

COVETOUSNESS

The Root of All Evil

L.R. Shelton, Jr.

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I.

For some time now the Lord has been laying upon my heart a series of messages on the SIN OF COVETOUSNESS, which is forbidden by the 10th Commandment: “THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbours’ house, THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor *any thing that is thy neighbour’s*” (Exo. 20:17).

We will consider three aspects of this sin: *first*, its DEPTHS as revealed by the power of the 10th commandment; *second*, its DECEITFULNESS as shown by our Lord’s teachings from the gospels; and *third*, its DAMNING EFFECT because it is the ***mother sin*** that breaks all the commandments. And then I desire to show you the EVIDENCES of covetousness that we may examine ourselves and see if we are overtaken by this sin.

Dear friend, I am impressed by the need of these messages, as I desire to show that the law of God has not been outmoded. It is not past its usefulness, but when used by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner, it still has the same effect: “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). How do we know what sin is?—by the law; for as the apostle Paul so clearly sets forth in Rom. 7:7, he had not known lust, the sin of unlawful desire, except the law had said, “THOU SHALT NOT COVET.” He stood blameless before the law of God in his own eyes until this 10th commandment was opened up to him by the Holy Spirit. Then he saw what a sinner he was before God, and that instead of being blameless, he was nothing but a dunghill itself in his own sight and in the sight of God according to his own testimony in Phil. 3 and Rom. 7.

The law then, is God’s schoolmaster, or truant officer, to bring us to Christ; for a sinner *must* come to know experimentally his sinful, hopeless, guilty, lost condition before God before he will desire the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. Only then will he be able to receive the precious truth that God can be just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). Only then will he be able to understand and believe that we may be made the righteousness of God in Christ, because God has made Him to be sin for us Who knew no sin (II Cor. 5:21).

You see, fallen man is not on trial; he is not on probation, but is only under a reprieve. He has already been tried and found guilty; he is already condemned and sentenced to death by the supreme Judge of the universe as John 3:18,36 declare: “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” So he is in the cell of condemnation, behind the prison bars of sin, held captive by Satan, and a prisoner of hell with no possibility of, or grounds for appeal in or of himself before God. Therefore, the only thing which a poor soul outside of Christ may expect is eternal death and judgment

unless mercy intervenes, through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ applied by faith to the door post of his heart.

This is the reason we preach the law, “for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). We’ve been crying for revival, and are trusting God the Holy Spirit to work in hearts and show how His holy law has been broken, and how sinners stand guilty and condemned to die before God; and that their only hope is in the atoning work of Christ as revealed in the gospel of the grace of God. You must know that your *only hope* is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the sum total of the gospel, for He took the place of the sinner upon the cross to pay his sin-debt in full and to deliver him from the just punishment of hell. John 5:24 says that those who are in Christ are no longer condemned, but have already passed from underneath the judgment of God, and from death unto life, having been brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21).

Now let us repeat the 10th commandment and look at certain words to show its force: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour’s.” Note these words—“thy neighbour’s,” “thy neighbour’s,” “his,” “his,” “his,” “his,” “thy neighbour’s.” Do you see the force of this commandment? There is in these words a seven-fold guarding of the interest of another! It is what is in “thy neighbour’s” vineyard, or anything that is “thy neighbour’s” that you cannot have; and *all* men are your neighbours. He says, that which is thy neighbour’s, leave alone; so you dare not covet what God has given to your neighbour!

The word “covet” is translated most frequently in the New Testament as James calls it, “LUST.” It means to desire inordinately or without due regard to the rights of others, to desire wrongfully. And the particular nature of the 10th commandment is that it reaches beneath the *externals* of our conduct to the hidden activities of the mind, heart and will, revealing the motives and intents of the heart, and condemns sin when it is first entertained in our affections. James 1:14-15 bears this out: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” So the exceeding sinfulness of covetousness is that *it breaks all the commandments in the heart* before they are ever committed in the overt act. Now we know that all the other commandments have forbidden overt acts, which if disobeyed, will sooner or later be detected by one’s fellow man. But this 10th commandment solemnly warns us against sin in the *inner* and *hidden life* which may be hidden from any human being, but is surely known unto our living, holy and righteous God. And sooner or later, this hidden sin will also reveal itself in some overt act. Herein lies the importance of this commandment.

Let us go further! This 10th commandment ***embraces all the other commandments*** because the breach of each one grows out of the heart of covetousness that every man and woman possesses by nature. Our Lord knew what was in the heart of man. He knows what is in your heart and in mine as is recorded in Mark 7:21-23: “From within, out of the heart of men [that is, out of their moral being] proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from *within*, and *defile the man*.” No wonder God has to give us a new heart when He saves us; and I praise God that He does just that!

