.

Exodus 20:17—

**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 is your neighbor's.**

## Foundational commandments

The first and final commandments are foundational. The first commandment, *You shall have no other gods before me*, is the first one to go. The Apostle Paul describes what happened to humanity: *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things* (Romans 1:22–23). He describes the essence of sin: *No one seeks for God. / All have turned aside to other gods* (Romans 3:11–12).

Why do people worship other gods? Because they want what God hasn't given them or hasn't yet given them. Such

wanting takes the form, most especially, of coveting what someone else has. When Paul makes the case that giving of the law provoked sin in Israel, he highlights the tenth commandment: *But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness* (Romans 7:8).<sup>1</sup>

The tenth commandment is also foundational because violation of it often leads to the violation of other commandments. We looked last week at Ahab, who violated the tenth commandment by coveting Naboth's vineyard, which led to violations of both the ninth commandment (bearing false witness against Naboth) and the sixth commandment (the murder of Naboth) (1 Kings 21:1–15). We also looked at David, who coveted Uriah's wife, then violated both the seventh commandment, by committing adultery with Bathsheba, and the sixth commandment, by arranging for Uriah's death (2 Samuel 11). Or think of Saul, who coveted the praise that David attracted and then violated the sixth commandment by attempting to kill David (1 Samuel 18:6–16).

Fidelity to the first and final commandments, therefore, is paramount. If we get these two commandments right, we also get the rest of them right.

## You shall not covet

The tenth commandment not only identifies people or things that are liable to attract coveting but also rules out coveting of any kind:

—*You shall not covet your neighbor's house.* "Maybe you see a better house down the block or all manner of mansions as you drive around and you'd like a better place to dwell. Maybe you think, "I could afford a better dwelling in some place other than the Silicon Valley." Maybe you're homeless and see someone checking into a motel for the night, and you wish it were you.

—*You shall not covet your neighbor's wife*—or, of course, your neighbor's husband. Once you get married, you soon discover in a practical way, even if you knew it before in a theoretical way, that you committed yourself to someone who doesn't do what you want him or her to do nearly as

much as you would like. Maybe you see someone on whom you can project your fantasies, and you imagine that he or she would be more cooperative. Maybe you're single and you'd prefer the life—or even the spouse—of one of your married friends.

— . . . *or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey.* Maybe you see so-called successful people, who have many people working for them, and you'd like a few people, or a few more people, working for you, too. Maybe you see some people who pay for gardeners or cleaners or nannies, and you think that life would be so much easier if you could afford such. Maybe you see someone driving around town in a sparkling Tesla, Mercedes, or BMW, and you wish it were you. Maybe, while waiting for your bus, you count the cars driving by and wish you could afford one.

— . . . *or anything that is your neighbor's.* Maybe you see another person's popularity, appearance, job, personality, family, abilities, athleticism, intelligence, portfolio, influence, passion, charisma, stability, or retirement and you wish some of that belonged to you.

You don't have to see any of these things or any of these people to covet them; all you have to do is access the nearest screen—a television, a computer, a tablet, a smart phone—and you can see anything you want, or anything you don't want, for that matter, or didn't want, at least until you saw it. Playing on a screen near you, a screen as near as your pocket or purse, is an image of someone enjoying something—or someone—that you don't have, and that image has been carefully presented to make you want what it is offering.

The problem is not so much wanting; the problem is demanding. Instead of taking our desires to God, we demand that our desires be met on our terms. We say, "I need this to be content."

Seventy percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product derives from consumer spending. The more stuff people buy, the better the economy. Our economy depends on covetous people who keep buying new and improved products. Far from being considered a transgression against a divine commandment, coveting is considered in some circles your patriotic duty. Remove the word "not" from the command, *You shall not covet*, and you've got a commandment that will please more than a few marketers. Can't afford to covet? No problem: put it on the card. Well, no problem unless too many people go into too much debt and you get something like the Great Recession. I wonder what would happen to the U.S. economy if even a fraction of believers in Jesus Christ revisited the tenth commandment and kept it from the heart.

## Why not covet?

So, what's wrong with a little coveting? What does God have against it?

