

## “THE TENTH COMMANDMENT”

Text: Exodus 20:17

By Pastor YAU

September 27, 2015.

### INTRODUCTION:

1) Definition of covetousness: According to the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary*, to *covet* is to desire, to long or to crave for things that belong to others. Some may defend the right of anyone to desire or to long or crave for things he wants to have. But I am sure no one will defend anyone who craves to have something that belongs to another person. We will talk about the merits and limits of desire later; but here, let us talk about the wrongs that come from desiring something that isn't yours.

2) The concluding Commandment: Many of the commandments in this study forbid God's people from committing wrong in actions, here the concluding Commandment deals with the wrongs on our inside, our thoughts, our desire. Most of us agree that actions mostly come from the desires on the inside. If we can align or control our thoughts and desires with the commands of God, chances are we may do more rights than wrongs in our everyday life.

The Tenth Commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17)

SOME OF THE GOOD DESIRES: Desires are created by God for us to pursue good things. Here are a few things the Bible sanctions for God's people to pursue in life:

1) The desire to pursue good: The desire to pursue good or good things is universal. This started when God created the universe and all things in it, the Bible says: “God saw all that he had created, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Before sin entered into human life, all that were there, including the first couple were innocent and good. Even after the Great Fall, there still is a trace of knowledge and desire to be good or to do good. The problem isn't that we don't know what is good, but we are unable to do that like Paul says in Romans 7. The desire to do good is evident in our everyday life: We want to do good in things we do at school, at work, etc.

2) The desire to know the truth: Throughout history, many people desire to know the truth, truth about God, self, others, purpose and so on. The Bible encourages us to pursue truth: “The ordinances of the Lord are sure and alto-

gether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold.” (Psalm 19:9-10) Many wise people pursued to know the truth on their own and they became philosophers, religious founders. This is so because they did it on their own without the divine guidance and inspiration from God. Even in our everyday life, we all want to know truth of things, people, reason and right from wrong, good from bad. That's why human courts demand that all witnesses must tell “the truth, all the truth, nothing but the truth.”

3) We desire to have gifts or skills: From our very early days of life, we learn to acquire skills: to walk, to talk, to do things, make things, to achieve. So we go to schools, take classes, join workshops and training programs. We do all these because we desire to be useful, effective and productive. Besides these, we also want to learn spiritual gifts, to exercise those gifts to bear fruits so our God will be glorified. Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts.” While worldly talents or skills help us to make life more effective, spiritual gifts help us to bear fruits, to serve God and people, to be effective witnesses so others may be saved.

4) We desire to love and be loved: To love and be loved is a beautiful nature of being human. The Bible teaches us so much about love: both to love and to be loved. The Bible told us God loves us, (John 3:16) and he desires we love Him back, (Matt 22:37) and we are to love one another. (John 13:34) The desire to love reflects the nature of God that He sent his Son to die on the cross to save us from our sins. The Bible also says, “By this (love one another) all men will know you are my disciples.” (13:35) Love is also the best catalyst in human relationship, expressed fully in 1 Corinthians 13.

SOME OF THE EVIL DESIRES: We call them evil because. . .

1) They rebel against God's commands: In the Ten Commandments, God shows us some of the things we should never do nor desire to do. Very early in the Bible, God set rules on things man should not do: Like not eating the forbidden fruit. (Genesis 2:16-17) Anything that rebels against God's law is evil in nature. In this last Commandment, God forbids any to covet or crave things that belong to others. While the Bible can't list all the things God forbids us from doing, but there are enough principles and guidelines in the Bible by which we know if they are against the law of God.

2) They sprout from the evil of greed: In most cases, when we covet things belong to others, they aren't things that we must have to survive, but we want more and better, and that is from the evil nature of greed. Jesus taught us to

pray for our daily bread, our everyday needs, not to pray for things to satisfy your insatiable desires. Paul advised Timothy to admonish those who were never satisfied with what they have, “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” (1 Timothy 6:9-10) Greed is a black hole and you can never fill it up.

3) They are brutal and shameful: In the case of King Ahab who schemed to take over the vineyard of Naboth, an inheritance of his ancestors, that is an act of brutality. (1 Kings 20) In the case of King David forced himself on the wife of his faithful soldier, Uriah, it was shameful to do that as a king. When those who are rich and powerful crave on things of others, using their power and position to take something from the weak and powerless, that is evil.

4) They violate the rights of others: When someone craves, schemes to take things that belong to others, he violates the right of ownership of the others. In a society governed both by moral and civil laws, taking things from others by tricks, force or scheme is a violation of both moral and civil laws and that is evil. No one has the right to take things at the expense of others.

### STRATEGIES TO COMBAT GREED:

1) Putting our trust in God's hand: When Isaac questioned his father Abraham about the lamb they need to offer a sacrifice, Abraham replied: “God himself will provide.” (Gen 22:8) And God did. Jesus encouraged us to trust God to provide all our needs of life, “Do not worry, saying: What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? For the Pagans run after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” (Matt 6:31-32) We become worry when we put the trust of our needs on ourselves or others or the environment, the government, the global economy, our job, our savings and things we can see and hold. We become worry because all these are like shifting sands and shaking grounds. What in the world can we trust better than God who created us, saved us and provides for us?

2) Enjoy in the provisions of God: God may not give all that we want, but he will always provide what we need so we can relax and enjoy life. The Bible tells us, “When God gives a man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work---this is a gift of God.” (Eccl 5:19) Whatever we have isn't the fruits of our work, but the gift of God. When God allowed Job to lose everything of his life, he humbly recognized God's sovereignty, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will

depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” (Job 1:21)

3) Be content in all conditions: No life is a smooth sailing all the time. We go through life in ways we can never expect nor control. So we need to learn from Paul on how to live with contentment in whatever condition it may be. He said, “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 things through Him who gives me strength.” (Phil 4:12-13) Contentment is a great virtue to live for but not something we can achieve on our own. Paul said he could do that because God gave him strength.

4) Aiming for a higher ground: As children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, it is important that we know why we are here and where are we going. We are here to witness for Christ so others may know him and believe in him and be saved. The ultimate goal of our lives here isn't to gain the whole world but to bring the world back to God. All things here in this world are fleeting and is temporary in nature. Whatever one may achieve or accumulate here, he can't bring anything to heaven once his life journey is done. We have a better and higher goal of life. Paul encourages us in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” Read history and look at all people around you and you can see how true this is.

### WHAT SHALL WE DO THEN?

1) Live like the righteous: In the Bible, especially in the O. T., those who lived by the law of God were ascribed as the righteous, and God promised to grant them blessings. Psalm 1:1-3 states God's blessing on these people: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of the sinners or sit in the seat of the mockers. But his delight is in the law of the law and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” So, follow God's law.

2) Good trees bear good fruits: In closing his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit, and a bad tree can not bear good fruit. Therefore, by their fruit, you will recognize them.” (Matt 7:17, 20) So, be grafted in Jesus and be good trees so you may bear good fruit and be recognized as true disciples of Jesus.

