

Truth and Contentment

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we come to our final installment in our series on the Ten Commandments. And next week we'll be able to actually start an Advent series, albeit a short one.
- So that will be good as well. How about I pray for us before we look at God's word together? So let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you again for your word through which you continue to speak to us.
- And what you have to say is still authoritative and very much relevant for us today. And so again, Father, we pray that you would help us to heed your word and to live our lives by it.
- For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, occasionally people think some instructions don't sound too important.
- And so they ignore them. So one third grade girl called Hope was told to name some shapes. But she didn't take notice of the other instruction which said to use the names given on the paper.
- [0 : 5 9] So instead of calling the quadrilateral square or rhombus or whatever on the next slide, she named the shapes Bob, Sam, Teddison. That's what she decided to do.
- Made sense to her. You see, some instructions may seem unimportant, but they are actually very important. And today we come to our final two commandments, as I said.
- And I wonder whether some people think that if you had to choose out of the ten, whether these two would be the least important, the least serious ones. I mean, when you think about it, you've got the first four, which are about honoring God.
- And you don't want to say any of those are not very serious, do you? It's about God. And then you've got other ones like not murdering. That's pretty serious. And stealing and adultery.
- That's pretty serious. But when it comes to, well, lying, you know, not giving false testimony, everyone seems to lie. In fact, in 2002, a study done at the University of Massachusetts did a study with 240 university students where they had to have a ten-minute conversation with each other and they observed them.
- [2 : 0 7] And then afterwards, they interviewed them and they found that 60% of them lied at least once in ten minutes. That's remarkable, isn't it? Of course, it's not just university students.
- Often people lie all the time and people just call the little lies white lies. You've heard that expression, haven't you? As though it's no big deal. And coveting?
- Well, that's to do with the heart and it's a bit hard to police that. And everyone seems to do that anyway. And so I wonder whether even the Jews perhaps thought, you know, these last two commandments are not all that important.
- Because it's interesting that these are the only two commandments that specifically mention our neighbour. Did you realise that? And so I wonder whether God did this to remind Israel that while these commandments might appear less serious, I mean, there was no death penalty for bearing false witness or coveting like there were for some of the others.

While they may appear less important, they actually have serious consequences for loving our neighbours. Either way, Israel were to obey them in response to God saving them.

[3 : 19] So this is our last one. So let me just very quickly recap what we've seen so far. Chapter 20, verse 1 of Exodus, verse 2. God reminds them that he saved them from Egypt, from the land of slavery.

And in response, in thankful response, they were now to obey him. And it's similar for us. That is, we are to obey God in thankful response to saving us, not from Egypt, but from sin.

The difference, of course, is that Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament law so that we don't have to. We've been set free from it. And yet, as I've said before, Christ did not come to abolish the Old Testament law either.

It still has a place for us. And so what I tried to do early on is to show you that the Old Testament teaches us three things. The Old Testament law teaches us three things.

One, it teaches us about God's character, what he is like, that he's a holy God, for example. Two, it teaches us about Jesus. And it helps us to understand why he had to be a priest and a sacrifice for sin.

[4 : 25] All those things are in the Old Testament law. It helps us to understand Jesus as a person and work. But thirdly, it teaches us how to love God and our neighbor, which we Christians are still to do.

And so when we come to laws that taught Israel how to relate to God or relate to their neighbors, I gave you those four questions which we'll use again this morning, so that we can still apply the Old Testament law rightly to ourselves.

So we're at point one in your outlines and verse 16 in your Bibles, the ninth commandment. Here we read, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

And so point one, the first two questions are, who does this command help us to love, God or others? Well, quite clearly it's others. It even mentions our neighbor. And the second question, how?

Well, again, it's quite clear, isn't it? By not bearing false testimony. Now, there are three things to notice here. First, this commandment is against all sorts of false testimony, actually.

[5 : 31] The word for false means lie, but it can also mean deceive, as in telling a half-truth and not the whole truth, so help me God. What's more, when the Ten Commandments are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy, a couple books later, there's a different Hebrew word used for false, and it means empty or worthless.

And so this commandment is broader than just not lying. It refers to all sorts of false speech, whether it's a blatant lie or a half-truth or an empty statement.

Even white lies are included, I think. On a parenting website, some parents admitted telling some white lies to their children. So on the next slide, one father admitted telling his young child, Daddy cannot hear when it's dark, so call mummy if you wake up at night.

