

Overcoming Sin (Part 6)

Covetousness

Luke 12:13-15

I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. 3 We live in a society driven by covetousness.
 - A. Television and movies showcase the lives of the rich and famous.
 - B. They encourage us to measure ourselves by these worldly standards.
2. Society tells us the measure, worth, and importance of an individual is measured by one's wealth.
 - A. "He with the most toys...wins!"
 - B. Those who give in to this kind of thinking spend their time, energy and money in an endless (and futile!) effort to "keep up with the Joneses." Why? Covetousness! Jesus said: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Lk. 12:15)
3. Advertisers spend billions each year to get our attention and appeal to us to spend money we don't have on products we don't need.
 - A. Because of readily available credit, there is no need to deprive ourselves of a lifestyle we want but can't afford.
 - B. Don't think advertising doesn't work? For the 2015 Super Bowl *NBC Sports* is selling 40 30-second ads at an average cost of \$4.5 million (doesn't include the production cost which is usually in the range of \$1.5-\$2.0 million). Grand total, including production costs is ~\$250 million.
 - C. But the bills eventually come due from all this spending!
 - D. ** Consider these statistics (source: *Nerd Wallet Finance*; current as of 8/2014)(statistics are per household):
 - ☛ Average credit card debt: \$15,480 (\$872.2 billion total U.S. credit card debt).
 - ☛ Average mortgage debt: \$156, 474 (\$8.24 trillion total U.S. mortgage debt).
 - ☛ Average student loan debt: \$33,424 (\$1.132 trillion total U.S. student loan debt).
4. ** Gambling profits:
 - A. Gross gaming revenue (GGR) in U.S. casinos (2012) was \$37.34 billion.
 - B. Lottery ticket sales (43 states and Washington, D.C.) was \$78 billion.
5. Why? Covetousness! The illicit desire to have things we see is called covetousness. Have you ever daydreamed about what you would do if you won the lottery?
6. The Bible has a lot to say about the sin of covetousness and the trouble it can cause, but it also tells us how we can overcome it.

II. Discussion:

1. 4 What is covetousness?
 - A. Several Greek words are used in the New Testament convey the idea of covetousness, but we'll focus on just one—*pleoneskia*.
 - (1) This word is a compound word.
 - (2) First part, *pleon*, means "more," and the second part, *echo*, means "to have."
 - (3) So the word covetousness literally means "more to have."

B. Covetousness is the wish/desire to have more than one possesses, or as Thayer defines it (p. 516): “a greedy desire to have more.”

- (1) It is an unquenchable thirst to get more and more of “things” we think we need in order to be satisfied.
- (2) Included in this word is the idea of one who shamelessly overreaches into areas and places which are not his in order to satisfy these desires.

2. **5** What is wrong with covetousness? Why is the desire to have more a sin? Why is it so dangerous? The Bible pulls no punches in exposing the real nature of the sin of covetousness. As Barclay comments, “again and again [the New Testament] most unsparingly condemns [covetousness].”

A. **** It keeps evil company:** Notice the sins listed with covetousness in the New Testament.

1 Cor. 6:9-10: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Eph. 5:3: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;”

2 Tim. 3:2-5 (KJV): “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

B. **6 It defiles a man (Mk. 7:20-23).**

- (1) The sin of covetousness is not a harmless attitude to harbor in one’s heart.
- (2) It stains a man’s heart and character from the inside out, thus, defiling every aspect of his life and character; for one’s life proceeds from his heart (**Prov. 4:23:** “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”).

C. **7 It is idolatry: Col. 3:5:** “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

- (1) Idolatry is not just the making and worshiping of a graven image; anything that becomes a primary focus in our life replacing God is an idol (or putting Him in any place but first place!).
- (2) A dime is very small in size and monetary value; but if you hold it up close enough to your eye nothing else can be seen.
- (3) For a covetous man, his money and “things” has become his god.
 - (a) He seeks happiness in money, he devotes himself to accumulating things (e.g., land), and, very importantly, he puts his trust in his wealth.
 - (b) He gives it his affection, love, and respect; nothing else in the world matters more to him because his money and things are all that he can see.

D. **8 It provokes the wrath of God**

- (1) Covetousness is listed among the sins that will bring the wrath of God upon mankind (**Col. 3:5-6:** “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.”).
- (2) Anything that provokes the wrath of God should get our attention and must be avoided!

E. 9 It is the root of many other sins: Covetousness is such an overwhelming desire for what belongs to another, we often violate the laws of right and justice to obtain the objects of our desire. The following are just some of the sins we can commit when we are driven by covetousness.

- (1) **Theft: Josh. 7:20-21:** “And Achan answered Joshua and said, ‘Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: 21 When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I **coveted** them and **took** them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it.’”
- (2) **Lying:** 2 Kgs. 5:20-27 (Gehazi, Elisha’s servant lied to Naaman, ended up a leper!)
- (3) **Betrayal:** (Matt. 26:14-16; Jn. 12:4-6) Judas sold out the Lord, in part, because he coveted the money in the treasury.
- (4) **Murder:** (1 Kgs. 21: King Ahab desired to have his neighbor’s (Naboth) vineyard, ended up killing him to get it.).
- (5) **Departing from the faith: 1 Tim. 6:9-10:** “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”
- (6) **Brings suffering upon loved ones: Prov. 15:27:** “He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.” One cannot fill his house with the fruits of greed and covetousness without his household reaping the consequences.

