

5 Ways to Conquer Covetousness

Introduction. Covetousness is like a monkey with its hand in a gourd. It reaches in and takes hold of a handful of nuts. But when it tries to pull its hand out, it can't — not because it's chained, or has no way of escape, but because it refuses to let go.

Many people live that way. Their hands are closed around a bigger house, a larger salary, a better title, another family's lifestyle, or another person's approval. They say, "If I could only have that, then I'd be satisfied." But the hand that refuses to release its grasp is the hand that remains trapped.

Covetousness never says, "Enough." It always says, "More." On the other hand, contentment is "a state of happiness and satisfaction." Simply put, when someone's content they're in a happy and satisfied state of mind, free from worry, and are at peace (cp. Philippians 4:19). Christ teaches us the freedom of an open hand: grateful for what God gives, generous with what God entrusts, and content because our treasure isn't in what we possess, but in the One who possesses us.

To promote faith in God and reliance on what He provides, let's get into examining five sober warnings about covetousness.

I. Remember That Covetousness Never Brings Satisfaction

- A. God's Word says that money doesn't satisfy those who love it (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Believe God and turn away from the love of money. It's a dead-end street.
- B. If the Word of the Lord needed confirming, there are enough miserable rich people in the world to prove that a satisfied life doesn't come from having things (Luke 12:15; cp. Proverbs 30:8-9).

II. Bear in Mind That Covetousness Chokes Off Spiritual Life

- A. When Jesus told the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1-20), He said that some seed "fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it" (Mark 4:7). Then He interpreted the parable and said that the seed is the Word of God. The thorns choking the seed are "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19).
- B. Covetousness is the "desire for other things" in competition with the Word of God. A real battle rages when the Word of God is preached.
 - 1. "The desire for other things" can be so strong that the beginnings of spiritual life can be choked out altogether.
 - 2. This is such a frightful warning that we should be on our guard every time we hear the Word to receive it with faith, and not to choke it with covetousness. This is the conclusion of Jesus after telling a different parable: "Therefore, take heed how you hear" (Luke 8:18).

III. Don't Forget That Covetousness Spawns Many Other Sins

- A. When Paul says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils" (1 Timothy 6:10), he means that the kind of heart that finds contentment in money and not in God is the kind of heart that produces many other kinds of evils.

- B. James gives an example: “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war” (James 4:2). In other words, if we’re content, like Paul, in hard times and easy times, we wouldn’t be driven to fight and wage war like this.
- C. Because covetousness is a breeding ground for a thousand other sins, it (cp. heightens the warning to flee from it and to fight for contentment in God with all our might. If we don’t, we introduce idolatry, envy, jealousy, ingratitude, lying, deceit, theft, fraud, adultery, anger, hatred, and division into our lives. Who would be excited about that? No one! But that’s what you get when you “close your hand” in covetousness.

IV. Recollect That Covetousness Lets You Down When You Need Help Most

- A. It lets you down in the hour of death (1 Timothy 6:7; cp. Job 1:21; Psalm 49:17; Ecclesiastes 5:15). At the greatest crisis of your life, when you need contentment, hope, and security more than any other time, your money and all your possessions take wings and fly away.
- B. They let you down. They’re fair-weather friends at best. And you enter eternity with nothing but the measure of contentment that you had in God. If you died tonight, would you take with you a payload of pleasure in God or would you stand before Him with a spiritual cavity where covetousness used to be?

V. Keep in Mind That Covetousness Destroys the Soul

- A. In 1 Timothy 6:9, Paul says again, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”
 - 1. Money, pleasure, power, people worshiping you — these things don't make you happy in the long run and in fact they leave you empty and depressed.
 - 2. But in the end, covetousness can destroy the soul in hell. The reason we can be sure that this destruction is not some temporary financial fiasco but a final destruction in hell is what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:12. What’s at stake in fleeing covetousness and fighting for contentment in future grace is eternal life.
- B. So when Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:9 that the desire to be rich plunges people into ruin, he isn’t saying that greed can mess up your marriage or your business (which it certainly can). He’s saying that covetousness can mess up your eternity (cp. 1 Timothy 6:10, “pierced themselves through with many sorrows”).

Conclusion. Covetousness isn’t cured merely by owning less. A poor person can covet, and a wealthy person can be content. The issue is the heart’s allegiance. If our joy rises and falls with what we gain, lose, or see in another person, then possessions have begun to possess us.

The answer is not simply, “Try harder not to want.” The answer is to cultivate gratitude, generosity, and confidence in God’s care. Open hands are the evidence of a heart that believes God is enough.

God has gone the extra mile to warn us mercifully that covetousness is a no-win situation. It’s a trick and a trap. So my word to you is the word of 1 Timothy 6:11: Flee

from it (cp. Psalm 119:36; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:5-6). The sword of the Spirit will put covetousness to death where the triumph over covetousness is promised!

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