**1 Timothy 6:6-10** September 9, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** 9th & 10th Commandments

*1 Timothy 6:6Godliness with contentment is great gain. 7For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Two Commandments at the End: Small but Powerful**

In the book of Proverbs, the writer took a look at God’s creation and said, *“Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer; coneys are creatures of little power, yet they make their home in the crags; locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks; a lizard can be caught with the hand, yet it is found in kings’ palaces”* (Proverbs 30:24-28). He marveled at things we dismiss as insignificant, and realized that they actually are very powerful and wise.

It seems that at the end of the Ten Commandments, we have come to something very small. Go down the list the list of the Ten Commandments: Worship God only; don’t misuse his name; have a day of worship; honor parents; don’t murder; don’t commit adultery; don’t steal; don’t lie in court. And now today’s.

One could be pardoned for thinking that maybe the last two commandments were added as kind of an afterthought. Like God thought, “I can’t have eight commandments. I need 10. Let’s see, ‘Murder, adultery, theft, perjury.’ Hmm. That pretty well covers all the big stuff. But I need ten! I got it, ‘You shall not covet.’”

Coveting? What’s coveting? When I ask young adults in confirmation class what coveting is, they can’t give me an answer. When I ask adults in Bible information class what they think coveting means, usually they really have no idea. I understand that. “Covet” has become one of those strange church words that we really don’t use much of anywhere else. “Covet” means to have a strong desire to get something that belongs to someone else. In a way, this commandment does seem pretty small, almost petty, when compared to murder, theft, adultery, idolatry and the like.

I would suggest that these commandments about coveting are, at least in some ways, the most significant commandments. Let me explain.

**I. Small Commands, Powerful to Condemn**

Exhibit A: A few months ago I heard a religious man of the Jewish faith say this: “I think that the idea that God will judge our thoughts is a New Testament, Christian invention. I believe that God will judge us on our actions, not our thoughts.” Is it true that in Old Testament times God did not judge people for their thoughts? If I could have a conversation with this man, I would ask him what he thinks the Ten Commandments mean when they say,***“You shall not covet…anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*** To me it pretty clearly tells me that God will judge our thoughts, whether we like that fact or not.

Exhibit B: A rich young man came to Jesus asking what he should do to be saved. Jesus said, “Have you committed adultery?” “Nope.” “Murdered?” “Nope.” “Stolen anything?” “Nope.” “Lied in public?” “Nope.” “Have you honored you parents?” “Yep.” “Ok then. Sell everything you have and follow me.” And he went away sad. While he had *done* everything right, his thinking, his heart were not right.

That is why the final commandments are such important commandments. They remind us that no matter how good we look, that isn’t the end of the issue. People say, “You can’t judge me for what is in here.” You’re right. We can’t. I can’t. In fact, Jesus tells me I must not. He says, *“Judge not.”* But God will judge what’s in there. He will judge you for every wrong thought you have: for that flash of anger on the road—God will judge you for it. For that dirty thought when you see the provocative picture on the TV screen—God will judge you. For that annoyance you feel at your family member’s irritating habit—God will judge you. For the jealousy you feel when your neighbor’s kid who seems to have everything gets better grades than your own child—God will judge you.

Today’s reading, following the lead of the 9th and 10th commandments, tackles the sinful thought most closely associated with coveting: ***“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”***

This commandment condemns a lot of behavior that is legal, but sinful. It gets down to our motivations. We see and lament such examples of people suing for amounts of money out of all scale to the wrong suffered. Or people who always try to find something wrong with the service or the food so they can get a free meal. Such people don’t do anything illegal. But they sinfully ace out of greed, love of money.

Yet the commandments on coveting don’t just condemn dodgy parasites on society at large. It goes to the six year old who is tempted to grab a candy bar off the store shelf and stuff it in his pocket. It applies to the 20 year old who would never go into the medical profession except that “it makes lots of money.” It speaks to the 35-year old waitress who has no intention of claiming the cash tips she receives on her IRS Form 1040. It convicts a man and woman who live together but won’t get married because if they did, pension or survivor benefits would come to an abrupt end. It convicts the aged miser who keeps storing up more and more for no other reason than to cast his eyes on a bigger balance at the bottom of the statement. Each of these, like evil King Ahab is a bad actor whose sins are merely a natural outgrowth of a greedy heart. Remember Ahab? Remember from our first reading how his covetous heart over a vineyard worked so much evil?

