



# Keeping It Simple

The 10<sup>th</sup> Word

September 3, 2023

Prelude – My Heart Alone by Colorvault

Welcome/Announcements \_\_\_\_\_

## CALL TO WORSHIP | Psalm 73:1-17, 21-25

No doubt about it! God is good— good to good people, good to the good-hearted. But I nearly missed it, missed seeing his goodness. I was looking the other way, looking up to the people at the top, **envying** the wicked who have it made, who have nothing to worry about, not a care in the whole wide world.

Pretentious with arrogance, they wear the latest fashions in violence, pampered and overfed, decked out in silk bows of silliness. They jeer, using words to kill; they bully their way with words. They're full of hot air, loudmouths disturbing the peace.

People actually listen to them—can you believe it? Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words. What's going on here? Is God out to lunch? Nobody's tending the store. The wicked get by with everything; they have it made, piling up riches. I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me?

A long run of bad luck, that's what— a slap in the face every time I walk out the door.

**If I'd have given in and talked like this, I would have betrayed your dear children.** Still, when I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache ... Until I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I saw the whole picture:

When I was beleaguered and bitter, **totally consumed by envy**, I was totally ignorant, a dumb ox in your very presence. I'm still in your presence, but you've taken my hand. You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then you bless me. You're all I want in heaven! You're all I want on earth!

Song #1 – Good God by Mission House

Song #2 – Always With Me by iamson, Paul Zach

Dismiss Kids

## PRE-SERMON READING | Exodus 20:17

**You shall not covet** your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or **anything that is your neighbor's.** (Exodus 20:17)

## SERMON |

“Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, **and fight for it deep inside yourselves.** You **lust** for what you don’t have and are willing to kill to get it. You **yearn** for what isn’t yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it.” (James 4:1-2)

That’s how one translation has James opening his fourth chapter. **At the heart of the quarrels between each other is a conflict within us: a lust, a yearning, a desire willing to expense—to pay the price, whether things, people, even ourselves—for something that belongs to someone else.** That’s what our scriptures mean when they use the word covet.

If we thought the final of our Ten Words would be an afterthought or perhaps a mere summary of the things already stated, it is not. Once again, the Ten Words reveal the essential nature of life together good, by disclosing what makes it not. And as James elaborated:

What causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, **that your passions are at war within you?** You desire and do not have, so you murder. **You covet and cannot obtain,** so you fight and quarrel. (James 4:1-2)

While each of the Ten Words presents a unique tension in our daily engagement with their essential nature, as we’ve discussed, the final word might stand out as unique among the unique. At least when it comes to the six words regarding our relating to one another, no coveting is perhaps the most overtly dismissed, practically misused, and universally pervasive.

Nearly every culture in human history across the entirety of the face of the earth has, in some explicit fashion, codified laws relating to the previous five words. Laws that require honoring authority, not killing, not breaking covenant/contract, not stealing, and not lying. Yet, no society I am aware of has ever set down laws governing desire, including the Jewish culture.

Ironically, unlike the words preceding, there are no Levitical precepts, no civil regulations with punishments assigned for the Tenth Word. There are scriptures similar to the command spoken, like in Deuteronomy 7, when God’s people are told to utterly destroy the idols of other nations in the land of promise, then:

“Thou shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them...lest you be ensnared by it...” (Deuteronomy 7:25).

There are also observations similar to the one James made, tracing the heart of our wicked/hurtful/violent actions to coveting, like this one from Micah,

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. (Micah 2:1-2)

There are also words of wisdom that warn of the trouble stemming from coveting, such as these from Proverbs:

The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are **taken captive by their lust.** (Proverbs 11:6)

The **desire** of the sluggard **kills him**, for his hands refuse to labor. All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back. (Proverbs 21:25-26)

But perhaps the most revealing of the Tenth Word's twisted abandon is found in Ezekiel 33. Here, the "son of man" has been sent to prophesy that God is ending His people's breaking of covenant, letting them have what they have chosen over a long period of in-fidelity: a life free from Him but which is actually enslavement to someone else. However, as God said through His prophet, there is no pleasure in this separation. God's only desire is for those He loves and has been faithful to, to turn back, to not die, but to live and live whole and holy with Him again. While the mixture of pointing out the brokenness of the community and the heart of the Father compels the people to listen, there is a more subversive force driving their actions and inactions, or so God reveals to His prophet.

As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another...'Come, and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as *my* people, and **they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their own covetousness.**

Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. (Ezekiel 33:30-32)

While the people were moved by the warning and invitation of God, even believing that both the warning against what leads to death and revelation of what and who leads to life, **they acted not with reason, nor in faith, but from covetous desire.** No matter how clearly they could see nor how fervently they believed in their brokenness and God's goodness, they could not act in accordance. And should we fail to appreciate the ubiquity of Ezekiel's experience, we need only listen to what Paul says about his history with the Tenth Word. Paul, writing to the faith family of Rome, many of whom were using the law to inhibit life rather than, as we've seen throughout the series, free and expand life, says:

The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behavior would be mostly guesswork. **Apart from the succinct, surgical command, "You shall not covet," I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it.** (Romans 7:7-8)

Of all the commands, why does Paul choose this one as an example of missing the mark of the Ten Words, missing their heart and the life which they were meant to aid God's people in building? Perhaps, like us, coveting is so "natural" that we dismiss it or "dress it up" as righteous judgmentalism (more on that in a moment).

