

## **The Ninth And The Tenth Commandment — Covetousness (The Thanksgiving).**

Text: Exo 20.17

1) Put Christ first in your life

Suggested Hymns:

2) The proper attitude is to give thanks to God

150, 851, 397, 437, 579

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 20:17, *“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.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we conclude our study of the Ten Commandments by considering the 9th and 10th Commandments which deal with covetousness. We will also be looking at the “Thanksgiving” in the liturgy. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Put Christ First In Your Life**

You can easily think of all sorts of examples of sins against these two commandments. For example the boys and girls sitting in juvenile court on charges of shoplifting. People in jail on sentence for robbery and murder all because they coveted something that did not belong to them. They thought that they would obtain a comfortable bank balance but are now in jail.

Then you may think of the finer forms of covetousness. For example people in a Christian congregation who work so long and so hard at work that they seldom go to church. Mothers who have taken a job where there was no real need to, with resultant neglect of their children and their homes.

You may think of the young and the not-so-young who have indulged some forbidden love and are seen in the house of God no more. Then there are those

people who are married to drink, or an ungodly spouse, or money, instead of to the bride of Christ.

The saddest sight in all the world is the situation of those *“who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”*<sup>1</sup> but have now fallen away from the Christ they promised to follow and serve.

The *“cares, riches, and pleasures of life,”*<sup>2</sup> have choked the growth that once was so promising. Things and people have got in between immortal souls and Christ. The end of such people, unless like the prodigal son they come back home, is eternal death.

No more tragic record can be made of a human life than this, and in order that a similar one may not be written of us, this sermon is preached. How are things of this world to be regarded? Have we a right to them? Do we earn them? Are they to be taken out of the hands of others? Or are they gifts of God to be accepted gratefully and to be used to His praise rather than for our own satisfaction?

The Christian answer is, of course, the latter one. It is an answer which is supported by reason as well as revelation. *“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”* You do not need to be a Christian to see that clear truth. We enjoy what is here for the time that we are here, and not a moment longer.

If, then, our connection with things is temporary, it follows that our evaluation of them ought not be too high — certainly not as high as our appreciation for what is eternal.

There is hardly any comparison between the two. But because of our lack of a true sense of values, it is necessary that we are reminded over and over again to lay up *“treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*<sup>3</sup>

A large part of original sin consists in seeing no further than the plane of sense. Adam and Eve sinned in this way. They saw that the forbidden fruit was *“good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make*

*one wise.*”<sup>4</sup> This was a purely physical drive which excluded all thought of their intimate relationship with God and its certain separation through sin.

It was not long before they discovered that no fruit was worth their exclusion from Paradise. Today we have more difficulty in learning that lesson, perhaps because we have never been in Paradise. We don't understand what we have lost, nor do we appreciate what Christ has regained for us.

Appreciation must come by faith, not sight, and faith is not an easy virtue for people who are imprisoned by sense. We like to see the object of our affection, which is why so few people labour for *“the things that are not seen and eternal.”*<sup>5</sup> What is beyond sight is unreal to us; but it is only to us that it seems like this because actual reality lies in the realm of the spirit.

We must take God's Word for that. *“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*<sup>6</sup> Those of us who hope and believe know that no satisfaction is to be derived from the possession of things that do not last, but only in the enduring things of Christ.

That is why the possession of these eternal things comes first with us. And that is why the devil's chief concern is to get us to put them further down on the list. His methods are most subtle and insidious.

He first approaches the adolescent with a proposal in which there is no apparent harm. He makes an offer of a part-time job or maybe the inclusion in a sporting team. Who can object to that? But it is on Sundays when Church is on. So he begins to miss Church.

Therefore a part of Christ is cut out of his time and interest and so out of the heart, to make room for something of seemingly greater importance to them.

So one thing after another is let go, until in many a case, there is no more church attendance or Communion or service to God or man. Sometimes the influence of the parents is strong enough to prevent this final result, but not always — even when the parents are pious Christians.

The point is that the principle is all wrong. They think that religion is a luxury which can be taken aboard the wagon of life, if there is room for it, and that religion must be accommodated to everything else, for the chief object of life

is to be prosperous, well-socialised or sported, and therefore everything else is secondary.

However God's Word, the New Testament, says the exact opposite. It says in John 6:27, <sup>27</sup> *“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life.”* It also says, <sup>49</sup> *“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.”* <sup>50</sup> *“This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.”*<sup>7</sup> We read in Matthew 6:33, <sup>33</sup> *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”* The New Testament puts Christ on the throne, not money.

What is true of the teen-age group is also true of everybody else. It is easy for anyone to put other things before worship and church attendance.

The church has the utmost sympathy for the worker who is confronted with a disagreeable alternative, if he wishes to fulfil his obligations as a member of the Christian church, but the plain truth is that nothing is worth a separation between ourselves and our Saviour.

Christ is either the Chief Thing, or in the course of time He becomes nothing. If Christ is not worth the sacrifice of a job or inclusion in a sporting team, He is not the Lord of our life. Don't deceive yourself that a temporary transgression of the Third Commandment will not become permanent. The devil will see to it that it will.

One day his victim will realise that what he once believed in, he believes no more. The Christ to whom he was once so close is now a Stranger. And the congregation of God's friends, once so delightful, is now uncomfortable and stuffy. And so it goes. It is important to halt the process before it has advanced too far.

## **2. The Proper Attitude Is To Give Thanks To God**

The secret of the proper attitude towards the things of this world is given to us in the Holy Communion. When the distribution is ended, all who have come to the altar have received a great gift from God, undeserved and unearned — a bestowal of pure grace.