These small commandments, like the rest, condemn us. In fact, these almost overlooked commandments at the end of a list of biggies perhaps condemn us more than any other. It delves down into our hearts in a way none of the others do. Sure the other commandments condemn the thieves and murderers and people whom human society has invented prisons for. But this commandment is for people who look at the headlines and shake their heads and can’t believe there are people like that out there. This commandment serves an arrest warrant on the doorsteps of those judged highest and holiest in the court of public opinion, and it says, “You too, stand in breach of God’s commands. Come with me.”

This commandment, like the others shows us just how godly we are—or aren’t, and it drives us to our Savior Jesus. We try, yes, we try, at least sometimes, to do right. But the corruption is so deep that in our sleep, in our unguarded moments we jump the rails and our mind is mired in sin. The corruption is so deep that even when we are fully conscious of the temptation and fight it, and resolve not to fall into it, we still do. Our war with ourselves starts not with doing the right thing, but with thinking and desiring the right thing. And we can’t. It’s like we have just suffered an 0-16 season and there is no draft! What will we do? We lose all hope because we just lose again and again. Who can deliver us? Who can save us? Only Jesus.

He knows us. Jesus invites all who humbly cry out for help, he invites us to him. There, standing before him, Jesus welcomes us and assures us of his blood-bought forgiveness. When you have tired of your battles, when you feel God’s righteous condemnation of your present and past, then Jesus shelters you in his shadow. That is where the Ten Commandments always drive us. Those commandments are too powerful for us. But Christ Jesus accomplished it all and fulfilled them for us.

**II. Small Commands, Powerful to Bless**

There is another use of these commandments. For the forgiven, these Ten Commandments are no longer a mirror showing us our sin-stained faces and lives, but they are a ruler that guides us in the straight path of God’s desires.

This use of God’s law is like a child seeing his mother sick and in bed, goes and asks her, “Mom, what can I do for you?” At that moment he becomes aware of his mother’s care and attention that he usually took for granted. In that moment he wants to show his thankfulness in her time of need. So he asks, “Mom, what can I do for you?” And so she tells him, and he does it. Not like he usually listens to her with a complaint on his lips, now he wants to do whatever he can for her.

Our God is never in a time of weakness or need like that mother, we saved sinners are like that boy. We know how badly we have needed all the good God has done for us, especially what Jesus has accomplished for us, and we ask God, “What can I do for you?” And God speaks these Ten Commandments. Yes, they do condemn us. But for those who stand aware of God’s forgiveness and who then say to God, “What can I do for you?” the Ten Commandments are the answer. Part of that is the first words of our reading are the answer. ***“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”***

God greatly desires our contentment. Now it says that contentment needs to be paired with godliness. If you are a content person but have no godliness, it’s like an ice cream cone without the ice cream. But godliness with contentment is God’s desire for us.

What does contentment look like? Well, maybe it is easiest to describe godly contentment, not by what it is, but what it is not. Look at verses 9 and 10: ***“People who want to get rich****[—people who aren’t content—]****fall into temptation and a trap.”*** People whose ambition is to get rich face many temptations. There are a million dirty ways to make money. And once into that way of getting money, it is a trap. Contentment is the flipside to that. If you are content, you don’t have those temptations.

Just as *getting* money is dangerous, *having* money can be dangerous. ***“People who want to get rich fall into… many foolish and harmful desires.”*** Ever wonder why you are never surprised to hear about someone in Hollywood O.D.-ing on drugs? Wealth is a minefield of temptations that the ordinary person can’t afford. But the end is even worse: ***“Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith”*** and ***“pierced themselves with many griefs.”*** Faithless and full of regret, they die.

Godliness with contentment is the flipside of this picture. Godly contentment is freedom from the temptations of wealth. Contentment is freedom from the traps and snares that keep us in tied to the pursuit of money. Contentment is a realization that faith really is more important than career advancement. Contentment realizes that our spiritual life is more important than being acceptable at work, whether on the floor or in the boardroom. Contentment keeps us from doing things we will later regret. Isn’t that a beautiful thought? Contentment?

And again we see the small and unrealized power of the final two commandments.

These commandments have a unique ability to condemn us because they condemn sins of thought like no other commandments. But these final commandments have a unique ability to bless us. Because when we stop coveting, we start being content with all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And who could enjoy their life more than one who is confident and content in all that God has done? Amen.