

A God who Speaks: The Tenth Commandment

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[0 : 00] Some of you who know me know that my wife and children know this far too much, but I turned 50 just a couple of weeks ago, and for some reason, this birthday really got me thinking, like almost for a whole year prior to turning 50, I'd think about it a lot and talk about it.

And it's odd because turning 20 was nothing, 30, nothing, 40, nothing, like not even a blip, but for some reason, turning 50 really got me thinking a lot about myself and everything.

And I'm sharing this, it's not really a proper introduction to the sermon, I just wanted to share with you how cool it is the way God works sometimes in our lives. And the day after I turned 50, I was reading a manuscript of a friend of mine who's writing a book, and in the manuscript, this is the day after I turned 50, he shared the story of a man who on his 50th birthday said to God, God, may you, by your mercy, may the 50s, may my 50s be the most productive and fruitful decade of my entire life.

And that man also prayed that when he turned 60 and when he turned 70 and when he turned 80. And I thought to myself, that's exactly God's word for me today on my first day, so to speak, in a new chapter of my life.

And it's really changed the whole way I view my future. That this is to be, if Christ does not come, and if God spares me for 10 more years, that by God's grace, my plan and my hope is that this will be my most fruitful decade of my life.

[1 : 47] And I plan to pray that again at 60, if Christ doesn't come. And I share this because, you know, today we're going to be talking about sin again. And one of the things which is really important for us to understand is that in Christ, change is always possible.

Like, no matter what the story of our life has been up until now, failure or sin is not the final word about us. And that repentance and amendment of life is always possible.

Whether we are 20 years old, 50 years old, 80 years old, or 100 years old, repentance and amendment of life is always possible. And the devil might try to tell us that something, whether until we're going to have a greed and envy, and the devil might want to tell us that those are things about us that are the story of our lives and the final word about us.

But it is never the case. A repentance, a new word from God, and a new way of living is always an option and a possibility. So, today we talk about the last of the Ten Commandments.

And that Ten Commandment is about coveting. And I thought today that what we would do is both I would try to open up the text and at the same time try to triangulate around the text so that we would have a bit of a sense as to what this commandment means.

[3 : 10] And in particular, that we might have a sense as to whether or not we are guilty of breaking this sin. Because the Bible teaches us time and time and time again that sin darkens the intellect.

One of the most important, I mean, Jesus' words about how we are far more ready to see the speck in somebody else's eyes before we see the log in our own eyes. That is just so completely and utterly true about every one of you.

And it's spectacularly true about me. And often we can hear maybe even a very, very powerful message or read a very wonderful devotional book on sin. And inwardly we are saying, I so wish my brother could hear that.

Or I so wish my neighbor or my boss could hear that. And we rarely say, Lord, have mercy upon me. You know, we rarely see ourselves pinned to the wall by the word of God.

And I have to confess that for quite a few years I had spoken on envy. For quite a few years I was the chaplain at Augustine College. And one of the things I did every first term with the students, I spent the first five weeks teaching them how to pray.

[4 : 22] And I spent the last seven weeks going through each of the seven deadly sins. And those of you who don't know what that old, very ancient Christian sort of examination of conscience guide, going from most deadly to least deadly, they're all deadly.

Okay, don't go home and say, whoa, I just, you know, I only have lust. That's not the most deadly sin. They're all deadly. But some are more deadly than others. And going from deadliest to least deadly, I mean, this is like going from a snake whose bite will kill you in one second to a snake whose bite will kill you in ten minutes.

I mean, they're all deadly. Okay. So pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust. And so every year I would teach the students these different sins.

And then one day, to my horror, I realized that I was guilty of the sin of envy. And that the sin of envy had, in fact, a significant role in my life.

I was horrified to realize that I had taught about it for quite a few years, completely and utterly blind to the fact that I had the sin of envy, that it had a role in how I lived my life.

[5 : 34] And one of the reasons that sins can be so, sins, or certain families of sins can be so powerful in our lives, is that the more spiritual the sin, the more interior it is, and often the most dangerous it is.

That's why, in fact, pride begins at the top and lust goes to the bottom. Just because the sins, in a sense, are going from the most spiritual sins to the least spiritual sins.

And the more spiritual and interior the sin, the harder it is to recognize that we are guilty of it. And, in fact, if you think about it, how many people have ever asked you, have ever come up to you and said, you know, I know that you're a prayer warrior.

Please pray for me because I'm struggling with envy. Like, very few of us ever hear that type of prayer request. You know, it might be that I'm dealing with anger, or I'm, you know, I'm dealing with lust, or I'm, you know, dealing with this or that, but rarely do we ever hear somebody say, you know, George, please pray for me because envy has such a hold in my life.

And because we're so completely and utterly blind for it, to it, we don't see it. And here's how I recognized about myself. I realized one day as I was walking along that I was thinking about some clergy that I knew.

