

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (29) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#17e. Three Great Foes: First, the World (part 5): Addressing the Sin of Covetousness**

Introduction:

We have been considering the “world” as one of the three great spiritual enemies of the Christian. We battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Scriptures speak of this engagement of hostility between Christians and the world in quite a number of places in Scripture. Here are a few we have cited:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world-- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life-- is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

The fallen world has its ways of thinking. These ways are often in conflict with, even in contradiction with, the ways of God. The world as the spiritual foe of the Christian takes on many forms. We have addressed some of these. Today we will consider the fifth topic in our mini-series, “Love not the World,” which is the sin of covetousness. Covetousness is a sin that can be regarded as associated with the first enemy of our souls, the fallen *world*. But covetousness could also be considered a manifestation of our second enemy, which is our sinful *flesh* in that we covet that which we crave. And yet it can also be seen as a sin to which we are tempted by the *devil*. Did not the tempter tempt our Lord to covet when he “took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me’”? (Matt. 4:8, 9). But we are treating this sin under the heading of the world. This is consistent with the verse that we have already cited: “Do not love the world *or the things in the world*. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 5:15). To love the things of the world is to covet that which God has commanded we are not to covet.

One of the most difficult aspects of the fallen “world” with which we all struggle is the place that *things* of this world have in our hearts. ***We are prone to covetousness.*** We desire to have that which we do not have. We refuse to be contented because we do not have what we want. We want more of what we do not have, whether we can afford it or not.

The Word of God declares to us that covetousness is sin. To fail to be content with what God has given us is sin. It is a sin that falls under this broad category of worldliness.

Covetousness should not be regarded as present when we simply appreciate and are grateful for the things that God has given to us. God “gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). Nor should covetousness be reduced to any and all desire for something you do not have. Desires are covetous when they become all important to us, leading us to do the following:

- (1) When we neglect or disregard the priorities that God has set forth in His Word, setting aside God’s promises of care and provision, setting aside our chief duty to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

(2) When we become discontented or angry, envious or jealous, of others for what God has given to them and has not given to us.

(3) When we grow impatient, and we violate scriptural principles and commands in order to obtain what we desire. When we go in debt beyond our ability to repay, or perhaps even steal or deal with others dishonestly in order to obtain that which we want.

Covetousness is a damnable sin. The sentence of damnation is upon those who are characterized as covetous. Let us read of this in **Ephesians 5:1-14**:

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ²And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

³But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; ⁴neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. ⁵***For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*** ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not be partakers with them.

⁸For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. ¹³But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. ¹⁴Therefore He says:

“Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.”

Similarly, we read in 1 Corinthians 6 that covetousness is a damning sin:

⁷Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? ⁸No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! ⁹Do 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, ¹⁰nor thieves, ***nor covetous***, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners ***will inherit the kingdom of God.*** ¹¹And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:7-11)

Now covetousness itself is a rather broad category of sin. In other words, although we are focusing our attention on covetousness manifested in greed for money or things, the sin of covetousness can be committed in many ways. Perhaps the tenth commandment makes this clear. God has given to all mankind this prohibition:

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exo. 20:7)

But again, we are focusing principally on covetousness as shown in greediness, the inordinate desire for money and things that are not ours to have.

We might argue that this is a problem that is particularly difficult in the culture in which we live. We exist in a ***consumer-driven*** society. Voices are bombarding us throughout every waking hour, leading us to

desire and purchase that which we do not currently have. Some of us are more plagued by this temptation than others. But this is a problem that is common to us all. It is a temptation that is common to man.

I understand that this is such a problem in our society that some have attempted to classify the desire to shop as a psychological disorder that needs treatment. I once heard on the radio of a development of a new drug that is designed to curb the appetite for spending. One woman testified that she could not go to sleep at night until she purchased at least one item off the Internet.

Covetousness is being discontent with what God has given us even as we long for that which He has not given us. Covetousness can be regarded as an absence of contentment. Covetousness, therefore, can also be regarded as ungratefulness to God for His goodness toward us.

