

## The Tenth Commandment

Beware Covetousness

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We will begin this sermon by turning to Exodus.

**Exodus 20:17** "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor's."

Turn now to Deuteronomy. You will notice immediately something of a difference between the two versions.

**Deuteronomy 5:21** "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's."

I am going to give you three paraphrase definitions of the word *covet*. These are not one-word things, but paraphrases and expansions as well. It should give us a little better sense of what the word means.

- (1) To long after in order to enjoy a property that belongs to another.
- (2) To indulge in thoughts that lead to actions named in the other commandments.
- (3) Grasping thoughts which lead to grasping deeds.

Coveting normally arises from two sources. The first one is a perception of beauty in the eye of the beholder as of an object to be desired. The second one is an inclination as for something more abstract, like a desire for power. The first of those two incites from without, because the eye or ear is directly involved; the second, from within; but both of them are equally bad.

Regarding the pervasiveness of this sin, one commentator said, "All public crime would cease if this one law were kept." Another commentator said, "Every sin against neighbor

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springs from the breaking of this commandment, whether in word or deed."

In the Exodus 20 wording, the word *house* implies "household." Then follow six other terms so that we would clearly understand what is meant. In Deuteronomy 5:21, *wife* is moved into first position, displacing *house* as the very crown of one's possessions. Of course, that would imply *husband*, as well. The word *field* is inserted because, earlier, when the Exodus 20 one was given, a field was of no concern because they had no land. They were out in the wilderness.

Thus, in the two wordings, there is a seven-fold guarding of the other person's interests. What this does is show that the underlying concept of all of God's law is of outgoing concern. It is in this commandment that we step from the outer world of word and deed into the secret place where all good and evil begin, which is in the heart. It is through this commandment that one clearly penetrates into the spirit of God's law, and its importance lies in the fact that it is the inner life that ultimately determines a person's choices. It is in the inner man where the change of heart that determines conversion and growth must take place.

There is no doubt that coveting can be stimulating. In fact, it can be fun. Indeed, in many cases it can be exciting because of the pleasant anticipation one has about what one is coveting. How many people do you know who love to shop? Just because one shops does not necessarily mean one is coveting; but in very many cases, coveting is indeed a silent, *unseen* part of the shopping process. People do a certain amount of bragging about it by saying that they "were born to shop!"

The problem with coveting, as with every other sin that may also bring a measure of pleasure, is that it has an horrific downside to it. How many people have piled up huge credit card debt because they cannot seem to stop spending money they do not literally have in their possession or in a bank? Not long ago, I read that the average credit card debt in the United States is around \$8,000. To me, that is incredible.

I am not saying that all of that debt is on one card. It is probably spread across several cards. I am not saying this is all due to covetousness, because sometimes people lose their jobs and the credit card becomes the bank of last resort for them. In order to keep on living at some level, they keep piling the money into credit-card debt.

Covetousness has played a large part in the current economic crisis of the United States. People are going bankrupt because they bought homes they could not afford. Banks have gone belly-up because they made loans from capital they did not have, and they got into deep debt borrowing from yet larger institutions. Already, investments firms

like Lehman Brothers have crashed. The U.S. Government is bailing out the two largest housing-lending institutions—Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—in order to keep their failure from exacerbating the debt problem beyond control.

Let me show you one cause of this problem: In 1977, Evelyn and I attended a "positive-thinking" rally in Charlotte, North Carolina, that had such renowned motivational speakers as Paul Harvey, Art Linkletter, Robert Schuler, Ira Hays, and the granddaddy of them all, Earl Nightingale. It became very apparent after one or two speakers that the "get" principle was really being pushed hard. Even though some of them mentioned "giving," the reason for giving was to get. Those people pushed the program that made financial success an end in itself.

Always lurking in the background of their presentation was achieving success by taking advantage of human nature, most specifically, of people's desire to conform, to keep up with the Joneses, or simply to have attractive things. One of the speakers—Ira Hays—clearly showed in his presentation that one of the major keys to success in business is to stop worrying about conforming to what your competition is doing but striving hard to be distinctively different.

