

## **Covetousness**

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*“To covet is to seek for something, someone, some position, some recognition, or some pleasure not in the will of God. Notice that I used the word seek rather than desire. To covet is not merely wishing for more, but going after it, lusting for it, working to hold onto it”* (***Biblical Ethics***, McQuilkin, p. 100). While we may want many things that do not harm us spiritually or distract us from serving God, there is a point at which our motives must be checked and the desire stemmed. Even two thousand years later, Jesus’ description is apt when He says, *“For what will a man be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26) There is a reason that covetousness is such a terrible sin in the Bible:

- It separates a person from God (Romans 1:29,32);
- It destroys community (James 4:1-4);
- Breaks fellowship (2 Peter 2:14ff);
- Is the object of church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:10-11);
- Brings the wrath of God (Colossians 3:5-6);
- It is a form of idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5).

Desire is not evil in itself. It is the distortion of a God-given desire that is so terrible and destructive. We are designed to desire the opposite sex, to desire a good job to take care of our families, to desire money so that we can have it to share, to desire food and clothing for the protection of our bodies, to desire safety. Covetousness is a root sin that leads to many others – adultery, stealing, murder. Paul tells Timothy that it is not money itself, but the desire of it that has led to the destruction of so many people (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

### **Covetousness Stands Opposite Love**

If the first and greatest commandment is to love (God first, and then all people) according to Mark 12:28-31, covetousness stands opposite that ideal. Love is interested in giving, while covetousness is interested in getting. The problem with this is that materialism is a lifestyle that can never truly satisfy a person. The paradox of the eternally satisfying life is that we can only fill our souls by emptying them (Matthew 16:25, Matthew 19:29-30). John D. Rockefeller was once asked how much money it would take to satisfy a man. He replied, “A little more!”

### **Contentment in spite of everything**

As long as live we in an imperfect world, our situations will be imperfect. In that sense I will always feel unsatisfied by life. My wealth, my house, the fulfillment of fleshly desires – none of it can satisfy me spiritually. I will always feel a little bit out of place in this life. Yet I can always be content. *“I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity...”* (Philippians 4:11-13). Try to remember a few reasons why you should live a contented life:

***I brought nothing with me, and I can take nothing when I leave*** – 1 Timothy 6:6ff encourages us to see the great gain in godliness. With food and covering we should be satisfied, because this is what we need to survive every day of physical existence. Wealth may enhance our time here, but it is neither necessary nor helpful to someone whose home is in heaven (Matthew 19:23-24).

***God will never leave me or forsake me*** – I am reminded by Hebrews 13:5 that I should be free from the love of money and be content with what I have. God has always taken care of those who are His. Perhaps Christians are not the wealthiest people, or the most popular, or the most glamorous, but we are seeking an inheritance that has no price tag.

***I cannot add to the sum of my life*** – My desires cannot satisfy me, and my anxiety cannot give me answers. Greed and unhappiness cannot stop death from finding me, and wealth means nothing when confronted with judgment. Jesus implores us to stop seeking earthly treasure because of its inherent emptiness and inability to truly make us satisfied (Matthew 6:19-34).