[6 : 51] And as I was thinking about the clergy that I knew, I resented their success. I resented the good churches they seemed to have, the fact that they didn't have problems that I had, the attendance, their abilities.

And I realized that as I was walking, my entire moment of walking, that entire time of walking was filled with different types of resentment about the success, the gospel success of these other ministers.

And envy is the sin of being sad or sorrowful at another's good. Envy is the sin of learning of another person's good or success, and that makes us unhappy.

That's what the sin of envy is. There's one famous verse in the Bible which really helps to emphasize just how deadly and how important a sin this is for us to try to get a handle on.

And if you turn in your pew Bibles to page 862, and all of you, because some of you I know bring your own Bibles, which is always a good thing, Matthew 27, verse 18, just one simple verse.

[8 : 05] One of those verses you could read hundreds and hundreds of times and never really quite get it. But Matthew 27, verse 18, if you're using your pew Bibles, it's page 862.

And here, Jesus is before Pilate, and this is what the Word of God says in verse 18. For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him.

Why was it that the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious leaders, why is it that they were so angry at Jesus? Why is it that they hated him? Why is it that they actually wanted the God, the Son of God, to die?

Why is it that they wanted the promised Messiah of God, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises? Why did they want that fulfillment to be put to death? Why is it that they wanted the Lord to die?

who has been to some friend that you haven't seen for a while? And as your friend, as she starts to tell you about how her job is going and the house that they're living in and what their children have accomplished, and if as you hear about this, you feel sad or resentful or angry, you have envy.

[9 : 42] if on Tuesday you discover that somebody else got that promotion and it just fills you with great sadness, you know what, you probably have envy I felt envy because other people were

better at preaching the gospel than me isn't that sinful?

just as soon as we hear about that, we should automatically know that that's sinful the other thing which often goes along with this and maybe I just, because it's familiar with me I can say this and it's just sort of you can't even imagine this, but not only can it be that maybe it's our sister or an old friend or a co-worker or something and we hear of some great good or great blessing that's happened to them and inwardly our reaction is resentment or sadness or anger or questioning God or something other than rejoicing and often the very next thing that goes through our mind in our internal conversation is like, I'm better than that person like, I did better in school like, you know I was better going through this and this I'm better at this and this and this and like, how on earth is it that I'm better than this person and yet these things are happening to that person once again we probably have envy in our lives and it is disfiguring how we relate to other people friends God made us to aspire to the greater aspire A-S-P-I-R-E and to rejoice in it think about it for a second there is one person who is always greater than us and that is God how can we let habits grow in our lives where that habit is that we feel sorrow at another person's experiencing blessing and how is it that we can develop within ourselves an attitude that we are better than that other person and how dare that other person have that good when we don't how can we have that grow in our lives and then rejoice in God's presence when God is always greater you see the danger? not only is the danger that it disfigures our lives that it can lead to things like hatred and murder I mean even murdering God the Son of God but that it in fact can quench the Holy Spirit in our lives make it impossible for us to come to Christ because it's impossible if we have a deeply ingrained habit of resenting the excellency in another to come to God who is the most excellent and rejoice you know God wants us to have heroes God wants us to aspire to be better God wants us to rejoice in success I mean God's hope and desire for us is that if we hear if I hear about some other minister and I'm just speaking personally folks I hear about some other minister and that person's church is growing and people are coming to Christ and I should say way to go praise God you know way to go praise God God wants us to have heroes you know that's a separate thing some of you have heard

David Short preach and you know every time I hear David Short preach I say to myself Father help me to preach even half as good as him or a quarter as good God wants us to have to see people who's you know whether it's their ability to make a home or to paint a painting or to deal with conflict or you know to have this type of success or academic ability or just loveliness of character or ability to share the gospel and God wants us to look out at the world not seeing the world from the perspective and the lens of lack or scarcity or resentment but to look out at the world and say look at these fantastic people worthy of aspiration heroes Father help me to be somewhat even vaguely like them a prayer like that praises God I realized in my own case of envy that one of the things that I had to do was to pray daily for the success of every one of the clergy that I felt envious of that that's what

[14:01] I had to do to have some type of healing from that is to everyday pray Father may their church their ministry their ability to preach their ability to evangelize their ability to whatever may it just get better and better and better and Father do with me as you will Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law that we shall not covet the second aspect of coveting is the sin of greed or avarice greed is the inordinate desire for possessions and the archetype of this sin of the inordinate desire for possessions is the inordinate desire for money and why is it money and it's because of this let's say I have inordinate desire for expensive sunglasses you know at some point in time sanity will intervene you know maybe it's ten pairs of sunglasses maybe it's fifty maybe it's a hundred but at some point in time even a vague sense of shame will stop you from buying the hundred and first but you can have a constant desire for more money

