

Another Brick in the Wall

TEN: DON'T COVET

Here's a question I want to discuss for a minute or so: "What's the difference between the first Nine Commandments and the Tenth Commandment: "Don't Covet?"

So.... What do you think?

R.T. Kendall suggests that this is the only command that refers to the heart. He argues that someone who is unsaved can keep the first nine commandments to some extent, but this 10th commandment touches the heart in a way the others do not.

So... How's your heart this morning?

Don't Covet... nice and simple!! The other nine commandments tell us not to sin in quite specific ways. The tenth commandment challenges us not to even think about sinning! Don't Covet: Don't even think about it! Truth is, thinking about something is what leads us, in the end, to breaking any one of the other nine commands. Another way of saying it would be if you've broken any of the other nine commandments, you've already broken the tenth!

The eighth commandment says: Don't Steal. The tenth commandment says: don't even think about stealing. This command addresses the issue of what is in our hearts. The law (Ten Commandments) says: Don't murder! Jesus, understanding the heart and the law, said don't even get angry with someone. His point was that murder happens in your heart, even if you don't kill someone!

So.... How's your heart? The problem with our hearts goes all the way back to the beginning. Everything God made he said wasn't just good, it was very good! Adam and Eve were given the Garden of Eden in which to live contentedly. The Devil, cleverly, sows seeds of discontent: "Did God really say...?" The answer was: "Yes, he did!" But Adam and Eve start to think about it! The Devil says: "You could be like God, knowing good from evil!" Adam and

Eve think about it! Then Adam and Eve start to desire what is not theirs to have. It was an attractive thought though – to have power and authority; to be in control of your own life; to have total freedom to do as you please! And they ate, both of them. It was a problem of the heart, and it remains so today. How's your heart?

That great, great theologian Augustine said: "You have made our hearts, Lord, and they are restless until they find their rest in you."¹ "My Soul finds rest in God alone!" Psalm 62 v 1. How's your heart?

God created us with a desire to know and to be known. He created us with the desire to love and to be loved. He created us with the desire to feel valued and to live worthwhile lives. He created us with a desire to feel safe and secure and the best way to live is to find fulfilment in God himself where we can know and be known; love and be loved; know our value and worth; be safe and secure. Trouble is the Devil sewed doubt into our hearts – and he still does.

So we try to find fulfilment for these desires in other places: you will be loved if you have sex; you will be valued if you wear the right clothes, or keep up with the latest technology; your life will be worthwhile if you achieve success – which by the way means you become famous, have the right kind of job, earn a good salary. You will feel safe and secure if you have enough money in the bank. The Tenth Commandment was given to protect us from looking in other places when God is enough! How's your heart?

R.T. Kendall suggests that one of the reasons God gave this tenth commandment was to reveal to us the true condition of our hearts. And the truth is we easily get drawn to coveting. We are continually being bombarded with adverts or offers that sow the seeds of discontent into our hearts, and we constantly have to be alert to the condition of our hearts. The best way to live is to be content, but because of the nature of our hearts we have to cultivate contentment. And to cultivate contentment we have to address our thinking because contentment begins in the mind.

Paul tells us that he had to learn to be content. Philip Yancey tells the story of a spiritual seeker who interrupted his busy, acquisitive life to spend a few days in

¹ J John: *Ten: "Laws of Love Set in Stone,"* David C Cook 2008 page 24

a monastery. “I hope your stay is a blessed one,” said the monk who showed him to his simple cell. “If you need anything, let us know, and we’ll teach you how to live without it.” What would it take to make you truly happy?

Friends, it seems to me that if we learn to cultivate contentment, then whether we are entrusted with great wealth and affluence or whether we are entrusted with humble means, or anywhere in between, we can live a satisfied, joyful life as God intended. What goes on in our mind will shape our lives. This command challenges what we think about! Our hearts always tend to want more: more of anything and everything because we think that will satisfy. But I’m going to dare to suggest that having less in truth has its benefits.

First, those with less learn to live with dependant hearts towards God! Every day for 40 years the Israelites had to depend utterly and completely upon God’s provision of manna. Every day they knew that if God didn’t provide, they were in trouble! Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us today our daily bread!” There is something deeply spiritual about living one day at a time and being dependant on God alone. Living on the edge drives us to our knees in prayer, and if you’re only as strong as your prayer life – it is a real blessing. Being dependant on God cultivates contentment.

Having less often helps us to appreciate the beauty of interdependent relationships. Remember the early church in Act 2 & Acts 4, they shared everything they had and didn’t consider their possessions to be their own. I think it means they weren’t precious about their stuff! They learned the art of borrowing, sharing and resourcing one another. We have a Koinonia Fund here: if you have a little more you can help those with a little less. If you have more, giving some away cultivates contentment. And those with less can learn the freedom and power of interdependent relationships and cultivate contentment.

Having less means, by necessity living a less cluttered life. What you don’t own you don’t have to insure, make payments on, protect, polish or worry about. And the more cluttered our lives become, the less time we have for the things of God. The more I have to pursue earthly things, the less I have time for eternal ones. Living a less cluttered life cultivates contentment.

Having less means we are much more able to identify with the poor, and the Bible tells us the poor are very important to God. His heart is always with the poor. And the less we have, the softer we are able to keep our hearts towards the poor. The less we have the more compassionate are because, living close to the edge, we get it!!.

Having less often means we have a heightened longing for heaven. Having less means we're not so firmly attached to the things of this world; there's not so much to attract us to his world and perhaps having less means we are more able to seek the kingdom of God because there's not a lot else in the way! So we look forward to being with Christ and able to live for him now, looking forward to heaven cultivates contentment.

John Ortberg tells of a writer who writes about a train ride.² Tucked away in our minds is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long journey that crosses mountains and plains. We are on a train but don't notice the scenes outside the window because we keep thinking about our final destination. We will arrive at the station to marching bands and waving flags. Once there our dreams will be fulfilled. The jigsaw of our lives will finally be assembled, the picture finally complete. In the meantime we sit restlessly, roam the aisle, check our watch and tick off the stations; waiting, waiting, waiting, always wishing the train would go faster. The name of the train is more. The name of the station is satisfaction. "When we reach the station, that will be it!" we cry.

When I'm 18; when I get my new Mercedes; when I get my second home; when I lose weight; when I get married and have kids; when I finally retire and the pressure's off. We keep thinking the train called more will get us to the station called satisfaction. But what if to pursue satisfaction by having more is like trying to run after the horizon? Why would we ever expect more to be enough here if this is not our home?

What if the train is called contentment? What if the station is called heaven? What if this station is real and is to be the object of our truest and deepest longings? Then we will see God face to face! Then our desires for being

² Ortberg J, *"When the game is over it all goes back in the box,"* Zondervan 2007 p. 199/200

known, beautiful, loved, valued to have and worth and meaning will be fully realised. Then we will cry, “enough!” And God will say “More!”

This command reveals who God is, who in Jesus, left all the glory of heaven and did consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing...that you might have more than you know!

Friends, “Don’t covet!” is an invitation to open your heart to the God of the Christmas story, the God who longs to give to you fully and completely. As we remember the Gift of Jesus, let’s open our hearts to receive all that he wants to give, content that His gift is enough!

How’s your heart?

Amen

Preached at Crawley Baptist Church by Rev. Ian Phillips on Sunday 15th December 2013.