First, you shall not covet because of what coveting does to you. As you covet, your focus turns away from God to the object of your desire. Not having what you want, you become anxious, just as I became anxious at my grandparents' apartment. Then, if you manage to procure the object of your desire, you discover that it doesn't please you the way you hoped it would. It (or he or she) looked better in the ad, or in your fantasies, than it (or he or she) does in your hands or on your arm. Obtaining what is not so pleasing after all, we start wanting all over again, this time for something else, perpetuating a never-ending cycle of coveting, stoking the economy but disquieting our souls. Oscar Wilde observed: "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it."<sup>2</sup>

First, you shall not covet because of what coveting does to you. Second, you shall not covet because of what it does to—or what it says about—others. In the tenth commandment, there are seven references to your "neighbor." Your neighbor has value—more value, of course, than what he or she possesses. When we focus on what she has, to the exclusion of who she is, we devalue her. As noted earlier, violation of the tenth commandment often leads to the violation of other commandments, creating social disorder and interpersonal strife and, in more extreme cases, abuse and crime, as in the case of Ahab, who coveted Naboth's vineyard; David, who coveted Uriah's wife; and Saul, who coveted David's praise. *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel* (James 4:1–2). Moreover, in all this coveting, in which we spend more in the belief that spending more will satisfy us, the poor get overlooked. A little less coveting may serve to narrow the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor in our world.

## Savor God

None of this is to say that there isn't a place for wanting, for to want is human. God created us to want food, water, clothing, shelter, and sex—and, more than these, and even through these, to want relationship with him. Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, says, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4). He proclaims himself to be *the bread of life* and offers *living water* to satisfy spiritual cravings (John 4:10, 7:37–39). David prayed, *O God, you are my God;*

*earnestly I seek you; / my soul thirsts for you; / my flesh faints for you, / as in a dry and weary land where there is no water, and, I stretch out my hands to you; / my soul thirsts for you like a parched land* (Psalms 63:1, 143:6). Asaph prayed, *Whom have I in heaven but you? / And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you* (Psalm 73:25). In the psalm, he started out envying the prosperity of the wicked, but after working things through, he doesn't want what they have; he wants God, knowing that God will give him everything he needs. Paul says, *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3:14). What's the upward call? It's knowing Christ fully.

Our problem, then, is not that we want; it's that we don't want God, or we don't believe that relationship with God satisfies the deepest cravings of our hearts. C.S. Lewis observes that God, in light of his promises to us, "finds our desires not too strong but too weak"<sup>3</sup> Not wanting God, we don't trust him to give us what we need. Therefore, we want other things—even if they're good and necessary—more than God. When we see other people with those things, we covet.

What does Jesus say? *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you* (Matthew 6:31–33). Seek first God. Seek first to know God, to grow closer to him, to open your heart to his love for you. Instead of wanting what other people have, acknowledge what you want—whatever it is—and channel it into your desire for God. For whatever you want, at best it only represents what you really want. Therefore, savor God.

## Give thanks

Seek to recognize that everything you already have is a gift. Seek to recognize that anything you could possibly want would also be a gift. What do you have that you haven't been given? You didn't create yourself. You didn't create anything you have. You didn't create anything you hope to have. What do you do when you receive a gift? You say thank you.

Moreover, you didn't redeem yourself. Christ redeemed you. Therefore, give thanks for what Christ has done for you. The first and tenth commandments are foundational, but in Exodus 20, there's something even more foundational: the foundation of the foundation, if you will. Before God gives the Ten Commandments to Israel, he says this: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery* (Exodus 20:2).<sup>4</sup> Christ has effected a new exodus, liberating us not from Egypt but from Satan, sin, and death. As the Israelites looked back thankfully to

the exodus, we look back thankfully—to the exodus, yes, but even more so to the new exodus in Christ.

First, savor God. Second, give thanks to God for Christ—and for everything else, for that matter.

Ann Voskamp writes:

*All of those years thinking I was saved and had said my yes to God, but was really living the no. Was it because I had never fully experienced the whole of my salvation? Had never lived out the fullest expression of my salvation in Christ? Because I wasn't taking everything in my life and returning to Jesus, falling at His feet and thanking Him. I sit still, blinded. This is why I sat all those years in church but my soul holes had never fully healed.*<sup>5</sup>

Voskamp then began practicing a discipline of thankfulness.

G.K. Chesterton, that great apologist for the faith, penned these words in his notebook:

*You say grace before meals.  
All right.  
But I say grace before the play and the opera,  
And grace before the concert and pantomime,  
And grace before I open a book,  
And grace before sketching, painting,  
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing,  
dancing;  
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.*<sup>6</sup>

(Boxing? Chesterton weighed three hundred pounds!)