This truth is confirmed in Jer. 17:9 which tells us that man’s “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” And there are many other Scriptures which tell us that man is far from God, that he hates God, that he loves wickedness and unrighteousness, that he is displeasing to God, that in his natural state he runs away from God and loves darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil. This is the heart of every individual outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not only the heart of the heathen who bows down to sticks and stones and crocodiles, or worships the sun and moon, but this is the heart of *every man* in Christendom whether in the pulpit or in the pew who has never bowed the heart and will to the Lord Jesus Christ!

You see, from this description of the human heart by Him Who is holy and righteous and Who knows what is in man, we understand that man by nature is *totally depraved*, abiding under the just wrath of God;

and dear friend, if divine grace does not come and give you a new heart by the working of God the Holy Spirit, then you are lost and lost forever! But it takes the power of the 10th commandment in the hands of the Holy Spirit to reveal the sin of covetousness in the heart of every individual, because it is such a subtle sin.

Now because covetousness is a heart sin, another aspect of this sin is that it *deceives and slays us* except for the convicting power and deliverance of God's Holy Spirit. Our Lord warns us in Luke 12:15 of this heart sin of covetousness: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He thereby tells us to be on our guard against covetousness or *greed* of every description. Therefore, let us take inventory to see if this sin of covetousness has crept into our hearts and lives!

Listen now! The Greek word for greed is very descriptive; it means to thirst for having more, always having more and still more! It is as if a man, in order to quench his thirst, takes a drink of salt water which happens to be the only water available. This makes him even more thirsty, so he drinks again and again until his thirst kills him. So it is with the sin of covetousness or greed: it is the *uncontrolled yearning to have*, to have more, more and still more, until covetousness kills the soul of man; and then he abides under the curse of God forever. As Prov. 27:20 tells us: "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are *never satisfied*." What a sin! Oh my friend, that's a deep-seated sin in the soul: "*never satisfied*." Covetousness damns a man to hell!

To show us further the deceitfulness of this sin of covetousness, of greed, our Lord warns us with a parable about a rich man who was eaten up with this sin. Listen to Luke 12:16-21: "The ground of a certain man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou fool*, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." This covers it all: Covetousness makes a man treasure up for himself upon earth things for which he has no need, and lay up no treasure in heaven toward God. So we see that covetousness *deceives a man about his values*. He places emphasis on *things* and misses the blessings of living for Christ and for others.

Covetousness is a damning sin because it *hinders the Word of God* from coming into the soul! Through covetousness, a man sees only his wants rather than the needs of his soul, so it blinds the eyes of his understanding and closes his ears to hearing God's claims upon him and his life. Through self-interests, his ears are closed to the precepts and commandments of the Word of God that God has given for the good of mankind and for His own glory. Instead of "seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33), he runs greedily after the world, grasping and loving the things of the world. He heeds not the warnings of God's Word which are given to protect and help him, so instead of the greatest good—*God*—he chooses the greatest evil—*sin*—at his own peril. As he blindly pursues his own depraved desires, he says in his soul: I must have *my way*: I'll have that woman or that man if I have to break up their marriage to get them. I'll have that position if I have to kill someone to get it. I'll have my pleasure and my drink, my money, my home, my job, my good times in life and my way, no matter what the consequences! This is the *essence* of evil, my friend, and this is the heart of every man or woman outside of Christ.

Covetousness then, blinds the soul into believing a lie: that he has the right to do with himself as he pleases; and he says to God, "Don't You get in *my way*!" But my friend, if God never comes in mercy to your soul and you die in this condition, you're in a terrible fix: hell from beneath will move to meet you at your coming! Did you know that? Oh that God would open the hearts of every one of you who have been deceived, that you may see and cry unto God to break the power of covetousness in your heart and life! Cry unto God to come to your rescue, and to apply His precious blood by the power of His Spirit to cleanse your soul from this sin. Only God can deliver you, and I pray He will.

II.

“THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbour’s house, THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor *any thing* that is thy neighbour’s” (Exo. 20:17). We have seen that it is only by the law in the hands of the Holy Spirit that a sinner can know what sin is and thereby come to know his need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then in the parable of our Lord in Luke 12, we have seen the deceitfulness of this sin, for it proceeds from the heart, and the heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). How damning then, is this sin which grips the soul with the uncontrolled yearning to have more and more until it takes the very life and soul of the individual, for it can never be satisfied (Prov. 27:20).

Let us again look into the parable of Luke 12 to see the warning given against this sin of covetousness: “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, THOU FOOL, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? *so is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (vv. 16-21).