While we can, by all outward accounts, keep the first nine words to some degree of success as the Pharisees at the turn of the ages so demonstrated, the final word is inescapable; eventually, our desire for something that is not ours, that is someone else's, leads to war within and quarrels between. Eventually, we will risk violence and death (not usually physical, but undoubtedly relational, psychological, emotional, even economic) of something or someone, including ourselves, to get what we covet. Eventually, we end up like the people in Ezekeil's prophecy, who love what the scriptures (and pastors and prophets) are saying but are unable to live free in the truth because the force that holds our hearts is a yearning for something that is not ours.

We cannot escape desire, but we can capitalize on it. This is one reason why the Tenth Word has been so readily dismissed and universally exploited throughout the centuries.

Today, we live in a world literally built on the fact that wanting what is not already ours is the strongest motivator to work and spend. This is especially true if the thing we desire is shown to belong to someone else of stature, fame, beauty, power, or in an ideal image of the life we desire. Without a drive to have what we do not, *and more specifically*, what another already has, there would be no advertising industry, no social influences (perhaps even media!), certainly a reduced debt industry and maybe even a less divisive educational and political environment. Nearly every popup, commercial, mailer, post, and attempt at persuasion is banking on our inability not to covet.

Now, that does not mean that everything promoted or sold or constructed is bad. Indeed, there are more than a few frivolous things produced—both products and ideas manufactured—and sold in ways that prohibit flourishing—of which I am undoubtedly guilty of buying and buying into. But, remember, we are made to work, to craft, and build a world good. And, so much more of what we work for and produce (whether a product or a service) is good and for the good.

Unfortunately, because the Tenth Word is so overtly dismissed and universally invasive, our faith's history has used the Tenth Word to make condemning judgments.

Our faith heritage is full of those who condemn things. They read the Tenth Word and somehow presume the objects' names (houses, spouses, servants/employees, animals/resources, etc.) are themselves the source of our passion. And so, they exhort abandoning things and condemn the possession of things. Ironically enough, when God's people were freed from their enslavement to Egypt, they were gifted things (practical and not so) to take with them into a land that would be their possession.

Or, if things were not the ire of the pious, then desire became the “thing” we are to do away with. Objects and ideas are only vessels of desire, so its argued. Therefore, we need only suffocate desire and discipline our hearts to long for nothing in this life but God to live faithfully. But we are made to desire, to long for the whole and holy in our lives here and now and not just forever. Plus, you can no more make someone not desire by command as you can make someone honor by order or love by demand. Being a parent, I've learned that such efforts are futile, for demand cannot soften or open or satisfy a heart—though it can harden it.

Ultimately, and this is the real problem that James speaks of, **our judging of things and desires becomes inseparable from our judging of others**—those who have things and desires we consider too much or the wrong ones, those who do not give up things and desires as readily as we might. Much of our religious judgmentalism is truthfully, as Paul said, covetousness dressed up.

The Tenth Word is not a prohibition against things or desire **but life disconnected from delight**. Remember what \_\_\_\_ read for us to begin our gathering? Listen if you can see what has the psalmist all worked up and what/where the solution, the peace and perspective, is found.

No doubt about it! God is good— good to good people, good to the good-hearted. *But I nearly missed it, missed seeing his goodness*. I was looking the other way, looking up to the people at the top, **envying** the wicked who have it made, who have nothing to worry about, not a care in the whole wide world.

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**I've been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me?** A long run of bad luck, that's what— a slap in the face every time I walk out the door.

*If I'd have given in and talked like this, I would have betrayed your dear children*. Still, when I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache ... **Until I entered the sanctuary of God**. Then I saw the whole picture:

When I was *beleaguered and bitter, totally consumed by envy*, I was **totally ignorant**, a dumb ox in your very presence. *I'm still in your presence, but you've taken my hand*. You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then you bless me [receive me to your glory]. (Psalm 73:13-17, 21-24)

The psalmist says that what caused him to quarrel with others—those who had—was really the war within of reason (what he knew, “What is going on?” this isn't how it is supposed to be) and faith (what he believed, that God is good to the pure, clear-hearted) against his envy of what others had, against the covetous in his heart.

When we want what others have, like Asaph, David's worship leader who wrote Psalm 73, attests, usually it's from a place of envy, judgmental jealousy. It comes from a place of feeling like they have and we do not (whoever they are, and usually the “they” are the quickly labeled wicked). We feel like our way of living with God, and others does not work for our benefit, and so we are “totally consumed by that envy,” that longing, that lust and are like senseless animals, oxen, wild beasts under the control of instinct, not reason or even faith. And so, what we want turns from a longing to a war of trust within and quarrels between.