Brethren, it became apparent that sharp men and women are taking advantage of our desire to conform. There is in us a desire to be accepted on some level by being the same as everyone else. Psychologists know this, and thus we are provided with constant urging from advertisers to buy what everybody else *obviously* already has. The impulse is then followed so that one is not seen backward or unsophisticated, a nerd, and "not really with it," as young people would say today.

For those of us in the church, it sometimes seems a paradox, a contradiction, that God says that He wishes above all things that we prosper and be in good health. We also know that many times in the Old Testament the servants of God have been very wealthy. On the other hand, He tells us it is better to give than to receive and that the accumulation of things is not to be a major goal in life. Rather, God teaches that they are means to an end, but they are not to be the end in themselves. He warns us that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. When we bounce these off, we have to accept that we, His children, are being witnessed to by Him and that we need to measure where we stand.

Since the turn into the Twentieth Century, life has sped up, spurred on by engineering marvels. People began rushing about to make more money and to have more things, hurrying to have a good time, to live the good life. People began running to and fro, and life *roared* into the Twenties. On every side we are taught—I mean, *bombarded*—to

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crave things. Luxuries that were unknown two generations ago seem to rise with the dawning of each year as knowledge increases. So often the hucksters are selling an image to get us to conform. "You owe it to yourself." "Move up to Buick." "Wouldn't you rather have a Chrysler?" And so forth. Nightingale said in his portion of that positive-thinking rally, "The Protestant work ethic has been so successful that it has spawned advertising and monthly payments in order to consume what it produces."

Covetousness, combined with greed, is the major cause of all of this economic mess. Advertising is credit's companion in helping people to fulfill their desires. Credit extended by the banks is intended to make *them* money and, by extension, to speed up business and, at the same time, speed up one's possession of one's desires.

I want you to get something in mind here. This is part of the Old Covenant. It is right *in* the Old Covenant:

**Exodus 22:25** "If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest."

That is a prohibition from God, and that same prohibition carries through from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant in regard to our relationships within the church. We can lend money to somebody in the church, but it has to be a "no-interest" loan; and if a seventh year comes up, into which we will not go, the debt is wiped out regardless of in what year of paying off they are.

Credit was allowed by God, but at no interest. This gets right back to the thought on which I was before. Interest is intended by the banks to make money for them, but in reality, credit, over the long run, actually slows down business and slows down people's possession of other items. Right now, we are seeing why. That interest keeps piling up, and the first thing you know, when people refuse to stop spending, the interest payments are greater than the principal payments. In a national sense, that is where we have now gotten: we cannot pay all the principal, or maybe just a small portion of it. Most of the money that is paid back is going into the interest, and it is driving us under. We are going to drown, as a nation, from interest.

Consider this: If there were no interest at all, even though you borrow the money, it would get paid off much more quickly, and then you would have the interest money that was normally paid into interest to spend on some other possession you would like to have. God is telling us here in Exodus 22 that interest does not make good sense for

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the individual or for the nation as a whole, and that is why He forbade it. He knew that eventually rapacious people would begin to get exceedingly wealthy on the backs of the poor. Now the United States is poor, even though on the surface we are like that Grand Dame that I mentioned. We really look rich, but it is a hollow shell.

Credit, combined with rapacious buying, has produced this. God indicts the entire nation with not listening, because our minds are on what we covet. We are part of a nation that is addicted to covetousness, and we seem to be slaves of our desires. Instant gratification is the watchword, seemingly intensifying with the Baby Boomers. They are at the forefront of this; and, as a group, they continue to spend as if there is no tomorrow, even as they age into retirement. However, it is not limited to them.

