

Thou Shall Not Covet

Covetousness and Idolatry

John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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About five years ago at the Feast, I mentioned an encounter that I had with a gentleman from India, who sat next to me on a plane. I do not remember how the conversation started, but he asked me if I would like a tract explaining his religion. I told him that I would not, since I was an elder in a Christian church, and that I firmly believed in the Bible. He responded by saying that the Christian religion was very negative.

I turned to him, and I said, "Well, what is negative about honoring one's father and mother, not committing murder, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, and not coveting what someone else has?" He then said, "When you put it that way, it is not so bad." I promptly told him that his problem was that he did not want anyone telling him, "Thou shall not!"—that he and the rest of mankind did not want anyone, including God, to tell them how to live their lives.

Then I asked him to consider the difference it would make in the world if the same law were kept by every person on the earth. I proceeded to extrapolate the differences that would occur if no one would ever murder: wars would stop; gangs would disband; anger would be curbed; and hate crimes would cease. If there were no adultery, pornographic movies would cease; regular movie scripts would be much more wholesome; TV would change drastically; "adult" movie stores would be a thing of the past; and the actions that come from filling one's mind with that garbage would lessen greatly.

If "thou shall not steal" were kept, underhanded transactions would never take place. White collar crimes would no longer exist; and companies, at last, could make the right amount of money and would sell what they manufactured at a fair price. Governments and leaders would have to treat public monies with honesty. There would be no Enron scandals, and all would be on the up and up. Of course, if "thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor," or more broadly, "thou shall not lie" were in place, it would be a whole new world in politics, marketing, salesmanship, and news reporting.

Then I just touched on "thou shall not covet," pointing out that one nation would not covet what the other nations had. He said that he had never considered it in this manner, and dropped the subject. I had not touched on the first four commandments, because I felt that it was the last six that caused him to view God's Word as being negative.

Then I started to consider the last six commandments that I had discussed, and I found

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that I considered the first five of the last six commandments to be very important because it was easy to see the results produced by their being broken. However, the breaking of the Tenth Commandment did not seem to be nearly as dangerous, on the surface, as the first five. Of course, I was totally wrong.

Exodus 20:17 Thou shall not covet [thou shall not desire (Deut. 5)] your neighbor's wife, neither shall you covet your neighbor's household, his field, or his manservant, or his maid servants, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

I could certainly see that coveting another man's wife would bring trouble, but I have no place for an ox or man servants or maid servants—I could not afford to pay them—and I have no place to keep his donkey. Since I have a difficult enough time trying to keep up with my household, taking on my neighbor's household does not appeal to me. As for his field, not being of an agricultural bent, I did not want his field either. My problem was being busy and not taking the time to truly consider the depth and wisdom in this command not to covet.

A similar example of viewing a commandment in a shallow fashion can be noted here:

Exodus 20:7 Thou shall not take the name of the LOORD your God in vain; for the LOORD wills not him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

For years, many sermonettes, and possibly a sermon or two, were given on this commandment, showing that it was wrong to use euphemisms such as *gosh*, *golly*, *gee*. As my grandmother used to say, when she wanted to say "Jesus Christ, God Almighty" she would say, "Cheese and rice got all muddy." That was her way of taking God's name in vain. For years, this seemed to be the explanation, to my simple mind, of that commandment. Indeed, the use of these euphemisms is incorrect; it is wrong.

Then, I believe it was John Ritenbaugh who gave a sermon that went far beyond that, giving the true sense of what the Third Commandment was all about. He simply stated that when we were baptized, we take on the name of the Family of God. We carry that name in our homes, with our families; we carry that name in our workplace, in our business dealings; and in every facet of our lives. In all that we do, we represent the Family of God because we have taken on His name. If we willfully sin, disregarding the agreement that we made with God at our baptism, and then we carry His name as being a member of His Family in vain, He will not hold us guiltless. To me it was easy not to

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use euphemisms, but now I saw in encapsulated form the weight of what God was placing upon all of us.

