

TOTAL SATISFACTION IN GOD

Exodus 20:17

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Introduction

Two poets once wrote,

When I'm drivin' in my car, and the man come on the radio
He's tellin' me more and more about some useless information
Supposed to fire my imagination
When I'm watchin' my TV and a man comes on and tells me
How white my shirts can be
But, he can't be a man 'cause he doesn't smoke
The same cigarettes as me
I can't get no, oh, no, no, no, hey, hey, hey
That's what I say
I can't get no satisfaction, I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no satisfaction.¹

It's a timeless sentiment that whatever we have it's never enough. And to only make it worse there's a world around you only reinforcing this discontentment with what you have. Whether it be commercials on T.V. or radio, or more likely today ads on web and your social media. Right, I mean it's scary but you'll just be talking about cars or clothing or food or something and the next thing you know you open your phone and there are ads for that very thing you were just talking about. It freaks me out!

And it's not just consumer marketing that feeds our discontentment; just looking at what others have can be a major source of dissatisfaction in our lives as well. We see each other's homes or cars or lifestyles. Let's be frank, we watch each other's Instagram or Twitter or Facebook and we think, 'I should be doing that or making that,' or 'That's what my life should be like.' We play this comparison game to the stuff that others have or the kinds of relationships or fun or careers they have.

Of course, the reality is that marketing campaigns and the lifestyles of others wouldn't have any effect on us if ultimately what we weren't suffering from wasn't a heart issue. Right? I

¹ Keith Richards/Michael Jagger, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction", © Abkco Music, Inc.

mean sure, sometimes a marketing campaign may hit you really hard with something or someone close to you may somewhat rub what they have in your face, but most often I think our temptations to covet and our struggles with discontentment come from right within us. I've always loved how John Calvin put it, "Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God. ... The mind begets an idol, the hand gives it birth," (John Calvin).² In other words, the human heart is a factory of idols. We don't need help or temptation to covet. Nope, it's all right here (the human soul).

We want and we want and we want because why? You and I drink from dry empty wells every day of our lives. And here's the thing that Christians throughout the millenia have often missed. It's not that the well in and of itself is bad, but that we expect more from that well than what it has to offer. A nice home or nice meals out of the house aren't bad themselves, but they become idols when we expect these things to offer us peace and fulfillment in life. When we treat lesser things like ultimate things we are never satisfied; we are never content.

And so, like we've seen with every other word in the Decalogue, this final command to not covet dives deep into the human heart, examining not just the way we are to love one another or to treat material blessings from God, but ultimately to discern where we are trying to find total satisfaction in life. To paraphrase Augustine, the tenth word reminds us that God has formed us for Himself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him. **The human soul can only find its satisfaction and contentment in God; therefore, we are to pursue Christ in faith that our hearts and minds would seek Him above all.**

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis Battles, trans., LCC XX (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), I.XI.8.

1. What does the commandment teach about God?

The Decalogue ends right back with where it begins, in many ways. The Decalogue began with God reminding His people, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery,” (Exodus 20:2). His name is Yahweh, I AM WHO I AM, I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE, the LORD. And as we saw at the very beginning of the book of Exodus, this name that He reveals to Israel and to the nations, the name by which He was not known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, reveals to us that He is Redeemer, hence reminding Israel that He redeemed them from bondage in Egypt. And because He freed them from Egypt, they now belong to Him, “Do not have other gods besides me,” (Exodus 20:3). God redeemed us from slavery to death to now be slaves to Him. He rescued Israel *out* of Egypt to bring them *to* Himself.

It’s only logical, therefore, that Israel have no need then to covet or desire anything, because they have everything they need in God. If you understand the first commandment then the tenth should make perfect sense and come naturally. Because of who God is in His character, because of His name and His work as Redeemer, we are to know that He is good to provide us our every need and be our entire satisfaction.

