

The Ten Commandments
Lesson 22: No Coveting
Contentment With God's Provision and God's Providence

Introduction

Everyone commits the sin of coveting at some time or another. What is coveting? Coveting occurs when wanting goes beyond God's will for our lives. Many consider this the foundation for breaking all the other commandments, because if we did not want more or different things outside of what God wants us to have, we would not be tempted to step over the boundary lines established by the other nine commandments. What does God want us to know about the sin of coveting? How do we escape its deadly snare? How do we become more like the Lord Jesus, who never coveted, who could give freely without envy or regret, and who was content with His Father's provisions?

When God gives us more than we expected, we must remember that He gives according to what we need, not in order to feed the endless desire for more. When we covet, we live in an "I want more, more, more for me" state of mind. But, God expects us to share generously with others, and to use the abundance He gives us to rejoice in Him and glorify Him.

Sometimes coveting does not mean simply wanting more; it may consist of merely wanting something different. "I don't like what I have, I want what he or she has because it is different from mine—bigger, better, newer, nicer than what I have." Usually, this is all dependent on personal perspective, what one thinks (and "I" am absolutely sure that "I" know best). This is the "whiny" sound of a childish heart, whether that heart is four years of age, or forty, or eighty-four. It is discontentment in any case. I am not content with God's provision—what He has given me at this time—nor am I content with God's providence—how He has worked in my circumstances, what He has allowed or not allowed, what He has given, withheld or taken. This all boils down to one's personal trust in His personal ways in one's life. Are we willing to walk by faith, trusting in His will and trusting His ways to accomplish His will?

We will look at these matters in our study of the Tenth Commandment. We will see how all the commandments are linked to this one and, hopefully, be able to honestly evaluate our hearts as the Spirit of God teaches us and guides us through the truth of *"You shall not covet."*

1. The Age-Old Practice of Coveting

The Tenth Commandment brings to us the heart of all the commandments, for it is in our desires that sin is sparked and flames up. Cultures have changed, styles have changed, ways of work and warfare have changed, but the heart of man has not changed in the least. How they handled the temptation to covet in Genesis or Exodus is how we should handle this temptation in our daily lives. Let's look at how Scriptures deals with coveting and see the heart of God toward this deadly sin.

- a. Read the Tenth Commandment in **Exodus 20:17**. Summarize what Moses penned along with your insights.
 - i. List the areas of caution contained in this command.

- b. **Deuteronomy 5:21** repeats this command with some slight differences. Look over that verse and record any additional insights.

The Tenth Commandment comes with multiplied caution as it addresses area after area to guard against. This highlights the force that coveting carries. It can strike any day, anywhere, in any relationship, with any activity. **Exodus 20:17** focuses on five areas of coveting: first, a neighbor's house, then his wife, his servant, his tools (livestock) used for his livelihood, and the general array of targets for coveting, "anything that belongs to your neighbor." **Deuteronomy 5:21** repeats those five areas, but adds the caution against coveting "his field," an area of concern particularly applicable to those about to go into Canaan and conquer new land. The field one's neighbor received could easily become a coveted treasure.

Coveting comes in all shapes and sizes. The modern-day applications are still as real as the cautions of Moses' day. People still covet another's house (neighborhood, lifestyle) or another's wife or husband. People covet the modern "servants," those labor-saving devices, conveniences, or services some have. Others covet the "ox" or "donkey", the tools one has for conducting business or for travel (car, motorcycle). Some have wonderful "fields" which is the equivalent of income potential, inheritance, or simply one's location or situation. The list is endless.

- c. What command concerning coveting do you find in **Proverbs 6:24-25**?

Like the temptation to desire or covet another's house or land or situation is very real, so the temptation to desire or covet a different spouse or an immoral encounter is very real. God's command is pointed. "Do not desire (Hebrew, *hamad*, "covet") *her beauty in your heart.*" That includes images in print or on the screen that can lead one down a deadly path. It is a heart issue that must be guarded. That starts with where one's eyes travel. Keep your eyes away from her gaze and you will help guard your path.

- d. This matter of coveting is at the heart of all sin. We see that in the first sin in **Genesis 3:1-7**. Read that account. What do you find about desire or coveting in verse 6?

