



Too Old to Covet?

By: Andy Farmer October 26, 2022

This past summer, our church had a sermon series on the Ten Commandments. Each week I was freshly reminded of God's commitment to holiness in His people and, just as importantly, the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a Savior who has fulfilled the law for us and provides ample grace to live in obedience to God's law and merciful forgiveness when we don't. But if I'm totally honest, most weeks during the series, I felt like the Lord was pointing out some misdemeanors in my life, but no felony lawbreaking, until the last message on the Tenth Commandment—"You Shall Not Covet." Guilty on all counts!

This surprised me because if I had looked over the Ten Commandments before the series started, I probably wouldn't have picked the Tenth as the one that got me. I usually see myself as pretty content with life. I adapt pretty easily. I make do. I've never seen myself pining after what somebody else has; it just isn't my style.

What's more, I've kind of assumed that as I've grown older, I've gotten even more okay with my lot. Hopefully more mature, but also a little smarter. Experience helps you realize that what other people have also comes with a price: the great job comes with pressure and competition; the big house or big yard comes with a cost of expense and time to keep it up. I'm regularly reading about how people who have wealth carry the heavy burdens of managing it. And we know that the glaring lights of fame can blind us to what is really important. All these things that I might have coveted in the past I now know I won't get, but I'm not all that bothered by it. So I'm thinking I should be hitting my stride in the "do not covet" department.

Wrong! As the preacher taught about coveting and contentment, God showed me that I am not aging out of the temptation to covet. In fact, coveting is alive and well in my aging heart.

We Are Never Too Old to Want Too Much

Here's what God is showing me. As we age, one would think we would settle into a comfort level with who we are and what we have—that we'd stop comparing ourselves to other people. But that doesn't happen. You see, as we start to diminish, it's hard to hold on to what we have—even that meager little bit we became content with starts to dissipate away. We begin to realize that when we were younger, we coveted what some people had that we weren't getting. In later life, we start to covet what we all had, but we are starting to lose. What comes to mind first is health and mobility. In general, we all have health for a good part of our lives, but getting older means we start losing it, some quicker or more dramatically than others. We can begin to envy those who don't seem to need the doctor like we do, don't take the pills we need to take, etc. It can seem unfair.

Then there are a lot of new covetings we can start to experience: We can covet extended families that live in the same area. We can covet the mobility of others who travel and get around well, who seem to have lots of meaningful things to do, who aren't all that concerned about where retirement income is going to come from. We compare what we have with what we used to have or with an unrealistic idea of what life should offer us by now. Most of these "mature" covetings and discontents were unforeseen in our earlier life. Yet they come at us and rob us of peace. As Thomas Watson once said, "Satan loves to fish in the troubled waters of a discontented heart."

Yes, We Still Need the Tenth Commandment

How do we cultivate contentment as we age? The preacher hit this in his message for everyone, but it really is key to how we older folks should think. We need to keep in view what we *have* versus what we *deserve*. As has been said so often, what we deserve is judgment; what we receive is mercy. The most contented older saints are those who never forget what Jesus has done to rescue them from sin. But there is an essential second part of the remedy. We must keep in view *who has us*. We belong to God. Every day we have on earth has a purpose in God's plan. No one gets out of this life untouched by pain, loss, and sorrow. But the one who knows who holds her tomorrow does not covet what others have today. Our preacher referred to this when he quoted the invitation of Jeremiah Burroughs for believers to "melt their wills into God's will."^[1]

Charles Spurgeon once preached:

"Surely, if anything could be a kind of conservatory, a hot-house, in which to grow the delicate plant of contentment to perfection, it must be this full belief that high or low, rich or poor, well or sick, God hath said, "I will never leave, nor forsake thee."^[2]

Let us be aging men and women who are conservatories of contentment. Let us root out the weeds of coveting, envy, and comparison and feed the soil of our lives with gratefulness in all things. Then, our family, our church, and our community will be blessed to encounter the garden of contentment that God is cultivating among us in the older generation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Regardless of your age, where do you presently struggle with coveting?
2. Are you able to find the joy of contentment in your circumstances? How can you cultivate contentment in your heart?

[1] Jeremiah Burroughs, "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment," *Monergism*, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/contentment01.html>

[2] Charles Spurgeon, "A New Year's Benediction," *The Spurgeon Archive*, Published on January 1, 1914, <https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/3387.php>.

Link: <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/10/26/too-old-to-covet/>