This has been, essentially, the whole premise of the book of Exodus. God’s missionary heart is to make Himself known, that the whole world and all the nations would see that all we need is found in Him alone. The reality is that as a human being we’re all a slave to something. We may not literally be in shackles or even realize we’re slaves, but by the way we define ourselves, the way we try to find joy and fulfillment in life, the way we devote ourselves to something, we’re all slaves to something. As Bob Dylan wrote,

You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
You're gonna have to serve somebody,

It may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody, (Bob Dylan).

God frees Israel from Egypt to now belong to Him, and in this we see the essential paradigm for our own salvation, that only half of salvation is the being saved from something part!

When God created the world He did so with the purpose of making a place where He could dwell in intimacy and fellowship with His creation. That's precisely what the Garden of Eden was, the unique place where heaven and earth were joined. Adam and Eve were tasked then to take that place and expand it to the very ends of the earth, where all creation could enjoy intimate communion with its creator. Right? You see, as Creator God made the world for Himself. Communion with Him is our ultimate need and destiny. Everything else flow from that. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "The chief end of man is to know God and enjoy Him forever." Or as the New City Catechism phrases it, "[Our only hope in life and death is that] we are not our own, but belong to God." Everything that your soul yearns for, aches for, is found in relationship with your creator. Accordingly, then, the tenth word reminds us that every moment or piece of discontentment or covetousness in our lives stems from somewhere where we are not pursuing total satisfaction in God.

2. How is the commandment to be observed?

So consider with me, then, how the tenth word isn't merely a prohibition against something, but rather can be used to help us diagnosis the condition of our hearts. In other words, we should look at this commandment as a way to help us constantly see where we are not finding our total satisfaction in God. First, however, it's important that we define coveting and understand what we're talking about and what we're not talking about.

Biblically speaking, coveting describes wanting for ourselves what belongs to someone else. Obviously, it's tied closely to the other commandments where our attitude toward

something does not reflect God's purposes. As already mentioned, it's closely tied to discontentment, of being dissatisfied with what we have or with our circumstances. Grumbling is often a tale-tell sign that we are covetous, something we've already seen prevalently in the wilderness section of the book of Exodus. And so, coveting is largely a disposition of the human heart that can manifest itself in all sorts of sinful actions. I mean, just for example, consider Paul words on idolatry and depravity in Romans 1. At the very end of the chapter Paul is describing the human condition when he writes,

And because they did not think it worthwhile to acknowledge God, God delivered them over to a corrupt mind so that they do what is not right. They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, arrogant, proud, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, senseless, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful, (Romans 1:28-31).

But just look at that description there and observe at what sits smack dab in the middle of it all: envy and covetousness.

Of course, we need to distinguish between coveting and desire. The Bible doesn't condemn desire; in fact, in many places desiring is commended. In the Song of Songs we read about the godliness of desiring one's spouse. Right, it is ok to desire something because it is a good thing of God's creation. It's when we start to then see that thing we desire and look at it to bring some sort of greater satisfaction or joy to our lives that we transgress into coveting.

Essentially, therefore, we observe the tenth word by not looking for satisfaction in creaturely things. The word identifies four areas where most often covet and are discontent in our lives. First, (1) We covet our neighbor's 'house.' I mean come on, how often do you at least think to yourself, 'I wish I lived there, or had that car, or those clothes.' I think HGTV has made all of its billions of dollars just capitalizing on how we covet each's other possessions. Whether

it be “House Hunters” or “Property Brothers” or “Fixer Upper,” we dream of what it would be like to live in some of these beautiful and glamorous homes.

Second, (2) We covet our neighbor’s spouse. How we may be tempted to think, ‘Oh their husband is so handsome; their wife is so beautiful. Their spouse is so fit or funny or smart. Her husband is so successful that she doesn’t have to work or he is so helpful.’ Often, we have our frustrations and discontentment in our own marriage and then project that on to someone else, elevating what others have as perfect compared to our own scenario.

