

Do Not Love the World or the Things in the World: Commandment 10

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[0:00] Let's take up then God's word, God's law, our delight, as we open up to Exodus chapter 22, continuing in our study of the Ten Commandments, and we're going to be reading from Exodus 22, verse 21 to the end of the chapter. It's on page 63 in the Blue Church Bible.

Let's hear God's word together. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you are sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.

If you do mistreat them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body. In what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. You shall not revile God nor curse a ruler of your people.

You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep.

[1:54] For seven days it shall be with its mother. On the eighth day you shall give it to me. You shall be consecrated to me. Therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field.

You shall throw it to the dogs. Amen. God's word. Please keep the Bible open as we come to God's word together.

Let's pray that he would speak and we would listen. Father, we pray that our hearts would be like the one of whom we have just sung.

He is fixed, rooted on your word, meditating upon it day and night. Lord, we thank you for Jesus Christ, he who is the word of God made flesh.

Fix our eyes on our minds and hearts. Upon him we pray, as we come under your word. For this we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Don't we think sometimes like this? The law is about the outside.

[3:04] The gospel is about the inside. The Old Testament is about rules. The New Testament is about love. Moses is about the hands.

Jesus is about the heart. However you want to put it, we often, don't we, pit the Old Testament law and Jesus' teaching in the New Testament against each other.

Works and grace, internal, external. We say, you know, we're not about washing the outside of tombs or plates and bowls.

We're about inner transformation and God's heart surgery. Man looks on the outside. God looks on the heart. But then we stop and think about it and we listen to what Jesus is saying and realize, hang on.

Jesus isn't just saying that I do wrong things. He's saying I want wrong things. That I love wrong things.

[4:12] He's calling out not just what I say, but what I think and what I feel, what I am inside. He knows my secret secrets and he tells me to repent.

Actually, you know what? The outside of that dish is looking pretty dirty. And that tomb does look like it needs a lick of paint. And so back to the Ten Commandments we go and we say, Moses, tell us what to do.

Give us tools. We'll do whatever. As long as no one tells me what to want or who to love or how to feel.

Okay, says Moses, here you go then. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Okay. Don't steal. You can do that.

Don't lie. Got it. Last but not least, you shall not covet. Wait, I thought this was where you come to pick up the whitewash.

[5:18] That's not much better than Jesus, is it? You shall not covet. Friends, swap the word covet for the word want and see how this sounds. You shall not want your neighbor's house.

You shall not want your neighbor's wife. You shall not want his ox, his donkey. You shall not want anything that is your neighbor's. How can it be wrong to want something if I never take it?

How can it be wrong to love something in my heart if I never let it out into the world? How can God pass judgment on my heart if my words and behavior don't hurt or offend other people?

Isn't that enough? Friends, the tenth commandment that we're looking at today, it brings us to the heart of God's law. And it pulls us up short if we think that God is happy as long as we get along nicely with everyone and not in his direction.

Because it says that far from being good, nice looking people, we sin in our desires, our will, our thoughts and feelings.

[6:35] And that is extremely uncomfortable for us. Not least because we're people who live in a time and a place that has enshrined desire and emotion and feeling as an unquestionable moral fact.

The people around us, the society that we are steeped in, says if you feel it, it is true. And when your feelings come up against some kind of objective reality, well, it's your feelings that are true and reality a liar.

In fact, one of the worst things that you can do, isn't it, in our culture is to tell somebody that what they want or how they feel is wrong. And yet we know through the pain and discomfort that God is right to judge our hearts and desires because that is where every other sin begins.

Who has murdered or lied or stolen and not first hated, envied, lusted, raged, coveted in their hearts?

But this is where the buck stops, isn't it? This is the commandment at the heart of all the commandments. Because it brings us to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the human heart.

[8:04] As we come then under the surgeon's knife again in Exodus, let's ask again, what do these commandments preach? What do they preach?