This was at the heart of Adam and Eve's sin in the garden. They desired what God had not given to them, even that which He had denied to them. We read of this in Genesis 3:6.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

This progression toward committing sin is commonly set forth in Scripture. First the woman "*saw*" the tree (fruit of the tree?), then she "*desired*" it, then she "*took*" it. She saw it, then she *coveted* it, and then would not deny herself of it. She took it.

This was the same pattern of the sin of covetousness in the instance of **Achan at Jericho**. God had commanded Israel to take the city, but not to take anything from the city. But Achan stole some items and hid them in his belongings. Because of his sin God brought judgment on the entire people of Israel. And so, whereas God had given them a swift and total victory over fortified Jericho, God caused Israel to be defeated by the inhabitants of the much weaker and smaller city of Ai. Afterwards a search was made to determine why God had forsaken them. They determined that it was Achan who had sinned against the Lord. We read of his exposure and confession in **Joshua 7:19ff**.

¹⁹Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

²⁰And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: ²¹When 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."

²²So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. ²³And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. ²⁴Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. ²⁵And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

²⁶Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day. (Joshua 7:19-26)

Covetousness is often born through our viewing that which God has not given to us or of what He has forbidden to us. But because of our sinful desire for that thing, which is the manifestation of a covetous heart, we long for it. We fix our attention upon it. We long for it. In essence we devote ourselves to it. To say that we come to worship that thing we want is not a great stretch. This is why covetousness is equated by the apostle as idolatry. We have an inordinate desire and affection for something other than God and what He has given to us.

I. The Lord Jesus addressed the sin of covetousness.

A. The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21)

¹³Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

¹⁶Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

²¹“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Our Lord warned the people against covetousness, which here is set forth as a greedy desire for wealth. We read that a man approached the Lord Jesus and posed a question. From the Lord’s reaction, we detect that this man was a worldly, greedy man; he was covetous. Here was a man who would be willing to destroy his relationship with his brother over money.

Often times problems over the distribution of an inheritance is played out in this way. I believe the response of our Lord reveals the inappropriateness of this man’s concern and of his question to the Lord on this occasion. The Lord was talking about spiritual matters, things of the heart which have bearing on eternity, and this man asks about temporal possessions. In so doing, the man revealed himself to the Lord Jesus as a greedy man, unconcerned about real issues of heaven and hell. He desired treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven. It occasioned the Lord to address the crowds concerning the danger of covetousness. The Lord declared, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

It is very easy to think that a man’s life does consist of the abundance of his possessions. The thought is to accumulate, amass, horde all you can get. Bumper stickers proclaim this philosophy unashamedly in the states: ***“He who dies with the most toys wins.”*** We would say that it is easy for even disciples to fall into this faulty way of living; that is why the Lord warned His disciples, ***“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!”***

In order to stress the folly of this kind of living, our Lord gave this parable, which we might describe as: **The End of a Greedy Man (12:16-21)**. Notice how our Lord described this rich man in His parable.

(1) He took pride in his possessions (12:16, 17)

Jesus said, “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’”

Actually, one need not be successful to be greedy. Greed is not determined by the amount in one’s bank account or the number of possessions; rather, it is measured by the amount of space and priority in the heart that is given to these things. A poor man might be a very greedy man. A wealthy man may not be greedy at all. This man was both a wealthy man and a greedy man.

By the way, notice that it was the **“ground”** which produced the crop (v. 16), but he took the credit-- **“my crops”** (v. 17). He regarded himself as a “self-made man.” The Scriptures declare that “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:26). But he did not see what he had as given to him by the Lord and therefore given to him as a stewardship before God, rather, he regarded his goods as the product of his own doing. He did not see himself as responsible to anyone else but himself. He was not thankful to God. He was not mindful that it was God Who had blessed him with the abundance that he had.

(2) He trusted in his possessions (12:18, 19)

We read of this man: “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’”” He had set goals for himself and had reached them. He then established further goals for himself, assuming that he would reach them also. He planned and worked for his retirement. And finally, he had arrived. Concerned only for himself, he had become rich for himself, but not rich toward God. He was self-sufficient. He was self-indulgent. He was self-centered. He had the attitude, “I am merry, let the world be damned.”

(3) God’s verdict: He was a fool (12:20, 21)

We read in verse 20f, “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’” And then Jesus concludes this parable, saying, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (12:21).