What was wrong with this farmer? Was it the fact that he was successful? Of course not! Nowhere does Scripture condemn success or riches as such. God never rejected Abraham or Solomon, Job or Joseph of Arimathea for being rich and successful. What was wrong then with *this* rich man? Had he acquired his wealth by dishonest means? There is nothing in this parable that points in that direction. On the contrary, we are given the impression that the man had become rich because of God’s blessing the labor of his hands, causing the soil to be so fruitful that it produced bountiful crops.

Listen to me now, dear friend! The verses we have read clearly indicate what was wrong: the rich man shows that *he did not know himself*. You see, he failed to realize that his body was mortal and would not live on for many years. He was deceived by the *deceitfulness of riches*, of which our Lord warns us in Matt. 13:22 “...the care of this world, and the *deceitfulness of riches*, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” Also, he did not take into account the fact that the ample goods in which he rejoiced could not satisfy his soul. You see, he had *nothing for his soul*, and this is where the deceitfulness of the sin of covetousness lies: it seeks after pleasure and enjoyment of the physical body while the soul is given nothing to feed upon. We read in Isa. 44:20 about this covetous man—“He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” And my friend, you’re deceived today if you have provided only for the body, the mind, for your family and all your physical needs, but have *not* provided for your soul! It is *the soul* that lives on after death; the body goes back to mother earth where worms will eat it while awaiting the day of resurrection. You see, you’re either going to be raised to resurrection of life to enjoy eternal life with Christ forever, or raised to everlasting damnation and contempt (John 5:29), to be cast out from the presence of God and to pay for your sins in hell forever and forever! And “What is man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

Another thing concerning this rich man is that he did not consider the needs of others. He laid up treasures for *himself*. His selfishness is shown in that there are six “*I’s*” and five “*my’s*” in these verses. He should have realized that there were other people who were in need of some of his grain. But he missed the joy of generous giving. All he could think of was tearing down his old barns or granaries in order to build bigger ones in which to store all his grain for himself. No wonder God called him a fool, for he thought of no one but himself, with no concern for his never-dying soul, nor for the needs of others. Oh what a terrible thing this is, for a man to live his life only for himself instead of for the glory of God and others!

We see then, that COVETOUSNESS IS THE WORSHIP OF SELF WHICH IS THE EMBODIMENT OF ALL EVIL. Because *self* is upon the throne of the heart, everything of this life becomes servant to the gratification of all fleshly and selfish desires. Selfishness is essentially—"my right to my own self and all that I touch for my pleasure and for my glory: me, my, and mine; and that's covetousness! It says in essence, "I'm concerned only for myself, so I will get what I want no matter how I get it, or who I hurt, rob or kill, and no matter how I lie or how many lives I wreck; I'm going to do just what I want to do!" But that's the heart of rebellion against God; and young man, if that spirit is not broken, you're going to wind up in hell without hope and without God! Young lady, you might be sitting there today saying to yourself, "Well, I'm still young!" But how do you know you're going to live until tomorrow? How do you know that God is not going to tell you this very day what He told that rich fool in Luke 12: "Thou fool, **this day** thy soul shall be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be?" You can't take anything with you, for "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (I Tim. 6:7); six feet of earth makes us all alike!

The root of the matter, however, as brought out by our Lord in this parable, is that by his selfishness, this rich fool *was not rich toward God!* He was even stealing or coveting the time the Lord had given him to prepare for eternity by running after his own foolish and hurtful lusts, of which I Tim. 6:9-10 warns us: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Oh my friend, what an awful thing it is for a man not to be rich toward God! This is the worst poverty a man can have, for if you are not storing up treasures in heaven, you are "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5)! If you are not in Christ and not sending treasures ahead to the next world by His grace, you'll receive the wages of sin which is eternal death! (Rom. 6:23). Poor is your soul, if you know nothing about the riches of God's grace!

Do you see how deceitful this sin is? It makes a man starve his soul that he might have the pleasures for his body. And then it makes him forget his fellowman while he considers only himself in everything; therefore he is *deceived in his values*. It robs him of the joy he could have by living for Christ and for others while he sends ahead those heavenly treasures by the grace of God; and it damns him because, instead of that, he is treasuring up the wrath of God and the wages of unrighteousness which is eternal death in hell forever!

So covetousness is a *subtle sin!* It wears many a covering; in fact, it is called the "*cloak of covetousness*" in I Thess. 2:5. Why? because it hides under a cloak of subtlety, even using the Word of God deceitfully, as one will say, "Don't you know God has said in John 10:10 that He gives the more abundant life? And in I Tim. 6:17 that He has given me all things richly to enjoy? He wants us to have the best; therefore it's right for me to allow myself this luxury or that entertainment." Oh dear friend, is this your heart? If so, you are *deceived by covetousness*, and by your own lustful desire for things and pleasures! Do you say, "My needs are just too great; I can't give to the Lord's work; I cannot give to help needy individuals! No, I must provide for myself!" But oh, my friend, you have a false security and miss the blessedness of giving! He did not give you what you have to spend only upon yourself and all the pleasures and things of this life, while the need for getting out the gospel of the grace of God goes begging!