Well, they could preach lots of things. One thing that they preach is that God looks on the heart. One of the reasons that legal processes are so complicated and that crime thrillers are so entertaining is that we have to work very hard to see all the relevant information clearly, don't we? Not only is there kind of too much to know, but even when we do know, we can't see all the way to the bottom of it. We get so far and we still have questions.

Friends, God is not like that. He's not like that. If I can put it this way, a crime thriller novel written from God's perspective would be very short and very dull, because he has all the answers all the time.

It was Colonel Mustard in the ballroom with the revolver. He does not need to find things out. It's not hard work for him. There would be no two to four year court backlog if God presided over every court case in our country, because nothing is hidden to him.

[9:25] It doesn't take him any time to reach the right verdict. He sees everything as it truly is. Not only what happened, but why it happened, and who is to blame.

Don't think, verse 21, that just because you wronged someone from outside the covenant community, that the Lord will not know. Don't think, verse 22, that you can mistreat people who don't have anyone to stand up for them, and the Lord will not find out.

If they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn. Don't think, verse 25, that if you take advantage of the poor, that the Lord is oblivious.

If he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. He is the God who sees. Now, that would be revealing enough.

It was only the outward things that God had his eye on. Like a kind of global CCTV network with cameras pointing at every inch of the earth from every angle.

[10:35] But actually, his sight goes deeper than that. Into the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And so, he says, with the poor, you might lend money to someone to tide them over.

But sticking 3% interest on top reveals a less worthy motive. Outwardly, you might seem to be helping out a neighbor who's less well-off than you.

But inwardly, you're taking the opportunity to grasp after what little he has for your benefit. Or, and here the surgeon's knife digs deeper, lending him money, and because you're such a good neighbor, not charging any interest on it, you just ask him for his cloak as a deposit, so you're sure you'll get your money back.

That seems fair. Kind, even. But again, what's behind it, grasping after what I count as mine in his possession.

This time, not through hidden charges, but through his physical warmth and comfort. It would be like today, although this would be extreme, wouldn't it?

[11:47] Lending somebody something, and then going and stripping their bed and taking their duvet and pillows and mattress home with you until they paid up. What's he going to sleep in, says the Lord?

But back then, it sounds like it was kind of the done thing, maybe, to keep a cloak as a pledge. It would have had the veneer of respectability. But underneath, says the Lord, is a scheming, indeed covetous heart, grasping after wealth at the expense of others' safety and well-being.

Even to delay, he says, to give God what he commanded out of the fullness of your harvest and outflow of your presses, verse 29, it tells God something. It's diagnostic.

That is, eventually, you will bring everything you should to him in full, but you take your time about it. Until the cash flow is looking healthier, or the stock price on grain and wine is at a low, so you can afford to offload some of that to God.

The Lord sees through what we might claim to be an oversight or a necessary delay. Again, to a grasping, calculating heart set on what is rightfully his and not ours.

[13:14] Now, we know that those laws about cloaks and harvests are given to illustrate a heart problem, because remember that this is a section of case law given for the use of human judges and courts.

And, of course, we can only go by what we see, the visible or the audible evidence, the material evidence of wrongdoing.

It's impossible, isn't it, for human court to pass sentence on somebody coveting their neighbor's house or spouse. Who's to say?

But the moral issue behind it is a grasping, clinging, clutching heart. We know that because the Tenth Commandment is explicitly about desire.

Now, we rightly recoil when governments create laws that criminalize thought. And maybe we're feeling a bit like that as we hear this. Our instinct is to push away.

[14:15] We recognize that that is an intrusion of the state into people's inner life. But why is that wrong? Well, it's wrong because it's human government, our equals, overstretching authority into an area that belongs solely to God.

Only he can look on our hearts and judge our inmost thoughts. Psalm 33 says, The Lord looks down from heaven.

He sees all the children of man. From where he sits enthroned, he looks out on the inhabitants of the earth. He who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

Or Hebrews 4, For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Or how about this one in Mark chapter 2?