Apparently he got away with it for a little while. And then on the next one, this time from a mother, my son and I spent ten minutes looking for his chocolate coins when I knew all along I had eaten them the day before.

She just pretended she hadn't. Now, I mean, they are humorous, and we may not think much of it, but white lies often lead to darker lies, don't they, that aren't so white or innocent.

[6 : 51] And they are still part of false speech. Goes to the parent's character, I guess. It's okay to have a joke, but if you persist in it, I mean, I suspect that's a different thing.

The second thing to notice, it's not just against all false speech, but the second thing to notice is that this commandment also includes our intention. So the command says, Do not bear false testimony against your neighbor.

That is, the command includes not just the content of my speech, is it true or false, but it also includes the intention of my speech. Is it working against my neighbor or not?

Am I seeking to tear them down for personal gain, or speaking the truth for their good, to build them up? And so it includes things like gossiping and slandering.

And in fact, if we look at some of the Old Testament laws, we see that. So on the next slide from Leviticus chapter 16, we read, Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

[7 : 54] But the third thing to notice is that while this command was against all false speech, like gossiping and slandering, it was particularly against false speech in the courtroom.

And we can see this, by the way, it talks about giving testimony. In fact, the word give in verse 16 of Exodus is literally answer. And so the scene is someone being asked a question, and they've got to answer and give their testimony as a witness in a courtroom setting.

And again, we can see this with the other laws that are connected with this commandment. And so on the next slide, we read from Exodus 23. In fact, it's just over the page in your Bibles. But it says, Do not spread a false report.

There's the slander. Then immediately it focuses on the courtroom. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.

And do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. But on the other hand, do not deny justice to the poor person either in their lawsuit. Have nothing to do with a false charge, and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

[9 : 07] Do you see how the focus, it includes all kind of false speech, but the focus is particularly in the courtroom. And that's because in ancient Israel, there were no surveillance cameras. There were no DNA testing or fingerprinting.

Instead, the judicial system relied heavily on evidence from witnesses. Indeed, God was so concerned to avoid any injustice that there had to be at least two or three witnesses.

So on the next slide, in Deuteronomy chapter 19, we read, One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offence that they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

This was especially important when it came to the death penalty. So as you can see, it says, On the testimony of two or three witnesses, a person is to be put to death, but no one can be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

You see, this is serious, and God takes it seriously, so there needs to be at least two or three witnesses. We might not think that this ninth commandment is all that serious.

[10 : 15] You're not as serious as do not kill, for example, but their testimony could actually kill, could sentence people to death. Truth really did matter. So much so that we read on the next slide from Deuteronomy 19 that if a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, and if the witness proves to be a liar giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party.

You see, truth really matters. It was for the good of others and the good order of their society. Well, before we apply this to ourselves, we need to see what the New Testament does, which is point two.

And as we do this, we see that it's less concerned with the courtroom and more concerned about life in general. So on the next slide, we read some of this last week from Ephesians 4.

Paul writes, See what he's saying there?

Sorry, we'll go back. Just keep it on there for a moment. Thanks, Sujia. So when we become Christians, we are given new spiritual life. It's as though we've put on a new self as a Christian.

[12 : 00] And so Paul is saying, we're now to live like it. We're to take off all the old behaviors that we used to have as a non-Christian and put on the new behaviors as a Christian.

Indeed, we are to reflect the family likeness, the likeness of our Heavenly Father. And God does not lie. And so neither are we to lie. We are to be like God.

In fact, we are to be like Jesus. After all, a Christian, Christian, follows Christ. And what did Jesus say? He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And so as members of God's family, we are to speak the truth like our Heavenly Father, God, and like our big brother, Christ. For if we lie, we actually reflect the likeness of a different father.

Do you know who? The devil. Jesus calls the devil in John 8, the father of lies. And so we had to put off our old way of life, which told lies, and put on the new way of life, which speaks truthfully to one another.

[13 : 08] This includes not just blatant lies, but also those polite lies we tell to save face. So for example, if people are invited out, often they will say, I'd love to go, but I have something else on, I'm sorry.

When what they really mean is, I'd hate to go, and I have nothing else on, actually. Rather, we're to put off falsehood, and just say, thank you for the kind offer, but no thanks.

Or with Christmas coming up, people often get gifts that they don't particularly like, but they still say, oh, more socks and undies, just what I wanted.

When really, it's not at all what they wanted. But we had to put off falsehood, and simply say, thank you for your gift. You see, we have put off the false speech, with the blatant lies, and even the polite lies.