Although a man may be successful, wealthy, stable and secure, if he only lives for himself and his own, not living before God and for others, he is a fool, for he ends with nothing. He lived with little or no regard for eternity. This life is all there is. And this is where his folly becomes most clearly manifest. He assumes and lives as though there were no God, no eternity, no heaven, and no hell.

It is clear what the Lord was teaching here: A life lived out with concern for only me and mine is a wasted life. God did not place us here on earth to indulge and gratify ourselves, but to live to glorify Him, to live so as to be “rich toward God.” This rich man gathered treasure, but in doing so he failed to gather true wealth for himself. Living for self will end in emptiness.

The Lord then gave instruction on how to avoid the sin of covetousness. He spoke of...

B. Earthly provision and heavenly possessions (Luke 12:22-34)

²²Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. ²³Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? ²⁵And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁶If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?

²⁹“And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. ³⁰For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

³²“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In order to counter the sin of covetousness, our Lord assured His disciples of their heavenly Father’s provision for all things needful for their day-to-day existence. It was appropriate that our Lord would address this at this point, for a sincere disciple might have said to Him, “*Lord I realize I should not be greedy, but really, I do not want to amass wealth and things. I just want to put food on the table and pay the bills.*” He responded, “*You are not to worry about life.*” And He gave a number of reasons:

- 1) For “life” is more than these things (12:23). To focus on these things is to miss out on what life really is. It is to live a misdirected, misguided existence.
- 2) You may be confident that God will provide for you (12:24)

- 3) It is ineffective to worry (12:25, 26)
- 4) After all, it is God Who ultimately clothes you (12:27, 28)
- 5) You would be just like non-disciples (12:29, 30)

It is as though the Lord said to them, “Unbelievers might worry about these matters, but you need not. Why be miserable, full of worry, like them?” Therefore, He concludes, “seek first the kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

II. Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding covetousness (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

⁶Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰For 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.

We could reason that the opposite of covetousness is contentment, contentment with what God has given us and with what God has not given to us. Here the Apostle Paul speaks to this matter. He first set forth a basic assertion of spiritual truth: **“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (6:6).**

What is meant by godliness? One once described it this way:

By “godliness” is not meant any particular grace, but all the graces of the Spirit of God; as faith, hope, love, fear, etc. the whole of internal religion, as it shows itself in outward worship, and in all acts of holiness of life and conversation; and which the doctrine that is according to godliness teaches and engages to; and this is gain, very great gain indeed. (John Gill, 18th c.)

Or, we might describe it in terms of the earlier chapters of this epistle:

Godliness speaks of a person who is devoted to God so as to be deeply concerned about knowing Him, pleasing Him, enjoying Him, and making Him known to others. A godly man is one whose life is immersed with high thoughts of God, who is aware that He is living His life in the presence of God and under the scrutiny of God.

A godly man or woman, is a *contented* man or woman. **What is contentment, or spiritual contentment?** Spiritual contentment is a sense of well-being, or sufficiency, or satisfaction the godly man or woman experiences in his soul that is grounded in a confident assurance that he has the All-powerful, All-benevolent God as his God.

The contented man is one who is happy enough with what he has or is; he does not desire to an inordinate degree something more or different. He knows he has all of the best by being a godly man, therefore, nothing else or nothing different is necessary for his happiness. He is content in knowing His God and knowing that he is known of Him. The contented man, who is a godly man, is confident, because in knowing God and knowing that God is for him, he has all that he could ever desire or ever need. He is soundly assured based on the truthfulness of the promises of God in Christ, that God, Who is the source and giver of all good, is for him; he therefore has no need real that will disturb his sense of peace. This is indeed great gain! This man cannot be a covetous man, for he is a contented man.

A godly man, who is a contented man, knows who he is and what he has been given in Christ. One once described him this way:

A man possessed of true godliness is a gaining, thriving, man. Such as are godly, or truly gracious, they are come into good and happy circumstances, and are possessors of the true, solid, satisfying, durable,

and unsearchable riches of grace. All their debts are paid, they are richly clothed and deliciously fed, and are in a good family, even the household of God. Who (They) before were in debt, arrayed in rags, were in a starving condition, and strangers and foreigners. Yea, now they are heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ, and have both a right and a fitness for the heavenly inheritance. They are now made kings and priests to God, and, in the present state of things, have God to be their portion, and exceeding great reward. They have an interest in Christ, and in all spiritual blessings in him, and have the Spirit as the earnest of their future inheritance. They are rich in faith, and in good works. Their souls, which were lost, are gained, and shall be saved with an everlasting salvation. And before long they will be possessed of all the riches of glory, signified by a house not made with hands, a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, an incorruptible inheritance, and a kingdom and glory: how great is the gain of godliness! (**John Gill**, 18th c.)

