

Covetousness

Edited by Leon King

"Let your conversation be without covetousness..." (Hebrews 13:5 (KJV)).

What is our manner of life as human beings among the heathen in this world intended to be? And how is it to be ordered? We are to "let" or allow – it to be; yea, direct it to **be without covetousness**. Precisely what is covetousness?

We are all familiar with the 9th Commandment, are we not?

Exodus 20:17 (KJV) *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.*

In this passage, we see the proper definition of covetousness. Covetousness is the noun form of the verb "covet." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the transitive verb "covet" as: "To desire; esp. to desire eagerly, to wish for, long for. To desire with concupiscence or with fleshly appetite. To desire culpably (wrongfully (syn) – lk); to long for (what belongs to another). (The ordinary sense.)"

Let us take a look at companion scriptures which address the word covetousness in the New Testament. What does these passages teach us about covetousness?

- **It comes out of the heart of the natural man.**

Mark 7:22 (KJV) *Thefts, **covetousness**, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:*

- **God's children are taught to beware of covetousness.**

Luke 12:15 (KJV) *And he said unto them, **Take heed, and beware of covetousness**: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

- **This is what men and women are naturally, both Jew and Gentile, and why they need a savior.**

Romans 1:29 (KJV) *Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, **covetousness**, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,*

- **Exhortation to Saints – covetousness is classed with fornication and uncleanness.**

Ephesians 5:3 (KJV) *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or **covetousness**, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;*

- **The saints are commanded to put covetousness to death when it rises up. Covetousness has another name: Idolatry!**

Colossians 3:5 (KJV) ***Mortify** therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**:*

- **Covetousness is the motivation of false teachers.**

2 Peter 2:3 (KJV) *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary defines covetousness as: "A strong desire after the possession of worldly things (Col 3:5; Eph 5:5; Heb 13:5; 1Ti 6:9,10;) It assumes sometimes the more aggravated form of avarice, which is the mark of cold-hearted worldliness."

Colossians 3:5 (KJV) *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*

Ephesians 5:5 (KJV) *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.*

Hebrews 13:5 (KJV) *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

1 Timothy 6:9-10 (KJV) *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. **10** 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.*

Covetousness is a very grave sin; indeed, so heinous is it that the Scriptures class it among the very gravest and grossest crimes (Eph 5:3); in Col 3:5 it is "idolatry," while in 1 Co 6:10 it is set forth as excluding a man from heaven. Its heinousness, doubtless, is accounted for by its being in a

very real sense the root of so many other forms of sin. Here are some examples:

- **Departure from the faith** (**1Ti 6:9-10**).

1 Timothy 6:9-10 (KJV) *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. **10** 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.*

- **Lying** (**2Ki 5:21-25**)

2 Kings 5:21-25 (KJV) *So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? **22** And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. **23** And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. **24** And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. **25** But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.*

- **Theft** (**Jos 7:21**)

Joshua 7:21 (KJV) *When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of*

fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.

- **Domestic trouble – trouble in one’s house.** Proverbs 15:27.

Proverbs 15:27 (KJV) *He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.*

- **Leads to Murder.** Ezekiel 22:12

Ezekiel 22:12 (KJV) *In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou hast taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbours by extortion, and hast forgotten me, saith the Lord GOD.*

- **It leads to "many foolish and hurtful lusts.** 1 Timothy 6:9

1 Timothy 6:9 (KJV) *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.*

Covetousness has always been a very serious menace to mankind, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament.

It was one of the first sins that broke out after Israel had entered into the promised land (Achan, Joshua 7:1-26).

And also in the early Christian church immediately after its founding (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-42).

For these reasons, there are many warnings against it.

A careful reading of the Old Testament will reveal the fact that a very great part of the Jewish law—such as its enactments and regulations regarding duties toward the poor, toward servants; concerning gleaning, usury, pledges, gold and silver taken during war—was introduced and intended to counteract the spirit of covetousness.