Third, (3) We covet our neighbor’s lifestyle. ‘They take such great trips; they look like they are always having so much fun. They have such a great job. Their kids are so well-behaved. Again, we feel trapped in the monotonous routine of our own lives, we feel daily dissatisfaction and exhaustion all because we fail to wake each day and approach it with worship. You read through the book of Ecclesiastes and there’s so much discontentment and frustration in the Teacher’s life all because he ultimately fails to daily look at his own life and the world around him through the lens of a biblical worldview.

Finally, in case anything is being left out, the end of the commandment forbids us to (4) We covet “anything that belongs to your neighbor,” (Exodus 20:17). This includes times when we say, ‘I wish I were smarter; I wish I were prettier; I wish I had a family like theirs; I wish I was athletic or musical or just talented at something; things seem to come so easily to them and they are hard for me.’ When we catch ourselves comparing ourselves to those around us, that’s a tale-tell sign of covetousness in our own hearts.³

³ J. I. Packer contrast these two attitudes of life writing, “The discontented man, whose inner itch makes him self-absorbed, sees other people as tools to use in order to feed his greed, but the contented man is as free as others are not to concentrate on treating his neighbor rightly,” (Packer, *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, 102-03).

3. How do Christians now reflect the Redeemer through this commandment?

And as I said just a moment ago, when we discern these places of covetousness we have to understand them as evidences of discontentment in our hearts and ultimately proof of places where we are not finding our total satisfaction in God. While the tenth word is phrased as a prohibition, “Do *not* covet,” it is ultimately a call *to* contentment. You remember Paul writes that contentment is something we must develop; we must learn it. He writes to the Philippians, “... I have *learned* to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself,” (Philippians 4:11).

Paul has learned it. That’s not something that happens quickly and it’s not something that happens easily. It is learned most often through experience and hardship. Right? I mean for Paul he’s learned this through the very hard road that God had given him. My point is that if you want to learn contentment, it’ll require sacrifice and hardship. But the result of this process is what I like to call Gospel-appetites: Learning to seek, desire, and pursue the things of the Kingdom of God rather than the things of the kingdom of this world. Learning to look at and enjoy all things as means to the worship of God, not as ends unto themselves.

Paul says that his circumstances don’t matter at all! “I know both how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need,” (Philippians 4:12). You see the reason you and I struggle to be content is because it’s the thing itself that we want. We’re looking for fulfillment and joy and completion and meaning in all these things that are fundamentally incapable of providing them to us. It’s never enough money; it’s never enough food; it’s never enough sex; it’s never enough entertainment; it’s never enough friends; it’s never enough fame.

Now note, though, that these things in and of themselves are not the problem. Right, we've already said this a couple of times but I think it's really important to beleaguer this point. Paul doesn't say avoid the things of the world. He doesn't say you all need to sell everything you have and get rid of everything. No. He isn't just content when he has nothing. He says he's also content when he has plenty. His contentment has nothing to do with what he has! When he has nothing, he says 'Ok, that is how God intends to glorify Himself most through me right now. My poverty will magnify Christ!' But, when he has plenty, he also says, 'OK, that is how God intends to glorify Himself most through me right now. My wealth will magnify Christ!' In other words, all these things are mediums toward the glory of God. Food, drink, entertainment, sex, relationships, whatever it is, are given to us so that we may better know and enjoy God through them! And that's the secret. That's the mystery. That's how we find contentment in them; it's when we *stop* seeking and glorifying God in these things that we become discontent.

This is what makes Christian contentment so distinct! In the ancient world contentment wasn't a foreign concept, but instead a virtue that was commonly extolled. But it was defined as self-sufficiency or independence. To be content meant to become detached and indifferent to one's surroundings. 'Stuff is bad; be self-denying,' it was taught. Of course, the error with this view is that it views things as the problem as opposed to seeing the human heart as the root issue to be dealt with.

