

Coveting

Introduction:

1. The Scripture is explicit. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."
2. But what is "coveting"? Sometimes it is associated with desire, but it is evident that all desire is not sin. "Coveting" has something to do with the intensity of our desires. And it has something to do with what we desire. One may desire the "kingdom of heaven" and do so with great intensity but such is not sinful, even though one might be said to covet the kingdom of God.
3. In this study we will try to define what coveting is, evaluate some examples, note just how serious a crime it is, and define the alternative healthy behavior.

Discussion:

I. What is coveting?

A. Three primary biblical terms.

1. In the Hebrew it is the word "chamad" (2530).
 - a. It is the word used in the tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).
 - b. Some idea of the meaning of the word is evident in Deut. 7:25-26. In a context of instruction to Israel regarding their coming into the land of Canaan they are to burn the graven images and not covet the silver or the gold in them. God describes it as an abomination and says it is under the ban. The idea is that you should not exalt such above your relationship to God.
 - c. This gives us some insight into the nature of the sin.
 2. In the N.T. two primary terms are translated "covet" in the NASB.
 - a. "Epithumeō" is often translated with the idea of lusting after. Used in Rom. 7:7-8; 13:9; Acts 20:33.
 - b. "Pleonexia"/Pleonektēs are translated "greed" and "desire to have more." Used in Mk. 7:22; 1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:10; Eph. 5:5.
 - c. The Eph. 5:5 (cf. Col. 3:5) translates with the word "greed" and identifies it with idolatry. This gives us insight into the meaning. It is desire elevated above God or as one individual expressed it "deified desire." Cf. Deut. 7:25-26.
- B. There are a variety of English synonyms: "yearning to possess," "to wrongfully desire," "to crave." Perhaps "greed" is the term that connects with us English speakers most.

II. There are various examples in Scripture of individuals who committed this sin. Looking at them helps us to understand more about what coveting is.

A. The example of Achan follows up on our perception that coveting involves "deified desire," that is, exalting our desire for things above our relationship with God.

1. In Josh. 6 God told the people what to do to conquer Jericho (6:15-19). He placed

- the silver, gold, bronze and iron articles under the ban.
2. They conquered Jericho, but when they proceeded to attempt to conquer Ai they were defeated.
 3. An investigation was made into what the problem was and it was determined that Achan had taken some things under the ban.
 - a. Read Josh. 7:16-21. In effect, Achan has taken that which belonged to the Lord.
 - b. He has “deified his desire.” These things became idolatrous to him.
 4. It was a serious crime as indicated by the consequence (7:24-26). Not only had 36 men died in the battle at Ai, but now Achan and his household are stoned to death.
- B. Ahab coveting Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21).
1. This account is amazing to me because it illustrates so clearly a contrast between the ethics of Israel and those of Baal worship (Jezebel).
 - a. Ahab sought to buy or trade for Naboth’s vineyard. Legitimate means of acquiring it by Israelite (biblical) standards.
 - b. Jezebel hires false witnesses, has Naboth unjustly executed and says to Ahab to take possession.
 - c. Micah 2:2 speaks of those who covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.
 2. Note how God is diminished and things deified, all made legitimate by idolatry.
- C. David did this in his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband.
1. Note God’s language in 2 Sam. 12:9-10. “You have despised the word of the Lord.” “You have despised Me.” It is a sin committed against God (cf. Psa. 51:4).
 2. The consequences were severe (2 Sam. 12:9-12, 18).
 3. Solomon followed a similar path (1 Kings 10-11). Hab. 2:5 refers to one who enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied.
- D. The rich young ruler in Lk. 18 seems to have had the same problem.
1. Of the commandments enumerated covetousness is left out.
 2. This is where the man is convicted.
- E. The account of the rich man and Lazarus reflects a similar mindset (Lk. 16:19ff).
- F. A family squabbling over an inheritance (Lk. 12:13-34).
- G. The seriousness of the crime is evident in these examples.
1. Israel is defeated at Ai and Achan is stoned to death.
 2. The sword does not depart from the household of David.
 3. The rich man is in torment.
- H. Additionally . . .
1. Defiles a man (Mk. 7:20-23).
 2. The people of God cannot be in association with a so-called brother who is covetous (1 Cor. 5:10-11).
 3. The covetous will not inherit the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:10).
 4. Covetous leads to all kinds of sins: robbery, gambling, tax evasion, neglecting parents, taking advantage of the disadvantaged and powerless, murder, war.

III. The alternative to covetousness.

- A. Elevating the Lord to proper place (Matt. 6:19-24ff).

- B. Giving (1 Cor. 9:5).
- C. Sharing (Eph. 4:28; Lk. 16:21; James 2:15-16).
- D. Self-sacrifice (Phil. 2:3).
- E. Contentment (1 Tim. 6:6-8; Phil. 4:11).

Conclusion:

1. Covetousness is not necessarily about how many things you have, although lots of stuff may be a reflection of covetousness. But mostly it is about your attitude toward things.
2. And not just about material things, but about anything that you desire.
3. Are you deifying your desires? Or is God the only deity in your life?
4. He jealously desires our exclusive devotion (James 4:1-8).