
You Shall Not Covet

DARRELL DELANEY

In the song, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, there is a line that says: All I have needed, thy hand hath provided. That is great and all, but what happens when we do not believe that, and get caught up in wanting what others have? On today's episode, we are going to deal with the subject of coveting and why God tries to help us steer clear of it. Hopefully, you will walk away encouraged by what the Lord has to say about it, coming up next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we have spent a lot of time in this Ten Commandment series. This is the last part of the program...part eight...and this is the tenth commandment we are dealing with today...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that commandment is dealing with covetousness; what a word! Some people think it is an antiquated word, but it has a lot of relevance for today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you don't hear people using the word *covet* much, but it is...in the Hebrew it is the word *chamad*, which means just a really strong desire for something...a lust...something you really hanker to have quite badly; and of course, very few of us would ever eat something, buy something, if we didn't see something: Oh, that looks good, you know; oh, I will order that...I will buy.... That is okay, but coveting is something that gets out of place; it slips out of place, and it can kind of take over your life.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is more than a strong craving, isn't it? It is this very deep, visceral, very strong passion that can move over ethical lines...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It can get you in a lot of trouble. I was looking at an example of this, where four guys robbed a bank. They were working together; they had just gotten done with the heist, and each guy is asked: What are you going to do with the money since you stole it? What are you going to do with it? The first guy is like: Well, I want to buy a nice car. The second guy says: Well, I am going to buy a stereo system; it's going to be huge speakers and everything. The third guy is more of a renaissance guy; he says: I am going to buy a fancy house with old antique art in it and priceless art in it. The fourth guy looks at all of them and he says: I like what you guys said. I will have one each of yours; and he ends up double-crossing them in the movie and

taking everything from them, because the word covet means he couldn't handle that they had a fair share of what it is, if you can call it fair. He wanted their share to be his, and so he did what he had to do to take it from them. That is the essence of coveting.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it comes up in Exodus 20:17; the very end of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or his female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

What is interesting is that this comes after a series of commandments that were very short: Don't commit adultery; don't kill; don't steal; don't lie; and this one you would expect there: don't covet...do not covet; but this is much more expansive. It gets really specific about a neighbor's house or wife or a servant or an animal; and then the catchall or anything that belongs to your neighbor. So, this tenth commandment gets expanded on in a way that we haven't seen since the Sabbath commandment on number four.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God makes it clear that it is out of bounds to want stuff that belongs to your neighbor. I was thinking about why is this such a bad thing? And I think one of the reasons why is because, number one, God says not to do it. You can pretty much understand that obviously if God says not to do something, it is probably not a way to go to go against what he regulates or what he actually provides for you and tells you what to do; and I think another reason is because we get caught in comparisons. We see what our neighbor has, we look about at what we don't have, and we get into this comparison game. If your neighbor has a nice house or car, you are like: Man, I wish I had that nice house or car. But you don't know the context on how they got that stuff; and so, it is really unfair to you to judge yourself less and judge them greater based on what possessions they have or the relationship they are in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is really basically a bottomless pit, because if you get caught up in coveting, it can ruin your life, and it makes you miserable...it really just makes you miserable, because there is no end to things other people have, or how they live, or what they drive, or what they wear. There is really no end to it, and if you get caught up in covetousness, right, then, yes, you just make yourself miserable every day. They say that: What do we tend to covet? Well, we tend to covet the stuff we see every day...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We tend to covet the stuff that is close at hand. We don't usually covet something from somebody who lives in Russia. We covet something from somebody who lives on Alexandria Street...our street, right? Well, if we covet what we see every day, then every day we are going to be made a little more miserable by being a covetous person.

DARRELL DELANEY

Grumpy Smurf...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

You are going to turn into a grump, because it robs us of the contentment and the peace and the joy that God has for us in his blessings for us each and every day; and it also makes us think that the solution to a blessing is always material...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And if we are thinking about the intrinsic value of being in a relationship with God and with one another, I think that it would move us away from the discontent and the disquiet that happens when you covet everything; and the other thing that I thought is that we forget when we start focusing on external things and possessions and other relationships that we *don't* have, we don't really get to focus on what is going on inside of us because we are so obsessed with getting a possession; if we get that thing, it will make us better, it will make us look like we have our lives together; it will make us happier, or whatever we think it is; and that stuff becomes externally focused.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

We don't get to look in on the heart when that is happening.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, the commandment specifically says not to covet your neighbor's wife. Today, I would say your neighbor's spouse, husband or wife, right? And you mentioned earlier, too, that the Hebrew word involves a sense of lust, and certainly if it were about a spouse that you are sexually desiring, that would be the sin of lust. Frederick Buechner is a pastor and a writer and a novelist. He has a book where he has just got a whole A to Z list of theological terms that he gives his own definitions to. For the sin of lust, he's got only one sentence, and it is this: Lust is the hankering for salt of a man dying of thirst...