But Paul absolutely refutes this. He says contentment isn't found in independence but instead in full dependence upon Jesus! As Lynn Cohick writes, "Paul seeks not self-sufficiency, but Christ-sufficiency," (Lynn Cohick).⁴ It's not about getting away from the world but instead viewing the world as Jesus does, for Christian contentment doesn't retreat away from everything

⁴ Lynn Cohick, *Philippians*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 246.

but instead actively seeks to engage and serve the world around. To be content means living in the world with Gospel-appetites; living and enjoying God's creation but in a way that is informed and balanced and guided by the foundations of God's City and not the City of Man. Regardless of external circumstances, having a Gospel-appetite means having a heavenly mindset that shapes and influences everything.

So, then, what is the secret? How do learn contentment? How do develop Gospel-appetites? "I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me," (Philippians 4:13). Easily one of the most well-known verses in all of the Bible and easily one of the most misunderstood. What are the "all things" that Christ strengthens us to? To be content whether we have little or much. You see Paul's point is that the secret to being content, the secret to seeing the world through the lens of the City of God, the secret to a Gospel-appetite, is the work of Jesus Christ within us. As Tom Wright remarks, "[T]he God [Paul] knew in Jesus the Messiah enabled him to face everything with a strength that came from outside," (N. T. Wright).⁵ In other words, it is the mind of Christ, the heart of Christ, the strength of Christ who enables us to see like Christ and in turn be content.

Conclusion

Thus, ultimately, we see that We can reflect our Redeemer through the tenth word by desiring Christ-likeness and pursuing His glory above all else. Of course, we know from history that it wasn't just keeping the tenth word that proved to be impossible for humanity to keep. Keeping any of the words was impossible. And so, as we conclude walking through the Decalogue this morning, next time we'll pick back up with the Exodus narrative, watching what transpired at the base of Sinai while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the law. We'll see

⁵ N. T. Wright, *The Prison Epistles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 134-35.

that rather than continue to trust in the faithfulness and goodness of their Redeemer to bring them into the promised land, they instead built and worshipped an idol. My point is that **Though the Law of God shows us who God is and how we are supposed to reflect Him, the Law does not give us the ability to actually do so.**

Rather, it would take God Himself to bring these things to fulfillment. Just as God alone could rescue His people from bondage, God alone can bring His people into a relationship with Himself. This is why God became man, why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ came to make a way where there was no way, and not just to rescue us from death and evil, but to make us new and restore us to the Father. That's why He said, **"Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished," (Matthew 5:17-18).**

You see, it is not merely that Jesus obeyed a bunch of rules and didn't break any. No, as we've seen the Law was always so much more than just do this and don't do that. The Law helps define what is to be the character of the people of God. The Son took on the fullness of humanity not just to earn up a bunch good merit points for sinners like you and me. No, Jesus was the fullness of perfect humanity. Jesus is the true and better Adam; He is the true and better Israel. He fulfills the law not by just doing a bunch of things; He is the perfect embodiment of the Law.

The Law couldn't make humanity right with God; the Law merely showed who God was and what we needed to be; in other words, what kind of saviour we required. That's why Paul writes,

What the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, in order that the law's requirement would be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh have their

minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit. Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. Now if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit gives life because of righteousness, (Romans 8:3-10).

We need to be redeemed before we can ever reflect the Redeemer. Jesus was everything that you and I are not, so that we could become everything that He is.

And so as we reflect on the Law itself, first, let its study drive you to the place where you can acknowledge your inability to make yourself right with God, to make yourself right at all. Second, let the study of law convince you of your need for a savior, for one who can restore you to that which God created and called you to be. Third, in the law see the beauty of the fullness of Jesus Christ, that Jesus would be magnified and exalted as we see more and more the depth of His person and work. And then finally, let the law be a guide to you to help you walk now in a way that exalts God and reflects Christ, not so that you would earn His favor or pay Him back, but that you would simply live in the total and complete satisfaction that comes only through knowing God.