3. **10 How to overcome covetousness:** We can overcome covetousness! Paul said some in Corinth had! 1 Cor. 6:9-11 (“And such were some of you...”) If they overcame, so can we! Since covetousness is a never-ending desire for things, the key to overcoming this sin is learning how to be satisfied with what we have (1994 Accord). That’s called “contentment” (**Heb. 13:5:** “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”). However, contentment doesn’t come naturally to most folks. It don’t think it came naturally to Paul! (**Phil. 4:11:** “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:”). How do we learn to be content?

A. * Learn to trust God: The Hebrew writer connects contentment with trusting in God: **Heb. 13:5-6:** “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

- (1) In learning to be content, Paul also learned he could do all things through Christ (**Phil. 4:11-13**).
- (2) Isn’t it ironic that our money carries the slogan “In God We Trust”; but most people trust in money more than in God! The more money we have, the better we think we’ll feel.
 - (a) This dependence upon an abundance of wealth in order to feel satisfied and secure is not pleasing to God (for good reason...just ask Robin Williams).
 - (b) Faith is more than just belief; we must move beyond simple belief in God to develop a trust in God to provide for our needs (**Psa. 37:25:** “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.”; Matt. 6:25-34).

B. 11 Learn that life is not about accumulating things: The world says, “He who dies with the most toys wins.”

- (1) “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Lk. 12:15) Hearses don’t pull U-Hauls! Cleaning out Jim & Pearl’s houses.

- (2) The amount of things we own or the amount of money we have in the bank, do not determine the real value and worth of our life (Pearl's account list).
 - (a) Life is about being a person of real character (**Prov. 22:1**: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold."); enjoying family and friends, having fellowship with God, and securing an eternal resting place for our soul (Matt. 16:26).
 - (b) None of these things can be bought with money.

C. 12 Learn to set our minds on the things above: Col. 3:2: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

- (1) As long as our mind is focused on the things of the world, we are going to be tempted with covetousness.
- (2) However, if our minds are focused on the things of heaven, our desire will be for the things of heaven, not for the temporary things of this world (**Matt. 6:19-21**: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.>").
- (3) I would like to believe I am getting closer to God as I grow older and more mature. That being the case, I am less and less attracted to "things." BUT, the temptation is still there from time to time. How attracted to "things" are you?

D. 13 Learn to be satisfied:

- (1) Solomon exposed the problems faced by those who have great wealth (**Eccl. 5:10-12**: "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. 11 When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? 12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.>").
- (2) We do not need abundance to be satisfied, to be content! Nothing is wrong with trying to improve our situation, but when covetousness is the motive behind we are simply feeding a monster that will never be satisfied.
- (3) The peace of mind God provides is much, much sweeter than the peace of mind things provide (Matt. 6:19-21).

E. 14 Learn to deny self: Matt 6:24: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

- (1) Covetousness is an expression of self-centeredness, an expression of selfishness.
- (2) Contentment means learning to tell self, "NO!" The world urges us to help ourselves to the things we see. In fact, it calls us a fool if we don't play the game!
- (3) Christians know better, but the lust of the eyes is hard to overcome. We see bright and shiny things and want them (Ferrari, McLaren F1, purple hemi-Cuda).
- (4) We see others enjoying things and we want them too; this desire for things must be put to rest (Col. 3:5). We need to remind ourselves daily concerning the meaning of life (Lk. 12:15).

F. 15 Learn to love our neighbor:

- (1) One of the vilest aspects of covetousness is it causes us to disregard the rights and needs of others as we place the pursuit of things first in our life.
- (2) Covetousness will eventually do harm to our neighbor, but love never will (**Rom. 13:8-10**).

- (3) If we love our neighbor, we will respect what is his and learn to rejoice in his blessings instead of envying them.
- (4) Covetousness is the opposite of generosity and love. Love moves us to consider others before ourselves, do for others, and look out for the best interests of others; all of which moves us away from self-centeredness.
- (5) My pickup truck is now 11 years old, I would like a new one. I would love to own a 1903 Springfield or a Ruger No. 1, single-shot 22/250 varmint barrel with a Leopold 4 X 20 power scope. But...

1 John 3:17: *“But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* (cf. Matt. 25:31-46)

III. Conclusion: 16

1. Covetousness is not a harmless habit or blameless characteristic.
2. ** Covetousness is “the sin of the man who has allowed full play to the desire to have what he should not have, who thinks that his desires and appetites and lusts are the most important thing in the world, who sees others as things to be exploited, who has no god except himself and his desires” (Barclay 235).
 - (a) But covetousness is even more insidious and deceitful than Mr. Barclay states.
 - (b) We don’t have to be some wild-eyed monster who puts his desires, appetites and lusts as “the most important thing in the world.”
 - (b) To be guilty of covetousness we only have to put these desires ahead of the needs of others, ahead of our spiritual life, etc.
3. ** So, I hope I haven’t given you the impression that you have to be a “Donald Trump” to have a problem with covetousness. Covetousness knows no socio-economic boundaries. It affects the rich and the poor! ***It can easily creep into anyone’s life!***
4. If we have a problem with covetousness, we begin overcoming it right now by confessing it to God and asking His help in repenting of it. Then we must do what the Bible says we must do in order to learn to be content.

Adapted from *Overcoming Sin*, by Heath Rogers, 2013, One Stone Press, Bowling Green, KY (pp. 53-57).

References:

- Barclay, William. *New Testament Words*. London, England: SCM Press Ltd., 1964. 233, 235. Print.
- Thayer, Joseph H. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996. 516. Print.