I want you to turn to where God gives a charge through Isaiah, saying:

**Isaiah 56:9-12** "All you beasts of the field, come to devour, all you beasts in the forest. His watchmen are blind [Whose watchmen? Israel's or Judah's watchmen. The watchmen are those who are supposed to be looking out for the well-being of the nation. They are those who are to give warning.], they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; [They cannot bark a warning.] sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. [Boy, are we seeing some of that in the news now!] And they are shepherds [who are supposed to pastor, to look after the well-being] who cannot understand; they all look to their own way ["Phooey on everybody else! I am going to get rich. I am going to get mine now."], every one for his own gain, from his own territory. "Come," one says, "I will bring wine, and we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink; tomorrow will be as today, and much more abundant."

That is what the politicians say. "You vote for me, and I am going to take this nation to prosperity. There will be more abundance with me in office because I know exactly what to do." Do not believe it, because this is God's word to a nation that was on its way down in the same way that our nation is now easily seen as on its way down.

Incidentally, in verse 9, guess who the "beasts" are. They are the Gentile nations. "Come," God invites them, "and devour." Do you think that is not happening? It is happening right before our eyes. "All you beasts of the forest, don't worry," God says. "His watchmen are blind." They [the beasts] are going to get away with it.

**Isaiah 1:23** "Your princes [your leaders of business, of politics] are

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rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them."

Covetousness among men is a powerful drug that corrupts judgment. "What's in it for me?" is the thought, thus making one subject to bribes. Covetousness makes them able to be bought and thus destroy their integrity. When they are running for office, they say, "Things will be better tomorrow." In fact, they might even campaign on an anti-corruption program. It cannot be done, though, because human nature keeps getting in the way, and this republican form of government that we have opens the door to bribery.

To whom is a politician going to listen to more readily? Is he going to listen to the poor Joe whose job is on the line, with at most maybe a couple thousand dollars in the bank, or to a major corporation like a bank or some industry that puts millions of dollars into the coffers so that the candidate can run for that office? It is a form of bribery. Those who put the most in are going to exert the most pressure on the mind of the politician who is able to run and get into office because they got his name out before the public a lot more than did the poor Joe who did not have any money to run the campaign; he owes them something. That is a form of bribery.

There is sin right in the machination of this form of government, and God is showing us these things so that we will understand, when we get the opportunity, why His government is arranged in the way that it is. This is why it is absolutely necessary for us to prove our being incorruptible before the resurrection of the dead so that we will not be able to be bribed, because that kind of thing is not part of our thinking processes. It never even gets started.

**Ecclesiastes 5:10-11** He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?

Let us begin with the word *loves*. It is this desire that takes this into the field of covetousness. God is saying that covetousness is a narcotic, and, ultimately, it is addictive. A person can love wealth, but does wealth love in return? This is what it means in verse 11, which says, "When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?" Wealth does not love in return. Wealth has no feeling. It is just there.

Let us see another part of this picture. In a way, this verse tells us that it is difficult to deal with.

**Ecclesiastes 1:8** All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Solomon (who you might say had everything—had wealth beyond people's dreams) found out from first-hand experience that, regardless of how much he had, how much he built, how much he did, and how much he walked around and looked at his gardens or whatever, his eye still wanted more. You see, wealth cannot love in return. That is something that a fellow human being can do. He can give love back, but a house, money, or whatever, cannot. It is simply a thing to be used for what God made it to be used for.

When we were in California, one of the most garish examples of covetousness I have ever seen in my life was Hearst Castle. To me, it stands as a monument to covetousness. William Randolph Hearst, who was almost like the Bill Gates of his day, was fabulously wealthy. He searched all over the world for objects of art to purchase and place in his home, which sits on a knoll high above the road with nice mountains behind it. It is just in a nice, appropriate place where everybody driving by can see it sitting up there.

By the time we got there, it was a museum belonging to the State of California because, brethren, the State of California was the only one which had enough money to operate it. It is sort of like the Biltmore in Ashville. It makes you want to say, "How much money did those people have to be able to operate something like that?" That is why Biltmore now belongs to the State of North Carolina, because the heirs of Mr. Vanderbilt said, "We don't have enough money to occupy it."

