

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbour’s inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbour’s wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

As we come to the end of our study of the Commandments, we come to those two commandments that both declare: ***you shall not covet.***

What is coveting? The dictionary says it is to desire something eagerly, to yearn or long for it, especially something belonging to someone else. We might say that coveting is lusting after the things or the people that belong to someone else. It is the desire to have more, because we aren’t content with what we have.

I imagine almost everyone here has heard the Rolling Stones song, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” That is the way many people feel: they are never satisfied, no matter how good things are, no matter how much they have. On the other hand, there are people who have every reason to worry and complain, who have so little, and yet they are quite content. What is the difference? The difference is what Paul is telling us in our text today. The secret to being truly content in this world is not found in having everything we want or in being rich or even in being able to do everything we want. True contentment is not based on our health, nor is it determined by how happy we are. We find true contentment in our relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. When we are content with God’s goodness, we will find that no matter what our circumstances in life may be, we are actually the richest of all people, possessing everything we need by the grace of God.

Paul puts everything in these commandments into perspective when he reminds us: ***But godliness with contentment is great gain.*** When we learn the secret of contentment, there is little room for covetousness in our hearts. But that is exactly what the problem is. We aren’t content. Advertisers remind us day by day, moment by moment of all the things we need, of all the things that we just have to have. They like to point out that our lives will not be complete unless we have these things. After all, he who dies with the most toys wins.

It is not wrong to want to get ahead in life. Nor is it wrong to want to have nice things. My wife can tell you that I would like many things. I would like the latest in stereo equipment or computers, and I would like to have the money to do what I want when I want. In all honesty, when I want something I do not want to have to wait for it. I think I have learned—for the most part—that I can be just as happy without them, content with what I do have. The problem starts when the desire for these things begins to take control of our lives. We call that obsession covetousness. God has a lot to say in His word about coveting. Covetousness begins in the heart, when we are dissatisfied with what God has given us in this life. In a way, these commandments take us all the way back to the first commandment, since our covetousness is an idolatry to someone or something we want to possess as our own. Adam and Eve had everything.

Their lives were perfect—and yet, when the serpent tempted Eve, he found that she still wanted more: she wanted to be like God. That desire, that dissatisfaction with her life, was the downfall of all mankind. And things have only gotten worse over the centuries. In our text today, Paul points out the dangers that coveting brings. He said: ***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.***

This is why our God tells us—not once, but twice—***You shall not covet.*** Covetousness quickly becomes the root cause behind all manner of sins. James said: ***“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”*** (James 1:14–15, ESV) That’s where coveting leads. It leads, like all sins, to death.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We need to be aware of how easily our hearts can lead us astray; how easily we become caught up in covetousness. Paul helps us deal with this. He says: ***But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.*** We need to come to God, confessing our sinfulness, but also seeking His grace for our lives. Thankfully, we have His forgiveness, the forgiveness that Christ won for us on the cross. On this last Sunday of the church year, we are taken back to the cross through our Gospel reading. We hear of the loving sacrifice of the One who was rich beyond measure, yet who set it all aside to stand in the place of poor, miserable sinners so that we, through His poverty, might become rich. We see the repentant thief on the cross, whose covetous attitudes led him to a life of crime. Even as he is suffering the punishment of his crimes, he hears the glorious promise of the Saviour: ***“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** (Luke 23:43, ESV)

We have struck it rich, not by winning a lottery, but through our relationship with God. That is what Paul is speaking of in our text when he says: ***But godliness with contentment is great gain.*** Godliness is God-likeness. Godliness is the result of faith that is alive; a faith that seeks to live in a God-pleasing way; a faith which trusts in God's promises day by day. That is the faith that brings real contentment into our lives, a contentment that is not affected by how much we have or how rich we are or how good our health is. It is a contentment which goes beyond the circumstances of our lives and which still feels that we possess everything we need. As St. Paul said: ***“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*** (Philippians 4:11–13, ESV)

That's how simple it is to be really content. Our contentment is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Through God's grace in Christ we truly do have everything we need. St. Paul asks us: ***“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”*** (Romans 8:32, ESV) Christ Jesus came into this world to die in our place on the cross, to take upon Himself the punishment we deserve because of our sin. That same Lord rose again from the dead for us, so that we might be richly blessed with the promise of life forever with Him. But that is not the end of God's goodness towards us. He gives us all things. That is not to say that He automatically answers yes to all our prayer requests, be they for health or for physical blessings, but that He always provides us with the help, the strength and the courage we need for each new day. He brings contentment, not by giving us everything we want, but by helping us know satisfaction through what we have or through what we are. He assures us of the great blessings that still await us in His Kingdom of peace and joy, where we will be satisfied just being in His presence forever.

Are you content with your life? Are you content with all God has given to you? If we covet the things of this world, then we will be very disappointed, and every setback in life, every trouble or illness or whatever will only serve to make us more dissatisfied. But those who place their entire lives into the hands of God and trust that He, in His goodness always works for the best, will find that no matter what may happen, they really have struck it rich, for they are content, sure that they have everything they need by His grace.

We know the great love that our God has for us, and how much He cares about us. We know His forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life in Christ. By His grace we are the richest of all people, content because God is with us and blesses us in all things through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. So why should we covet, wanting the empty, meaningless

and worthless things of this world? God has given us a far greater treasure. He has given us Himself and the life we have with Him. In that gift, He has given us more than the world ever could. Amen.