A. The reasons why the godly are or may be content:

1. “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (6:7).

The first reason the godly man should be contented with his godliness is that he knows that he had nothing to begin with, he came into the world naked. He also knows that the things of this world belong only to this world. When God calls him home, he will leave behind all but his soul. This is the idea of Ecclesiastes 5:15f, which reads,

“As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?”

Even in times of great loss or distress, there is a calmness about him. It was Job who had lost everything, who nevertheless could say, “And he said:

‘Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD.’ (Job 1:21)

And so we read of Job, “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. (Job 1:22). How could Job be this way? Although Job had been a wealthy man, he had not been a covetous man. He would be content before the Lord, even in his great loss and distress.

2. “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (6:8).

The godly purposes to be content with what God has given him and he purposes to be content with what God has not given him. Since God is able and is willing to care for His own, the godly man may be patient in waiting for God's provision, and content with what God in His goodness has given him. Our Lord bid us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We are to be content that our God is able and willing and faithful to give us all we need.

“Food and clothing” probably speaks to the necessities of life. A place of habitation is probably included in the expression. The idea is that we should be content with what God has given us to sustain us. We are to be content and assured that He is our Provider and that we need not worry about how our food or housing or clothing will be provided us, for we know that it will be in God's own way and in His time.

The Psalmist in Psalm 37 wrote of the assurance that the godly may have in God's provision for them and the certainty that the ungodly will not prosper. Even if the godly suffer occasions of deprivation, it will turn out okay for them in the end, for God has purposed to bless them. Here are a few verses from that psalm:

- ¹⁶A little that a righteous man has
Is better than the riches of many wicked.
- ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
But the LORD upholds the righteous.
- ¹⁸The LORD knows the days of the upright,
And their inheritance shall be forever.
- ¹⁹They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
- ²⁰But the wicked shall perish;
And the enemies of the LORD,
Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish.
Into smoke they shall vanish away.
- ²¹The wicked borrows and does not repay,
But the righteous shows mercy and gives.
- ²²For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth,
But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.
- ²³The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD,
And He delights in his way.
- ²⁴Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
For the LORD upholds him with His hand.
- ²⁵I have been young, and now am old;
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his descendants begging bread.
- ²⁶He is ever merciful, and lends;
And his descendants are blessed. (Psa. 37:16-26)

3. “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” (6:9).

This is not a warning to the rich. It is a warning against those who *long* to be rich rather than godly. These people do not desire foremost to be godly; they long to be wealthy. They do not see contentment in being right with God; contentment in their estimation is found in the accumulation of wealth. They are not satisfied, because they are not rich. They may never become rich, but they never cease longing to be rich. These are troubled people, and they bring trouble not only to themselves, but to others about them.

a. They who desire to be rich fall into *temptation*. Their longings to become rich leads them to compromise standards of honesty and integrity. They sacrifice their godliness for gain. The temptation for riches is too great, seeing that is for what their heart longs.

b. They who desire to be rich fall into *a snare*. Their temptation is a snare to them. A snare was an ancient way of catching birds or game. A loop of rope was placed on the ground and the game was lured to it by some form of bait. The snare would then be drawn closed and the animal or bird would be captured. The longing to be rich will trick one into being caught in unexpected, unforeseen ways.

c. They who desire to be rich fall into *many foolish and harmful lusts*. They not only desire to be rich, but they desire other sins also. Sin does not stand still. Sin sowed in the life will reap more sin. The love of money will show itself in many more sins in time.

B. The reason that those who long to be rich are neither godly nor content: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (6:10).

Again, this sin does not abide alone. This sin of love of money is a “root”, it will bear other kinds of sins when it takes root and sprouts in a man’s life. This sin calls for many other sins to come and dwell in the heart.