William Randolph Hearst and his heirs ran into the same thing. At any rate, I personally did not find anything of taste inside of the Hearst Castle walls. No doubt it was costly—*undoubtedly* so—but also gaudy and tasteless and, to this man, bordering on demonic garishness. To me, there was no unified harmony of beauty from one room to the next, and I left the place feeling that I never ever wanted to go back to see it again. That place cost him millions upon millions of dollars back in the days when a dollar was of great value in this world. As I left, I thought that this is nothing more than an arrogant display that said to everybody, "Look at what I am able to afford."

Let us let Jesus speak on this.

**Luke 12:13-15** Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And 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."

Many modern translations say, "Beware of covetousness in every shape and form." Very interesting. It is good that they have done this, because coveting is certainly not limited to the accumulation of wealth. Jesus' response is interesting, to say the least, because at first He appears to beg off answering the man's appeal by claiming that it was not His job. However, brethren, who on Earth was better qualified to answer this man's question?

The book of Deuteronomy contains instruction regarding inheritances, and maybe the questioner had a legitimate complaint. Who could better discern between right and wrong, the holy and the unholy, than Jesus? But Jesus answered as He did because He had something more important in mind, and that important thing is a vital lesson for all seeking the Kingdom of God and desiring to avoid this sin and maybe others. The lesson was contained within the parable that follows, although the parable does not actually begin until verse 22.

**Luke 12:22-24** Then 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. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider 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?"

Boy! To have faith like this! Jesus is challenging us to do this.

**Luke 12:25-26** "And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?"

In other words, to add one cubit to your stature would be a pretty big thing. However, you cannot add, and neither can I, even one tiny increment of a cubit. We cannot even

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do that. Therefore, verse 26 says, "If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?"

**Luke 12:27-28** "Consider 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. If 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?"

That can be a stinging rebuke to us, because we worry a great deal about things of this nature. Yet here is our Lord and Master, saying that if we are in an attitude like He is describing here, we have a weakness that needs to be eliminated from our character.

**Luke 12:29-32** "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

There we are. You might ask yourself, "Am I a greedy person?" "Do I have an inordinate desire for wealth, or for being well-thought of, or for material possessions?" Listen to this: The Greek word for *greed* literally means "the thirst for more." How long does it take us to get thirsty? Interesting word.

This commandment pierces through surface Christianity and really shows whether a person has surrendered his will to God. We have a really long way to go. The spiritual requirement for keeping this commandment is in some ways more rigid than any of the others, because it pierces right through to the thoughts of one's heart.

**Mark 7:20-22** And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

It makes one wonder if there is anything good there at all. That is quite a listing. This ought to serve as a warning to us, because covetousness is in the heart, and we are at the threshold of it all the time. Our heart is given over to satisfying its self-centered

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design at most any time. This is a very serious sin because this combination can produce sin in almost a moment.

We are going to go back to the book of Ephesians. Paul is talking about the Gentiles, the unconverted,

**Ephesians 4:19-32** Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

**Ephesians 5:1-5** Therefore be imitators [followers] of God as dear children. And 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. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 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.

Paul is describing the heart of the unconverted, and he makes it very plain that it has been given over to lewdness to work all uncleanness with greediness; in other words, voraciously going after the fruits of sin. From shortly after this point in Ephesians 4:19, Paul launches into a section on for what those seeking holiness should strive.

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As we begin, I want you to understand that the things Paul mentioned that we should do are under our control. I am saying that we do not have to do them. Conversion has given us the choice that we did not have before when human nature *drove* us, having free course toward our conduct. When God converts us, He empowers us, enabling us to discern and make the right choice. We are not going to do it perfectly, but the ability to do it is there because we have a base of knowledge as to what direction we should go. In verse 23, he tells us to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" and "put on the new man, which was created, according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (verse 24).