It is the same with "Thou shall not covet." It is the capstone commandment telling us that if we covet, we will end up in the spirit of breaking all Ten Commandments. The moment we seriously covet wrongly, we commit idolatry. We allow ourselves to focus on our desire and to lust after what we should not have. We covet what God tells us we must not covet, thus placing the idol of our desire before God's clear law. This is exactly what the apostle Paul was talking about when he stated,

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

One might think, "Why did Paul not mention murder, adultery, stealing, or lying?" He did not because he was keeping the physical letter of the law. Paul now understood that God's laws are broken when we do not keep them mentally; coveting something will break them. In other words, the desire to break the other commandments originates in the mind, when we covet or desire wrongly. Put still another way, we covet wrongly when we covet living our way (whatever that might be), as opposed to living God's way. It is something to really think about.

When Paul is referring to sin in verse 7, he is referring to a force that lies dormant before being brought to the front by being prohibited, then rising up to destroy the individual. This is what I told the Indian gentleman: "You object to being told, 'Thou shall not.'" All of mankind fights against being told how to live their lives in this manner.

Paul did not choose "thou shall not covet" at random. Paul saw that to covet is more precisely to desire or lust. Thus, if one gives reign to wrong desire, it can lead to lying, stealing, killing, and all of the other things prohibited by the Ten Commandments.

Quoting from the *Expositor's Commentary*:

The sin indicated here is not so much a craving for *this or that* wrong thing, but the craving itself. In analyzing sin, one must go behind the outward act to the inward man, where the desire clutches at the imagination, and then puts spurs to the will.

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Romans 7:8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

Here Paul personifies sin, not making it a real physical entity, but showing the existence of our corrupt passions, inclinations, and desires in the mind itself.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

He was stating that God's laws call sin, or the desires of the mind, into account. Put another way, God's laws set boundaries or borders for our thoughts and mind, but the human nature that we brought into the church rages against them.

Romans 7:9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.

Paul certainly knew and kept the law in all of its physical aspects; but now with God's Spirit, he begins to see its depth. There was a time when he lived in a state of indifference to the intense and searching demands the law makes on the inner man! Because of this, he was fooled as to his own righteousness. His previous fight had been physical and intellectual, but now it was mental, or of the heart; thus, it was a whole new ball game that Paul was facing. Because of this, he said that he died seeing the tremendous job in front of him. In the past, he had unconcerned confidence that he was clean before God, but now he felt the weight of guilt.

Romans 7:10 And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

His new understanding of the commandment seemed to bring death but in fact brought a way that, if followed, would lead to a wonderful life and future.

Romans 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

Paul once again personifies sin produced by coveting by labeling it as a murderer that

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promises gratification, honor, independence, and pleasures of all sorts but in doing so lies to the person that falls for it.

Romans 7:12 Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

God's laws are just and good, because they teach us to rightly regulate our heart, or mind, which governs our actions that we might eventually be in God's kingdom. This is no small thing.

From this point on, Paul tells of the great struggle he had to undertake and at the same time is telling us that each of us faces the exact same struggle every day of our lives. Sometimes, I think we tend to read Romans 7 and say, "Boy, Paul had a tough time." We have the same struggle.

I am going to read verses 13 through 25 in the *New English Bible*:

Romans 7:13-23 Are we to say then that this good thing was the death of me? By no means. It was sin that killed me, and thereby sin exposed its true character: it used a good thing [God's law] to bring about my death, and so, through the commandment, sin became more sinful than ever [seeing the depth of the commandments displayed the depth of sin]. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am not: I am un-spiritual, the purchased slave of sin. I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do, but that which I detest. But if what I do is against my will, it means that I agree with the law and hold it to be admirable. But as things are, it is no longer I who perform the action, but sin that lodges in me. For I know that nothing good lodges in me in my [coveting] un-spiritual nature, I mean, for though the will to do good is there, the deed is not. The good that I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will; and if what I do is against my will, clearly it is no longer I who am the agent, but sin that has its lodging in me [my human nature]. I discover this principle, then: that when I want to do the right, only the wrong is within my reach. In my innermost self I delight in the law of God, but I perceive that in my bodily members a different law, fighting against the law that my reason approves, and making me a prisoner under the law that is in my members, the law of sin.

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Paul is saying that within his normal actions and responses is a law that fights against the law of God. It frustrates him that at times it takes control of what he hates.

Romans 7:24-25 Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me out of this body doomed to death? God alone, through Jesus Christ our Lord! Thanks be to God! In a word then, I myself, subject to God's law as a rational being, am yet, in my un-spiritual nature, a slave to the law of sin.