What happens when desire is disconnected from delight is that what we desire turns into what we demand, what we feel entitled to, all the while keeping us from **seeing the whole picture: the fleetingness of life lived for someone else's life**. A picture we only see in worship in a place of delight:

when I tried to figure it out, all I got was a splitting headache ... **Until I entered the sanctuary of God**. Then I saw the whole picture (Psalm 73:16-17).

But, if we are not attentive, the end of envy that we see in our worship, in delighting in the faithfulness of God, like the people of faith gathered around Ezekiel, and like Paul who followed in their footsteps, we'll continue to "dress up" our covetousness, rather than trusting our desires to God.

That is why David wrote, in what sounds like both a rebuking response and affirmation of Asaph's psalm:

Fret not yourself because of evil doers; be not **envious** of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like grass and wither like the green herb. **Trust in the LORD**, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness, feed on God's faithfulness. **Delight yourself in the LORD**, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will act. (Psalm 37:1-5)

If you've been around Christ City for a while, you're familiar with this psalm; it's one of my favorites, for it grounds me when I am prone to "dress up" my natural covetousness as a righteous judgment rather than the jealousy it is. And it does so not by demanding that I stop desiring or having things, or that either are necessarily evil, **but by grounding my desire in delighting in the One who delights to give me what my heart truly wants**; if, as the psalmist continues, I'd only:

"Be still (let my heart settle) before the LORD and wait patiently for him.." (Psalm 37:7)

What does a still, settled heart look like? Most commentaries and authors that I've read in preparation for this series and sermon contend that **the Tenth Word not only prohibits coveting but also directs to contentment**. And I'd agree, but I think an explicit nuance is necessary. To be content does not mean not to want something different or something more. Again, our heart desires the good, true, and beautiful, and where those are lacking or not flourishing, we will always want something different—and that's a godly thing.

The Greek word for **content**, which the apostle Paul used in the famous Philippians 4 passage, means being self-sufficient, having sufficiency within, possessing all that you need for life in that moment of life. The Tenth Word prohibits neither desire nor things but yearning for someone else's life. And so, the Tenth Word directs us not to not want or not work for what we want but rather to discover the sufficiency of life, of my life—not someone else's—in God's life. That's what Paul says to the faith family of Philippi,

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (self-sufficient). I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens (empowers) me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

I can do all things through my life in Jesus' life; Jesus' life lived in my life—not your life, not their life, not her life or his life, but my life—wherever I'm taken in life, even if I didn't want or intend to go there; whether I have more than I need or little of it; whether I am hungry for more or fully satisfied—**the secret to facing the desires for and in life good, and not being consumed by them or consuming others in pursuit of them, not allowing them to do violence in or through me, is to let Jesus' contentment (His self-sufficiency) be mine**. The only way to live a life whole and holy, full and forever, happy and complete, is to live **your** life (through all

the ups and downs, highs and lows, difficulties and pleasures) through God for you, God with you, and God in you. Not to want someone else's.

While we might all say "Yes and amen," remember our Father's revelation to the son of man, that our love for what is advocated will not lead to action unless our hearts delight in Him, the life we already have in Him, as we let our hearts settle in His presence: "Be still (let my heart settle) before the LORD and wait patiently for him.." (Psalm 37:7)

## REFLECTION |

Allow the Spirit to examine the heart of your daily actions and attitudes, asking: In what ways are you trying to live another's life?

Let Psalm 37 be Your prayer: I trust you, LORD, and I will do good, for my life is lived in Your faithfulness. I delight in you, LORD, and my desires are Yours. My way is committed to you, LORD; I trust You to empower my life in Jesus' life. Amen.

## COMMUNION INSTRUCTIONS |

Paul would say his letter of freedom to the faith family of Galatia:

For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:19-20)

We know that we can't not covet. We also know that our ability or inability to do so is not our hope. Rather, it is the life and love of Jesus, the grace upon grace we experience because his **body was broken for our brokenness, and his life poured out so ours might be lived in His self-sufficiency.**

PLEASE STAND AND MAKE YOUR WAY DOWN TO RECEIVE THE COMMUNION ELEMENTS.

Song #3 – More Than Anything by All Sons and Daughters

# COMMUNION & TEN WORDS |

His body, broken for our sins. His life poured out as a forever promise that His life is now ours.

Because we abide in truth and the truth frees us to live life whole and holy with God and others, we say together the highlighted Ten Words:

Then God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from...the place of your slavery.

"Have no other gods.

"Make no images to serve.

"No twisting who I AM.

"Sabbath...and work.

"Honor others...especially those to whom you were given.

"Do not take life...protect and care for it.

"Do not break covenant...nurture it.

"Do not steal...steward.

"Do not corrupt judgment...speak truth in love.

"Do not desire another life...delight in your life in God's."

Song #4 – Light of Your Love by Young Oceans

Song #5 – My Worth Is Not in What I Own by The Gettys, Gray Havens

## BENEDICTION | Psalm 37:3-4

As we conclude the day made for us, we enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering that:

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.