Another seeks to justify his selfishness by saying, "I cannot give to the Lord's work; I cannot give to others because I must provide for my family. You know the Scripture in I Tim. 5:8 says that he that does not provide for his own household is worse than an infidel." Yes, but in I Kings 17:13 Elijah told the widow to *first* make him a cake, and afterward she could make one for her and her son; and the cruse of oil never failed, nor did the barrel of meal waste. And in Matt. 6:33 He commands us to seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, "and all these things shall be added unto you." My friend, you are just hiding your covetous heart under the pretense of providing for your family!

Do you see how this sin damns? Do you see its subtlety? It makes a man say, "Well, I'm thrifty you know, I must save." Yes, you save only for yourself! But the Word of God teaches in Eph. 4:28 that we are to labor for the purpose that we "may have *to give to him that needeth*." Or, you say, "Well, I must be doing something right; God has certainly blessed me with material gain!" The Bible is plain when it says that these are "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that *gain is godliness*." It also teaches "*godliness with contentment is great gain*!" "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment," He says, "let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:5-8).

But a covetous heart *cannot* be content! It looks at another man's wife and says, "Oh, if I had one like her." You'd better be content with what God has given you; the grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence, but it's not! "Oh, if I could only get this or that job, then I'd be satisfied." No, you wouldn't! If God gave you a thousand dollars a day, you wouldn't be satisfied! Your heart goes after its covetousness. "Give, give" cries the horseleach (Prov. 30:15), and so the sin of covetousness says, "Give, give, I've got to get more!" And you repine because God has not given you that which others have; you covet another's blessings, or their peace and quietness; yet you are not willing to come down before God in repentance and take the blame. You must have your way and your will. But oh, my friend, "sin, when it is finished, brings forth death!" (James 1:15). That's the reason I'm warning you of this sin; it's a damning sin!

Sermons die in a covetous heart because the soul is taken up with the world and does not want to hear of a life of self-denial. This again is why it's a damning sin: it hinders the Word of God as it is preached from taking hold on your heart. You might come to the house of God, but you cannot hear the Word of God as long as your heart goes after covetousness and the pleasures of this world. You are there physically, but you are thinking of how you can make more money. Your soul is robbed of the blessing, and you go on, pining and working, and looking forward to nothing but the deceitfulness of riches and the pleasures of this life. You have no time for the Word of God; you have no time to meditate upon the goodness and grace and the mercy of God Who has given you time to repent. You're content with a few tears or with a few verses of Scripture; you're content to give a few dollars and to perish because you are not willing to break before God and become a self-denying one.

It is said of the thorny ground hearers in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:22) that the seed received among thorns is *lost* because the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and pleasures *choke the Word*, making the hearer unfruitful. Yes, and this covetous heart makes a man fit only for hell! Therefore we know that covetousness keeps a man from praying, believing and studying the Word of God, for a covetous man cannot live by faith. He trusts in "things" rather than the living God Who gives us richly all things to enjoy (I Tim. 6:17).

Covetousness makes a man a thief. He lies and cheats to get more money. He laughs it off as a good bargain, but this is stealing from others, my friend! In our next message we will show you how this sin of covetousness is a mother sin, because it breaks *all* the commandments of God. My heart goes out to you who are eaten up with this sin, for you are a sorrowful individual; the Word of God cannot find a resting place in your soul.

Dear friend, if God shows this to be your heart, fall down before Him in repentance, crying unto Him for mercy against this sin that closes the heart against God, against your fellow man, and against providing for your never-dying soul! Oh may God work, may He have mercy, may He come down in power and in much assurance and deal with your soul as only He can. May He work mightily and effectually in giving you a heart of grace and a heart to cry out after Him as never before, "Lord break the power of sin in my life." And my friend, I would not let Him go, I would keep crying after Him! Even I must cry daily: 'Oh Lord, don't leave me to myself, continue to break the power of sin, giving me victory over it as you promised in Rom. 6:14.' Bring every sin to Him and cry out against it, that He might cleanse it by His blood and deliver you by His power, giving that grace which is needful that you may close with Him. Then you will find in the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Lover of sinful souls, your all in all!

III.

“THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbour’s house, THOU SHALT NOT COVET thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor *any thing* that is thy neighbour’s” (Exo. 20:17). We have seen the depths of this sin as this 10th commandment reaches beneath the externals of our conduct to the hidden activities of the mind, the heart and the will, and condemns sin when it is first entertained in the affections. Then we saw this same thought brought out in James 1:14-15: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” And in Mark 7:21-23 we saw that everyone by nature possesses this evil heart of covetousness, for out of the heart of man proceeds *all* sin.