DARRELL DELANEY

Wow.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you think that that woman is going to make you better, it is going to slake your thirst. It is salt; it is going to make your thirst worse. We talked a little bit about that in the program on you must not commit adultery, as well, right? Because it does; it consumes your life. It blinds you. We are going to talk a little bit later about how we really need to lean into gratitude, because it blinds you to the things you already have to be able to give thanks for as well. So, you know, we have mentioned this before in the course of this series, Darrell, but there are several words that are sort of in the same neighborhood...they are kind of cousin words. There is envy, there is greed, and there is covetousness; and they are all sort of in the same category. Envy makes you want to take away what somebody else has; greed makes you devote your whole life to get something like somebody has; and covetousness is a little of both. It makes you go into that comparison game, and it does tempt you to take away from your neighbor what you want from him, so now you have it and he doesn't.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, we see it in countless examples in the Bible, David and Bathsheba is one of them. You see the cluster of these things coming together, and the problem of what happens to be a coveted situation, where he covets this man Uriah the Hittite's wife, and we see, like some of these challenges that we are talking about are really just the beginning on why it is bad to covet your neighbor's stuff or your neighbor's spouse or anything that belongs to your neighbor. We are going to dig deeper in this as we go along. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking about the tenth commandment. This is the series finale, Darrell, of our eight-part series on the Ten Commandments. Why eight parts? Well, if you have been listening you know we did the first three commandments in just one show, and then we have devoted one episode each to the remaining ones...the remaining seven. So, it is an eight-part series; this is the last one, on coveting. Again, we said it is not the most familiar word. We don't often use coveting in ordinary language, but as we have already established, Darrell, it is definitely something we are familiar with.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, definitely. So, it is one thing to want something of your own, but it is another to want someone else's. Like their thing or their spouse or their relationship. If they have something that you want and then you are actually trying to figure out how do I get that to me? How do I get that to me? That is the problem that you cross the line where God is having a problem with it; and I think it is appropriate to understand that lust is connected to coveting, but lust is not always sexual. We did talk about a situation where lust was sexual in context, with David and Bathsheba, and whatnot; but lust itself is like this deep desire, and it doesn't always have to be sexual.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, it could be power, status, importance, ambition. You can lust for fame and glory. There are all kinds of things you can lust for and covet for; and the Bible warns us. The Apostle John in 1 John 2, starting at verse 15: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father, but from the world.

So here, John, in a rather direct, blunt, almost scary statement says: Coveting cuts you off from God. It cuts you off from your Father in heaven.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is really frustrating when you get into the situation where you do not even know that that is happening in your life because you are so focused on the outside thing...the external thing...that you lose connection with your heavenly Father, who is trying to guide you and give you a plan for your life...he is trying to give you a plan; but when you are so caught up in what you see, caught up in what these things can do for you or what it does for your emotions...or your flesh, is what we call it...then you lose focus. We see that in the case of Adam and Eve.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, we often are told...and there is a sense in which it is true...it kind of goes back to Augustine, the 3rd and 4th Century theologian...that the original sin was pride. They were proud; pride goeth before a fall. We have all heard that...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, there is a sense in which pride...but, a really good commentator that I read a while back pointed out that in a sense, the original sin was not pride. It started with coveting...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Listen to Genesis 3 at verse 6:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good [for food] and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some of it and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

What precedes that, of course, is the serpent saying to her: God told you not to eat that? You know why? Because it will make you like God. It will give you the secret knowledge of good and evil, and you, Eve, deserve to have that.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And once the serpent, Satan, the tempter, once that seed was planted in Eve's mind: I deserve this. I should be able to have that. What is up with God, holding back something so good. Eating the fruit was inevitable. Once she thought that...once she coveted that knowledge that the fruit was the doorway to, it was over.

