

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Christ our Savior and Lord, Amen.

A kid's Sunday school class was studying the Ten Commandments. As they were ready to discuss the last two, the teacher asked if anyone could tell her what the 9th and 10th commandments were. Little Susie raised her hand, stood tall, and quoted, "Thou shall not take the covers off the neighbor's wife or anything else that belongs to your neighbor." Well, that's close, but not quite. 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... Do you ever complain about your lot in life relative to someone else? Why can he sing like that, and I sound like someone is torturing a duck? Why does that coworker always get the breaks? How come you can't have that marriage, or that inheritance, or that talent, or those looks? When I want what God has given to someone else - I am coveting. We think this is a virtue in our day. We teach our children to covet, to never be satisfied. "Just wait your turn for it," we tell our kids... Almost all advertising is designed to tempt you to covet. When I don't have something I believe I'm entitled to it leaves me feeling bitter or cheated - I am coveting.

Coveting is the catch-all sin and the only one of the ten commandments that involves thoughts instead of actions. I propose that all sin starts with coveting

something we don't have but want to possess. There is no one who is not guilty AND it's obvious! We Lutherans, like our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, believe Coveting is so important we made it into two separate Commandments! Commandments #9 and #10 are basically a restatement of the previous 8. Most other Protestant Denominations lump all coveting into one Command, #10.

I believe we need to have coveting in two commandments because it's at the root of so much evil. Here's what I mean... I violate commandment #1 when I covet God's authority; I want to be a god. I violate commandment #2 when I covet God's glory; I take God's name and use it improperly like it was no more than a disposable napkin. I violate commandment #3 when I covet more stuff than God has already blessed me with, enough is never enough, so I refuse to take even one day of rest each week. I violate #4 when I covet the authority God has placed in my parents and others over me and I refuse to honor them and give them the respect they deserve. I violate #5 when I gossip and dish on other people as if by lowering their value, my value or esteem will be raised. I'm coveting their social ranking. I violate #6 when I dwell on my lusting urges over my neighbor's spouse. I violate commandment #8 when I covet my neighbor's possessions.

It doesn't matter if you lump them all into Commandment ten or divide them up into two separate commands. All of the evangelical catechisms, Lutheran and reformed, see coveting as a summary of the preceding eight commands. Coveting

deals not with the criminal actions of law breakers, but with the heart of every human being. God is not only concerned with our actions, as Jesus explains in the sermon on the mount; God holds us responsible for the motives and intents of the heart. Coveting catches everyone who is slow to realize their sinful condition. Even if you believe you are not guilty of killing because you've never been charged with committing murder in a court of law, coveting raises the stakes to a whole new level. You can, in fact, be guilty under God's Law, even if you've never pulled the trigger or raised the hand against your neighbor. (SLIDE)

According to George Barna in The Barna Report: 1991-92 (Ventura, California: Regal, 1992) most Christians believe they obey the Ten Commandments:

- No other God's - 76%
- Honor parents - 77%
- Do not murder - 93%
- No adultery - 82%
- No theft - 86%
- No False Witnessing – 52%
- No Coveting – 53%

Because we have lost the understanding of law and gospel in our modern society, we have no sense of the urgency of our condition. We believe we are “fine” because we don't know what is expected of us. Let's take a quick survey through the Bible and see where we really stand... (SLIDE)

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies

and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers,^[i] what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Remember that the next time you think you’re a pretty good person... The standard is Godly perfection...

In the book of James (James 2:10) it says, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it... So, even if you haven’t committed a mass shooting, but you watch TV on a device that pirates copyrighted movies, you’re guilty of breaking the entire law. Remember the standard we’re being held to is perfection...

It seems to me nobody is guiltless under the weight of God’s law. This is bad news for those who want to believe they live a pretty good life and deserve to go to heaven when they die... No, you’re just as guilty in the eyes of God as I am or as the shooter in Texas who killed all those elementary children... I can hear the objections already... Pastor Mel, if we’re all guilty and deserve nothing but eternal suffering, what hope do we have? What must we do to get back into God’s grace? For those who, maybe for the first time, have heard the truth about where

they stand under the eternal judgment of God, do not fall into despair here's your good news...

In the Book of Romans, chapter 5 Saint Paul says, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Here's the big take away for today and for the last four weeks that we've focused on the Ten Commandments: the law is rightly carved in stone - it is impossibly hard. We all fall short of the standard God has set for us, Godly perfection... To the guilty, for those who still haven't gotten the Word, that's every single one of us and all other people, I repeat the Words of Jesus, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is near!" To the innocent I say go back and listen to the beginning of this sermon as well as the last three before it again.

How great is our need; how great is our Jesus! The truly Good News is that Jesus has promised to be with us until the end of the age. Jesus has covered our imperfections, our guilt, our shame with his blood and with His Righteousness. That means we are set free from that which we deserve, eternal punishment, and

given new life. I'm going to use an example from Harry Potter. He hid from his enemies by hiding under an "Invisibility Cloak." When he wore the cloak his enemies couldn't see him and he was able to accomplish his goal. We wear the righteousness of Jesus as our cloak and when we trust in Jesus and the power of his promises all our guilt and sin become invisible. In fact, God says we are separated from our sin as far as the east is from the west and God remembers our sin no more. Just how far apart is the east from the west? I'm going to say it's about that far... (Raise arms like Jesus did when he was on the cross...)

May these Ten Commandments force you to know your true standing under God's Law. May your guilt bring you to realize your need for something more than your own good works to redeem yourself from sin death and the devil. May the weight of the Law's demand for Godly Perfection drive you straight into the arms of your loving and forgiving Savior. His name is Jesus and He is all you will ever need! Amen. I'd like to close this sermon with a short video to help us remember the freedom we celebrate this weekend of Independence Day. Our freedom is in and comes from Jesus Christ and to Him be all the Honor and Glory, Amen. (Video)