

Living Together in God-Glorifying Community

Deuteronomy 5:19-21

Series: *Loving God in Every Way*

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Deuteronomy 5 – Deuteronomy chapter 5.

The story is told of a king who lived long ago in a land far away from here. Like most kings, he was wealthy and well-served by his many servants. His kingdom stretched far and wide, and encompassed a lot of different gods who were worshiped by the various people in his kingdom. A particular part of his kingdom contained some incredibly fertile ground for growing wonderful vineyards and fruits and vegetables. In fact, he had a palace in this fertile valley which allowed him to see the best gardens and vineyards in his land. One day he noticed that there was a particularly wonderful vineyard which just happened to be right next to his palace. Immediately he longed for this vineyard and he started devising a way to get it for himself. Now this king did not need this vineyard – far from it – he had plenty already. But the more he thought about it, the more he was convinced that he needed this particular vineyard.

So, he decided to try to get it the right way. He talked to the man who owned it and told him that he wanted this particular vineyard because it was beside his palace. And in exchange for it, he would give the man a better vineyard somewhere else. Or, if the man preferred he would simply buy it from him. But the man was not interested. How could he dare betray his parents and grandparents and great-grandparents and give up the family vineyard? The king couldn't believe that someone would tell him no. So, he went into his palace and sulked. He was so despondent and depressed that he wouldn't even eat. He just laid in his bed and turned his face toward the wall! So, his wife devised a grand plan to get this vineyard for her husband so that he would be happy once again. She wrote a letter with a wicked plan to the leaders of the city where the man lived. They were to have two men in the city accuse the man of breaking the Law to such an extent that he deserved the death penalty. It was all a complete sham, but it worked. At the appointed time the men accused him of the crime, and he was taken outside the city and stoned to death. And then, guess what? The king came swooping in and took the vineyard because the man was now dead. The thing he so longed to possess was now his, and he thought he would live happily ever after.

If you know your Old Testament, or paid much attention in Sunday School, you just recognized that story as the account of Ahab and Jezebel stealing the vineyard from Naboth through a deceptive miscarriage of justice. It is easy to look at Ahab's wicked actions and compare them to the 10 commandments and then think – I would never! But, unfortunately we are all more like Ahab and Jezebel than we would care to admit. We might not so blatantly break the 8th, 9th, and 10th commandments, but we often break them nonetheless.

We come this morning to the end of the 10 commandments. Remember that they are the heart of the Law of God for His Old Testament people, the nation of Israel. They are like what road signs are to the rules of driving. They give us the really important and always needed core laws for God's people. We will cover the last three together this morning because they are so very similar. Deuteronomy 5:19 says this . . .

The first four commands taught God's people how to relate to Him by loving Him exclusively as their one and only God. The last 6 commands teach God's people how to relate to one another driven by love for one another. If these 10 commands were followed by God's people they would certainly enjoy the greatest joy and peace possible in life in this world. And these last three laws in particular get into the nitty gritty of living life together in a community which honors God and blesses others. Don't steal from one another, don't bear false witness about one another, and don't covet one another's stuff. As we dig into each of these commands we will find that each of them has at their root the exaltation of self to the position of God over another so as to gain something desired that they currently have. In other words, if stealing and lying and coveting go unchecked in the people of God there will be no true worship of God and no true unity underneath God. So, if we, even as the church, are going to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, as it says in Ephesians 4, then we must guard our hearts from these sins in any form.

In order to do that, let's consider each of these commands by diagnosing the sin and then prescribing the cure. And to truly do so, we need to go under the surface and not just deal with the obvious surface symptoms, but get down to the root issue.