Brethren, what is this force that takes over and directs us to wrong thoughts and actions?

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This force that Paul had to fight and that we have to fight is our human nature reacting as it always did in the past to this society's influences and to the environment in which we were raised. As the old song says, we want to do "what comes naturally." Has Satan always understood this weakness in us? From the creation, Satan has understood this great weakness that would plague all of mankind and, indeed, is far greater than we think.

Genesis 2:8-9 The LOORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LOORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:16-17 And the LOORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Adam shows no desire to disobey God in any manner but goes on to name all the

animals and fowl. Eve is created, and their future seems to be bright in every aspect. Then comes the father of covetousness, Satan the devil, who introduces the premiere device that will haunt mankind until the Kingdom of God is on earth. This is producing untold pain, suffering, and death in this world that God has given man. His purpose for introducing this to mankind is to destroy them once and for all.

Genesis 3:1-3 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Adam and Eve had no desire to disobey God in any fashion until Satan, the father of lying, told his lie to Eve. It is interesting to note that the first lie told was to produce desire, or coveting of that which was forbidden, and hereby ushered coveting into the world to curse mankind from this point forward.

Genesis 3:4-7 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 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. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

The serpent said, "Now let me instruct you in this new teaching. You are not going die; in fact, you are going to be like gods. Your eyes will be opened and you will know good and evil." With coveting in her heart, the tree and the fruit took on a whole new appearance. It called to her and was pleasant to the eyes, and the desire to be wise and all-knowing filled her mind and crowded out all of the instructions God had given them. That is what happens when we covet greatly.

God would have been exceedingly proud of Adam had he said, "Eve, God has said we should not eat of that tree; therefore, throw that fruit down and come away from the tree." Of course, God is proud of each one of us when we face coveting and do the same thing. However, we all know that Adam took of the fruit, and their eyes were

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opened.

Unger's Bible Dictionary defines *covet* thus:

To desire dishonest gain. The wish to have more. An inordinate desire for what one has not, which is the basis for discontentment with what one has not. It has an element of lawlessness, and is sinful because it is contrary to the commandment to be content with such things as you have.

Hebrews 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."

Synonyms for *covet* are *desire*, *want*, *long for*, *yearn for*, *crave*, *lust after*. I trust we all understand that God has given us right desires, such as home, family, a good job, and all that pertains to those. God wants us to desire the good things. It is the inordinate, lustful cravings that can bring us to destruction.

Let us see what God has to say about it in the book of Colossians.

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Coveting wrongly takes the love that we have for God and the instructions that He gives us for living a life that will culminate in our being members of the God family and transfers it to an idol. That is wrong for us.

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

Ephesians 5:5 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.

This is how serious this thing that I took so lightly is. In verse 3, the word *covetousness* is placed in association with *fornication* and *all uncleanness*, indicating sexually debasing

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vices. Paul stresses that this should never be named among the saints. In verse 5, the covetous individual is one that gives to his vice or lust the love, attention, and discipline that belongs to God. It takes him right away from God.

From the incident of Adam and Eve, the Bible is filled with the tragedies brought about by coveting. I will just touch on a few, such as David and Bathsheba and Amnon and Tamar (where he rapes his sister and eventually is killed because of it.) We see the example of Absalom in taking over his father's kingdom. We see all of the wars that are in the Bible. You can go all through the Bible, and you will see that coveting has produced disaster over and over again.

I will give one example of covetousness to show what it does to an individual and the pain and suffering it brings to those around them. Sometimes, we feel that only the person that covets is hurt, but that is not true—especially in the church of God. You will see that when you covet, you totally lose sight of God. It is just a disaster.

Numbers 16:1-3 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LOORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LOORD?"

Moses knew what they had done. They were coveting a position that God had set aside, and he knew what the result would be.

Numbers 16:4-5 So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LOORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him."

Moses immediately went to God; and when he spoke to Korah, Moses knew what God wanted to be done.

Numbers 16:8-10 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi:

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Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LOORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

How long Korah had been coveting the leadership of Israel is not mentioned, but it was no last-minute thought. This had been working on him and working on him to achieve this take over. He had to rope in others, two hundred and fifty men and families, who in turn coveted their new prospective roles. It was contagious.

