

## YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT!

### Concluding the series, Ten Commandments Revisited The Tenth Commandment

Preached by Douglas Norris at the First United Methodist Church, Palo Alto, California  
May 5, 1985 Matthew 7:7-14

You get what you want! Do you doubt that? We are warned about coveting, excessively wanting, because you get what you want. That is the danger. Watch out! Beware! The tenth commandment warns, "You shall not covet." Why? Because you get what you covet. Jesus told us, recorded in the gospel lesson today (Matthew 7:7-8), "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Some of you say, "That doesn't work for me. I ask and do not receive." Or, some say, "I certainly don't get everything I want." Want is not quite the word. Covet is a stronger word, implying an excessive preoccupation with wanting. I am not talking about wanting a new car, or a better job, or a bicycle, or such things. Bob Medearis told me of a young man who approached his father, "Dad, I want a car. I really need a car." The father thought about it and replied, "All right, you may have a car under three conditions. First, get a "B" average this next quarter. Second, read the Bible every day. Third, get a hair cut." A few months later, the son returned. "Dad, here is my report card, and I got a 'B' average." The father was pleased and asked, "Are you reading the Bible every day?" "Oh, yes," the boy replied, "and I really enjoy it. I especially enjoy reading about Jesus. Dad, did you know that Jesus had long hair?" "Yes, son, I realize that, and did you notice that Jesus walked?"

I'm not talking about wanting or coveting things. I'm not talking about the surface level; but deep inside you, the soul level, the heart; deep down inside you where the wants converge into one. I'm talking about the abiding passion in you around which your life is oriented, that to which everything else yields, that to which everything else is but steps, parts of the process that leads to the attainment of your central goal. Perhaps "passion" is a clearer word; that which you passionately want; that which fills your waking thoughts and causes sleepless nights where you toss and turn; the passion which drives you, motivates you, consumes you.

For some people, their passion is to "get even." It possesses them, drives them. For some, their passion is to have power. Probably Adolph Hitler's central want, his passion, was to exercise power. For some, their passion is to fail. They are convinced they aren't much good, so they spend their life proving their inadequacy and inferiority by failing. And they get what they want. For some, it is confusion and chaos, for their center is not focused.

Traditionally, words like "fate" and "predestination" have been used. We look at people, observe repetition, as if they are not in control, and conclude it is their fate. But, perhaps they are getting what they want. They are programmed by their central passion. The life they are living is the life they have asked for. Noel McInnis says it this way:

"O Lord," I prayed, "if only I were somewhere else. I know my life would be much better there." My prayer was answered, but not my expectations. The place was new, but my life was just the same. "O Lord," I prayed, "it must be yet another place where life is better." Soon another

place became my home, but my life was still the same. I continued to pray and kept on moving, seeking out a better life but finding life no different anywhere I went. That was a few years ago. Today you'll find me settled in the better life I sought. I've stopped all my running from place to place, from job to job, from person to person. I knew where to find what I was looking for the day I accepted the fact that everywhere I go, there I am.

His problem was himself. His problem was his soul's desire, his passion, what he deeply wanted; not his place or situation or job or friends. He was getting what he wanted; what he needed to do was face that reality, and change what he wanted.

What is insidious about coveting is that you get what you want. Your life as you now experience it is probably exactly what you have set out to make it. The tenth commandment--"You shall not covet"--is a warning, and the warning is: watch what you covet, what you passionately, single-mindedly pursue, for the danger is you will get it, and realize it is not what you bargained for because it turns to dust.

Look at King David in the eleventh chapter of II Samuel. It reads like a dramatic soap opera, beginning in verse 2, "It happened, late one afternoon when David arose from his couch and was walking upon the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful." The story goes on. David coveted. He had to have her. He was possessed by the desire, consumed by the passion. And he got what he wanted, but it was more than he bargained for. He got what he wanted, but what he got was more than what he wanted! His coveting unleashed a chain of events that ended in tragedy. When he received the shocking news that Bathsheba was going to have a baby, David arranged for Uriah to come home on leave from battle. But Uriah felt guilty about leaving his troops to sleep in the fields, so he wouldn't go home. David then arranged a devious plan. "Send Uriah into battle," he commanded, "and then draw back his support." Uriah was killed, David married Bathsheba, and she gave birth to a boy. Then, Nathan, the prophet, visited King David. Nathan told of two men, one rich with many flocks and herds; the other was poor and only owned one lamb. The lamb became a pet, played with the children, ate with the family. The rich man took the poor man's lamb and prepared a feast. King David, the judge, was angry with the rich man. "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die." Nathan quietly looked David in the eye and said, "You are the man." David was struck with remorse and repentance, but his baby son became ill and died. Watch what you covet, for you get what you want, and often you get more than you want.

Be careful when you want success, status, money, wealth, power, respectability. For these things are idols, and idols turn to dust. They crumble under the pressure of trying to satisfy the deep, yearning desires for fulfillment and meaning. Too much expectation, too much hope, is placed on unworthy idols, and they crumble. They are not good enough for you. Many men have pursued success and achieved it, only to find they lost their wives and children in the process. They sacrificed their families, and the success turned to dust. They reached their goals but missed life. Hitler got his power, but at what price! Hiding in a cave, afraid of plots against his life, his nation in shambles, his dreams turned to dust, he committed suicide. What a price is coveting! In the words of Ecclesiastes (2:11), "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind," like chasing the wind.

Therefore, do not covet, but as Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be yours as well." The psalmist wrote in 73:25, "Whom have I

in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee," and in 42:1-2, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Only God can satisfy the passion of the soul, the drive, the deepest want.

We are not alone. Don't let me leave the impression that we live our lives in isolation, that we want, covet, all by ourselves. God is with us. God is also working in us. God has made you. God loves you, and there is a yearning deep in you for God, for oneness with God. There is a homesickness for God. Fulfilled is the person, whole is the person who wants God. Frustrated is the person who tries to focus his/her life on idols that will turn to dust; when the wants, the coveting, are for things less than God. "My soul thirsts for God." Happy are you when you seek to satisfy the thirst with God. There is still struggle in life. There are still ups and downs. But, there is direction, peace, wholeness.

We have come on a long journey through the Ten Commandments. I believe the main point of the commandments that is still fresh, challenging and valid for us today is that we are people of the covenant. God has chosen to be our God. God has chosen you to be his people. God will love you, call you, make plans for you, lead you into love and eternity. Your response is to accept God's love for you, accept your salvation in Christ, accept your place in God's family, and together, all of us together, live out God's lifestyle on behalf of the world. God did not choose you just for your sake, but for the sake of people around you, and the entire world. God so loved the world that he sent his Son, and called you to be people of the covenant, that the world might see your modeling of God's way, and believe.

The tenth commandment brings us back to the beginning. "You shall have no other gods before me" is the call to let God be # 1 in your life. The tenth commandment strikes at your heart, your deepest commitments, your central focus. Do not covet anything less than Christ, for you get what you want, and what you get will crumble and turn to dust, unless it is God you seek.

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THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

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