[15:33] Jesus is just told the paralyzed man his sins are forgiven. Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like this?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, Why do you question these things in your hearts?

You can see the blood drain out of their faces, can't you? As they realize that even their thoughts are not hidden from this man, who has his divine stethoscope pressed up against their chests.

He can hear the accusations that they are thinking against him. Verse 28 says, You shall not revile God or curse a ruler of your people, or literally to make light of God, to make light of a ruler.

Brothers and sisters, how we make light of God and of his King Jesus Christ, when we pretend that we can hide our dirty thoughts in the dark corners of our minds, or tuck our unworthy desires and emotions into the corners of our hearts, and he will not see how we take him lightly, when we are satisfied only to look right in the eyes of others and don't give thought to how we must sound to God.

[17:12] The tenth commandment preaches a God who is all-seeing, all-knowing, and intimately concerned with what goes on inside us, not only what we do or what we say.

He sees not only the outward symptoms of our sin, but the inward cause, not only the bad fruit, but the twisted roots in our heart. We do look on the outside, but he looks on the heart, for he is a great God.

Now what does he see there? Well, these commands point out that we are great sinners. They point out our sinful desires. We call it sometimes the green-eyed monster, which is easier than what the theological textbooks call it, concupiscence.

Okay, that's a word for you. A couple of years ago, in our Doctrine in a Day event at MTA, it was on the doctrine of concupiscence, or sinful desire.

A lecturer called Matthew Mason came up from London Seminary. All the sessions are actually on YouTube. I'd really recommend going back to watch them through. One of the things that stuck with me from that day is that he pointed out that the Bible says we tempt ourselves into sin.

[18:41] We think, don't we, about temptation being outside influences, you know, friends or things that we see on our phone or the surroundings that we're in.

James chapter 1 says, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Our own heart, desire, tempts us further.

Think about it. Why do companies spend millions of pounds on advertising? We are shown things, aren't we, that we don't have and told our lives would be better if we had it.

Now, that wouldn't work, would it, or stick to us, unless the pictures on our screens caught the grasping tentacles of our own hearts, clutching after ever more things to make our lives look and feel better than they are.

Temptation is like Velcro. Influences on the outside only tempt us if they can meet a desire on the inside to stick to.

[19:50] And when that happens, as James goes on, desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

Like three generations of the same family, when sin conceives, sinful desire brings forth sinful behavior and sinful behavior brings forth the curse for sin.

Friends, that's got to be the unhappiest family ever. And it begins, not out there in the big bad world, but in our own heart desires. And we don't even need to get into the kind of really lurid stuff, do we? I wonder, when was the last time that you compared yourself to somebody else and felt less secure? So much of social media is fueled by envy, isn't it?

To feed the green-eyed monster. Tiny, kind of short or ten-second clips that someone spent hours dressing up for, filming, editing, we drip it into our eyes like medicine and tell ourselves that that is real life.

[21:05] all the glam, the tech, the sport, the life, lifestyle. Until all those wee clips that we see have built up like a drug in our bloodstream and our hearts begin to long and to ache for the fantasy life that we don't have.

What we see on our screen, it's a clipped and edited parody of life that doesn't actually exist, but it's packaged as if it does, and because that's the stuff that finds the Velcro in our hearts, it keeps us watching, consuming, dripping it into our feeds and coming back for more.

What is coveting? It is that ache in our heart for somebody else's life or body or home or work or relationship or possessions or anything that your neighbor has that you don't.

Why is social media so addictive? Because our covetous hearts are drawn to fantasies of other people's lives that are not our own like magnets.

It's not a bad idea, is it, to ban social media for under-16s? But think about it for a minute. What doesn't that achieve? You can tear the bits of Velcro apart for a bit and that's okay, but you can't extract the Velcro out of the hearts of people.

[22:40] Young people will find other things to set their hearts on like we all did before social media. And when they get their accounts back, they'll be all the more hungry for what they have

missed.