We’ve seen the warning our Lord gave in Luke 12, where He tells us to be on our guard against this sin because of its deceitfulness: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (v.15). Covetousness deceives and slays us except for the convicting power of God’s Holy Spirit and His deliverance; for it is the uncontrolled yearning to have, to have more and more and still more, until it kills the soul of man, and then he abides under the curse and wrath of God forever!

Now we desire to show you that the DAMNING EFFECT of this dangerous sin is that it is a *mother sin*: It makes a man break *all the commandments in the heart* before the sin ever gets to the overt act. That’s why the sin of covetousness is the *root of all evil*. You see, it breaks the **first commandment**: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me;” for a covetous man is an idolater, having other gods besides the one true and living God. The very essence of this sin is clearly defined in Col. 3:5 as *idolatry*. It reads: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness...and covetousness, which is idolatry.” So a covetous man makes mammon, or this world, his god because he lives for this life and this life only. He is driven by the idols of riches and pleasures, or lust, position or fame and fortune, and will reap the wages of eternal death in hell if he does not repent (Rom. 6:23)!

But more than anything else, covetousness is seen to be idolatry because *self* sits as god on the throne of the heart of every unsaved soul, as shown by the parable of the rich fool. This is the embodiment of all evil, for everything of this life becomes servant to the gratification of all fleshly and selfish desires.

Covetousness breaks the **second commandment**: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...thou shalt not bow down thyself to them.” Man breaks this commandment when he worships the idols he has set up in his heart. He does not seek to know the true and living God as He is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ through His holy Word, but he wants something he can see and understand with his own depraved mind. So he changes “the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23).

My friend, to what idol are you bowing today? Do you bow down before the idol of your own opinion or your own church saying, “This is what I believe,” or “Ours is the only church”? Is pleasure your idol, to which you dedicate all your spare time and even your health? Do you worship your house or your car, your boat or your fishing rod, your gun or your job, sacrificing your all for them? Do you idolize your wife or your children and bow down to their every whim? Do you worship at the shrine of your own self image? In all these ways you break the second commandment through covetousness which is idolatry.

Again, this sin of covetousness also breaks the **third commandment**: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.” This commandment is broken every day when men and women leave their wives or their husbands or their children and go off with somebody else’s wife or husband saying: “The Lord led me to get a divorce and go out on my own; the Lord led me to do this.” This is blasphemy! God *never* leads you into sin! Dear friend, if you are guilty of this, you are bringing God into something for which you and you alone are responsible. This is nothing more than your covetous heart wanting to have its

own way and trying to shift the blame to God; therefore you stand guilty before God of taking His name in vain and breaking the third commandment!

In II Sam. 15:7 Absalom told his father that he must go back to Hebron and pay his vow to God, when all the time he was trying to usurp the throne and cover up his covetous heart by bringing God's name into it. He was blaspheming by taking the name of the Lord in vain! And any time we take God's name upon our lips when we don't worship Him in spirit and in truth, we take His name in vain. It does not give Him the glory to bring His name into everything when in works we deny Him (Titus 1:16). But there are many who make a profession of faith in Christ after some great crisis when they have no interest in turning from sin in true repentance with a hatred for it. Others make a profession only to escape the wrath of God or the consequences of sin, which is eternal death in hell; but this is taking the name of the Lord our God in vain and a breach of the third commandment!

Many a person takes the name of God in vain by making a profession of faith in Christ with nothing more in mind than to cover up a covetous heart. I knew a business man who visited various churches in the same town, mixed with the people and left an offering of \$20.00 with each church, only for the purpose of influencing the people to buy his merchandise! He was using the name of God in vain, as a cloke under which to hide his real intentions; so all of this came from an evil heart of covetousness. Beloved, we'd better be sure of what we are doing when we take God's name upon our lips!

Covetousness is a breach of the **fourth commandment**: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." God has given us six days to labor and prepare for the seventh day of rest, worship and relaxation before God. He tell us in Isa. 58:13,14: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, *not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words*: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." But a covetous man wants this day for *himself*, to do his own pleasure instead of God's pleasure on that day as well as every other day. Even if he attends religious services regularly, his heart still covets after his pleasure and he has only "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (II Tim. 3:4-5). God says of this covetous man that he draweth nigh unto me with his mouth, and honoureth me with his lips; but his "heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8). And in Ezek. 33:31 He says, "And they came unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." My friend, can this be said of you? Do you break the fourth commandment through your covetousness?