I might have a huge desire for cream puffs but at some point in time my desire for cream puffs will come to an end but there is an infinite almost infinite desire for more and more money and so the desire for more and more money the inordinate desire for money is taken as the archetype of this type of sin and that is the sin of greed the problem here is not that we can recognize greed as a sin but that we can rarely recognize it as a sin in us many of us might say to our wife or our friend gosh that person is greedy isn't it like didn't it just offend you to go to that restaurant and just see how greedy they were or doesn't it just offend you to go to their house and see how greedy it is but it's very very easy sometimes for us to see greed in other people it's very very very hard for us to see greed in ourselves once again when was the last time somebody said to you please pray for me I'm

struggling with greed it's rarely something that we will ask another person to pray for in us we rarely see it in ourselves it's just something that can have this and the other thing about greed is it has nothing to do with money when I was in

Africa a couple of years ago I mean I was visiting with people who had virtually nothing and their generosity was unbelievably humbling and I have because I speak sometimes across the country and I have been with people blessed with spectacular financial resources and I have been with them and I have been embarrassed by their greed but at the same time the other thing has happened as well I've been with people who have virtually no financial resources and I've been struck with their greed and I have been with people with great financial resources and I've just praised God for how unbelievably generous they are like the amount of money that we have is not an indicator of our greed greed is a disposition of the soul and as such we can be generous with little generous with much greedy with little greedy with much but greedy is still being greedy having this greed is still a sin just turn to one passage in the Bible there's many passages in the Bible I just wanted to turn to one once again in Matthew it's in the Sermon on the Mount and it's Matthew chapter 6 verses 21 24 if you're using your pew Bibles actually we'll begin at verse 19 which is on page 837 page 837 Matthew chapter 6 verse 19 and this is part of the Sermon on the Mount it's Jesus' sermon and here's what he teaches do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also the lamp of the body is the eye if therefore your eye is good your whole body will be full of light but if your eye is bad your whole body will be full of darkness if therefore the light that is in you is darkness how great is that darkness no one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other you cannot serve

God and mammon and that intervening there's lots of stuff you can get out of that intervening text about the light within you being darkness partially what Jesus is saying is that idle when a sin such as money a desire for more and more money takes a hold of you when money in effect becomes an idol by which you serve money rather than having money serve you or even more importantly to have money serve God's purposes in the world when money or possessions becomes something that you and I serve it starts to twist how we see things how we evaluate things how we understand things what we're sad about what we're happy about and it starts to inwardly change us and if that which and so that even as things are happening in the world the way we react to them is not reacting from God's perspective but from the perspective of idolatry and sin and we can become unaware of this then the light within us is darkness and we can't even see to realize that it's dark we can serve money we can serve the desire for possessions but we were meant to serve

[19:53] God and others in obedience to God I have met people who have allowed marriages to end and relationships with children to end because they pursue the next deal or the next promotion ahead of their wife or their children or their friends we trust money but we are meant to trust God we believe that money will satisfy us without realizing that only God can satisfy us you know it's not the case that in a poor area everybody is unhappy and in a rich area everybody is happy it's not the case at all I'm not romanticized the poor at all by the way it's never God's will it's very in very few cases is it God's will for us to be poor I mean God calls some small number of people to a life of voluntary poverty it is a very small number of people but God does call some people to voluntary poverty it's not

God's will to be poor and I'm not romanticizing them but it is definitely the case that having more money does not necessarily satisfy us only God satisfies us we believe that money will care for us ultimately only God cares for us we come to believe that money is our greatest need more and more money is our greatest need it blinds us to the fact that our greatest need is intimacy with God and our second and third greatest need flow from that intimacy with others I tell my children you know dads have lectures and bad jokes and I tell my children that my hope for them is you know I mean my fundamental hope I'll tell you what I pray I pray five things for my children every day first of all I pray that they will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ secondly I pray that they will grow into confident joyful disciples of Jesus Christ thirdly I pray that God will protect them from spiritual and from physical harm fourthly

I pray that they will know what God's purpose is for their life and fifthly I pray that God will grant them a godly spouse and I actually do a sixth thing I learned this from that man's dad actually I pray

