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9th and 10th commandments

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My favorite TV show of all time is called, "The West Wing." It's a political drama about day-to-day life in the White House. Martin Sheen plays the president but the show is more about the people who work for the President. In one scene of the West Wing, one of the characters says to another: "Didn't you hear about this small city that wants to get rid of all the city laws and replace them with Ten Commandments. The only city laws are the Ten Commandments. And one of the characters said, "Aren't some of the Ten Commandments kind of hard to enforce. How would you enforce, 'Thou shalt not covet'?" And that's exactly right. A police officer or a detective would not be able to prove that someone is guilty of coveting because coveting is not an outward action. Coveting is something that happens only in your thoughts and in your desires. Coveting happens in your heart. The ten commandments close with a reminder that sin starts in the heart.

What is "coveting"? "Coveting" is wanting something that God has said is off limits to you. The ninth commandment says, **"You shall not covet your neighbor's house."** A couple of weeks ago in church we heard the story of Naboth's vineyard. Naboth had a very nice vineyard and King Ahab wanted it. When Naboth told King Ahab, "No I'm not going to sell you my vineyard," King Ahab should have put that desire out of his heart. But instead, Naboth wanted the vineyard which was off limits to him. He coveted the vineyard.

His sin started in his heart by coveting something that was off limits to him, and then that covetous desire led to sinful actions. His wife Jezebel hired some people to accuse Naboth of crimes. That breaks the eighth commandment: "you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Because Naboth was falsely convicted, he was stoned to death. So Jezebel broke the fifth commandment: "You shall not murder." And then with Naboth dead, Ahab stole his vineyard, the seventh commandment: "You shall not steal." If the commandments were bowling pins, Ahab and Jezebel would have knocked most of them down right there. They broke almost all the commandments in one story! But it all started with a covetous desire in the heart. The book of James says, **"After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin"** (James 1:15). Sin starts in the heart and sinful desires give birth to sinful actions.

Another example of sin starting in the heart is King David. When King David heard that Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, his romantic interest in her should have stopped. She is the wife of another man. The tenth commandment says, **"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."** Remember coveting is wanting something that God has said is off limits to you. But instead of putting that sinful desire out of his heart, King David sent for Bathsheba and slept with her. He broke the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." And then he tried to cover it up and when that didn't work he used his authority as king to have Uriah the Hittite killed. He broke the fifth commandment, "You shall not murder." Again, if the commandments were bowling pins, King David knocked a lot of them down in this one story. But it all started in his heart with his lustful and covetous desire for another man's wife. Jesus

said, **“Out of the heart come evil thoughts – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person” (Matthew 15:19-20).** Sin comes from the heart.

We’ve been through each of the Ten Commandments now, but God knows he needs to change our heart. If your heart doesn’t change, then all the laws in the world will not do any good. The apostle Paul said, **“I would not have known what coveting was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.” (Romans 7:7,8).** There is an interesting phenomenon with the sinful heart. If you tell the sinful heart, you shall not covet, the sinful heart will want to covet even more. The point is laws don’t change hearts.

God needs to change our hearts and he can’t change our hearts by giving us laws. He can’t change our hearts through the law. How does he change our hearts? He changes our hearts, by showing us his heart.

Jesus hasn’t given you your neighbor’s wife. Jesus hasn’t given you your neighbor’s house or his bank account. But you know what Jesus has given you: Jesus has given you himself. Jesus on the cross is yours. Jesus on the cross takes away all of your sins. The divine wrath falls on him so that it won’t fall on you. Jesus’ resurrection is yours. Life eternal is yours. Jesus gives you himself in baptism. Baptism is all about Jesus because it unites you to Jesus. Jesus gives you himself in the Lord’s Supper. He says this is my body and this is my blood. Jesus gives you himself in the Lord’s Supper. There is no reason to “scheme to get your neighbor’s inheritance or house” because Jesus has given you an inheritance in heaven. I read recently that in the very very early church, like 100 AD, when someone was baptized as a gift they would give the baptized person milk and honey because that person’s inheritance was a promised land flowing with milk and honey in heaven. Jesus doesn’t give you your neighbor’s spouse or his home or his bank account. No Jesus gives you something much better. Jesus gives you himself. Amen.