In Numbers 16:12-14, Moses tries to reason, but they justify their new stand, stating that Moses has not delivered what he had promised. They did not even see God in any of this. In their coveting their new supposed positions, their soundness of reasoning failed; and they heaped up foolish reason after reason as to why they were justified in doing what they were doing.

Numbers 16:12-14 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up! Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

This was all brought about by coveting.

Numbers 16:31-35 Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!" And a fire came out from the LOORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

One might think that just those who coveted the offices were the ones punished, but the

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gossip that went through the camp caused others to blame Moses—as if God did not even exist—for their death and to gather together against him. Korah's coveting that after which he should not have lusted affected far more than his group of conspirators, and it caused the death of 14,700 men of Israel besides those that went down into the pit.

In our own minds, we tend to think that our coveting hurts only us individually, but, brethren, we must understand that we are to be a holy people, clean before God. We must realize that when we covet or lust wrongly, we damage the entire body of Christ. Could this be why some healing has not taken place, or possibly why God is waiting to act in other areas on our behalf? We are to be a clean and a holy people.

Let us look at the formula that goes into operation when one covets or lusts wrongly. This is not for everybody else; this is for us individually, for you and for me.

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

That is the formula for lusting or for coveting. Does Satan understand this formula? You bet he does!

Isaiah 14:12-17 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?'"

Satan completely understood lusting. He understands the formula, because coveting cost him everything; and he hates us with every fiber of his being. I do not think that we really realize this. He wants to discourage us; he wants to put us down; and he wants us

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to quit the race. He has set this world and its lifestyle to continually influence us to lust for what is wrong.

The apostle John gave a sermon to his flock, and at the same time he gave a sermon to us upon whom the ends of the age have come.

I John 2:12 I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

He wanted to remind them that their sins had been forgiven.

I John 2:13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father.

The first part of this epistle deals with the allegations made by John's gnostic opponents and by John giving test statements such as, "We know that we know Him if we keep His commandments," and "He that says I know Him and does not keep the commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." He does this because the Gnostics said that the law does not have to be kept. This is the setting of this meeting he is having with the flock. After this, John warns them not to be caught up in the coveting of the things of this world.

Verse 12 John addresses the congregation as his children, *teknia*, reminding them to stand firm since their sins have been forgiven. Then he covers all elements of the group.

Verse 13 He uses the term *fathers* for the senior members of the congregation, who by their age bore authority in leadership. It was a solemn designation that was given to them. "You have been here a long time; do not quit. You must help the other people." He reminds them they have known Him who had gone before.

13.b He addresses the solid young men who are strong and steady in the faith.

13.c He addresses the new members with a different word—*paidia*, the most

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recent converts—and particularly those among young men and women who from their youth have had an affectionate love for God and care for Him and who were very dear to John. He wants to cover every facet of the congregation.

I John 2:14 I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

He tells them not to love the world. This present world, the present order of things is opposed to the Kingdom of God; and hence, always has the idea of transience, worthlessness, and evil, both physical and moral. It is the seat of cares, temptations, and irregular desires. This is the world about which he is talking.

I John 2:15 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.

There are two different words for love used here. The first two instances are #25 in Strong's, *agapao*, meaning "to esteem or love," indicating a direction of the will and finding one's joy in something or someone. He is talking about loving the world as a direction of your life.

Then he goes on with the third usage of *love* in this verse. It is Strong's #26, *agape*. This is that love in which God the Father or Jesus Christ is the object of one's heart. What he is saying here to his flock is that if we love or covet what the world offers, God the Father and Jesus Christ will no longer be the object of our heart. This is what Satan wants in each of us: to love the world and not hold God the Father in our heart.

Next, John identifies the traps set for us:

I John 2:16-17 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

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I have a little note from Albert Barnes that says, "The reference here does not seem to be so much to the material world as to the scenes and show of vanity which make up the world." That is what he is talking about.

John identified the traps that are set for us:

The lust of the flesh—sensual and impure desire which seeks gratification in women and strong drink and in immoral escapes.

The lust of eyes—inordinate desires including finery of every kind, gaudy dress, splendid homes, superb furniture, expensive trappings of all sorts, and a great lust for wealth.