I. You Shall Not Steal – vs. 19

- a. The 8th and 9th commandments are pretty straightforward. The 8th commandment is you shall not steal. Stealing is the act of taking something from someone else that is not yours and of which you have no right to take. We immediately think of shoplifting or of burglary, but the Law had in mind the stealing of a person and making him your slave, or the stealing of livestock from your neighbor and making it part of your flock. As this law is further explained in Exodus the penalty was severe for stealing. If you stole a person to sell them into slavery – like what Joseph's brothers did to him – the penalty was capital punishment. In Exodus 22 we are told that the penalty of the law for stealing a sheep or an ox is to pay back four-fold what was taken. This is a serious offense in the eyes of God. And it is such because it elevates my perceived need or want over the clear and obvious ownership of someone else. Theft completely disregards the owner's needs and rights and elevates the one doing the stealing to a level of supreme importance. In theft, nothing matters more than the individual and his or her supposed need or want that is compelling the theft. It is yet another expression of our vicious selfishness of heart which refuses to back down until it gets what it wants.
- b. I don't think any of us in this room are guilty of stealing another person and selling them for profit. I'm guessing we don't even have anyone in the room who has stolen livestock from someone else – though I guess that might be a bit more

likely. But that certainly doesn't mean that we are free and clear of this command. Certainly we have exalted our own self over others around us and taken something that rightfully belonged to them simply because we wanted it. We do this when we are given too much change at the store and don't take it back. We do this when we use something from our employer for personal business when they have not said we could. We do this when we tweak a business deal to a little less than transparent and thereby sweeten our personal payday. We do this when we waste time at work and get paid anyways. We do this when we steal someone else's answer in school and present it as our own on homework, or a quiz, or a test. And the list of potential abuses of this law can go on, but certainly we all see this tendency to exalt self to the point where we are willing to take something from them simply because we wanted it.

- c. So, what is the prescription? If the disease is selfish exaltation which leads to stealing, what then is the antidote? Well, this heart disease left to itself will kill you, so we need a radical cure. Do you remember one of the most famous thieves of all time? When we meet him in the Scriptures he is hanging on an execution stake next to Jesus Christ. He is condemned to die because of his theft and in his dying moments he turned in faith to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus responded - "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." What prescription did this thief need for his grave sin? He needed a Savior outside of himself. He needed one who could take the penalty of his sin in his place and rescue him from spiritual death. He needed a Savior who was not condemned under his own sin. He needed a Savior who could overcome sin and death and hell for him. He needed a Savior who could cure him of his sin disease and give him new life. He needed Jesus. And that is the prescribed cure for all of those who break these 10 commandments. As the Law exposes the depth of our rebellious heart against God we are humbled and broken and hopeless in ourselves. We realize we are law-breakers and are deserving of eternal death. But this is the glory of God's grace and mercy to us. He has provided His Son who lived in perfect obedience to the Law and has given his life under the just judgment of that Law in the place of sinners like you and me. Do you have this new life in Christ? Do you have this cure of the glorious Gospel of grace? Friend, if you are here today and the Law exposes your sickness of heart, but you have never been given the cure of the Gospel, you will die without it! More specifically, you will die without Christ! You must turn from your wicked rebellion against God and look to Jesus Christ as your only hope.
- d. But even if you are in Christ by grace through faith, you still know the tug of your sinful heart to exalt yourself and steal from others. What is the cure? Well, Ephesians 4:28 says it this way - Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Eph. 4:28 ESV)
- e. The grace of Christ trains us to steal no longer, but to put on the new man we are in Christ, and do honest work with our own hands. Stop taking other people's stuff and work hard and work honestly so that you can have your own stuff.

Notice that God expects you to have stuff. It's not bad to have stuff. Having stuff *can be bad* for your soul, but just having it isn't bad in the eyes of God. It's when you love the stuff instead of loving God and loving others. That's why the new man replacement in Ephesians 4 to the old man sinfulness of stealing is to work hard and get your own stuff *so that* you can have something to share with those who have a need. See the beauty of grace at work in us. Instead of exalting self through stealing, we are to work hard so that we can bless others through generosity. Grace turns the sinful heart desire on its head, and makes us into the exact opposite! That is grace's power to heal those who steal.

