

FOUNDATIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTION - Part thirteen

Looking Again at the Ten Commandments - Pastor Don Horban

Sunday, July 28th, 2013, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1669

COVETOUSNESS - MAN'S WORST HEART DISEASE

Exodus 20:17 - "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."

Deuteronomy 5:21 - "And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

Colossians 3:5 - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

1 Corinthians 13:5 - "...love does not insist on its own way...."

The first command has the advantage of *priority*. The last command has the advantage of *finality*. It warns us of a danger we never escape totally in this world. It's fitting that the last thing we're warned about is greed. Greed, to quote *Elton Trueblood*, "*...is the last enemy of noble and ignoble minds alike.*"

The first and last commandments are like bookends. The first underscores a *virtue* that fuels and undergirds the other commands. Because God is God and man is made in His image, we don't murder, commit adultery, take our neighbor's goods or smudge his reputation.

The last command underscores a *temptation* that fuels all other sins. I covet my neighbor's goods before I steal. I covet his wife before I commit adultery, I'm jealous of his standing before I slander his name.

No doubt about it. This commandment is listed last so it will never be forgotten. Sin is tracked down to its lair. The desires of the heart are finally exposed.

1) WHERE GREED COMES FROM AND WHY IT'S SUCH A PROBLEM

Ephesians 4:17-19 - "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

Notice those last key words - "They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, *greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*" One of the cruelest side-effects of the sinful nature on the human heart is also one of the least mentioned. Ultimately, sin always destroys true happiness and contentment. *Sin destroys man's capacity to find fulfillment in anything in life.*

Sinful actions always invite heightened pleasure, increased excitement, and more gusto. But that's not what sin delivers. It's not what sin ever ultimately delivers.

Just look at some of the phrases in the verses from Ephesians 4: "*futility of their mind,*" "*darkened in understanding,*" "*excluded from the life of God,*" "*ignorance that is in them,*" "*hardness of heart,*" "*become callous.*" Sin destroys the potential for joy. It sucks out the substance and leaves nothing but a vacuum. Sin *creates* emptiness. Emptiness is sin's only creative capacity. Emptiness is all sin can make.

But that's not all. Notice what Paul says next. Sin not only *empties* the heart, it *deceives* the heart. As the sinner realizes the first taste of sin didn't bring the life it promised, a frantic search begins. Something must be found to fill up the void left by empty promise and frustration. My own sin has left me empty. Perhaps as I increase the dose I'll finally be satisfied. And the demons laugh.

That's why nobody ever sins just once. Like a fishing hook, sin *sets itself* in the gullible heart. Satisfaction must lie just a little further down the road. But it never does come. Like digging down through a cloud, trying to find some solid foundation, true satisfaction eludes the sinner. That's why, in **verse 22**, Paul specifically calls these covetous desires "*deceitful desires.*" They don't *satisfy desire*, they *create desire*. They don't *bring joy*, they *subtract joy*. But that's not easily seen right on the surface of the temptation. These desires are *deceitful*.

They set the life on a course of self-destruction with the pace of a dog chasing its tail. With good reason, the tenth command cautions against starting on that downward spiral. "Don't allow yourself to covet anything! Deal with the *desire* while it's still just a desire. Don't cement those desires into place by acting upon them."

2) **DEAD RELIGION IS NO MATCH FOR THE FALLEN DESIRES OF THE HEART**

If all of the things covered in point one are true, why are people, who have been so clearly warned in the Word about the true nature of covetousness, still captured by fallen desire?

Matthew 13:22 - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the **deceitfulness of riches** choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

Exposure to the Word of God will be fruitless as long as the mind is distracted and the heart is plugged by greed. I can't gain power for deliverance from God's Word **and** give place to the entertainment of my own sinful desires at the **same time**.

The writer of Hebrews makes it very clear that the Word of God is indeed powerful and sharper than a two edged sword. But Jesus said it could, even though powerful, be totally unfruitful. James makes it clear that God's Word must get to the inside of the life ("**engrafted**" in **the old King James**) or it would accomplish absolutely nothing.

Remember, nothing so weakens the Christian or makes him so vulnerable to temptation as the mistaken sense of security that because there has, at some point, come into the life **an understanding** of some doctrinal truth, the soul is therefore protected by that knowledge.

Listen, your **desires** will outstrip your **knowledge** every time. Truth has to be engrafted - rooted in the experience of the life before it protects and empowers. Even the writer of Hebrews says that this sharp and powerful word of God has to get **slicing right into the spirit and soul of a person before it does its work**.

Hebrews 4:12-13 - "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart**. [13] And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The Word will speak to you about the desires of our heart. It will expose **intentions** long before they become actions. And it's the kind of repentance God's Word generates **at the level of my desires** that establishes freedom from guilt and condemnation and judgment.

In this Parable about the seed from **Matthew 13**, Jesus says that the Word of Truth encounters **two main obstacles** in the human heart. Both obstacles are responses we make to the material world around us. The first is **fear** (that's what worry is) and the second is **greed** (the deceitful nature of wealth that makes me feel that I don't have to be afraid if only I have enough wealth to keep my future secure).

And Jesus is clear as crystal in these words from this simple parable. If I believe the lie that life is rooted in the things of this world, then His Word will forever just bounce off the floor of my soul, never germinating, never bearing fruit unto life.

And here's the point. **Knowing what I just said about the dangers of earthbound desires won't change your chances for spiritual success**. This is truth that is only activated in the heart by a **radical upheaval of confrontation and repentance**.