The pride of life—desiring worldly honors; status symbol titles; offices associating with and desiring to be like the world's popular leaders, whether executives, rock stars, football players, baseball players, or whatever.

In other words, all the coveting, lust, and desire that man invests in this world's system is going to cease to exist, as will those who will not overcome them. That is what John is saying in verse 17. Those who will continue to exist will be those who love and do the will of God.

Does Satan understand how to attack with the lust of the flesh? You bet he does!

I Timothy 2:8-10 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

God, through Timothy, instructs the women of Israel to dress modestly. It does not mean one has to look unattractive or shabby; it means what it says. Israel's women were to be modest in dress. However, the meaning of the word goes further than that. The term *modest*, used only here in Bible, not only refers to propriety in one's dress and demeanor but also refers to the inner person expressing one's self outwardly. It means "one who is sensible, self controlled; one who voluntarily places limitations on her own freedom, resulting in grace and dignity." That applies to men, too, and men should want that kind of woman.

Jesus Christ tells us in Matthew 5:27-28 that if we look on a woman to lust after her, we have already committed adultery with her. Satan, knowing what God wants from His people, deliberately sets a trap to seduce them from that standard. He has done a good job in this world.

In the discussion of the lust of the flesh as it relates to sex, it is hard to know where to begin, because icons to produce sexual lust are everywhere in the society that we live in.

I was going to repeat some of the cover headlines on the magazines in the check out counters at the grocery store, but I thought it would be an insult to God to repeat what is on those covers to attract sales. Our little ten- and sixteen-year-old children read them, and it is so blatant and so accepted by this world that it seems normal to them. It seems, perhaps, like a right way to live, but the pain is tremendous when God's laws are not followed. It can seem to be an acceptable lifestyle, even though Mom and Dad may say it is not. The world around them shows it.

Have you gone through the mall and seen Frederick's of Hollywood or Victoria's Secret? There are not many secrets with Victoria, I will tell you that. How about the string bikinis with the little triangle patch in the front and back, plus the too-short skirts, low-cut pants, and bare midriffs. Do we think somehow that these things are just stylish and do not promote coveting sex? We are wrong.

"Pornography is literally everywhere," to quote from *Whistleblower* Magazine.

Whistleblower documents with devastating clarity exactly how America was transformed in fifty years from the "Leave it to Beaver" innocence of the 1950s to today's wanton "anything goes" sexual anarchy. First, there is the multibillion-dollar pornography industry. I understand that their gross [income] surpasses football, baseball, sports, and all that Hollywood produces. It is just gigantic. Through the Internet, it is magically being transported into previously-unreachable market territory, namely, the sanctity of millions of middle-class homes. That staggers me. There are 4.2 million pornographic web sites—that is 12 percent of all web sites in the world—totalling 372 million pornographic pages. Pornographic search engines' requests total 68 million per day.

This just touches the tip of the sexual iceberg that dominates and causes coveting of perverted sexual desires. As I was on the way home from visiting a prospective church member, I had the news on, and they were talking about a XXX Christian pornographic station. This is just unbelievable. The argument was that the president of this station said that they should not show it to children but the board said that we should by all

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means show it to children. That was the argument, and it was in the news.

As we travel through this life, at this end time, do we somehow think Satan is not up to the eyeteeth in this trade, from clothing to the most perverted aspects of sexual depravity that exist? Satan is indeed involved in it; and if possible, he wants us in it, as well. This is what John was warning his church, and he warns us as well.

The second warning John gave was to not covet or lust after wealth. Mankind, in general, thinks that if he were rich, all his problems would disappear. Probably this attitude is nowhere more prevalent than here in the United States.

I Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

The sense of this is that living in obedience to God should be considered the most valuable possession or state that one could desire, and this should produce a mental contentment despite whatever might come. The apostle Paul stated in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." In short, it is God's way that should come first in our lives. God does not want us to be poor; do not go there.

I Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

Timothy tells us that we cannot take it with us. This world is a testing and learning ground. Physically, we brought nothing into this world, and the only thing we will take out of this world at the end of our lives is our report card. I hope that, before that time comes, you will consider greatly how you are handling your life.

I Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Be content with the basics of life. This does not mean that one should live in a tired, worn out home if you can afford better, wearing dowdy old clothes, driving a wreck of a car. God wants us to prosper and to work and grow that we might have some of the nicer things—but never by pushing Him into second place.

I Timothy 6:9 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.

They that will themselves to be rich—set their mind in this direction as their goal in life—fall into compromising situations that conflict with God's laws. The effort required to be rich takes time away from contact with God and from serving the people of God. It is a trap that is not readily seen until it has sprung. Timothy likens it to a ship that is on a wrong course and crashes on the rocks. I have personally seen men in the church that have gone the way of riches, and they have left the church. The corporate world and riches have pulled them away.

I Timothy 6:10 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.

I can think of a man right now that had it all, and he lost it all. Having money is not the root of all evil. Abraham, Isaac, and David were unbelievably wealthy and yet put God first. *It is the love of money in place of God* that is the root of all evil. It is putting having money first in one's life that brings the grief. Coveting wealth places one in a different environment from that of the church. One can find himself in a group where anything goes to achieve riches in this world, and this brings many sorrows upon them. However, the greatest danger, brethren, is that one relies on his wealth to save him and not on God.

I Timothy 6:11-12 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

He is saying that you are on the right course; do not quit. Does Satan understand God's instructions to us? You bet he does. Because he does, he has set in the majority of men's hearts the desire to get rich, thinking all of life's problems can be solved with wealth.

Not too many years ago, gambling in this country was forbidden. I believe that all the states needing revenue to support this and that bill, and the lifestyle that the state cannot really afford for whatever reason, have set up the lotteries, holding out the potential of great wealth to those who participate. Families continually spend beyond

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their means. Some of the poor have actually papered their walls with losing lottery tickets that they could not afford to purchase in the first place. On the back of Canadian lottery tickets, they even have an 800 number to call if one is addicted. States, because of foolish spending, have authorized gambling casinos to garner greater riches for state coffers, while the average citizen takes his hard-earned money and tries to strike it rich. The result is that the state gets richer; and the gambler, poorer.

I had a friend with whom I worked for years. He was a fine man, but he was addicted to gambling. I remember he told us about the time that he went to Las Vegas and won \$900. That does not sound like much, but back then it was quite a bit. He always saved his money and went up there. However, he never told me all of the times that he lost.

It is always the carrot on the stick—the thought of obtaining something without working for it. The result is that work ethics, steady savings, and relying on God go by the wayside in the hope of getting rich without effort.

Proverbs 13:11 Wealth gotten by vanity [or dishonesty] shall be diminished: but he that gathers by labor shall increase.

John was telling the church not to be sucked into this manner of thinking, because it will lead to one's spiritual shipwreck.

Finally, we come to "the pride of life," or haughtiness: to be inflated with self conceit, to be high-minded and lifted up with self-importance, to be slowly consumed without flame. Satan wants us filled with self importance because of what it will produce in our lives.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate.

See the category into which pride is put?

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes then comes shame, but with the humble is wisdom.

Proverbs 14:3 In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

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Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 29:23 A man's pride shall bring him low; but the humble in spirit, will retain honor.

Ezekiel 16:49-50 Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.

What was the first thing listed? Pride. You see, with pride, there is no humility towards God or God's laws, no humility that requires obedience, no humility that makes you want to come before God in repentance or in change. Pride is the killer. Believe me, Satan wants us to have that. This was what produced the sin that caused Sodom's downfall; the first thing that was listed was pride. Pride will take you out of the church. When you start making the big dollars, all of a sudden you do not need God. Satan, of course, is aware that pride will separate us from God. It was his pride, coupled with coveting, that brought him to disaster. He knows the formula, and he wants us to follow that same formula.

Pride is having an undue sense of one's superiority, or inordinate self-esteem. Pride manifests itself in disdain or haughtiness toward others and, I might add, towards God, although it might be quite concealed. Pride gives an exaggerated opinion of one's ability or worth, coupled with a desire for admiration and praise. Today, many of those that the world looks up to as being exciting and successful are filled with inordinate pride, very probably because of their wealth and the adulation that the world around them gives them.

Britney Spears kissing Madonna while wearing as little as possible, Janet Jackson exposing her breast, and much of what Hollywood is producing exhibits their feelings of arrogance and superiority in being able to do anything they wish. Unfortunately, these stars are who the nation's young people hold in great admiration as examples to follow.