Into the Garden of Eden, the serpent came speaking his crafty lies to Eve's desires. She looked carefully at the fruit, taking in all its tempting beauty, its delicious potential, and its delightful promise of forbidden knowledge. Eve saw and coveted, intensely desiring what she saw. Then, she wholeheartedly took the fruit and ate. Adam ate as well, and then both hid in the shame and fear of sin, the end result of coveting. The promised benefits never materialized. The beauty and taste and new knowledge were not what the serpent promised they would be. The first disappointment with coveting would not be the last.

- e. We see another clear example and warning about coveting as the people of Israel entered into the land of Canaan. Read **Joshua 6:15-19**. What warning did Joshua give in verses 18-19?
- f. What happened? Read **Joshua 6:24** and **7:26** and summarize what Joshua did. Of what was Achan guilty according to **Joshua 7:11**?

The Captain of the Host of the Lord gave Joshua very clear instructions about how to conquer Jericho. Joshua made sure everyone knew to set aside "all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron" as "holy unto the Lord." He warned them of the danger of coveting and taking anything set aside to the Lord and bringing

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trouble to the people of Israel. When they captured the city, Achan saw some of the rich treasure, “*a beautiful mantle from Shinar*” as well as abundant gold and silver. Achan longed for the forbidden treasures of Jericho, the lure of those treasures capturing his desires. He took what he saw. After stealing what belonged to God, Achan deceitfully hid his treasure, apparently with the knowledge of his family since the Lord told Joshua “*they have also put them among their own things.*”

They sinned against the Lord and transgressed the covenant God had made with Israel. As a result of his theft and deception, the judgement of God came. Again, coveting chased a desire that led to sin and death.

We know that idolatry is forbidden by the Lord. It is a sin against Him and an act of unfaithfulness in one’s relationship with Him. Yet, when we covet after things, we have a tendency to worship them as well, even though we probably do not bow down to them. God knew that his chosen people, the Israelites would covet the graven images of the conquered people, if for no other reason, because they coveted the gold and silver these false gods were made from.

- g. God addresses this scenario in **Deuteronomy 7:25-26**. Read those verses and summarize what God said.
 - i. What do these verses say about what comes into one’s heart or one’s home?

God promised Israel He would lead them in conquering the land of Canaan. In so doing, they would discover the many idols of the people along with the graven images used in their pagan worship. He instructed them to utterly destroy those images, including the silver and the gold used to decorate them. These idol statues would be more than simple “art” or some cultural statement or fad. They represented a heart commitment, a dependence on a lifeless, breathless, mindless, voiceless, heartless object.

God wanted a relationship with His people that was heart to heart, thinking clearly with His word, choosing His will, and rejoicing in His ways and His provision. He wanted them to guard against any heart attachment to an idol, statue, or any part of a statue.

Watch out for and avoid anything that increases covetousness and lessens your worship of and satisfaction in the Lord. That can come from a material desire or a sensual craving. It can come from a longing for some position or prestige or an inordinate delight in a person, whether thinking too highly of another or thinking too highly of yourself. All these are symptoms of idolatry. Idolatry feeds on one’s coveting, while coveting, in turn, increases one’s idolatry.

APPLY: What applications do you see in your life? Are there any idols that have infected you with more coveting? Is there some coveting in your heart that is feeding idolatry of some sort? Consider what we have talked about so far. Ask the Lord to search your heart to see if there is any wicked way, any coveting that needs to stop. Repent of any sin He reveals and replace it with the truth of His word.

2. Viewing Coveting The Way God Views It

The Old Testament has much to say about coveting and allows us to view coveting as God views it. Now as we look in Deuteronomy, in Proverbs, and in the prophets, we will see even more of the deceptiveness of coveting, the danger of our desires, and how we can avoid this deadly sin.

One of the words of warning often found in the Old Testament concerns the heart attitude with which one views material possessions. We have seen Achan ensnared by what he saw, and we have observed that his heart was attached to the forbidden possessions. Several verses in the Old Testament speak of having the right perspective about what one wants and how one gives.

- a. Look first at **Deuteronomy 15:7-11**. What is God's command in verse 7? What does God want His people to do, according to verse 8?
 - i. What is the warning found in verse 9? What is counsel and promise of verses 10-11?
- b. Other Old Testament Scriptures also deal with this mindset of giving. What added insights do you find in **Proverbs 22:9**?