II. You Shall Not Bear False Witness – vs. 20

- a. How about the 9th commandment? What is the diagnosis of the real sickness there? The command is that you shall not bear false witness. The command is clearly aimed at the legal system established in the Promised Land under the Law. There was to be no conviction at all of a crime unless there was 2 or more eye witnesses. This was really crucial in a society that didn't have surveillance cameras, DNA evidence, or lie detector tests. The accusation of breaking the Law needed to be established on the public testimony of at least 2 people.
- b. So, when someone breaks this 9th commandment, they are capitalizing on someone else under a false accusation so as to gain some advantage. That is what happened with the two men who lied about Naboth in 1 Kings 21. They gained a good standing with the king and probably some financial kickback under the table for lying about Naboth and bringing a false charge. Certainly we are tempted to do this as well. Maybe not in a court of law, but in the everyday course of life we find ourselves tempted to speak evil of someone else, and lie about them to gain some advantage for ourselves. So, the child might bear false witness about his sibling. Maybe he will swear that his brother was the one who made the mess in the bathroom and didn't clean it up, when in reality it was the one lying about who did it. Or maybe the employee is tempted to plant seeds of doubt about other co-workers to the boss by exaggerating things they did or didn't do so that they look better to the boss than the others. The Bible calls this slander, and it is a form of bearing false witness. It is a way to cast doubt about someone else's character in the minds of another. Why do we do this? Because it gains us an advantage in the mind of the person we are speaking to. We gladly build our own reputation upon the rubble of the person's we just tore down. When we slander them we intentionally pass along something we know isn't true, or is very unlikely to be true so that we can look better to others.
- c. This is a close cousin to gossiping. In gossip we share juicy information about someone which may or may not be true. We know that sharing it with is completely unnecessary and uncharitable to the person we are talking about. But we are compelled to pass it along because everybody loves to hear juicy morsels of bad news about others. Like a warm chocolate chip cookie which slides into your belly and makes you feel all warm and fuzzy, so too is a juicy piece of gossip about someone else. At their expense we feel a little bit better about ourselves.

- d. And closely connected to this is how we think about other people and how we judge their motivations. It is so easy to assume the worst from a small bit of information. We get a text from a friend that sends us into orbit because we make all kinds of assumptions about what they mean by what they said, and about why they said what they said. Like looking at one piece of a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle we assume the puzzle is a picture of a whale, when in reality it is a picture of a waterfall. Beloved, this is a subtle, but deadly, form of breaking the 9th commandment. We assume we know what is happening in their life, or what they are thinking, or why they are not communicating, or why they made the decision they did – and we put ourselves in the position of God and we judge them based on the assumptions we have made. And then we open our mouths and we speak evil of them to others when we really have no idea what is really going on with them. This is bearing false witness about them, seizing upon their plight so as to make it advantageous for me. It is the exaltation of self, and it is arrogant pride before God. And I don't need to tell you this, but he hates it!
- e. So, what is the prescription to deal with this vile illness of heart? Well, once again, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You must be born again. Your sinful rebellion against God through bearing of false witness about others is yet more evidence that you need a Savior. Repent and believe!
- f. But for those who are in Christ you must put off the old man who easily breaks this 9th commandment, and you must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And Ephesians 4 once again helps us to know what we should replace this lying and gossiping and slandering with. In verse 29 the text says - Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:29 ESV)
- g. When you are in Christ by grace, then words are no longer weapons used to bludgeon other people to your own benefit. Now words are turned on their head to be servants to bless others. As a follower of Christ you need this verse plastered as a guard over your mouth. Before you talk you should ask – is it corrupting, or will it build up those who hear and those that I talk about? Will it be fitting for the moment? Will it give grace to those who hear me? If it passes these tests then you can know you will not be breaking the 9th commandment. This is grace's cure.

