

TEN: Free to Obey

A Christian Looks at the Ten Commandments

A Big Barrier to Happiness

Exodus 20:17

INTRODUCTION: Today we complete our series on the Ten Commandments.

I hope you have seen the truth that I tried to explain as we began this study that The Ten Commandments remain valid today, in spite of the fact that they were part of the Old Covenant that has passed away.

They remain valid because the principles embodied in these commandments were valid before the Covenant of the Law began. These principles were valid while Adam and Eve still walked the earth. They were valid during the days of the Old Covenant of the Law, but after God declared that covenant broken, null and void, **the Ten Commandments remained valid.**

And all of that is true **because each of them are based upon the character of God.** These are things God wants us to do or not to do because of who He is. And God never changes.

Ex. 20:3 NKJV You shall have no other gods before Me.

- God is the one and only true God, so He does not want us to worship or follow anyone or anything else except Him.

Ex. 20:4-5 NKJV 4 You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything that is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. ...

- He is the living God, so He does not want us to worship idols without life that neither hear nor speak.

Ex. 20:7 NKJV You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

- God is holy and His name is holy, so God does not want us to speak in such a way as to abuse or disrespect His name.

Ex. 20:8-10 NKJV 8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God.

...

- God made us to worship, and He designed our bodies so that we function best on a 6 to 1 work to rest ratio, so God wants us to reserve one day a week for rest and worship.

Ex. 20:12 NKJV Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

- God in His wisdom sent each of us into this world through our father and mother, so He wants us to honor them no matter what. Some of us may think our parents were too good for us; others think they were not nearly good enough. But we honor God, who chose this means of letting us have life, when we honor our father and our mother.

Ex. 20:13 NKJV You shall not murder.

- God values life, and He wants us to value and protect life, our own and everybody else's.

Ex. 20:14 NKJV You shall not commit adultery.

- God instituted marriage, and He wants us to honor it by being faithful and only using the gift of the sexual relationship inside the bounds of marriage.

Ex. 20:15 NKJV You shall not steal.

- God is the Creator of all, and as the Creator, He is the owner. God wants us to live as stewards, as managers of what He entrusts to our care.

Ex. 20:16 NKJV You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- God is the God of truth. When God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, He said, "I am the truth." So God wants us to tell the truth.

Do you see it? Every one of the commandments are based upon the character of God. The principles upon which the commandments are based are based upon who God is. And who God is never changes! Never!

Now that we are through nine of the Ten Commandments, let me tell you something else. This is probably something you have observed as we walked through the commandments, but let me say it plainly and overtly.

- **The Ten Commandments do not tell us how to know God or how to be in right relationship to Him.**
- They reveal who He is, but they do not offer you a personal introduction.
- Keeping the Ten Commandments has never offered a right relationship or salvation to anyone.

- Even if it offered that, it would do no good because none of us is capable of keeping all ten of the commandments perfectly throughout our lives. But if we could, we would still not have a right relationship with God.
- **Salvation has never been offered through the Ten Commandments. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone.**

John 14:6 NKJV Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

- The Ten Commandments do not tell us how to know God or be in right relationship to Him.
- **Instead, they tell us how, after we know Him and are in a right relationship to Him through faith in Christ, how to live in that relationship.**
- They tell us how to live consistent with who God is and how to have His character reflected in our lives, honoring Him.
- Folks, do you know what happens as we live lives consistent with God's character? We are happy! We are fulfilling God's purpose for making us, and doing that fills us with joy and gladness.

And this is most certainly true of the final commandment,

Exodus 20:17 NKJV "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

Like all the other commandments, obeying this one will not get you into heaven.

This commandment tells us how to live in sweet fellowship with God after we have been made a part of God's forever family through faith in Jesus Christ.

Keeping this commandment will definitely increase the joy and happiness of the follower of Christ.

Disobeying the commandment is a barrier for the Christian to fellowship with God and to the joy and happiness God desires us to have as we walk with Christ.

So, let us ask the key questions that have helped us unlock our understanding of each of the commandments:

1) What does the final commandment reveal about God?

The tenth commandment to not covet builds upon the foundation laid by the eighth commandment to not steal, namely ...