DARRELL DELANEY

And then, you know, she believed that: Hey, we won't even need God because who is going to make the decisions? I will make the decisions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

So then, the good for food is the lust of the flesh, pleasing to the eye...lust of the eye, and then desirable for gaining wisdom is pride of life...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the enemy is not actually doing anything new. He is constantly doing that. He did it with the temptation with Jesus in Luke 4; he also does it in our lives, and tries to tempt us in one of these three areas, because if he can get us to covet and not believe that God in his goodness has given us everything we need, then we could fall into that trap very easily.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and boy, oh, boy, Darrell. If you want to be scary, and we have mentioned this in other *Groundwork* episodes, but if you want to consider how scary this is, keep in mind that what Eve and Adam did in coveting this knowledge...that they didn't trust that they had enough...keep in mind, this happened in Paradise; this happened in a garden that was full of everything they could possibly have needed, right? *All I hath needed thy hand hath provided*, the song you quoted at the very start of this show, they had it. So, boy, if you can get blinded to what you already have when you are in the Garden of Eden, it sure can happen anywhere else in life.

Of course, Darrell, the other sad thing is that the serpent said: You will be like God; but the Bible already told us they already were...

DARRELL DELANEY

They already were...in his image....

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were made in God's image and likeness. So, they got blinded to that, too, by covetousness.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when you brought up that part about what I feel is an entitlement, like we deserve this; I think every marketing scheme on the planet who wants to sell you anything from socks to hamburgers to cars to whatever, they often pull on this covetousness string that says we deserve this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And if we understand that God is in the process of actually helping us and blessing us...not just materially...I am not talking about that, really...I am talking about the help that comes from a relationship under the obedience and providential care of our God. If we trust in that, then it will ebb away at the covetousness and the comparison game that happens when you think about what you have and what others have.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And with that comparison game...we have talked about this before, also in the context of the deadly sin of envy. You know, we are always tempted to compare ourselves upward, right? To the guy who has a little more money, a nicer car, a more beautiful wife, or whatever. Well, why don't we try to compare downward once, and look at all that we have that so many in the world could only dream of, right? I mean, if we live in the Western world, not everybody is in great shape. We have plenty of poor people and impoverished people in the United States and in Canada, but boy, you look at the standard of living in most of the world, people who live on a dollar a day, and sometimes they cannot get that dollar...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But you don't have to go to that extreme, you know; compare yourself downward once, because we are going to be talking in just a few minutes when we close out the program, that gratitude is the great antidote to being a covetous person; and covetousness, therefore, makes you an ungrateful person because you are always comparing yourself up.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if we did what you just said there, Scott, and we compare ourselves down, we would be content right where we are. You know, one time I went on a mission trip, and I went to Central America. When I came back home from that trip, I felt like a rich man because I looked in my closet. These kids didn't have very many things to wear or many things to eat, and when I came home, I felt like I had too much; and that is actually something that: 1) God has been blessing and God has been faithful in both situations; and 2) It keeps me from coveting and wanting other things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is exactly right. To take stock and to realize your position in the larger ecology of the world, and even of your own community. I mean, I have also been to Africa, and I have been inside what Africans regard as a really nice house, but to my Western eyes, it was like, wow, it is kind of a little ramshackle place, but, you know, it is a really nice house in that culture; but you don't even have to go that far. We can look, all of us...almost all of us...within our own communities.

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We can see plenty of things that would remind us what blessings we have, and that also would motivate us to want to share our blessings, right? Instead of wanting to take, take, take, we want to share; but we want to conclude the program and this series with some other ideas and some antidotes and practices we can put into place to combat covetousness and enhance gratitude, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and Scott, we have been talking about the nature of what it means to covet, why that is bad, and why we have problems trusting God's plan for our lives. You talked about earlier that it kind of clusters itself, and in the last few commandments, you hit them. They are right point-blank: Don't kill, don't steal, don't commit adultery, don't lie; and then you said that they also elaborate on more things, but those are relational things; and so, I think it is important to talk about why the relational aspect is affected negatively when you covet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, we have talked before, Darrell, particularly in the early part of this Ten Commandment series, that we always took note of the fact that the commandments came after salvation, after they had been rescued from Egypt. So, the Ten Commandments were not prerequisites that they had to fulfil in order for God to save them. They were the fruit of salvation. This is how you respond now that God led you out of Egypt and saved you; but the other significant thing is, Israel has now become a nation in fulfillment of what God promised to Abram long ago. They are now a nation, they are a community, and so, almost all the Ten Commandments are aimed at regulating community, and what you just said, regulating those relationships, because sin disrupts community. When you steal other things from people, when you have to be suspicious about your neighbor, when you know your neighbor is lying about you, it just unravels community.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's just clear up a few things and think about how relationships are actually very important. You know the greatest two commandments they asked Jesus: What is the greatest commandment? Loving God and loving your neighbor...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