In fact, Paul himself said that it was only when he heard the truth about the power of covetousness that he knew what repentance was all about. He saw that this was a sin that all of his studies and learning hadn't touched. **This truth opened the eyes of proud, religious Paul**. This was the place where his life was turned around:

Romans 7:7-9 - "What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." [8] But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, **produced in me all kinds of covetousness**. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. [9] I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."

Again, the important point here is that Paul was not going to rest when he knew this covetous heart was still beating in his soul. He allowed the truth to **trouble him, disturb him, make him cry out for a relation with Jesus that would be strong enough to bring transformation and freedom**.

That's the point. You can't be content with a heart like this. You have to willingly be **exposed** before you can be **healed**. Life has to be remade right at the center of the desires of your heart. **Do you know how many professing Christians rest with a level of life that never pauses to probe what kind of desires are being thoughtlessly fed on a daily basis?**

There is a third point that is directly related to this one:

3) **ONLY A BLAZING PASSION FOR GOD CAN REPLACE THE FALLEN DESIRES OF THE HUMAN HEART**

Colossians 3:5 - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

“Covetousness, which is idolatry.” Those words *define* covetousness. And they also open the door for hope for *deliverance*.

- a) **First, they define idolatry. “Covetousness, which is idolatry.”** Desires compete for fulfillment. That is, desires aren’t just static impulses that peacefully coexist in the human heart. **All desires are sprawling in nature.** They constantly push for more and more of your heart.

Giving in to desire never quenches the desire. Yielding merely turns more of the heart over to the desires influence. Yielding tightens the desire’s hold on your life.

That’s what Paul means when he says greed amounts to *idolatry*. People strive to gratify desires (greed) with the passion of worshiping a deity. In fact, greed is the most common object of worship in our world. And, just like God, greed remains restless until its rule over your will is entire and unchallenged.

“Well, pastor Don, what’s the big deal about being a slave to your own desires. After all, a person can’t complain about doing the very things he desires all the time. That sounds more like heaven than hell.”

And you’re right. That kind of *bondage* sounds more like *freedom*. You get to do whatever you want. And you get to do it all the time.

But then you’ll have the experience I had last week. A young lady, not involved in this church, who has her life all messed up with the law, with drugs, with a sexual relationship she thought was going to be fun and exciting.

And as she chewed her stubby, yellowed, cracked finger nails, she cried her way through half a box of Kleenex and moaned over and over, **“O, how I wish I could stop, how I wish I could stop. But there’s no way out. It’s too late for me.”**

Listen, there is no crueler dictator in all the world than your own desires. Your desires become your God. That’s why Paul says greed amounts to idolatry.

- b) **But this passage from Colossians also presents the path of deliverance and freedom.** Christians who have been following Jesus Christ as Lord for a little while will tell you about the *paradox of the Lordship of Jesus*.

When Jesus Christ has **total control of a life, that life is the most free and liberated.** When Jesus Christ is reduced to anything **less than absolute, unchallenged Lord, then another desire will slip on to the throne of the heart. And bondage of life is the result.**

Put Jesus in second place, and bondage reigns. Keep Him first, and you’re truly free.

Here’s how David expressed the same truth: **Psalm 73:25 - “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.”**

That first phrase describes the absolute, unchallenged passion for God that David had settled in his heart. “Of all the things I have in heaven (including his baby boy who had died) there is nothing I love more than you!”

The second phrase describes the result of that love for God. **“And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.”** Honor God properly, worship Him with all your heart, think about Him often and long. You will find, on the way, you free your heart from the bondage of lesser desires.

You can’t just fight greed, and all of the hucksters in this world who want to set up shrines of material worship in your soul, by trying not to fall in love with this world. That will never work.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth **will grow strangely dim** in the light of His glory and grace.” The song writer wasn’t a bad theologian after all. He wasn’t writing about some mystical, bleary-eyed religious trip. He was trying to teach the church the road to keeping the heart free and safe and clean.

Everything you and I do in this church should be done with understanding. When somebody leads the congregation in worship, when they encourage whole-hearted involvement, when we raise our hands or bow our knees, we’re not just trying to

raise the dust a little bit and maybe work up a revival.

Don't just murmur about how long you've been singing or how we just sang that song last Sunday. See the big picture. Understand that ***we're guarding our hearts. We're putting Jesus on the throne all over again. And we're keeping the false gods at bay.***

The tenth command identifies a terrible enemy living inside our own skins. All of us carry the disease. And both ***freedom*** and ***bondage*** are a process, not an event.

Matthew 6:22-32 - "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, [23] but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! [24] "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. [25] "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

Jesus knew that everyone needed to eat. And He knew that people had to plan and budget and organize certain aspects of life in this physical world.

But He also knew that a great danger lurked just under the surface of our lives. He knew it was easy to become so ***preoccupied*** with even legitimate concerns that Kingdom life shriveled from lack of attention and thought. Physical concerns ***push their way to the top of our minds.*** That's why Jesus warned again ***seeking*** these things. On the other hand, spiritual pursuits ***require study, prayer, thought and discipline.*** They don't ***naturally*** stay in the front of our minds. You and I have to ***re-seek and re-pursue and re-establish them constantly or they lose potency in our lives.***

But there's also a precious promise here. Jesus gives us His word - ***"Make the effort - pay the price - put Me first and you'll never regret it. The other desires of the heart will be kept in their proper place."***