The sin of covetousness breaks the **fifth commandment**: "Honour thy father and thy mother." The covetous person desires his *own way, his own rule* instead of God's appointed way of obedience to parents and to God by submitting to His rule through the parents and walking in peace with them. And dear friend, this is a commandment broken a million times every day by children and young people who are coveting their own way and seeking their own honour rather than bowing to the authority of their father and mother whom God has given them; thus they dishonour their parents and show their rebellious, covetous heart against God. And you young children or young people who are listening to me today, let me tell you with love from my soul, you will never get saved until you bow to the authority of your parents that God put over you, for when you rebel against them, in essence you are rebelling against God and showing that your covetous heart wants your way and not God's way!

Listen further now! This sin of covetousness breaks the **sixth commandment**: "Thou shalt not kill," because when a man is greedy of gain, he will kill to get what he wants. As covetousness is a heart sin, we *first* break this sixth commandment *in the heart* when we hate our brother, as I John 3:15 tells us: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." It is covetousness then, that drives a man to kill so he might possess that which belongs to another. King Ahab, blinded by his covetous heart, had so little regard for the life of Naboth that he allowed him to be

murdered so he might possess his vineyard, thereby bringing greater condemnation upon himself (I Kings 21). A covetous heart can lead a man to kill his wife or have her killed so he can have another woman. It is a covetous and selfish mother who has her unborn child killed so she will be free from an unwanted pregnancy. We are seeing this sixth commandment broken every hour and every day of the week, aren't we? Right here in our own city recently, one of our policemen was killed in cold-blooded murder when he came upon a thief who was trying to rob a bank. It is covetousness that drives a man to murder!

Covetousness also breaks the ***seventh commandment***: "Thou shalt not commit adultery;" because the adulterous man or woman covets forbidden flesh which God has not given them. Covetousness makes men and women sell their very souls to the devil in hell just to satisfy their own damnable lusts. It is covetousness that drives a man to leave his wife, children, home and a good job to go after another woman to satisfy his own lustful desires. It is covetousness, selfishness, that leads to every illicit, perverted sex act practiced today. And again, covetousness, which leads to adultery, begins in the *heart* as our Lord tells us in Matt. 5:28: "Whosoever looketh on a woman *to lust after her* hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." How searching are these words which go deep into the heart of man and mark for judgment that sin when it is known only to God! Oh that God would convict of sin in this hour, sending His Word home to your soul in power and much assurance so you would be brought down by the authority of His law!

Man and woman, God sees your covetous heart! He sees all that is going on in this promiscuous society in which we live, and has already sent the judgment of herpes and AIDS against us. Is this not a warning? This is the judgment of God because your covetous heart has broken this seventh commandment! You'd better get down before Him and cry for a broken heart and a contrite spirit; cry for a hatred of this sin. For the judgment of these social diseases which have come upon so many millions in our nation today is only a foretaste of the final judgment when God shall cast you out of His presence forever!

The sin of covetousness breaks the ***eighth commandment***: "Thou shalt not steal;" because a man reaches for and takes that which God has withheld from him; he steals it because his covetous heart must have it. Not only that, but a covetous man steals from his own soul when he denies his soul the blessings of heaven while he holds on to his sin and reaps the curses of hell. And the Word of God classifies thieves along with covetous men in I Cor. 6:9-10. All come under the judgment of God! My friend, where do you stand?

Covetousness also breaks the ***ninth commandment***: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." The covetous man breaks this commandment when he lies to his neighbor for advantage. And what makes the perjurer take a false oath but covetousness—a hope for reward?

And again, the sin of covetousness breaks the ***tenth commandment***: "Thou shalt not covet." When a man covets his neighbour's house, his neighbour's wife, his neighbour's good name, his neighbour's job, or his neighbour's servants for himself, he is breaking the tenth commandment and all of the other nine as well!

So you see, dear friend, this is truly a mother sin, breaking all the commandments of God, and this is its damning effect. It brings the wrath of God down upon you in judgment, for Gal. 3:10 reads: "*Cursed* is every one that continueth not in *all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them." Therefore, if a man persists in the sin of covetousness which is idolatry, he shuts himself out of heaven, for we read also in Eph. 5:5: "This ye know, that no...covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Oh how awful then is this sin of covetousness that has set man on fire—the fire of lust and greed—to have any and every thing at any cost! How awful is this sin that has torn our nation apart! And when we look at this *inflexible* law of God which all of us have broken, we stand guilty before God, helpless and hopeless; we are undone, for we are brought into the light of the divine requirements and therefore must confess our guilt and cry: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Only when we are brought to this extremity will we hear those blessed words: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25).

So what is the cure for this sin of covetousness? Listen now! If you will confess before God (and please, dear friend, be honest with Him) that you have been feeding upon ashes, that your heart has deceived you so you cannot deliver your soul, and that there is truly a lie in your right hand, (that is, you've been lying to God and to man) then this is the cure: a new heart, a new nature given by the grace of God in Christ (Ezek. 36:26; II Pet. 1:4). Hear these words my friend! This is a *gift of God* worked in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will give you faith in Himself as He is revealed in Christ. This faith will enable you to turn to God from all your idols, to feed upon Christ, and look to Him and Him alone to provide all things for your soul, including heartfelt repentance and sorrow for sin (Acts 5:31).