for that future spouse some of you were at the wedding of Sean and Victoria last summer and I shared how I had been praying for Sean before I ever met him because like even now I pray for Tommy's wife and Tommy is only seven it means possible Tommy's wife hasn't been born yet but God can sort all that out but I you know and I tell my kids that it's far better to be in God's will and be a janitor and have a godly wife and family than it is to be very very rich not wrong to be rich I'm going to say more about that in a second but we believe that we can come to believe that money is our greatest need but ultimately intimacy with God is our greatest need and intimacy with others through God is our second greatest need money can lead us to believe that we can approach God as an equal we can only approach God as God we become less and less like God by grasping anything we become more and more like God in his character by giving man by the name of John Maxwell once said something which has always stuck with me one of the highest forms of living is giving because God is the great giver you can't out give God just as I'm bringing this to an end John Wesley gave very wise advice to some of the business people who came to him after they had come to faith and he said to them that there's nothing wrong with praying for success in their business okay if you folks out there you're in sales you own a business pray for help I mean you have to go and you have to make a sale pray for help with that you're doing a business pray for help in running your business pray for the prosperity of your business nothing wrong with that at all Christianity is not a creation denying religion the person who has renounced all for Christ and is living in voluntary poverty is no more spiritual than the person who has a husband and children and a nice house in the suburbs it's no more spiritual to be one rather than the other it's not that at all and so John Wesley's advice to the business people was pray for your business pray that it will prosper but at the same time pray that you will become more and more generous at the same time you know ministry costs money spreading the gospel costs money and if God has blessed you with generous with great financial resources he has blessed you with the great privilege of being generous in gospel ministry pray for your business to prosper and also pray that you will become more and more generous if we are not generous with what we have now we will not be generous when we are richer it's one of the reasons why it's important for students to tithe because one of the lies that greed tells us is well when I make an extra five thousand dollars a year that will be generous and we always want to make that extra five thousand or ten or hundred or whatever the number is where when we have all our

[25 : 36] RSPs and we are well established if we are not generous with the very little that we have we won't be generous when we have lots in fact it can be a lot harder to be generous when you have lots it can be a lot easier to give five bucks than it is to give fifty thousand dollars it can be a really hard thing to sign a check like that I've never had that experience by the way I'm going on what other people have told me but if we're not generous with what we have now we won't be generous when we are richer generosity is a habit of the soul a disposition and a worldview pray for generosity pray for the ability to tithe Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law just want to look very very briefly at the final triangulation of this commandment and just turn in your Bibles to the book of Deuteronomy just so you can notice something about the commandment and it's on page 161 page 161 it's Deuteronomy chapter 5 verse 21 is this the last commandment just want you to notice something in particular about this page 161 you shall not covet your neighbor's wife and you shall not desire your neighbor's house his field his manservant his maidservant his ox his donkey or anything that is your neighbor's now notice the first thing that we're not to covet I'm not to covet my neighbor's wife the third if the first way the first sort of aspect of coveting is the sin of envy if the second aspect to try to understand it is the sin of greed the third thing is to understand that we can have a desire for what can never be ours and by that

I don't mean like 50 billion dollars like Bill Gates okay I mean something more fundamental and this is what I mean by that Louise and I will be celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary thanks be to God in the 24th of October and you know 25 years ago I don't know maybe there were 4 billion people on the planet and in a sense what I said when I stood at the front of the church and turned to Louise and exchanged vows with her and the two of us entered into the estate of holy matrimony I in a sense was saying to Louise Louise there are 2 billion other women in the face of the planet and I am turning my back on all of them and I will only be with you for the rest of my life and she in a sense was saying George there's 2 billion other men in the planet and I'm turning my back on all of them and for the rest of my life I will only be with you and I am to say that and it is to be a good thing that's a good thing it's something that I am to rejoice in and so you see when I covet my neighbor's

wife I am coveting something that I can never have if I am coveting something that by the very very structure of creation it's a whole other sermon about how the very very nature of the created order is that

I am desiring something that I can never have in theory Bill Gates could listen to this sermon say I'm going to leave my entire 50 billion fortune to George and I would get it and I would be flabbergasted you know but that could conceivably happen I'm not going to bet my life on it but I can never have my neighbor's wife if I am a person who is same sex attracted if I was a person like that I can never have I can never sexually know that man it is something that I can never have and never desire there's other examples as well Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law let us bow our heads in prayer father thank you so much for loving us thank you father so much that you see each one of us as we really are that you you know the dreams we have at night that we don't remember you know the faces and the fronts that we have you know the things we're ashamed of and the things we delight in you father we give you thanks and praise that you know us better than we know ourselves and still you love us and sent your son Jesus to die upon the cross for us we thank and praise you father that when your son died for each of us that he knew every single thing about us and still he willingly died for us thank you father that as we come to know you through Jesus that we will never discover something about ourselves that you didn't know already and still you loved us loving father may your holy spirit move and work in our lives may your holy word move and work in our lives so that we might see ourselves as you see us and father as we see the things in our lives that we need to repent of in your mercy may your holy spirit lead us to repent and to amend our lives may we have the joy and comfort of your holy spirit that new life in you is possible that goodness is good for us and that you can use us no matter what our disposition or state of life or prevailing sins father thank you so much that no matter what those are you can bring a blessing to the world through us when we trust in your son Jesus

Christ father thank you for your mercy in Jesus's name we pray amen because of the■