We can put on the new man—take off the old and put on the new—understanding that it is going to be a process. It is going to take time. We have to be patient, but we have to keep on keeping on, stripping off the old and putting on the new. As we put on the new, we must speak truth. We must not allow ourselves to grow angry. We have got to stop stealing and to allow no corrupt words to proceed from our mouth.

In verse 1 of chapter 5, he says we have to be followers of Christ. Our responsibility is to mimic Christ. That is what the word *follower* literally means; it means "to mimic." We are to mimic Christ.

When I was a boy, we used to play a game called "Follow the Leader." Maybe they still do it now. In following the leader, you did exactly what the leader did. There was a line—we will say five boys—and whatever the leader did, the other four behind him had to follow him and do the same thing. The leader may have run around, jumped up, grabbed a low limb and swung on it a little bit, maybe did a summersault or whatever, and did all kinds of crazy things. Everybody followed right behind him and did the same. That is what this word *follower* means. As we see, as we learn what Christ did, we mimic what he did. It is within our power to do that.

We are "to walk in love." He gives a demonstration of what he means by love in this context. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to His brethren. He took it on the chin for us, and lost His life. Are we willing to take it on the chin within the group? What He did really pleased God; it was sweet-smelling to Him. If we do the same thing, rather than get offended, we turn around and do good to the one offending. We can do that and treat him with respect and kindness. That really pleases God.

In verse 3, he directly names covetousness, and, if we connect it to verse 2, covetousness is not walking in love. It is thinking about ways of getting things for the self, and it is in the same classification, in this context, as fornication and uncleanness, which is simply a code word for all other sexual sins grouped together. In fact, Paul

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goes so far as to say that these things should not even be so much as *named* among us

Why do you think that he contrasts these things to love? Because these things he names in verse 3 are self-centered acts. They are concerned about the self. Love acts out of concern for the other; fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness are incoming self-concern. They have to be gotten rid of. Love is centered on self-sacrifice; those others, on self-indulgence.

Incidentally, I am almost positive (this is my own thought here) that because of the way Paul grouped these things in verses 2 and 3, he was contrasting the sexual intimacy of the marriage bed to these others. In the marriage bed, there can be true love. Regardless of the thrill and excitement that may come from fornication or uncleanness that stems from covetousness, there is no love involved in it at all, and it is not satisfying except for a moment.

In verse 4, he says that these things are so evil that they should be banished not only from speaking of them but also, brethren, from even thinking about them. Then, in verse 5, he goes on to remind us all that those who commit these things will not be in the Kingdom of God.

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

Once again, covetousness is linked directly with sexual sins and idolatry, as in Ephesians. However, in this case, he added *passion* and *evil desire*. I did a lot of looking up on this, and nobody really had a good explanation of why *passion* and *evil desire* were put in there, but I thought one commentator came up with something that might be what Paul intended. He suggested that *passion* might be considered by itself as a passive state, whereas *evil desire* indicates passion that is actively put into action. Thus, *passion* might indicate keeping one's mind stirred up by such things as pornography without carrying through with the actual act.

Brethren, overcoming coveting is difficult because the desire is so close to the surface of our nature and because there are so many means of stimulating it into action. However, it can be overcome. The reason it can be overcome is that God is on His throne, creating Jesus Christ in us. It must be overcome, because, as we just read, no covetous person will be in God's Kingdom.

The Tenth Commandment by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

How can covetousness be overcome and be replaced with contentment? What can we do? Here is a little success list, a process that I can give to you:

**Major Point Number One:** We must be willing to face some realities. Do not run from them. The first reality is that human nature cannot be satisfied. It is always going to be open to desire. We are not just going to run away from this thing, because it is in the heart, and it cannot be satisfied. Because it is this way, we have to be constantly aware.

The second reality is that there is no peace to be found in satisfying a lust. God's word proves this. If lust could be satisfied, once a thing was done, one would never do it again. However, because it is done over and over again, that proves it never satisfies but actually is addictive. It always wants more.