Dear friend, seek and pray for a broken heart over sin and the things of this world; pray for a heavenly mind after Christ. Pray that your affection will be set on things above (Col. 3:2). Cry unto the Lord to dig the world out of your heart and teach you how to possess it, but not to love it (I John 2:15-17). And trust Him by His power, the power of His Word and the power of His blood, to cleanse you from sin, and save you by His grace.

You see, dear friend, God holds out hope to us only in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, Whose blood cleanses from *all sin*. It is Christ, and Him alone Who satisfies the human heart. The God-given appetite is satisfied completely, perfectly and solely in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, feed upon Him as He is lifted up out of the Word of God, for if any man feed upon Him Who is that living bread which was sent down from heaven, he will live forever.

IV.

So far in our studies of the SIN OF COVETOUSNESS, THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL, against which the tenth commandment warns us, we have seen that it proceeds from the depraved heart of man from which all sin proceeds. For Mark 7:21-23 tells us: "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, *covetousness*, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

Also from the Word of God we have seen that this sin of covetousness is a sin which engrosses the heart of man, holds him captive, deceives him, and causes him rather to be damned in hell than to give up his evil ways. Again listen to Ezek. 33:31: "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but *their heart goeth after their covetousness*." And II Pet. 2:14-15 reads: "Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with *covetous practices*; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam...who loved the wages of unrighteousness."

And from I Tim. 6:9-10 we've seen that it's a sin that leads to many foolish and hurtful lusts and a departure from the faith: "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Oh my friend, what an awful sin this is to cause a man to turn from the faith of Christ, His peace, hope, love and joy, and instead pierce himself through with many sorrows which will drown him in destruction and perdition in hell! And the greatest sorrow of them all is to be excluded from the kingdom of God as Eph. 5:5 tells us: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, *nor covetous man, who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

What a powerful sin that so enslaves and grips the soul of man with the insatiable desire of getting the world that he cannot hear the word of God warning him against it: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (I John 2:17). What he thinks is gain so blinds him that he cannot consider his greater loss: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and *lose his own soul*? Or what shall a man give

in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). The deceitfulness of this sin so hardens a man's heart (Heb. 3:13) that he cannot see the inevitable results: "The wages of sin is *death*" (Rom. 6:23), eternal death, the second death in hell! (Rev. 21:8). And this judgment awaits every soul outside of Christ: "...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thess. 1:7-9).

With all this in mind, and with God's hatred shown against this sin by bringing the unrepentant sinner into judgment, should we not stop and consider these questions: How may we know when our hearts are given to covetousness? How can I discern how my heart stands before God in regard to this sin? Listen as we consider these questions.

First, I would say that a man is in the grip of this sin of covetousness when ***his thoughts are wholly taken up with the world***. He is always plotting and projecting about the things of this life, and has no concern about the true riches which are found only in Christ. So he thinks of nothing but his shop, his farm, his work, his house, his family, his pleasure, how he can get on in the world, how he can make more money or own more things, get more interest on his money, find more time for his fishing, hunting or bowling, or any of a hundred things that will satisfy him on this earth.

On the other hand, a good man's thoughts (made good by the grace of God) are in heaven. He has set his affection on things above, not on the things on the earth (Col. 3:2), and where his treasure is, there his heart is also (Matt. 6:21). His conversation, his citizenship is in heaven from whence he looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change his vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21). So he thinks on "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely [Christ's love and eternal glory with Him], whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise..." he thinks on these things (Phil. 4:8).

Oh my friend, where is your heart? Is it set on things above where Christ is, or is it taken up with the things of this life? Is it said of you as it was said of the thorny ground hearers in Matt. 13:22: "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful," because your heart is taken up with this world and with your covetousness? Or have you laid up for yourself treasures in heaven where Christ is? Is your heart set upon Him, His glory, His grace, His love, all that He is and what He has done for your never-dying soul by His work of redemption?

Second, a man may be said to be given to covetousness when all his speech is about the world (I John 4:5). His breath, like a dying man's, smells strong of the earth, for out of the abundance of his wicked heart he speaks (Luke 6:45). He might speak of the social functions of the church, but he is still speaking of this earth because he knows nothing of Christ; so he has no place in his thoughts or his speech for the precious things of Christ. He speaks only of the world, its pleasures, its fashions, its politics, its television programs, and things that are sensual, lustful, blasphemous and dishonoring to God. Your tongue, dear friend, is the mirror of your soul; your speech always betrays you! (Matt. 26:73).