- **As the Creator, God owns everything in the universe.**
- **God has given the human race the role of stewards or caretakers of His property.**
- **When God apportions property, He allots it to a person as a steward of that property, never as the ultimate owner.**
- **We are stewards (managers) of property, real and personal. God remains the owner.**
- **Stealing is taking for oneself that which God has given to another.**

The final commandment, you shall not covet, builds upon these truths about God:

The Bible tells us,

- **In addition to being the owner of all things, God is also the distribution manager of all things.**

Psalm 145:15–16 NKJV The eyes of all look expectantly to You, And You give them their food in due season. **You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.**

Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 NKJV I know ... that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in **the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**

James 1:17 NKJV **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above**, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- **God is the distribution manager, but not always the delivery boy.**
 - Sometimes God sends His blessings through others, who may or may not be faithful in delivering them where God desires.
 - This is why the widows of the early church for a season did not receive the food God had provided for them through the church. It is why the office of Deacon was created and the first Deacons appointed – to oversee the daily distribution to the widows.
 - This is why some godly ministries go unfunded. The Lord sends sufficient funds for them through His people, but some of God’s people use what God sent for their own selfish purposes.

So,

2) How does God want this portion of His character to show in our lives?

In other words - **How do we demonstrate in our lives that we know that God chooses to whom to distribute which blessings?**

- **By giving thanks to God for each and every blessing.**

The old hymn, *Count Your Blessings*, says

**Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.**

Indeed it will! If we will take time to list every good thing God has given us just this last month, we will be surprised how long the list is. The problem is that we take God for granted. We ask; we receive; and then we act like we had it all along or that we procured it for ourselves!

- **By recognizing the ways God sends blessings.**
 - **By direct gift**
 - Sometimes, James tells us, we do not have because we do not ask. We are not willing to humble ourselves and acknowledge that apart from God's benevolence, we cannot gain something we want. Sometimes we just do not pray. So because we do not ask, God does not send the gift our way.
 - **Through hard work**
 - Sometimes we do not have something God would be willing to give us, but we are not willing to let the delivery boy of hard work knock on our door.
 - **Through practicing wisdom**
 - Or we may not be willing to gain and use the wisdom God offers in His Word that would roll the delivery truck of some blessing to our house.

But when we have done what God desires, and God just does not send a particular blessing, we honor God in our lives

- **By accepting God's decision that whatever God withholds is not best for us.**

By saying to the Lord, "OK, God, I know Your thoughts are higher than my thoughts and Your ways higher than my ways. I don't understand, but I trust

You. Lord I ask that You remove the desire from my heart for anything You do not want me to have”

- **By steadfastly refusing to covet that thing that we want when we see it in the possession of someone else.**
 - Eve had all the fruit in the Garden of Eden, but she coveted the only one God says was forbidden. Her covetousness condemned her to a life where she and her husband had to hoe hard ground, plant seeds, haul water, pull weeds, and carry baskets of produce from their own little garden to feed themselves and their family for the rest of their lives.
 - Lot was an exceedingly wealthy man, but he coveted the territory including the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. And his covetousness cost Lot his wife, his home, and his good relationship with his daughters because their husbands were killed in the conflagration because Lot moved into the city of his desire.
 - R.G. Lee describes so pointedly what happened to a covetous king of Israel. He said, “Ahab had a king’s treasury and a king’s house, but he tormented himself with the desire for one bit of land more,” and Ahab coveted the vineyard that belonged to Naboth, and his covetousness and the thievery and murder that followed, earned Ahab the prophetic condemnation that the dogs would eat his flesh and drink his blood, which prophecy God Himself brought to pass.

Oh, my friend. Do you see something you want? Is there something that is a desire of your heart?

- Ask God for it.
- Work hard to obtain it.
- Practice wisdom to see if that allows you to get it.

And if God by these means grants it, pour out your heart in thanksgiving.

But if God withholds it, honor Him by accepting His decision.

And do not let covetousness rob you of the joy of walking faithfully with the Lord and enjoying the other blessings God has given to you.

Finally,

3) What does the New Testament say that helps us understand this commandment better or how to live it out day to day?

The New Testament shows us the positive virtue to be developed that overcomes the negative sin of covetousness.

Hebrews 13:5 NKJV Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The positive virtue to be developed that overcomes the negative sin of covetousness is contentment.

Paul says, "No matter what it is you do not have, you have Christ, who will never leave or abandon you!"

And Paul practiced his own godly counsel.

Philippians 4:11–13 NKJV 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

And Paul wrote to Timothy

1 Timothy 6:6–10 NKJV 6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.