The third reality is that God has not placed power into anything physical to completely satisfy anything coveted.

A fourth reality is that there is a difference between joy, which is a fruit of God's spirit, and happiness and pleasure, which are frequently nothing more than the fruit of a physical stimulation. Thus, joy and contentment are the fruit of a spiritual component that nothing physical can produce.

**Major Point number 2:** Seek God first. After facing these realities, seek God first. Part one will help us get the realities straight. Part two is, then, we have to seek God first.

**Colossians 3:1-2** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

**Matthew 6:31-33** "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

**Philippians 4:6-8** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good

The Tenth Commandment by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Seek God first, which means study, fast, pray, meditate. Think things through. What we are doing when we do these things is spiritual discipline to avoid the "garbage in, garbage out" syndrome. There has to be an active process of putting in the good before good can come out. There is nothing better than the Word of God to get into our mind. Why? Because it makes all the difference in the world to what to think about. This takes a lot of sacrifice, but it fills the mind with the raw material of the kind of thoughts that, brethren, can make it almost impossible to sin. That is the way it is going to be in God's Kingdom. We will always think God's thoughts. When you are thinking *His* thoughts, there is no way you can sin.

**Major Point number 3:** In your prayers, concentrate on interceding for others, and give praise and thanksgiving to God.

**I Thessalonians 5:15-18** See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**Hebrews 13:15-16** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The principle is this: Doing these things takes the concentration off the self, and it leaves far less time for thinking lustful thoughts. This does require discipline, though, and it requires preparation, in some measure, of thinking about what one is going to pray to God for and about and to thank Him for it. If I can sum it up, thanksgiving extinguishes covetousness.

You might want to use the Psalms as an example. Almost every Psalm extols God or some aspect of His being as well as to what He has done, either by way of creation or by intervention in the psalmist's behalf.

**Major Point number 4:** Adopt true values about yourself in relation to God and fellowman; in other words, how you *think* about yourself. There is probably no verse in

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the Bible that is important in this regard as Matthew 5:3. That ought to be in our scripture memory bank, because it says,

**Matthew 5:3** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

This closely relates to the previous point, but it concentrates on our privileges; that is, what we have spiritually because of God's grace, not on what we do *not* have. When we allow ourselves to covet, and maybe even nurture those thoughts in our heart of hearts and because of vanity, it makes us think we deserve what we covet. However, if we are "poor in spirit," brethren, we think we do not deserve anything. It squeezes the covetousness right out of us, and it produces contentment with what God has graciously already given us. It is a wonderful attitude.

**Major Point number 5:** This tells us what grace *should* teach us:

**Titus 2:11-14** For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

That is what grace should teach us. It teaches us to renounce evil. Covetousness is evil; that is, it is the evil desire for sin that arises from within and becomes our conduct that needs to be changed. But with the gift God has given us, our conduct can be changed, because Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the power that makes us sin. He gives power to those who are striving to overcome the remnants of the old nature. Certainly, it is a tough and, in many cases, a long, discouraging process; but with the help of God, if we make the effort, it will be overcome. Brethren, the dynamic of this new life is the coming of Jesus Christ. That is what that formula says grace teaches us.

The dynamic of the new life is the coming of Jesus Christ; and when royalty is coming, everything is made spiff and polished clean and decorated for the royal eyes to see. That is us! It is our job to get everything spiff and polished and clean in our character, in our mind, in our heart. That is what grace is teaching us to do. To make the effort to do that, the Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 9:24-27 that he practically, you might say, burned himself out to overcome. He did not shadowbox. He really went at it, lest he

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found himself a castaway. He said that fifteen years or so after he was converted, and he was still going at it. I am sure that he went at it right to the end of his life, making himself ready for the arrival of the King.

We must know that right thoughts produce right conduct. That is the issue. Grace has made it possible for us to have right thoughts.

That is the end of the sermon for today. I hope the remainder of your Sabbath day is enjoyable to you.