And instead, we had to put on truthfulness. And so, if we are late, or forget to do something, then we're not to make up an excuse, that is not true. I mean, sure, if there's a true reason, we can say that, of course.

[14 : 13] But we're not to make up a lie, just to save face. Instead, we just own it, and apologize. I remember the principal of the Bible college, I went to, was meeting with me, and some other students, not because we were in trouble, just for the record.

But he promised that he would bring something along, to discuss, a paper. But he forgot. Now, he was a very busy man, and he could have come up with any sort of excuse, and we would have believed him.

He could have said, look, someone just caught me, as I was going to the photocopier, so I got held up, or, I got a phone call from the archbishop, and you can't ignore the archbishop, you know, kind of thing. But, he chose not to save face, but speak truthfully, and he simply said, I'm very sorry, I just forgot.

You see, we had to speak the truth, and not lie to save face, nor even to avoid persecution. I was asked once, by a non-Christian, if I really thought, people who did not believe in Jesus, would go to hell.

And my first instinct, was to try, and avoid answering the question, altogether. Or to perhaps, massage the truth, so it didn't sound, so bad.

[15 : 24] Why? Well, because I wanted to avoid, any persecution, and I wanted to get on with them. But we cannot do that, especially, in that circumstance. Not just because God says, that will happen in the Bible, but also because, they need to hear, that's what will happen, if they don't trust in Jesus.

And so instead, we need to say, yes, that's what God says, in the Bible, but, he also says, that Jesus died for you, so that if you trust in him, you don't have to go to hell.

You can be certain of heaven. You see, we need to speak the truth, because in that situation, the truth will indeed, set them free. Of course, we need to remember, that we're to speak the truth, in love, and with grace.

After all, it is possible, to speak the truth, in an unloving way. I remember one time, when Michelle and I, were newly married, she had a dress on, and she asked me, if I liked the dress, she was wearing, and I said, no.

Oh yeah, that's right, I learnt, I learnt. I told the truth, but it wasn't loving, was it? I could have said, well my love, you make it look better, than it really is.

[16 : 41] Or perhaps, just simply, I don't particularly like the colour, which was what the issue was. You see, we need to watch, not only what we say, but also how we say it. It's interesting, that in John chapter 1, Jesus is described, as being full of, grace and truth, isn't he?

And sometimes, people are so full of grace, that they won't ever stand up, for the truth. But on the other hand, sometimes, people are so full of the truth, that there's no grace, in the way they say it. We need both, grace and truth.

We need to, speak the truth in love. And this is especially so, if we are to bear witness, to the truth about Jesus. I mean, if we don't speak the truth, in life, then why would anyone, listen to us, when we speak the truth, about Christ?

They wouldn't. And they have every reason, not to. Rather, we need to be known, as people, who speak the truth, so that others, might believe us, when we speak of Christ.

For the truth of Christ, is a matter of life and death. In fact, eternal life and death. This commandment, is important. Well, the last commandment, gets to the heart, behind all the others.

[17 : 51] Point three in your outlines, Exodus 20, verse 17, in your Bibles. Here we read, you shall not covet, your neighbour's house, you shall not covet, your neighbour's wife, or his male, or female servant, his ox, or donkey, or anything, that belongs, to your neighbour.

So, point three says, who does this help us to love? Well, clearly, it's about others, our neighbour. Mentioned three times here. How? Well, by not coveting, what is theirs.

I'll explain a bit more, about how that works, in a moment. But, the word for covet, here, is literally, desire. So, this commandment, is about, desiring, or longing for, or wanting, something that is not ours.

All the other commandments, are about what we do, with our mouths, our eyes, our hands, but this one, is all about what we do, with our hearts, our desires. So, does that mean then, that all desire, is wrong?

I mean, am I not allowed, to desire a juicy steak, some Cadbury chocolate? Am I not allowed, to desire a sleep in, or a holiday? Of course, we can desire, those sorts of things.

[18 : 59] In fact, the Bible, uses this same word, for desiring, in a positive way. I think on the next slide, is Psalm 19, where we are told, to covet, or desire, the word of God, more than gold.

It's the same word, as covet here. Or in, Philippians chapter 1, Paul desires, or covets, to be with Christ. Christ. So, there is a positive way, we can use this.

But what sort of desire then, is this commandment against? Well, the commandment itself, gives us a clue. It says, you shall not covet, or desire your neighbour's house, you shall not covet, your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or female servant, his ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs, to your neighbour.

