

No.10: Keeping Up with the Joneses

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Exodus, Exodus chapter 20.

Exodus chapter 20. And we're going to read at verse 17. Where the Lord says to His people, 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.

You shall not covet. As you know, over the past number of months, as I've often said, as we've been going through these Ten Commandments, we've referred to them as house rules.

And we've called them house rules not because they teach us and tell us how to have good morals and good values and be a good person in life, but they're house rules because they remind us that we're all sinners.

[1 : 1 3] We're all sinners, and we're all sinners in need of a Savior. And these house rules, they address us all as a church. They address us as a church family, where our Heavenly Father, He speaks to us as a Father to His children.

And as His children, we need these house rules. Because as we said many times before, without rules, there's recklessness. Without laws, there's lawlessness. Without commandments, there's chaos.

And our Heavenly Father, He has given us these house rules. He's given us them not to spoil our fun, but to parent us and to protect us as a good father would. And He's protecting us from hurt.

He's protecting us from harm. He's given us all these house rules out of love for us and in order to look after us as His children. And this morning, as you know, we've come to the concluding commandment.

We've come to house rule number 10. And as you said a number of times in these concluding commandments, they are all 3D. They're three-dimensional. They address our heart, they address our head, and they address our hands.

[2 : 2 0] And that's what we see once again with house rule number 10. It addresses our heart, our head, and our hands. Our heart, our head, and our hands. So first of all, it addresses our heart.

It addresses our heart. The Lord says, 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.

Now, as we've studied these 10 house rules together, I don't know about you, but I've not only found that these house rules are so real, and they're so relevant to our lives still in the 21st century, but I've also become more and more convinced that there's this ordained order to these 10 commandments.

And that's because the God we worship is not a God of chaos. He's not a God of confusion. No, he's a God of order. He's a God of organization.

And as we've seen, and as we've said in our study, we've seen the order. We've seen the organization that God presents to us in these 10 commandments.

[3 : 31] Because house rule number one is number one, simply because God needs to be number one. He needs to be number one in our life.

House rule number one is number one, because God needs to be number one. House rule number two is number two, because God is not to be number two. House rule number three calls us, as the children were reminding us, to watch our words. We are to watch our words, how we speak to God and how we speak about God.

But not only how we speak to God and about God, but also how we speak about those and to those who are made in the image of God. House rule number four, it began with that parental word.

Remember, kaini, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Remember that it's the Lord's day. It's a wonderful day. This day is a day of resurrection, a day of renewal, a day of redemption. Remember that it's the Lord's day, the day that the Lord has ordered and ordained. He has sanctified it and set it apart as his day. So remember it, kaini, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. House rule number five, it also began with another parental word, honor. Honor your father and your mother. Honor your father and your mother. It's a house rule addressed primarily to our covenant children because our children are precious. They're the heritage of the Lord. They're the fruit of the womb. Therefore, we need to teach and train our children to love and follow the Lord because if we don't, the world will. When we reached house rule number six, we saw that these concluding commandments, they not only began, they begin with this familiar phrase, thou shalt not. All of them, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten, they begin with that phrase, thou shalt not. And as we said, they're three-dimensional. They address our heart, our head, and our hands. And so house rule number six teaches us that it's not only our children who are precious, but life is precious. Life is precious because life is a gift from God. Therefore, we're to preserve life. We're to protect life because God is pro-life. God is pro-life. Then house rule number seven, as we said to the children, it stresses that God is not only pro-life, but God is pro-marriage.

God is pro-marriage because it's God who has ordained and originated marriage at creation, where marriage is to be between one man and one woman. House rule number eight, we saw that it considered the fact that for many people, cash is king. Cash is king. But in his order and organization of creation, God has not only ordered Sabbath and marriage, he's also ordained work. We've been created in the image and likeness of God not to waste our day being lazy. But God has ordained and ordered that his creation are to acquire and attain wealth by working. Therefore, we're not to seek security by stealing, which is the eighth commandment, or to seek security by gambling. We're to work.

[6 : 55] We're to work. Then last Lord's Day, we looked at house rule number nine. We saw that it contained the language of the courtroom, where we, as children of God, were to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Our Christian character, conduct, and our conversation is to be one of truth.