The poor will always be on the earth, in every nation, every town, and all with various needs. God spoke to His people and commanded each not to harden his heart against a poor brother, nor withhold what one can and should give. Loan him what he needs, whatever the need. At times, he will need more than a loan. He will need a gift. Freely give when that is appropriate. Watch out for a calculating mindset. The Jewish economy required that one release all debts in the sabbatical year, which occurred once every seven years. If one loaned a certain amount a year prior to the sabbatical year, it was possible to lose it all if the person could not pay it back in the short time until the seventh year when that loan was expected to be canceled by law.

God gave a general law that applied to the mindset or heart with which one approached anyone in need. He spoke of a "hostile" eye, or an "evil eye." Do not have a "hostile" eye toward a brother, the Hebrew phrase 'evil eye' referring to someone with a stingy or greedy mindset.

The contrast to an "evil eye" is a "good eye." **Proverbs 22:9** promises that the one who is "generous," for example, in giving food to the poor, will be blessed. The word translated "generous" is literally a full Hebrew phrase translated "has a good eye." It means to give, looking for ways to bless another, not being stingy or greedy or constantly thinking only of oneself.

- c. The "evil eye" in the Old Testament is also found in **Proverbs 23:4-8**. What counsel does the writer give in verse 4-5? Describe the man presented in verse 6-8.
- d. What marks a man with an "evil eye" according to **Proverbs 28:22**?
- e. In the lesson on the eighth commandment against stealing, we saw how one of the sons of Josiah, King Jehoiakim, King of Judah, refused to give workers their just pay. Look at God's rebuke to him in **Jeremiah 22:13-17**. What sins and crimes did he commit according to verse 17?
 - i. According to verse 16, what did God want to see in his life?
- f. Look at **2 Kings 23:34-37**. What did Jehoiakim do to the people of Judah according to verse 35?
- g. What judgments did God pronounce on his life according to **Jeremiah 22:18-19**? [For further insight, read God's word against Jehoiakim in **Jeremiah 36:27-31**.]

Jehoiakim, one of the sons of the godly king Josiah, did not walk in his father's ways. Justice, righteousness and taking care of the "afflicted and needy" had marked the reign of Josiah. Thinking that a luxurious palace

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with cedar paneling was one of the distinguishing marks of a king, Jehoiakim pursued building for himself a spacious palace beautifully painted and appointed. To do so, he hired many workers but refused to pay them for their work. He stole from them. Why? Because his eye and his heart were intent on his own gain, "dishonest gain."

- h. **Micah 2:1-5** presents one of the accusation God has against His people. What were the powerful doing according to verse 1-2, and why? What judgment did God pronounce in verses 3-5?

Micah prophesied to the people of Judah during the latter half of the eight century (around 735 BC). He declared the coming judgment of God on their sin, particularly their injustices toward others. This is what he deals with in Micah 2:1-5. The wealthy had the power to seize houses and land, even though by God's law, one's land was to stay in the family and tribe to which God gave it. Because of their covetous hearts and proud ways, they pondered and planned schemes to forcefully gain those houses and lands. It was the final desire of their minds at night and their waking thought in the morning.

In just retribution, the Lord promised that He would bring in foreigners who would seize all their fields and houses. Coveting leads to injustices, cheating, lying, stealing, and oppressing others, even one's own countrymen.

Apply: How are you doing in this area of coveting? Do you cheat, lie, steal, or pressure others to get what you want? Do you push to get your way, to fulfill some covetous desire you have? Are you pushing for selfish satisfaction or striving for significance in some areas? Desires can sometimes be overwhelming. That is why we must daily die to self and be overwhelmed by the lordship and love of Jesus Christ. He knows what each of us needs. Remember, your satisfaction and significance are in Him and His will. Pause and ask the Lord to search your heart for any signs of coveting, any pressure tactics of which you may be guilty, any cheating, even in 'little' ways, trying to make sure you get what you want.

Homework: Read **Matthew 6:19-24; Mark 7:20-23; Matthew 20: 1-16; Romans 7:7-13.**

Lesson Topics: **Jesus' Words On Coveting And Contentment & Christians And Coveting.**