# A Sermon Rev. Thomas V. Abbott 4/7/19

**"Do Not Covet"**

**Scripture Passages: 1) Exodus 20:17-22**

**2) James 4:1-3**

**3) Matthew 5:17-20**

**God’s Gift:** As you know, today we come to the end of our journey through the Ten Commandments. Next week we begin our journey through Holy Week. Through this study of the Ten Commandments I have been referring to the commandments as a gift, from God, to us.

In our world, where we want to be free from laws, the idea of the Ten Commandments as a gift can seem odd, wrong, ridiculous. We truly have to make a paradigm shift in our brain, if we are going to embrace the Ten Commandments as a gift from God that will bless our lives and our relationships, our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. Human laws may not always be a gift, but God’s laws are a gift.

**Reverent Awe:** After reading about the Tenth Commandment, which we will return to in a moment, we read this: “All the people, experiencing the thunder and lightning, the trumpet blast and the smoking mountain, were afraid—they pulled back and stood at a distance. They said to Moses, ‘You speak to us and we’ll listen, but don’t have God speak to us or we’ll die.”

In this passage the author attempts to paint a picture of the power of God, the glory of God, the might of God. The author attempts to remind us that if we truly believe in God, then God is an entirely different kind of being than you and I. We are not God. We know that in our heads, but we tend to live our lives as if we are God, if we are the ones in control, that we are the ones with the power, that we are the ones with the wisdom.

In our minds we may imagine that when we walk into a room that all the other people in the room experience lightning and trumpet blasts and smoking mountains. I hate to break the news to you, but that is only happening in your mind.

Friends we are not God. We do not have the wisdom of God. If we believe God gave humanity the Ten Commandments as a gift, then don’t you think it would be smart to embrace the commandments, to pursue living our lives under the guidance of the commandments? Don’t you think it would be in our best interest and the best interest of the communities in which we live to embrace the Ten Commandments as a gift for our lives?

After painting this awesome picture of God, the author wrote, “Moses spoke to the people: ‘Don’t be afraid. God has come to test you and instill a deep and reverent awe within you so that you won’t sin.’”

Every day we are tested as to whether we will trust in the ways of God, or whether we will trust our own ways or the ways of humankind, the world, our culture. The Ten Commandments have been given to us to help us and encourage us to move through our days with a deep and reverent awe for God.

But is that how we move through our days? The Tenth Commandment names for us the primary barrier, stumbling block, that hinders us from living with a deep and reverent awe for God. The Tenth Commandment states: “No lusting after your neighbor’s house—or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don’t set your heart on anything that is your neighbor’s.”

**Covet:** The more common translation here is “You shall not covet”. The Hebrew word here means either “covet” or “lust after”. So, today we might translate this commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house—or wife, or cool robot that cleans the house, or a newer, better car. Don’t set your heart on anything that is your neighbor’s.”

This commandment, like Jesus’ teaching on the commandments in The Sermon on the Mount, shifts the focus from our actions, to what is going on inside of us, what is happening in our hearts and our minds. The fact is we all covet, and we probably try to keep that to ourselves.

For instance, we probably don’t mention to our neighbor, “Hey neighbor I really covet your wife.” Or, “Hey neighbor I really covet your husband.”

We think those things in our head, we feel them in our heart, but we don’t typically express them. When our neighbor gets a new toy of some kind, we simply stand at the fence and drool, but we probably don’t express out loud, “I want one of those.”

This Tenth Commandment pushes us to consider the state of our heart and our mind. The Tenth Commandment pushes us to consider why we struggle so much with contentment in our lives. Why do we always want more? Why isn’t what we have enough?

When we get right down to the bottom of the issue the Tenth Commandment forces us to ask whether I trust in God’s provision for my life, or do I primarily wish God’s provision for me, looked more like that of my neighbor?

And because we struggle in trusting in God’s provision for our life, and we struggle with being content with what God has given us, we end up regularly coveting other people’s lives and stuff. We covet their spouses, their kids. We covet other people’s financial portfolios. We covet other people’s careers. We covet other people’s musical gifts, or personalities, or looks, or confidence. And of course, we covet people’s stuff.

When we covet, it actually makes a statement about our lack of trust in God: God’s care, God’s love, God’s grace, God’s provision. When we covet, we have lost our awe and reverence for God. When we covet, we have started to trust more in ourselves, and others, than we do in God.

**Retirement:** Maybe because I am 55, soon to be 56. Maybe because I have spent the last 30 years of my life hanging out primarily with people in their 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s; I primarily covet retirement. I would love to be doing ministry and not have to make a living at the same time.

My brother-in-law, Deb’s brother, is a couple months younger than me. Scott has been retired for two years, and his financial margins continue to be much greater than mine, even though I am working.

Sometimes I find myself down right angry that Scott gets to be retired and I have at least 14 more years before retirement will be a financial possibility. In my human mind this is a justice issue. In my human mind this is not fair. In my human mind this just “sucks”. I don’t think Scott has worked harder than me. So why does Scott get to be retired and I don’t? I want God to provide for me, just like God has provided for Scott! What is up, God? Coveting is all about three of the deadly sins: lust, greed, envy.

“You shall not covet.” Tom, “You shall not covet.”

**Internal Battles:** When I have this internal battle going on inside me, it makes it impossible to enjoy my life, the life I am living, the life I have been given, which is a really good life, a really beautiful life. When I covet it completely messes up how I feel about God, and it messes up how I feel about the other people in my life. When we covet it undermines the health of our relationships, both with God and with humans.

“You shall not covet” is the Tenth Commandment because it sums up all the other commandments. The Tenth Commandment challenges us to be content with the life we are living, to enjoy the life we have been given. The Tenth Commandment challenges us to trust in God’s provision, rather than being stuck in a perspective of scarcity and want. “You shall not covet”.

**Covetousness in the Church:** As Cottonwood begins a time of pastoral transition it is an easy time to covet, to perceive other churches as healthier, more vibrant, better programs, better pastor. It is a time when it is easy to be discontent. It is a time when it is easy to lack trust in God’s provision.

As this time of transition begins, I hope you will bind together, caring for each other well, celebrating God’s faithfulness, and all that God is doing among you and through you. I hope you will help each other be content in the beautiful gift of Cottonwood, rather than coveting the neighboring church.

Times of transition are easy moments in life to lose sight of who God is calling us to be, and lose sight of all that God is doing in our lives. I pray you will help each other move through this time of transition without coveting. “You shall not covet”.

**Conclusion:** Listen to a bit more of Jesus’ teaching from The Sermon on the Mount. **Read Matthew 5:17-20.**

“Trivialize even the smallest item in God’s law and you will only have trivialized yourself. But take it seriously, show the way for others, and you will find honor in the kingdom.”

God’s law is a gift. When we choose to follow God’s law our lives become more fully what God intends for us. When we follow God’s law our lives make a greater impact on the world and those around us. My dear friends, I hope each day we will fall a bit more in love with God’s law, trusting more fully in the gift God has given us. Amen.