We're to be trustworthy and true. We're to be known as people of honesty and integrity, where the truth will impact and influence our heart, our head, and our hands. And so these house rules, they're real, they're relevant to our lives, because there's an ordained order to them. There's a structure to them. And that structure stresses to us so clearly. It stresses to us, as we see in this concluding commandment, that the position and the purpose of house rule number 10, is that it is to recap and reaffirm to us all 10 of these house rules. The position and purpose of house rule number 10, you shall not covet. Its position and purpose is to recap all the other nine, and reaffirm all the other nine, and present to us all 10 as one unit. And as we said before, our heavenly father has given us these house rules to parent us, to protect us. He's given them out of love to look after us. Because our heavenly father, this is the point of the whole thing, our heavenly father wants what's best for us.

But our heart often wants what it shouldn't have. Our heavenly father wants what's best for us.

But our sinful heart often wants what it shouldn't have. That's why our heavenly father, he concludes the 10 commandments by addressing covetousness, wanting what we shouldn't have.

We are addressing covetousness. And you know, a covetous Christian is nothing new. It's a problem, it's a problem in the 21st century, and it was a problem way back in the first century church.

[9 : 11] And we see that because in his letter to what the early church, the apostle John, he wrote to the early church and he highlighted three kinds of covetousness. Three kinds of covetousness.

He described them as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Three kinds of covetousness. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. But John wrote this because covetousness not only affects our heart, it also affects our head. And that's what we see secondly. Covetousness affects our head. So our heart, and then secondly, our head.

The Lord says in verse 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. Now I'm sure that we've all heard that familiar phrase, keeping up with the Joneses. Keeping up with the Joneses. It's actually a phrase that has been around for over a century. It dates back to, way back to 1913. But keeping up with the Joneses, it became this familiar phrase that everybody knows about because it was part of a daily newspaper comic strip. You often see these comic strips in the newspaper. But it was in an American daily newspaper, and it was part of their comic strip. And it began in 1913, and it continued for nearly 30 years until just after the start of the Second World War in 1940. And the daily comic strip was called Keeping Up With the Joneses. And it featured this family, the McGinnis family. And they were, the McGinnis family were this ordinary working class family. But the McGinnis family, they lived next door to this affluent family, their affluent neighbors, who were the Joneses. And sadly, the McGinnis family, they were always looking over their fence and peering over their fence where they had this, these three kinds of covetousness. They had the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The McGinnis family were always looking over their fence at what the Joneses had, what they owned, what the Joneses bought, what the Joneses enjoyed. They always looked over the fence, and they saw their nice home, and their good jobs, and their expensive clothes, and their fancy parties, and how the Joneses had a fast car, and how the Joneses always had a perfect lawn, and the Joneses, they had a good garden, and the Joneses, they were fit, and they were healthy people. They were always in and out of the gym. And Mr. Jones, he had a gorgeous wife. And Mrs. Jones, she had a handsome husband.

And Mr. and Mrs. Jones, they had well-behaved and privately educated children. The Joneses over the fence had everything that money could buy. And yet, the working-class McGinnis family, they spent their life, and they spent everything that they had, trying to keep up with the Joneses.

And you know what's interesting is that during its 30 years as a comic strip, the Joneses were never actually seen. You never met the Joneses. They were often spoken about.

[12 : 42] The Joneses were envied over the fence. The Joneses made the McGinnis family jealous. But the Joneses never made an appearance on the comic strip in 30 years. And of course, the Joneses never made an appearance. Why? Because there are Joneses in every street, in every village, in every town, and in every city.

You know, we can all relate to the comic strip and the reality of trying to keep up with the Joneses. But you know, even though the narrative was pictured and portrayed on the comic strip section in the newspaper, it's not really funny at all. Because it's actually a sad reality for many people.

It's a sad reality. In fact, we can all be guilty of trying to keep up with the Joneses over the fence. We can all be guilty of looking over our fence or glancing down the street or even scrolling through social media. And we can all be guilty of thinking to ourselves, I wish I had what they have.

I wish I had their high income. I wish I had their big house. I wish I had their nice car that they keep posting on Facebook. I wish I had their beautiful garden. I wish I had a close family like theirs.

I wish I had their figure. They looked amazing. I wish I had their clothes. I wish I had their health. I wish I had this, and I wish I had that, and I wish I had the next thing. You know, we can all be guilty of looking at other people and other places and other products and thinking to ourselves, I wish, I wish, I wish, I wish that was mine. I wish that was mine. But as this commandment clarifies to us, that's covetousness. That's what covetousness is, which is why the Lord says in verse 17, you shall not covet. 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. You shall not covet. And my friend, we're not to be a covetous Christian.