Why? Because the temptation is not only out there, is it, but in here, the desire, the longing to be satisfied with visions of somebody else's so-called life that we do not have.

This is written, isn't it, for God's people, the covenant community. We can do it at church, can't we? All our phones are away, we can still do that, can't we? Do we not bring our best version of ourselves to church on Sunday?

I don't just mean outwardly the way that we dress and get ready, but the version of ourselves that we want people to think that our life is like, put together.

Fine. Under control. We're on our best behavior. If we're feeling a bit fragile or too tired to manage our best, we just don't come or leave as soon as the service is finished.

[23 : 49] because we don't want to go away feeling worse about ourselves when we sit down to somebody who we think has it all together. We come genuinely to worship God.

And yet, how often in the background do we have this game running, playing the comparison game? Who is going to see me? Who will I see?

Who will I speak to? I learned about something called tidal locking this week. Have you ever wondered why we only ever see the same side of the moon from Earth, kind of wherever it is?

It's because the Earth's gravity apparently, okay, I did actually check this with an astrophysicist, the Earth's gravity is much greater than the moon's, and that gravity acts like a brake that kind of stops the moon from spinning any faster than it orbits.

And so, because it spins at the same speed as it orbits the Earth, the same side of the moon is always facing the Earth, kind of wherever it is in its orbit. That's tidal locking. Sometimes, I read, when you get two moons of a similar size, they tidally lock to each other, meaning that, if you can imagine such a thing, they are stuck facing each other as they circle each other in space.

[25 : 16] our sinful desires exert that kind of gravitational force on us, don't they? In our covetousness, we look jealously at others who look jealously at us until we're all kind of locked in this green-eyed staring competition, not able to pull our hearts away from the mutually reinforcing gravity of sinful desire.

despair. And if we find that too exhausting, we just stay home. We come out, don't we?

We meet people, we talk to people and engage with people when we think we're winning. Rather than our gaze being locked into someone greater than us, whose pure and infinite love and approval can hold our gaze forever as we together orbit him as the great center and love of our lives, the deepest desire of our hearts, and the one that we can and must always want more of. See, the problem is not desire itself. The Bible does not teach a kind of joyless stoicism about life. Christianity is not the same as the kind of self annihilation of Buddhism, for example, where we mustn't want at all.

No, the problem is the disordered desire. The Lord deserves to be loved, wanted, desired with all the heart and soul and mind and strength. It's right that we fix our desires and affections on him, his majesty and beauty.

[27 : 02] And it is right that we want other good things in moderation with an appropriate humility and a gratefulness to God.

But we know, don't we, that those desires, those loves, can become mixed up, disordered, unbalanced. If our desire for what we don't have makes us resent what we do have, we are guilty of coveting.

If our desire for what we don't have feels like an unmet need, we are coveting. If our desire for what we don't have squeezes our love for the Lord to the margins of our hearts, we are coveting.

If we wish that what somebody else has was ours, instead we are coveting. If we are jealous, envious, often, or always, in competition mode, we are coveting.

And friends, when the Lord looks on our heart, please let us not pretend he does not see sinfully disordered desires there. He says you shall not covet, not as a precaution, hypothetically, but because he knows that we are like that, that we do, and we will covet.

[28 : 28] That's what these laws point out. We are covetous people. But thankfully, that is not where they leave us. Finally, what do they promise?

These laws promise true contentment, now and forever. Some people think the apostle Paul once had a coveting problem.

He writes in Romans 7, I wouldn't have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

It's a pretty personal confession, isn't it? He seems to single this out as a problem he had. Maybe we think that's what drove his endless ambition. We heard in Galatians not that long ago, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many my own age.

There's the comparison game. So extremely zealous was I. He was a massive overachiever. Nothing was too extreme. He wanted more and more.

[29 : 32] Nothing could stop him except for Jesus. Literally, on the road to Damascus. But even more importantly, the grasping of his heart after more and more self-defined success, worldly praise, and self-glorification.