You see? You know, it's all about desiring, what belongs, to another. Wishing we had, what they have. It's about being, discontent, with what, we've got, such that we, envy, what they've got.

I saw a photo recently, which I think summarised this commandment pretty well, I thought. It's on the next slide. Here's a child coveting. He was content with his icy pole, but now he's discontent, and envying what she has.

[20 : 26] See, that's what this commandment is about. Now, this is more than just visiting your neighbour's place, and having a meal with them, and thinking, oh, that was a lovely meal, I'd love to, or I desire that recipe, or, oh, that's a good idea for how you've done the dishes, with that drain rack, I'll go and get one too.

It's more than that, it's desiring what they have so much so, that you're now discontent, and your heart longs for, or even chases after, what they've got, such that it controls your thoughts, your attitudes, your actions.

It's perhaps seeing someone else's better health, than yours, and longing and envying that. Or perhaps, it's seeing someone else's longer marriage, that they get to spend with their spouse, and envying and longing for that, wishing that was you in your marriage.

Or it's seeing someone else's house, and wishing it was yours. Or seeing someone succeed, and wishing that was you. Or perhaps, seeing someone else's gifts, and wishing they were yours.

My parents are down from Sydney, last week and this week, and they came to church last Sunday. And after hearing me preach, which they haven't heard me preach very often, but after hearing me preach, they said at lunchtime, gee, isn't that VJ good?

[21 : 53] Who was leaving the service? Thanks, mum and dad. Now to be fair, they did encourage me too, but, it's wishing I had that smooth, slightly British accent, that polished presentation.

Whatever it is, it's very easy to envy or covet, what others have, isn't it? But the problem with coveting is threefold. First, such coveting only ends up, eating us away, or up.

So, on the next slide, Proverbs chapter 14, verse 30, is quite apt. It says, a heart at peace, gives life to the body, but, envy, rots the bones. And it does.

You might have heard of Aesop's fables before. One of those fables is about an envious neighbour, and he prayed to their God, who said they would give him their heart's desire.

But the God said, whatever I give you, I will give your neighbour twice as much. And the man's envy had so corrupted him, rotted his bones, if you like, that he prayed that he might have one of his eyes gouged out, simply so his neighbour might lose them both.

[23 : 07] And the point of the fable, what's that proverb? Envy rots the bones, doesn't it? And that leads to the second problem with coveting. It's unloving towards our neighbour.

I mean, how can we love our neighbour when we are preoccupied with wanting their things? Instead, it can lead us to resent our neighbour, or tear them down, like in the fable.

Or perhaps even break one of the other commandments to get what they've got. Take King David, for example, when he saw beautiful Bathsheba one night, he coveted, he desired her.

And that led to all sorts of unloving things against his neighbour. Do you remember what happened? He coveted her, even though she was the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah.

But because he coveted her, he took her, and broke the eighth commandment, no stealing. Then he slept with her, and broke the seventh commandment, about no adultery. Then he had her husband, Uriah, killed, breaking the sixth commandment, no murder.

[24 : 11] And then he lived alive for some time, before confessing to God, and so broke the ninth commandment, not bearing false testimony. You see, coveting opens the doors to a whole cupboard full of sins, which are unloving towards our neighbour.

And not just unloving towards our neighbour, but this commandment is also actually unloving towards God. You see, when we covet, we are saying what God has given us is not good enough. And our hearts long for, and become devoted to getting this thing, rather than serving our God.

In other words, what we covet ends up replacing God, and takes our affections and desires away from God, which is unloving towards God. And so you see, this tenth commandment, really summarises all the other commandments, doesn't it?

They all begin with coveting, with the heart condition. But what does all this mean for us? Well, let's see what the New Testament does, before applying it to ourselves, point four.

The New Testament actually reiterates much of what we've seen. In our second reading from 1 Timothy, we heard Paul tell Timothy, I think on the next slide, that it's the love of money, not money per se, but the love of money, the coveting of wealth, that is the root or cause of all kinds of evil.

[25 : 40] You see, the New Testament also says that coveting opens up a cupboard full of sin, including, it says there, plunging other people into ruin and destruction, which is pretty unloving to our neighbour, isn't it?

What's more, they also pierce themselves with all kinds of grief, as we see at the end there. And for some, including wandering from the faith. You see, envy still rots the bones, doesn't it?

What's more, it still replaces God. And so on the next slide, from Colossians 3, verse 5, Paul writes, that greed or covetousness is idolatry.

That is, what we covet becomes an idol that we end up worshipping instead of God. You see, the New Testament backs up what we've seen in the Old Testament.