It astounds me that executives would amass millions or billions of dollars and distort stock prices, destroying pension funds. I believe that, because of Enron's pension funds being destroyed, there have been several that have committed suicide. These people

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are filled with haughtiness and self-importance. One man I read about that they were trying to convict on something had a birthday party on an island. It was a two-million-dollar birthday party, and he brought in girls, bands, singers. Talk about self-aggrandizement! This is certainly coveting wealth and power. However, it is their pride and their feeling of superiority that leads them to attempt to amass wealth at others' expense.

What does Jesus Christ say in Matthew 16?

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

We are called to give our life to Christ, to humble ourselves and to belong to Him.

Matthew 16:26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

When you are wealthy, you can think that you are high on the hog. You can see all of your luxury around you and think that you are secure and have protection, but the day comes when you die. As I said earlier, all that you take with you is your report card. All that wealth stays behind, and it does not mean a thing.

Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

The day of judgment is coming.

Matthew 16:28 "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

How, then, are we to accomplish what John told his congregation at that time and for us today? How are we to pull back from the coveting that Satan sets forth to trap us?

In Romans 7, Paul asks the question, "Who will save me?" and answers, "Jesus Christ."

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In Philippians 1:6, Paul tells us that once God starts a work in us, He will finish it. What is our part in overcoming coveting? Does this mean we do not have a very active part to play? Of course, you know that this is wrong. Did the apostle Paul fight to do this?

I Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

He is saying that we have a goal to achieve, a goal to reach, and we have to run accordingly. We cannot do this in a sloppy fashion, skipping prayer, study, and the Sabbath; but we must be consistent in how we run.

I Corinthians 9:25-26 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

I know the course, and I know what I have to do. I stumble; I have problems; I have trials; I slip; I hate myself for it (as Paul said in Romans 7); but I get up and I keep on running. He does not shadow box, but he sees the seriousness of what he is doing and of the struggles that he is facing.

I Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Paul truly understood, brethren, the bottom line regarding coveting, as did Jesus Christ. This is the bottom line, and I hope that you find it interesting.

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

It shows that he was tempted more than once.

Matthew 4:2-10 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by

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every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LOORD your God.'" Again, the devil 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." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LOORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

One could read this and come to the conclusion that Satan was tempting Jesus to become filled with pride and to show He was the Son of God, or to covet having all the world right now rather than waiting thousands of years. Jesus saw right through all of this to the true reason of Satan's questions—that Satan, through all his temptations, was asking Jesus Christ to obey him—and Jesus responded accordingly. Brethren, that is exactly what Satan is doing with us in his laying all the traps and enticements that produce coveting in us that he might pull us into his world. In short, he is asking you and me to obey him and, I might add, in doing so, to worship him.

The apostle Paul completely understood this principle when he wrote,

Romans 6:16 Know you not, that to whom you present yourself servants to, his slaves you are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

How do we defend against coveting?

Paul had just written eleven chapters with wonderful promises, marvelous things in there. We are going to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ and all of these beautiful things.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I might add to that, "and live it." How will we accomplish this? By the renewing of the mind. In Strong's, that word *renewing* means "to renovate." Any carpenter, any plumber, any air conditioning specialist goes into an old house where the faucets are no good or the walls are broken and has to renovate it. He has to take out that which does not work, that which is wrong and dirty and crummy.

That is exactly what we are being told here—to clean up our minds, to clean out the old self and to renovate it and make us into a new person. We do this by allowing God's Word—through diligent study, prayer, and fasting—to bring about a change in our nature, that our mind that was always subject to Satan would now be subject only to God and His laws. This is what God is after. Just as Jesus Christ responded to Satan's urgings with Scripture, having His waist girded with God's truth, and having the breast plate of righteousness and all the armor of God, so must we do the same to thwart Satan's attacks.

As I said in the beginning, initially I did not see the depth of the command not to covet, but now I see it precedes all sin and can be a deadly trap to God's people.

Romans 13:12-14 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

From now until the return of Jesus Christ, Satan will do all he can to lure us away from this way to his way. It is vitally important that we seriously listen when God tells us, "Thou shall not covet!"