So that much later, in his letter to the Philippians chapter four, he could write these extraordinary words. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you've revived your concern for me.

Not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

That's so far, isn't it, from the grasping, bottomless desire for more that once characterized his heart, all kinds of covetousness. What kind of words would you use to describe him now?

[30 : 50] Satisfied, at rest, content. Surely he could say with David, Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Or Psalm 131, I've calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother. He knows that what he doesn't have, he doesn't need, because if he needed it, the Lord would provide it.

And we know that Paul's not saying this because he had secret savings to fall back on. He didn't have what we would call an easy and a straightforward life. Sometimes he had less, sometimes more, sometimes he was full, sometimes hungry.

Even as he wrote this, he was in prison, not for having done anything wrong, but simply for preaching Jesus. But in every and any circumstance of his life, he he could say, I am content.

Life went up and down for Paul like a stormy sea. His heart cut a straight line through the waves.

Another preacher, Samuel Rutherford, who knew life's hardships and also spent some time in prison for the gospel, once wrote to a friend, believe God's love and power more than you believe your feelings and experiences.

[32 : 09] Your rock is Christ. And it is not your rock that ebbs and flows, but your sea. The apostle Paul, Samuel Rutherford, countless Christians through the ages have known the secret of contentment that comes from planting their feet on Christ the rock and standing on him while the sea of life swelled around them.

I can do all things, says Paul, through him who strengthens me. We need to hear that, don't we? We live in an incredibly anxious age.

And we know that in the church and as Christians, we're not immune from that anxiety. So many of us find it hard to be at rest, kind of not looking at others' lives enviously, not feeling the weight of missing out or the next thing, the next thing.

The world promises so much, it cannot deliver that fullness and satisfaction we are looking for.

Because in the words of the church father, Augustine, God made us for himself and our hearts will be restless until they find their rest in him.

brothers and sisters, if your trust is in Jesus, if you're standing on Christ the rock this morning, God has given you all of himself to rest in.

[33 : 40] He gives so that we want for nothing. He strengthens us so that we can do all things. The harder we lean into him and the more deeply we abide in him, the less and less our hearts will ache and grasp and covet for what isn't him or what he hasn't given us.

The more and more grateful, unanxious and content we will be in life with all of its changing circumstances. That the blessing of not coveting is ours in Christ.

Don't go without it. Come back to him again and again. Repent of those disordered desires and loves and anxieties and find rest for your soul.

And friends, if you've never done that yet, never come to Christ, there is such freedom for you in this commandment. No longer to be a slave of your restless heart, always wanting more, never

letting you rest.

Come to Christ and know true freedom. Let him rule over your turbulent heart. Put all your desires, feelings and loves back under him and in their proper place.

[34 : 58] That is the secret that Paul learned. No longer to crave and covet what wasn't his, but to be content whatever life threw at him because of Christ who strengthened him.

And that secret is open to you now. God has shared it with you in his word. So don't let it pass.

Take hold of it today. Come to Christ, you who labor and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest.

Take his yoke upon you and learn from him, because he is gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your soul. His yoke is easy and his burden is light.

God, let's pray that for one another now. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are the God who satisfies every desire of our hearts and conforms our desires to your will.

We thank you for Jesus. He is sufficient for us. Lord, that his strength is made perfect in our weakness, and that he is the bread of life that fills our hungry soul.

[36 : 19] Father, we pray that you would help each of us to come to him, to submit our hearts to him, to let him reorder our disordered desires.

Deliver us, we pray, from temptation. Help us, Lord, our hearts not to grasp after what is not ours.

Help us, Father, to know the secret of contentment in Jesus, and out of that contentment, to live generously towards you, towards others, not clinging, but giving freely.

Free us, we pray, from anxiety that grips our heart. Help us, we pray, not to compare ourselves to one another, but to love one another, indeed counting each other more significant than ourselves in Christ.

These things we pray and ask in Jesus' name. Amen.