But it does more than that, it actually tells us the antidote to coveting. And the antidote to coveting is contentment. As Paul said early on the passage, I think on the next slide, back to 1 Timothy, he said that godliness with contentment is actually great gain.

[26 : 48] Gaining money or our neighbours' belongings, it's of limited gain, because as Paul says, we cannot take anything with us when we die. But godliness with contentment, well, that is great gain for both this life and the life to come.

Godliness prepares us for our life to come, and contentment helps us to live this life now. Because the world teaches us to be discontent, doesn't it? I mean, take the world of advertising.

A few years ago, we had those Jeep ads on TV, with that music. Do you remember? I think I've got a little clip of it. You have to turn the volume up. Too late.

Can you go back, and we'll just play it again. So it's the blue volume, Andre, USB one. All right. You'll recognise the music. No?

Any climax? All right. Do you remember that music? It was iconic. And every time our kids heard that music, they knew what their ad was about, even to the point where they started saying, you guys should get a Jeep, mum and dad.

[27 : 57] Now, there's nothing wrong with having a Jeep, but you see, they've tapped into our human nature to covet, or to envy, to be discontent, and desire what others have. And so in the ads, everyone who had a Jeep was smiling, and those who didn't were frowning.

Oh, take the TV shows, like Better Homes and Gardens. It's all about coveting other people's homes and gardens, and getting you discontent with your own, so you might have theirs.

Imagine, though, if the world started living by the principle of Christian contentment. Our Better Homes and Gardens would be renamed as perfectly adequate homes and gardens. People who owned a Jeep would look just as happy as people who owned a Toyota, or whatever other brand you have.

You see, contentment is actually the antidote to coveting. We see this in Philippians 4 as well. We're going to finish here, so please, in your Bibles, turn with me to page 1181, and we'll finish in Philippians chapter 4.

Paul writes, I am not saying this, he's talking about the partnership with the Philippians. I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

[29 : 10] I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. They're pretty well-known verses, aren't they? But do you notice, Paul has learned contentment, verse 11, in whatever circumstance.

The word learned suggests that it didn't happen straight away, but it was a process that took time. But what helped him to learn this contentment was also learning the secret to being content, verse 12.

And this, he seems to have learned more quickly. What is this secret? Well, it's Christ. Christ is the one whom Paul has come to learn of and trust in.

And if we've read the rest of the letter, we would see that Christ is the one whom Paul values over everything else. In fact, chapter 3, verse 8, Paul considers everything else as garbage, he says, literally, compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

[30 : 24] Chapter 3, verse 8. Christ is the one in chapter 3, verse 20, who has secured for Paul a citizenship in heaven. Christ is the one in chapter 3, verse 21, who will transform Paul's lowly body to be like his glorious body.

Christ is the one who in chapter 4, verse 13, gives Paul strength to be content. You see, you see, the secret is to know Christ and all that he has given us and all that he continues to give us so that we might be content no matter the circumstance and not covered.

Well, let me finish with a story about Michelle's godmother. Her name is Elizabeth. She's lived in a caravan for the last 20 years because she cannot afford anything more.

In fact, when she now sends cards to Michelle, they are often recycled because she can't afford new ones. She has chronic health issues and her husband passed away last year.

And so, there are lots of things that she could cover, aren't there? Money, a home, health, a husband, but she doesn't.

[31 : 38] Instead, whenever we receive a letter, yes, sure, she talks about her hardships. She does that. But she also expresses her joyful contentment in Christ.

You see, because she trusts in Jesus, then she knows Christ has secured for her a citizenship in heaven that will more than make up for any loss on earth. And so, for her, why would she covet earthly things now when she has so much more on the way later?

For her, for her, it's a covet would be like, you know, coveting a child's toy house when you know you're about to enter a massive real mansion.

There's no point. Oh, sure, life is hard, and she finds it difficult. Yeah, she does. But she also knows that Christ has secured for her not only a citizenship in heaven, but access to God in prayer to find help and strength in her times of need.

And she also knows that Christ has secured God as her heavenly father, who will never leave her nor forsake her, but help her through whatever trouble she faces. Now, it doesn't mean life will be easy, far from it.

[32 : 52] But it does mean, despite every earthly reason to covet, she can actually, and is actually, content in Christ. Well, despite these two commandments, perhaps appearing to be the least important, they are actually just as important as the others, aren't they?

For they help us to love not just our neighbor, but our God, by pursuing both truth and contentment.