1. “For which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness.”

Paul warned that some had become apostate, having forsaken and denied Jesus in word or deed, because of their love for money. They are as the stony ground hearers in our Lord’s parable of the sower. Jesus told the parable to the multitudes:

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matt. 13:3-9)

Later, among His disciples, He explained the meaning of the parable. Of the seed sown in stony soil He said, “*Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful*” (Matt. 13:22). For the love of many and the cares of this world, they forfeited the eternal riches and reward of the world to come. They lived for this world rather than for Jesus who gives an inheritance in the world to come to all of His followers who are looking to Him and trusting in Him.

2. “And pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” I have a book in my library entitled, *Whatever Happened to their Kids*. It is a book of short accounts of the children of the rich and powerful. It could be seen as a book of illustrations about the truthfulness of this verse. The rich have pierced themselves through with many sorrows, and often it would seem that much source of their sorrow must have been in their observance of the life of their children.

One might remember **Lot** in this case, or perhaps **Lot’s wife** as well. Their hearts were focused not on the Lord, but on the riches of this world. It did not begin that way. Lot desired the same heavenly country that is uncle Abraham desired. He had left Haran (modern day Iraq), leaving family and home, and journeyed to a place where he and the others dwelled in tents. The time came, however, that a choice had to be made. He made the tragic decision to live near Sodom and before long was dwelling in the midst of that city that knew not God. Lot was led by temptation for riches into the snare of that place, and the tragic consequences to himself and his family are retold for us in the pages of Genesis. Meanwhile, Abraham, was content to live in a place that seemed outwardly unpleasant because there he knew that he could walk with God. Abraham was the godly man, and in time he was also the wealthy man. But his contentment was not based on his riches, but rather on his relationship with His God.

IV. Paul’s exhortation to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:11-16)

A. An exhortation to flee sin and pursue godliness. “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness” (6:11).

God told Lot to flee out of Sodom prior to its overthrow. Paul told Timothy to flee from the danger and temptation of the love for money. He was to run from the desire for physical wealth as his principle pursuit, and rather give himself to pursuing godliness. The Lord Jesus said, “What does it profit a man if he

gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Why, then should someone devote his life to these things? They give only temporary pleasure, but they leave the soul with a sense of emptiness and longing. Holiness is the thing that brings happiness. To live before God, to become Christ-like in character and behavior is the way that a man may become a truly contented man.

We are to pursue "**righteousness**." This is not a reference to becoming justified before God, in the sense of being forgiven and being regarded and treated as righteous through faith in Christ. Timothy was already "righteous" in this sense; that is, he was justified by and before God. Paul would not have been telling Timothy to pursue that which he already possessed. Rather, Timothy's pursuit of righteousness speaks of his effort to conform his thinking, attitudes, and behavior to the will of God as set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

We are also to pursue "**godliness**." We have already spoken of this. Timothy was to seek to know God more fully. He was to desire to know God's Word and understand more fully God's purposes in his life and in the world. He was to pursue the state in which he would feel himself to be with God and God with him throughout each day of his life.

We are to pursue "**faith**." Faith in God and His Son increases or diminishes given various circumstances we encounter in life and due to varying degrees of the effort we give to be in His Word and in prayer before Him. If a Christian is growing in faith, it is because he is increasingly seeing and looking at things from God's perspective. He looks not to things seen, which are temporal, but to things not seen, which are eternal. He leads himself to trust in God rather than in his own gifts or abilities.

We are to pursue "**love**." Love is a grace; it is the chief grace. Love for God is inconsistent with love for money. You cannot serve God and mammon, Jesus told us. Loving money foremost will lead you to pursue it with all your thoughts and energy. But if love for God is preeminent, your money or the ability that God has given you to accumulate money will be seen as a great means to show your love for God and for others.

We are to pursue "**patience**." Pray for patience, and tribulation will soon follow. We know that this is how God produces this grace within us. "Tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3). That is why we are to glory, or delight, in "tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." God would have us be a patient people. He therefore places us in situations which are at the limits of our ability to deal with them or endure them, then He pushes it just a little bit farther over the brink, so that we have to look to Him for strength, and wait upon Him to bring relief. Patience can only be produced through having to wait on God to bring an end to the difficulties that we are encountering.

