

The Hidden Heart *The Ten Commandments*

Exodus 20:1-17 (preached on March 30, 2008)

Story Summary: As The Israelites are gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, trembling in fear as the mountain quakes and thunders. God has come down. Moses, serving as the mediator between God and his people, has been called up to the top of the mountain to meet with God. After the Lord reminds Israel of their story — their deliverance from Egypt and the favor he has shown them — he gives them the terms of his covenant, the law.

READ Exodus 20:1-17 (focusing on v. 17; *NT READING: Luke 12:13-21*)

REFLECT

1. Now that the series on the Ten Commandments is finished, do you have a different view of the commands? How do you look on the commandments' "deep and wide" perspective on God's moral law? Has the study of the commands expanded your understanding of your specific sins?
2. How would you respond to a friend who asks you why the Bible includes these commands? "Didn't the Israelites already know not to steal, lie or commit adultery? So, why make such a big deal about it?"
3. Christopher Hitchens has written a book arguing against the existence of God. When asked about the tenth commandment in an interview, he said:
That is a particularly horrible crime of dictatorship, namely the crime of thought. It says you can't even think about this. To say you're not allowed to steal your neighbor's possessions—including his wife—that's one thing. But to say you're not allowed to envy your neighbor is absurd. It's impossible. And the spirit of envy can lead to ambition and innovation and initiative. I would say that's an immoral commandment.
How would you respond to Hitchens' complaint?
4. *We can't understand the law of God without understanding the story of God.* What story do we need to remind ourselves of? What story or stories do you find helpful to tell yourself?

5. When you look into your heart, what is it that you secretly covet? Even if you aren't willing to admit it to others in your community group, are you willing to admit it to yourself? Does the fact that God knows what it is you covet have any impact on your covetousness?

6. *Psalm 73, penned by Asaph, is described as a "Confession of a Coveter." Asaph was "envious of the arrogant" and complained that "All in vain have I kept my heart clean." But then there is a change in his attitude in verse 23: "...until I went in to the sanctuary of God," and he ends his Psalm with "But for me it is good to be near God/ I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works."* This verse notes the point where Asaph goes from isolation into community. What is it about community (church) that works to eliminate coveting?

7. *Coveting is fantasizing for a life other than the one we've been given.* When you think of your "ideal life," what kind of life is it? Why is it damaging to fantasize about an ideal life? Do you think there is a difference between wanting a better life (better job, better house, better health, etc.) and wanting an ideal life?

8. *Paul writes in Philippians 4, "for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 everything through him who gives me strength."* What do you think the secret was that Paul learned? Do you think "peace" is the same as "contentment" (Phil. 4:7)? What is the connection between "contentment" and the way our culture confuses wants and needs? Give some examples of the "wants" that have become "needs."

9. What is the connection between the first commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me") and the tenth commandment? Between idolatry and covetousness? How does our view of God influence our view of our circumstances? (Or put another way, does theology influence how we live?)