My great-grandmother lived to be one hundred. She not only outlived her husband by many years, she also outlived both her son, who died of a heart attack at the age of eighty on his way to visit her, and her granddaughter, my mother, who died of cancer at the age of sixty-one. Toward the end of her days, when she lost mobility, her life consisted mostly of sitting in front of her television during her waking hours. What did she have to be thankful for? She had lost much, but she hadn't lost her mind. I used to visit her a few times a year, at her convalescent home in San Rafael, and she would usually relay to me, in her thick accent from the old country, what her caretakers told her: "Mary, you are so lucky to have lived so long and to still have your faculties." My great-grandmother was thankful for her faculties.

What are you thankful for?

## The older son

After feeling unsettled when I chose the porcelain figurine at my grandparents' apartment, and as I prepared to make my second choice, I realized what was happening to me, and I didn't like it. I guess you could say I came to my senses. Really, in the entire apartment, there were only two things I wanted—either of which I could happily live without. First, because I lived with a bunch of guys who liked to watch a ball game from time to time, and because we had a balky television set, I thought I might bring my grandparents' newer set home. Second, I wanted my grandparents' scissors—so that when I used them I could remember them. When my turn came again, I gave back the figurine and chose instead, with my retroactive first choice, the television set, and, with my second choice, the scissors. Then I excused myself from the rest of the proceedings, and the feeling of unsettledness left me. I can't remember how I left that day, but I imagine that it must have been a comical scene: a guy lugging a television set out the door and down the stairs with a pair of scissors perched on top. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's—or anything that is your grandparents', or anything that was your grandparents'.

Yes, the feeling of unsettledness left me, but only for a while. It comes back. It always comes back, for I am often unsettled—by what I don't have as well as by what I want. (I'm even unsettled by what I do have!) What to do?

Some years back, during a personal retreat in Inverness, north of San Francisco, I had a profound encounter with a verse from the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In the parable, a father welcomes home his rebellious younger son by killing the fattened calf. The resentful older son complains that his father hasn't given him so much as a goat. Especially, I fixated on the father's words to the older son in Luke 15:31: *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.* The father in the parable represents the heavenly Father, who through his Son welcomes both obvious sinners (the younger son) and not-so-obvious sinners (the older son). The older son wants a goat but doesn't realize that he already has everything.

I sensed the Father telling me, *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.* Really? Everything? I looked out my window, to the Tomales Bay below and to the hills beyond, and beyond the hills to the endless horizon. At sunrise, it dawned on me—as it had never dawned on me before—that God has already given me everything. The Tomales Bay, the hills, the horizon, the heavens and the earth: God created everything for us. Although the heavens

and the earth groan because we rebelled against God, God promises to re-create them. The Father is with me; I belong to him. All creation is mine. What more do I want? A goat? I spent the next four hours reveling in Luke 15:31. I meditated on the Father's love for me. I delighted in what he has given me and what he will give me.<sup>7</sup> I savored God. I gave thanks.

It is not enough, though, simply to have the occasional serendipitous experience of God that may or may not inspire thankfulness. We must pursue the one who is pursuing us. We must set aside time on a regular, preferably rhythmic, basis to intentionally savor God and give thanks, even if we don't feel like doing so. Such disciplines are like sails. You don't catch the wind unless you set them. If you set the sails, if you practice the disciplines on a regular basis, you'll catch the wind of the Spirit at least some of the time.

What to do? In order to cultivate holy affections and thankfulness, I've incorporated Luke 15:31 into my daily prayers. Every day, I hear the Father speaking to me, *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*

What will you do? Instead of coveting, savor God and give thanks.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>When Paul uses the first-person pronoun “me” or “I” in Romans 7, he's referring not to himself but to Israel. See my written message on Romans 7: [www.pbc.org/messages/freedom-from-the-law](http://www.pbc.org/messages/freedom-from-the-law).

<sup>2</sup>Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (published in *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*. London: Penguin, 1940.).

<sup>3</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Touchstone, 1949), 26.

<sup>4</sup>The Ten Commandments are not a list of demands from a capricious tyrant or a distant landlord; no, they are a gift, deeply related to our humanity, from our creator and redeemer. We receive the commandments and thankfully obey them, as the Holy Spirit works them into our hearts: we obey God from the heart, trusting that such a response is best for us.

<sup>5</sup>Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 40.

<sup>6</sup>Dudley Barker, *G.K. Chesterton, A Biography* (Constable, 1973), 65.

<sup>7</sup>My experience with Luke 15:31 is featured in my book, *Hooked in the Heart: Appreciating the Artistry of God in Everyday Life*, page 166.