We are an impatient people, as a society, generally speaking; therefore, we tend to be a discontented people. We want service and want it now. We want our product now, or at least overnighted to us. We want our food now, both hot and fresh. We are irritated when we get it fast but it is neither. We grow impatient with the most trifle of things, because we live in a service-oriented society that wants to give us everything now without waiting. We are willing to pay for the privilege of not having to wait. But we are to pursue "patience." In order for that to occur, the Lord will have to put us in the place of waiting, perhaps for a prolonged period of time.

We are to pursue "**meekness**." Meekness is the ability to yield, or surrender. It is a quality of character that says, "It does not have to be done my way or in my timing." Meekness is present when a person simply does not have to be given the credit for who he is or for what he has done. ***The meek Christian does not seek great things for himself***, in fact he is willing to give what he has, his riches, power, or reputation, to the cause of Christ. He is content with a lower station of life, for generally it is pride, which is in some ways the opposite of meekness, gives people a determination to be rich and powerful and popular at any cost to others or themselves. The person who is not meek, feels he must be popular. He must be esteemed by others as someone great in who he is or what he has done. I think that is why Hollywood, politics, and much of professional sports is so grating upon the sensibilities of God's people. The hype, the bragging, the pride and arrogance, the glory that is placed on man, is contrary to the spirit of meekness that is so attractive and desirable for the one who is godly.

Meekness is the quality of being willing to set one's own comfort and glory for the cause of Christ. The meek man does not seek nor need the approval of others. He does not build his sense of identity one what he does well or who he knows, or how much he has acquired, whether in terms of money or power. He

is concerned about others' reputation, but he cares little of his own, as long as he knows that he is living so as to please and glorify God. In this sense meekness is to be equated with a humble spirit.

Apart from the Lord Jesus, who was the meekest person in history? **Moses**. Numbers 12:3 reads, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Why is this? He had so much that was and could be his, and yet he gave it all up. The book of Hebrews describes his meekness:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible (11:24-27).

It was Moses' desire to be godly above all else that moved him to walk away from gaining the whole world. Why? For he viewed his life from the perspective of eternity. He saw that the wealth and power of this world were in a sense illusionary, or at least temporary. The real and lasting things were spiritual in nature. He would choose to be godly rather than wealthy, popular, and powerful.

If Moses was very meek because of his willingness to give up his power and wealth for the sake of God's people, *how infinitely more was our Lord Jesus!* He was willing to give up the glory which He had with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5). Giving up the praise that was given to Him continuously from creation, coming among people who did not treat him with the dignity due a human being yet alone eternal God. He came to serve, rather than be served. He came to die, and to die a terrible and shameful death. He did so in order to save His people from their sins. We can read of Paul's warning regarding those who are covetous. He wrote, "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, *nor covetous*, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners *will inherit the kingdom of God.*" But then he wrote, "*And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Cor. 6:11). Through the life and death of our Savior, He saves us from our sin, even the sin of covetousness.

May the Lord help us pursue these things that are summed up in the term, godliness. May He help us to have the mind to be like the Lord Jesus Himself Who so fully demonstrated how we are to believe and behave. May we be content with what things He gives us. May He enable us to be content with what He does not give us.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,
that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
make you complete in every good work to do His will,
working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20f)

How would we know if we were covetous?

by Dr. Steven C. Riser

1. Do we prefer material gain to God?
2. Do we prefer to spend now rather than invest in eternity?
3. Do we love things and use people or vice versa?
4. Do we set our minds of earthly rather than heavenly things?

5. Do we have an inordinate desire for money or material things?
6. Do we rob God of His tithe in order to indulge ourselves?
7. Do we talk more about things than the things of God?
8. Do we trust in finances for security rather than God's love?
9. Do we reluctantly or generously seek to give to others?
10. Do we use money to pamper the flesh or invest in God's mission?
11. Do we go shopping or go to God when we feel bad?
12. Do we think that more money will make us happy?

What do we need to consider in developing a proper attitude toward things?