A sign of a godly man, however, is that his speech is seasoned with grace (Col. 4:6) so his tongue talks of Christ, His blessed Person, the things of heaven, of holiness and godliness. The speech of the children of this world wearies him, but he rejoices in the things of Christ and desires to converse with the children of God. Why? because Christ is in his heart and is his true Treasure.

Third, a man may be said to be given to covetousness when ***he takes more pains to get the things of earth than the things of heaven***. A covetous man will take many a weary step to get the world, but will take no pains for Christ or heaven. He will stay up late and miss his sleep, sacrifice his wife, home, children or anything so he can have his money or drink, fame or honour, or his pleasures—hunting, fishing, or the like—but he neglects his soul and the Word of God. He so overloads himself with worldly business until he

has no more time for God, His Christ, His Word, His service, or fellowship with His people. This insatiable desire for getting the world eats at his heart and so overcomes him that he has no time to pray, listen to the preached Word or seek the Lord. Because of the natural depravity of his heart, he is so eaten up with accumulating riches and the things of this life that he cannot stop long enough to consider the value of his soul; his covetous heart can never be satisfied, but seeks after more, and more and more! He gives no heed to the words of our Lord in Matt. 6:33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [the things that are necessary for this life—food, drink, clothes and shelter] shall be added unto you.” If he could have heaven on his terms, he would take it, but he will never put forth any effort to obtain Christ and His salvation. So he wholeheartedly seeks the world, while he only wishes for heaven.

Lastly, this covetous man *so sets his heart upon worldly things, that for the love of them, he will part with Christ and heaven*. When Christ said to the rich young ruler, “Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matt. 19:21-22). He would rather part with Christ than with all his earthly possessions. Listen, my dear friend, when it comes to the critical point—whether you are to lose your estate or Christ, your friends or Christ, your family or Christ—and you would rather part with Christ than any of these things which will fade away at last, then it is clear that you are possessed with the demon of covetousness!

Oh how many have sold Christ for less than thirty pieces of silver like Judas did! Esau sold his soul for a bowl of red beans and rice; and you are selling your soul for something just as trivial if you have chosen anything of this life over Christ, Who is God’s Love-Gift to sinners. Has the Holy Spirit ever convicted you of this sin of covetousness, this insatiable desire for getting the world and all that it has to offer?

Remember what I John 2:15-17 tells us! “*Love not the world*, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is *not* in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” And what is the will of God? His will is that we repent, confess this sin of covetousness, forsake our way and our thoughts, and return unto Him (Isa. 55:6-7); that we lay down the arms of our rebellion and seek His face in grace (Acts 17:30-31); that we come to Christ for salvation (Acts 4:12); that we believe on God’s Son Whom He has sent (I John 3:23); and that we follow after righteousness and holiness so we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world (Titus 2:12). His will is to give us pardon and forgiveness of sin, righteousness, a new heart, a new spirit, a new nature—in fact, a new life, because He tells us, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Only then will we have the promise of John 6:39 where our blessed Lord promised us the greatest blessing in all the world: “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

Oh my dear friend, for what are you selling your soul? To stay in your sin of covetousness and hang on to the things of this world will only let you hear those awful words in the day of judgment: “Depart from me ye that work iniquity: I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23)! You and I will never know what it means to be in Christ until that last great day when all shall be swept away and we stand before the righteous Judge to give account of all that we have done while here on earth. We will never know the value of Christ’s blood, the value of His righteousness, the value of His great grace and love until we stand there with Christ as our only Refuge and Hope. Oh what a great mercy, to be in Him and stand in Him in that day!

Think of it, dear friend! What will it be, with all hope and all mercy gone, with all the things of this world swept away, when you must face the Righteous Judge as a naked, sinful soul, because you would not give up this world! What an awful thing! Oh I pray that you will think upon these things and cry unto God to have mercy upon you in Christ. Trust Him! Believe Him! Cast yourself by faith upon Him, for He alone can save and keep and deliver you spotless before God in that day. ✠

“COMMUNE WITH YOUR OWN HEART”

Hence, vain, intruding world, depart;
No more allure nor vex my heart;
Let every vanity be gone;
I would be peaceful and alone.

Here let me search my inmost mind,
And try its real state to find,
The secret springs of thought explore,
And call my words and actions o'er.

Eternity, tremendous sound!
To guilty souls a dreadful wound;
But O, if Christ and heaven be mine,
How sweet the accents, how divine!

Be this my great, my only care,
My chief pursuit, my ardent prayer,
My interest in the Saviour's blood,
My pardon sealed, and peace with God.

Search, Lord, O search *my inmost heart*,
And light, and hope, and joy impart;
From guilt and error set me free,
And guide me safe to heaven and thee. —*Steele*