For this they give thanks, first in the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon's song of praise when he held the infant Christ in his arms, and then in the post-Communion

prayer, introduced by the versicle *“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. Hallelujah!”*

It is proper and right to do this. The sign and seal of salvation has been given to us, and we would be unresponsive people indeed, if we did not express our gratitude to God for it.

This, then, is to be the approach to everything which God permits us to enjoy — a philosophy which is not in the modern idiom. We are not a people that goes about being grateful for things. It is assumed by too many of us that the world belongs to us, to be possessed by us, to waste, to hoard or to fight for, as we are inclined.

Others, who are more weary of the competition of life, try to escape from it through drink or drugs or a philosophy which has no connection with reality. Both attitudes are utterly futile. We can neither run away from things as they are, nor, being occupied with them, can we misuse them without being hurt.

If we follow the latter course, we only impoverish ourselves. That is what mankind is doing today, illustrating again the words of Scripture as recorded in James 4:1-2, *<sup>1</sup> Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

We do not ask because we have no sense of dependence. We think of acquiring from one another but not of receiving from God. We want things for ourselves but not for the common good or for the glory of Christ. We fight great wars for the resources of the earth, and in the end we find ourselves destitute. If it were not so tragic, it would be ridiculous.

We all have wars without and conflicts within, until we learn that it is not freedom from want that we must have - but freedom from wanting, freedom from an unnecessary appetite, freedom from covetousness.

What, then, is to be our attitude towards the things of this world, seeing that no amount of them, however great, will give us peace? It will not do to cry out like the Psalmist, *“Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, I would wander far off, And remain in the wilderness.”<sup>8</sup>* There

is no escape from reality without cowardice. The teaching of our Lord does not permit us to run away, and no possible situation will ever permit us to escape from ourselves.

We may not be of the world, but we are in the world and will have to deal with it as best we can. Nor is it, dealing with it to indulge in all sorts of wishful thinking, as many of us are inclined to do. Human nature remains unchanged. Any plan for the future which ignores the fact of original sin is an escape mechanism. It is a vain attempt to run away from reality.

The pointer must be turned in the direction of the truth shown forth by the Lord's Supper. There is the memorial of an action that was no running away from life's unpleasant reality but rather a running to meet it and dealing with it in the most forthright way imaginable.

Our Lord certainly was not one who shut His eyes to things as they were. It was precisely because He recognised evil when He saw it and knew it to be a hellish fact that He went to the cross to redeem us from it. It is we who are the sentimentalists, not He, when we lull ourselves into a feeling of security with our idealistic dreams of a better world.

Jesus said that there would be no better world unless men made their peace with God through Him and therefore with one another. That is how matters stand, quite simply. Mankind may either follow Jesus or end up in hell for all eternity. Here is the realism of Christianity. This is the stern alternative which the church must press upon a bewildered race.

That is one thing which the Lord's Supper teaches. It is a grappling with the reality of evil at its root. The other is that in so doing one must never be mastered by things and forces. You must remain in control. Our Lord did this. There has been no other figure of history so cruelly pressed and driven by the powers of evil, but throughout His most difficult hours of stress He continued to be Lord.

That was because the things of this world — even His own life — were not so precious to Him that they had to be possessed at the cost of disobedience to the Father's divine will.

Jesus was deliberately poor all His life. His saying "*the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*"<sup>9</sup> was not a complaint but a pointing out of an

illustration of the esteem in which all people ought to hold property. No one ever so much as accused Him of being out to get what He could. He desired nothing for Himself, only that He might be a servant and that He might give His life a ransom for many.

Even today there are few people indeed who have a word to say against Him. They know, even if they do not act on their knowledge, that Jesus loved them and gave Himself for them. You and I, of all people, should know it well.

We come here to feed on the body which He gave for us and the blood which He shed for our redemption — history's great act of sacrifice, a thing totally removed from covetousness. The sacrament proclaims to us that our Saviour lived not for things, but for love.

That is a way of life which for us, as for Him, is fraught with peril and pain. Jesus said in John 16:33, *In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* And this last point brings us to the real meaning of Christianity.

Christ is only secondarily an Example to us. He is primarily the Gospel of a victory already accomplished. Christ has overcome the world, and the fruits of His triumph are transmitted to us as a gift. We receive Holy Communion without money and without price, and with it is the forgiveness of sins, the life, and the salvation about which Luther speaks in the Catechism.

The sacrament thus preaches to us that our mastery over life is not a thing to be fought for and won at the cost of blood, sweat and tears. Rather it is bestowed by Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We come to the Father through Him. We take His way, we believe His truth, we live His life. All this is given to us. We receive it, act on it, and so appropriate the blessing which He has promised.

It is precisely because all that needs to be done has already been done by Christ and in Christ, that we utter our prayer of thanksgiving after Communion, and indeed at all times. For *“this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith”*<sup>10</sup> — faith in the broken body and the shed blood of the Son of God, by which we are redeemed and set free.

No subscriber to this truth is a slave to earthly things. He sets his affections on the things that are above as we read in Colossians 3:1-2, *‘If then you were*

*raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

If you want to dream a dream which is reality, think of these word of God in the book of Revelation, *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”<sup>11</sup> ... “I will grant to sit with Me on My throne <sup>12</sup> ... “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.<sup>13</sup> ... I will give to eat from the tree of life.<sup>14</sup> ... I will give you the crown of life.<sup>15</sup>*

The wonder of this is expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:9, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

These things are ours. We lay hold on them in Holy Communion, which is at once the assurance of our present possession, and the promise of even better things to come. Covet earnestly these gifts and do not fail to thank God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 6:4-5

<sup>2</sup> Luke 8:14

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:20

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 11:1

<sup>7</sup> John 6:49-50

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 55:6

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 8:20

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 5:4

<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21:7

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 3:21

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 3:12

<sup>14</sup> Revelation 2:7

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 2:10