1. What do we need to consider in developing a proper attitude toward things?
2. Consider the wisdom of storing up treasure in heaven
3. Consider the brevity of this earthly life—only what's done for Christ will last.
4. Consider the fact that God has already given us everything we really need.
5. Consider the fact that earthly riches become useless at death.
6. Consider all the perils, dangers and warnings associated with riches.
7. Consider that the more you have the more you have to account for.
8. Consider the fact that "things" will never satisfy—only God can satisfy.
9. Consider the example of Christ—the pursuit of things was not his primary goal.
10. Consider the example of the early church—how generous they were in sharing.
11. Consider God's promises related to giving—remember, we can't out give God.

Warnings against Covetousness

by John Piper

1. Covetousness never brings satisfaction

Ecclesiastes 5:11. "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity."

This is God's word on money: it does not satisfy those who love it. If we believe him, we will turn away from the love of money. It's a dead end street.

Jesus put it like this in Luke 12:15, "Beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." If the Word of the Lord needed confirming, there are enough miserable rich people in the world to prove that satisfied life does not come from having things.

2. Covetousness chokes off spiritual life

Jesus told the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1020) and said that some seed fell on among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it.

Then he interpreted the parable and said that the seed is the Word of God. The seed sown among thorns is interpreted like this: "the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."

A real battle rages when the Word of God is preached. The desire for other things can be so strong that the beginnings of spiritual life can be choked out altogether. This is such a frightful warning that we should all be on our guard every time we hear the Word to receive it with faith and not choke it with covetousness.

3. Covetousness gives rise to many other sins

1 Timothy 6:10, "The love of money is the root of all evils." And James 4:2 says, "You covet and cannot obtain so you fight and wage war."

Covetousness is a breeding ground for a thousand other sins. And that heightens the warning to flee from it and fight it with all our might.

4. Covetousness lets you down when you need help most

It lets you down in the hour of death. 1 Timothy 6:7 says, “We brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world.” At the greatest crisis of your life, when you need contentment and hope and security more than any other time, your money and all your possessions take wings and fly away. They let you down. They are fair weather friends at best. And you enter eternity with nothing but the measure of contentment that you had in God.

If you dropped dead right now, would you take with you a payload of pleasure in God or would you stand before him with a spiritual cavity where covetousness used to be? Covetousness lets you down just when you need help most.

5. In the end covetousness destroys the soul

1 Timothy 6:9 says, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.”

In the end covetousness destroys the soul in hell. The reason I am sure that this destruction is not some temporary financial fiasco but final destruction in hell is that Paul says in verse 12 that covetousness is to be resisted with the fight of faith; and then he adds, “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession.” What’s at stake in fleeing covetousness and fighting the fight of faith is eternal life. (See 6:19.)

So verse 9 isn't saying that greed can mess up your marriage or your business (which it certainly can!), but it's saying covetousness can mess up your eternity with ruin and destruction. Or as verse 10 says at the end, “it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.” (Literally: “impaled themselves with many pains.”)

God has gone the extra mile in the Bible to warn us mercifully that the idolatry of covetousness is a no win situation. It's a dead end street in the worst sense of the word. It's a trick and a trap. So my word to you is the word of 1 Timothy 6:11: Flee from it. When you see it coming (in a TV ad, or a Christmas catalog, or a neighbor's purchase), run from it the way you would run from a roaring lion escaped from the zoo and starving.

But where do you run?

You run to the arsenal of faith, and quickly take the mantle of prayer from Psalm 119:36 and throw it around yourself: “O Lord, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to worldly gain.” And then quickly you take down two cutlasses, a short one and a long one, specially made by the Holy Spirit to slay covetousness. And you stand your ground at the door. When he shows his deadly face you show him the shorter cutlass:

1 Timothy 6:6. “There is great gain in godliness with contentment.” GREAT GAIN! GREAT GAIN! Stay where you are, Lion of Covetousness. I have great gain in God. This is my faith!

Then, before he has time to attack, you take the longer cutlass (Hebrews 13:5-6), “Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for [God] has said, ‘I will never fail you nor forsake you.’ Hence we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?’” And drive it home. Do exactly what Paul says to do in Colossians 3:5, “Put covetousness to death.”

Brothers and sisters, all covetousness is unbelief. Learn with me, O learn with me, how to use the sword of the Spirit to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life!