III. You Shall Not Covet – vs. 21

- a. Lastly this morning, let's diagnose the breaking of the 10th commandment, and find the prescription to address this heart illness. As we diagnose this sin issue we must stop and take note of the 10th commandment. It is the only one in this second table which directly addresses a heart sin. You could argue that the 5th commandment does as well, but that honoring quickly gets equated in other texts with obeying. But the 10th commandment is clearly prohibiting something that is hidden in the subtle contours of our hearts. It makes itself known, as we will see, but what is condemned here is the soil of coveting which gives nutrients and life to so many sins. In fact, you could easily make the case that the rest of the 10 commandments have a tap root into the soil of covetousness. False worship,

idolatry, taking God's name in vain, breaking the Sabbath, dishonoring parents, murdering someone else, committing adultery, stealing something, and bearing false witness can all be traced with little difficulty to a covetous heart. So, what does it mean to covet? What is being forbidden here?

b. *Explanation*

- i. Well, maybe the best place to start to answer that question is to say what is not being condemned. It is not always wrong to have desires. God made us with innate desires which are part of being human. He gave us a desire to care for our physical needs and provide for those we love. He gave us a desire to work hard and then to rest. He gave us a desire to be fruitful and multiply. So, a desire, in and of itself is not necessarily wrong. But it can be, and often is.
- ii. Coveting is when our hearts are captured by something that is not ours, or that shouldn't be ours and we determine that we want it and we set ourselves on a course to obtain it. It is the inner desire to have more and more whether or not we truly need it. It is the ungoverned and selfish desires which compel you to seek to gain something. As you will see in the examples given, these desires bubble up from the heart which has set itself against God in rebellion. In coveting, these desires become our god and give birth to all kinds of other sins. That is what Jesus said in Mark 7:21 – that covetousness proceeds from the heart. In Romans 1 Paul explains to us the depravity of our rebellion, and in a long list of sins which prove our depravity he lists covetousness in verse 29. So, when we covet something we are setting our desires on something which is not ours, or which has been explicitly forbidden by God, and this is a wicked expression of making ourselves God.

c. *Examples*

- i. Some examples from the Scriptures of this coveting in the heart would be helpful here. So, just think of Eve in the Garden being tempted by the serpent. The text says in Genesis 3:6 that Eve saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes – that is the same word as what we have in verse 21 for coveting. She looked at the fruit and she set her desires upon it, even though it had been strictly forbidden by God. The text goes on to say that she saw it would make her wise and then she took it and ate. In other words, she was deceived by the Serpent and she allowed her heart to be drawn to desire what God had strictly forbidden.
- ii. This word is also used in Joshua 7 to describe the sin of Achan. You remember his story don't you? The children of Israel were given strict instructions to destroy everything in the city of Jericho, but he took some devoted things back to his tent. When he is exposed by the Spirit of God he confessed and said that he saw the beautiful spoil and he coveted them and took them and then hid them in his tent. He had an unstoppable desire for the very things God had demanded they not take. His eyes told

his heart that he couldn't live without them, even though God had expressly said – you must live without them!

- iii. Then you'll notice in verse 21 that we are told to not covet, and then the second sentence says we are not to desire our neighbor's house, and field, and so on. That is a different Hebrew word, but it obviously has a very similar meaning. The best example of this illicit desire is found in Numbers 11. The children of Israel are between Sinai and the Promised Land and they get a hankering for meat to eat like they used to have in Egypt. The text says in Numbers 11:4 that the rabble among the children of Israel had a strong craving – that's this word for desire in Deuteronomy 5. They demanded meat, and as Psalm 106 says – they put God to the test with their covetous demands. So coveting is this strong desire which is convinced God has not given us something we deserve and so we demand and crave for that thing.
- iv. And then, in Proverbs 6:25 the wise father instructs his son to not desire, or covet, the beauty of the adulteress and to not be captured by her looks. This again is something strictly forbidden by God, but that the father knew the son would be tempted with.
- v. So, these examples help us understand coveting all the more. Coveting can start out with a good and right desire – like the desire to eat something, or the desire to provide material goods for yourself or your family. But then that right desire gets enthroned in our hearts and becomes the god we worship as we demand that we have this thing we now crave. That is coveting.
- vi. Coveting, as we have seen, can also be an illicit and ungodly desire right from square one. So, the desire of Achan as he laid eyes on the riches of Jericho was right from the start a sinful desire because God had strictly prohibited it. Or the young man being addressed in Proverbs is confronted with a desire to pursue a married woman, which is wrong from the starting line. So, coveting can be rooted in a good desire that we have enthroned and are now idolatrous, or coveting can be rooted in a wrong desire that we also enthrone in our hearts and determine to fulfill it.
- vii. Let me just say briefly that there is a lot of talk in the larger Christian world about same-sex attraction. There is a camp that is telling the church at large that if you find yourself same-sex attracted that this is an okay desire in the sense that this is just your burden to bear, but you must not act out on it at all. Well, I am glad they are calling others to not act out on it. But we need to back the train up to the station and admit what the Bible condemns. The desire itself is sinful before the Lord because the desire is contrary to God's command and God's design. Just like the desire or urge to pursue an adulterous relationship is a wrong desire from the very start, so too is this same-sex attraction. They both must be repented of in the desire phase. We must not let those desires rage within us