[15 : 01] We're not to be overcome and overrun by the three kinds of covetousness, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We're not to be covetous. No, the Bible teaches us that we are to be content. We're to be content. You know, covetousness is in direct conflict with contentment. Covetousness is in conflict with contentment. And our Bible says, and I think it's a very powerful verse, godliness with contentment is great gain. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Therefore, covetousness, looking over the fence, looking down the street, scrolling through social media, it is not God honoring and God glorifying. Because covetousness forgets that God is the one who has given us everything we have. Covetousness forgets that every good and perfect gift comes from above. And it comes down to us, says James, from the Father of lights. Covetousness forgets that the Lord is our Jehovah Jireh. He is our provider. My friend, covetousness is in direct conflict with contentment. Which is why Paul wrote, godliness with contentment is great gain.

But you know, Paul didn't stop there when he said that. Paul said, and he said it to Timothy, 1 Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain. Why? Because we brought nothing into this world.

And assuredly, he says, we will bring nothing out of this world. But if we have food, and if we have clothing, with these we will be content. My friend, godliness with contentment is great gain.

And you know, Paul, as an apostle, he was someone who learned the secret of being content. contentment. Because when Paul wrote to the Philippians, Paul was in jail, he was in prison for preaching the gospel. And Paul said there in that letter to the Philippians, he said, I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content. He was content in prison. And what he wrote to the Philippians, he said, I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. But what was the secret?

What's the secret? What's the key to contentment? Everybody wants to know what's the key to contentment in life. And Paul tells us, Philippians 4, verse 13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

[18 : 02] I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Which means that the secret to contentment, it isn't about keeping up with the Joneses over the fence next door. No, the secret to contentment is all about being safe and secure and satisfied in Jesus Christ. The secret to contentment is about being safe, secure and satisfied in Jesus Christ. Because as Paul says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You know, it's a well-known verse, Philippians 4, verse 13. And it's the key to contentment. It's the key to contentment because covetousness is in conflict with contentment.

The key to contentment, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Because godliness with contentment is great gain. But you know, we're good at quoting verses from the Bible, aren't we? I don't know if you're like someone who likes to quote verses. To people, if they're going through something and you just quote a verse here and a verse there. But you know, we're good at reeling off promises of Scripture. And you know, one particular promise of Jesus is, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. But what we often forget, and this is what I discovered this week, what we often forget is that that particular promise was given within the context of contentment in Christ. That promise, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you, was given within the context of contentment in Christ. Hebrews 13, verse 5 says,

Let your conduct be without covetousness. Be content with such as you have. For he himself said, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you. And you know, that was the verse my mother used to always quote to us as children. It wasn't, I'll never leave you and I'll forsake you, but be content with such as you have. Because as children, I see it with my own children. Maybe you see it with your own children or grandchildren. Children are always plotting. They're always planning. They're always wanting their next purchase. They're always after the next thing, the next new thing, the next fad, the next fashion of the day. Which is why our Heavenly Father reminds us in this commandment about covetousness. That life is not about keeping up with the Joneses. Life is about being safe and secure and satisfied in Jesus. I'll repeat that. Life, my friend, is not about keeping up with the Joneses.

It's about being safe and secure and satisfied in Jesus. Let your conduct, says Paul, be without covetousness. Be content with such as you have. For he himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. But as you know, this concluding commandment, it's 3D. It's three-dimensional. It addresses our heart, it addresses our head, and it also addresses our hands. It addresses our hands. That's what we see lastly. We see that in verse 17. The Lord says to his people, 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. So when it comes to the concluding commandment against covetousness, we're reminded that our hands are often the problem. Our hands are often the problem where we want it in our heart, we want it in our head, and we want it in our hands. I want, I want, I want, and I want it my way. Which is why, as we said, the position and purpose of house rule number 10 is to recap and reaffirm all 10 house rules. Because when it comes to house rule number one, when it comes to house rule number one, number one is number one because God needs to be number one.

[22 : 49] But our sinful heart says, I want to be number one. I want to be priority. I want to be primary. I want to be first, and I want to be foremost in my life. And when we fail to make God number one, the reality is we actually fail to keep all the other house rules as well. Because house rule number two is number two because God is not number two. But when God is number two, and there is something else at number one, our sinful heart says, I will worship God how I want, when I want, where I want, and if I want. With house rule number three, our sinful heart says, I will speak about God and those made in the image of God, how I want, when I want, where I want, and if I want. With house rule number four, we're reminded to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, because God has ordered that day.