And this is one way to love your neighbor. So, let's just be honest, okay? We all have had a struggle here. You cannot walk through this life and say that you have never, ever had a problem with coveting or wanting something that someone else has. I mean, let's just normalize that, because being a pastor, I have seen and I have talked to people and I have known that walking through life, everybody has struggles, right? So, how do we walk through these kinds of struggles and work through what it means to move away from the coveting and move more toward contentment?

SCOTT HOEZEE

What is interesting, though, too, Darrell, is that in the tradition of the Church, this tenth commandment has often been seen as a catchall for all of the Ten Commandments; in fact, in the Heidelberg Catechism, that great Reformation document that we have referenced several times in this series, question and answer 113, the question is asked: What is the aim of the tenth commandment; and the answer is that not even the slightest desire or thought contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts. Rather, with all our hearts we should always hate sin and take pleasure in whatever is right.

So, in that sense, covetousness is behind all the other commandments, too. If we covet...and we said that earlier...if we want to be like God like Adam and Eve, now we are breaking the first three commandments where we have no other gods before God...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We put ourselves in God's place. If we covet, we can mess up our family relationships with our parents, it could lead to adultery, it could lead to murder, it could lead to stealing. Covetousness catches them all, and so the Catechism says: What does the tenth commandment say? Love life and hate evil always. Don't have even a slight desire to live in anti-God ways.

DARRELL DELANEY

And be honest with God about that when those desires come up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, the authentic Christian life, where you are being really honest and vulnerable with God is the first step, because he says in 1 John 1:9: If you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you. So, confess them; confess them to one another as well. Another thing you can do is basically count your blessings. Remember...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, that word *remember* shows up in the Old Testament so many times; after God has delivered his Israelites from Egypt, and bringing them into the Promised Land, he is always telling them to remember.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The theme of the book of Deuteronomy—the slogan of the book of Deuteronomy... I think we did a series on Deuteronomy years ago here on *Groundwork*...but the slogan is remember and do not forget.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Remember and do not forget when you get into the Promised Land, you just came through wilderness where if God didn't rain down manna, you didn't eat. If God didn't bring forth miraculous water from a rock, you didn't drink

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But now, you are going to go to a land where you can grow your own garden. You are going to have your own well, and it will be easy to forget that that is from God, too. Every bit as much as the manna and the water from a rock, a tomato from your garden and water from your well, that is a gift of God, too; remember and do not forget, count your blessings.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is all over scripture. I mean, in Deuteronomy 6, it tells us right here that: ¹These are the commands, decrees and the laws the Lord your God directed me [Moses] to teach you to observe in the land in which you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord

your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in the land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again, it is all about flourishing; it is all about having a good life; and the ironic thing is that coveting is about thinking that I don't have a good life, so I have to get myself a good life by getting a boat like my neighbor's, or a woman like my neighbor's wife. That doesn't lead to a good life, it leads to a miserable life. As we said earlier, God wants us to have the good life, and the Ten Commandments and all of God's laws and decrees are the map...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the roadmap to a good life.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think we could boil it way down, Scott. We could just literally thank God for waking us up this morning...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thank God for food on our table, clothes on our backs, the very things that we take for granted, that his providential care gives us each and every day. Like the sparrows getting fed that Jesus talks about, or the flowers getting clothed like Jesus talks about. We are worth more than them. If we could just be grateful for that, it would keep us from having the grass-is-greener-on-the-other-side comparison game, because we don't know what other people have gone through...the sacrifices they have made and all the prices they have paid, or the discipline, or whatever they earned...we don't know the context on what they have. When you do grass is greener only, you don't give yourself the context to know this is what they went through to get that; you just want the thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; let the peace of Christ...from Colossians 3...¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

DARRELL DELANEY

Boom!

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that, I think, is that gratitude is the coveting killer; it kills covetousness in our lives, and gratitude also, I think, if we can nurture a heart of gratitude, it will help us keep all of the Ten Commandments; to God be the glory.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you; and tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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