unchecked believing that as long as I don't act on the desires, I am okay with the Lord. No, the desire itself is dishonoring to the Lord and He offers His great grace and the power of His Spirit to help us put those desires to death inside of us.

d. *Expose*

- i. So, where do we see this in us? Let's expose this sin of covetousness in our own hearts. Let's start with the 10th commandment as it is given. Coveting is hidden in the contours of our heart and can be seen in the self-talk that we let go in our hearts. So, for example, the text says we are not to covet our neighbor's wife. We might think – “wow, she sure is beautiful – why can't my wife be as pretty as her?” Or, “my co-worker is always so attentive to me and cares about me so much more than my spouse.” Or, “would you just look at how friendly her husband is? I wish I could marry someone who is so caring and other's oriented as he is.” These are the seeds of coveting.
- ii. Next it says that you shall not desire your neighbor's house. We might think, “man, I wish our house was as big as theirs. Did you see their TV, and their nice furniture? How do they afford such great stuff?” Or maybe we think, “I hate living in my neighborhood. Maybe I should go on House Hunters and look for the perfect HGTV house.”
- iii. Next the command is to not desire his field. “Wow, did you see his beans? How does he do that? His ground must be so much better than mine!” Or, “I wish I could afford property in the country like they can! I hate living in town.”
- iv. Next the command is to not desire his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. You might think – “why do I have to drive this piece of junk? I am so tired of driving junky cars.” Or, “why do all of my friends get to take awesome vacations? They get to go to Hawaii, and we're lucky if we can get the kids to grandmas!” Or, “I wish I had my friend's parents – they are so much cooler than mine – my parents are just lame!” Or, “why can't I be smart like she is? She aces everything in school and hardly tries.” Or, “how did they get that killer job? I'm stuck in this dead end place with these awful people, and I even did more schooling, and look where it got me.” Or, “my life would be so much easier if I just had her looks.” Or, “school would be so much easier for me if I was as athletic as he is. Why didn't God give me the body and the skills he gave him?” Or, “why couldn't I get a normal family? My siblings are such losers, but their family is so cool!”
- v. You get the idea. And verbalizing it publicly in front of the church exposes its wickedness doesn't it? It is so easy to coddle those thoughts and to nurture that soil of discontentment which quickly gives birth to covetousness. We are going to come back next week to examine some other Scripture texts which show us how this coveting in our heart comes out in our life. So, I just exposed to you how we coddle it in our thoughts

– that’s the starting line. But coveting doesn’t stay there very long. Soon it affects how we live and causes great damage in life. And then we will look at some key texts to help us put this sin to death as we seek to live out this new life we have in Christ.

Conclusion: As we close this morning I want to remind you of Jesus’ words in Mark 4. This is the text where he gives the parable of the sower and the seed and the 4 different types of soils that the seed falls on. The seed is the gospel and the soil is the heart condition of those who receive the gospel. One of the soils is filled with thorns. The seed falls into it and is received and tries to take root, but the thorns soon crowd it out and it proves unfruitful. Jesus says that this is the heart of the one who initially receives the word, but the cares of the world and, listen, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. Oh beloved – this covetousness of heart has the potential to keep you from truly knowing Christ. Many have fallen away from the Lord on account of money and stuff! This is a serious issue that needs a Gospel cure! Let’s pray.