He has ordained for himself one day in seven. One day in seven. That's all he asks for. But our sinful heart says, I want all seven. I want all seven. When it comes to house rule number five, we're to teach and train our children, the children that God has gifted to us, to love and follow the Lord. But our sinful heart says, I will teach and train my children the way I want, how I want, when I want, where I want, and if I want. It's all about I want. House rule number six emphasizes that God is pro-life.

But our sinful heart says, I will live my life how I want, where I want, when I want, and if I want. House rule number seven shows us that God is pro-marriage. But our sinful heart says, I will love how I want, who I want, when I want, where I want, and if I want. House rule number eight says, you shall not steal. But our sinful heart says, I will take what I want, when I want, how I want, where I want, and if I want. House rule number nine stresses the importance of truth and honesty and integrity. But our sinful heart will always say, I will tell the truth how I want to, when I want to, where I want to, where I want to, and if I want to. And you know, by the time we actually reach house rule number 10, we're made to realize why our heavenly Father has given us these house rules in the first place. Because we need to be safe, we need to be secure, we need to be satisfied in Jesus. But our sinful heart says, I want, I want, I want, I want it my way.

And you know, it was once said, the anthem of hell is I did it my way. The anthem of hell is I did it my way. Which, as some of you will know, is a line from the Frank Sinatra song called My Way. Where Frank Sinatra, he foolishly wrote, and just to quote him, And now the end is here. And so I face that final curtain. My friend, I'll make it clear. I'll state my case, of which I'm certain. I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and every highway.

And more, much more, I did it. I did it my way. My friend, the anthem of hell is I did it my way. Because I wanted to. Which is why our loving Heavenly Father has given us these house rules. And He's given us these house rules as a father to His children to parent us and protect us from hurt or from harm. They're given out of love to look after us. And we need these house rules.

[26 : 54] We need them. We need to keep coming back to them. Because without rules, there's recklessness. Without laws, there's lawlessness. Without commandments, there's chaos. They don't teach us and tell us how to be a good person with good morals and good values. They teach us that we're all sinners. Every single commandment shows us that our heart is sinful. Our heart is sinful.

And we're all in need of a Savior to create within us a clean heart. We're all sinners in need of a Savior. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

But the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. And so, my friend, we need to come to the Savior. We need to look at every single one of these commandments and realize, I fall short. I fall short. I fall short. I'm a sinner. An absolute sinner.

But Jesus, He is a wonderful Savior. And you know, as we were saying to the children, what do we do when we come to the Lord? How do we have this clean heart? How is our heart cleansed?

We just ask. We just ask. Ask the Lord to create within us that clean heart. We ask Him and say, Lord, come into my heart and come into my life. Change me. Make me new. Make me yours. Make me clean.

[28 : 42] So, let's seek to live out these commandments, not by our own strength, but always looking to the Savior. The Savior who loved us and gave Himself for us. Looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word. And we give thanks for these commands that teach us and tell us that we are sinners in need of a Savior. And that there is nothing in us. There is no soundness in us, as Thy Word says. But Lord, help us to come to Jesus, the one who creates within us that clean heart, the one who washes us as white as snow, the one who promises to walk with us each and every day of our lives, promising His goodness and His mercy, even to follow behind us. Encourage us, Lord, we pray.

Bless thy truth to us, we ask. And go before us. Take away our iniquity. Receive us graciously. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. We're going to sing in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119. We're singing from verse 103. So it's on page 408. 408 in the blue psalm book.

Psalm 103. And we're singing down to, sorry, Psalm 119 at verse 103 down to verse 106.

[30 : 34] Where the psalmist says about God's Word, about His commandments. He says, How sweet unto my taste, O Lord, are all Thy words of truth. Yea, I do find them sweeter far than honey to my mouth.

I through Thy precepts that are pure do understanding get. I therefore every way that's false with all my heart to hate. Thy word is to my feet a lamp, and to my path a light. I sworn have and will perform to keep Thy judgments right.

So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 119 to God's praise. How sweet unto my taste, O Lord, are all Thy words of truth. Yea, I do find them sweeter far.

I do find them sweeter far.

That's false with all my heart to hate. Thy word is to my feet a lamp, and to my path a light.

[32 : 40] I sworn have and will perform to keep Thy judgments right.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.