

## God's Rest (Part 4)

### Lust and Coveting

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This sermon is on coveting and lusting—the tenth commandment. The subject is linked to the previous sermon on peace, coveting, and restlessness. But it's not so heavily concerned with the restless mental disturbances that were covered previously.

In 1975, Evelyn and I attended a Positive Thinking Rally in Charlotte, North Carolina. We lived in Columbia, South Carolina at that time but Evelyn showed me an advertisement for this, and she suggested to me that it would be a pretty good to go see what they had to offer. So we did. We spent the entire day there. I believe they started about ten o'clock in the morning, and it was somewhere between nine and ten o'clock in the night before we got out of there.

This particular rally featured people like Paul Harvey, Art Linkletter, Robert Schuler, Ira Hayes, and it also had the 'granddaddy' of them all (the man who started this line of rallies, thinking, and so forth), Earl Nightingale. And after just two or three speakers, it became fairly apparent that the "get" principle was being pushed very hard. Even though, at times, it was mentioned within their presentations of the process of producing success that it included "giving," but always there was an underlying element that the *giving* was done in order to *get*. In other words, this hand gives here, and you take it back in with this hand over here.

These people made financial success an end in itself. Financial success was not the only theme that they covered. They covered, in principle, overcoming in all kinds of different areas. But always the underlying motivation was for *self-gratification*. It wasn't done to please God. It wasn't done for the purpose of the Kingdom of God. It was given simply *to advance the self*—towards what 'the self' considered to be successful. And always lurking in the

background of their presentations was to get success by taking advantage of human nature—taking advantage of people's desires to conform, to keep up with, or to get ahead of the Jones', or simply to have attractive things.

One of the speakers, Ira Hayes, clearly showed that one of the major keys to success in business is not to worry about conforming to what your business competition is doing, but rather strive to be distinctly different. Again, you are different so that you can *get* success.

Through the years, it began to be apparent to me that marketers are taking advantage to our desire to conform, to follow the subtle pressures of one's peers, by means of constant urging to buy what everybody else obviously already has—so that one does not seem to be backward, or an unsophisticated nerd. We are urged, by these people, to *compete* for the same material things that our neighbor has.

On the other hand, to us it can seem that the Bible presents us with a paradox—a contradiction, actually—in which many of God's servants, especially in the Old Testament, have been wealthy. Abraham was very wealthy. David was a very wealthy man. And there were others besides. Yet He tells us, pretty plainly and clearly in the New Testament, that it's better to give than it is to receive. He tells us that the accumulation of things is not to be a major goal in life. We are shown that material things are to be a means to an end—not the end in themselves—and that a man's life consists *not* in the abundance of the material things that he possesses.

**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.

Remember that commandment (in Exodus 20) said, "You shall not *covet*." Here we have the Deuteronomy version of the tenth commandment.

**Deuteronomy 5:21** Neither shall you *desire* your neighbor's wife, neither shall you *covet* your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is your neighbor's.

You can see that the translators made a change in the first phrase—from "covet" to *desire*. This is just a little item to keep track of, one of those little bits of trivia. They are exactly the same word in the Hebrew, in Exodus as in Deuteronomy. Why they made the change, I have no idea. But one thing that you can learn from it is that very frequently when you look at the word *desire* in some other part of the Old Testament it is very likely going to be exactly the same word that is translated *covet* in a different context. And so the word, of and by itself in the Hebrew, isn't going to tell you a great deal. It's the context that may tell you what God intends.

That word is *khawmad*. It simply means, "to delight in, to covet." It can be translated "desire, covet, or lust" (among other things). This same word is translated only one time into the English word *lust* in the Old Testament, and you will find that in Proverbs 6. I think this is because there is a subtle difference in the usage—between the word "covet" and "lust." This is especially noticeable in the English.

*Coveting* generally means to simply long after in order to enjoy the property that belongs to another (or, as a property that which belongs to another). Another way of putting it is that *coveting* is grasping thoughts, which lead to grasping deeds. By contrast, *lusting*, though somewhat similar, is specifically used in the English to indicate a sexual desire.

Regardless of which it is, both arrive from two different sources. One will begin with a perception of beauty—as in a thing, so that it begins to be desired. The other will arise from an inclination, or something more abstract—as like a desire for power, or fame. Much of the first one arises from the senses—from what we see, from what we hear, smell, taste, or feel. The second primarily arises from within. One leans towards excitement, or arising of desire—beginning *without*. The other arises from *within*. It is primarily inward, and that is the one that tends to be more abstract.

But regardless of which source it comes from, to give you some sort of a sense of their impact on life, one commentator said that all public crime would cease if just this one commandment were kept. Another one said that every sin against neighbor springs from the breaking of this one commandment, whether of word or deed.

**Genesis 3:6** And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired [Hebrew, *khawmad*] to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

What we learn from that is that *coveting* played a major part in mankind's first sin and, therefore, mankind's separation from God, right from the beginning.

You might recall that when I read the commandment in Exodus 20:17, that the word "house" appeared in it. It will be somewhat better for you, and a little bit more 'all inclusive,' if you will understand that that word "house", in that kind of a context, generally means *household* rather than simply a dwelling in which one lives. One way to help you to understand this is that when they were given those commandments they had no houses. They were standing there at Mt. Sinai. The commandments were given. And, as we are going to see in just a minute, the commandments were given primarily with "the wandering" in mind—because some adjustments were made with the commandments in Deuteronomy 5. They aren't real big ones. They are subtle, but they are important.

The commandments are given in Deuteronomy 5 just as they were ready to go into the Land. They were then going to begin to dwell in houses once again. That signifies the reason for the other changes that are in that commandment. "Neither shall you desire your neighbor's wife." (Deuteronomy 5:21) In Exodus 20, "wife" is not put first. "Household" is put first; and then the next five terms are giving you an indication of what God means by "households"—that which is within the house, even including the animals that are owned. That is, that which is within the "household." But now they are going to go into the Land, and "wife" is moved into first position. We should also understand that, included within it (though not mentioned) should be the term "husband" (because women are just as capable of coveting after a man, as a man is after a woman). So that is *forbidden territory* for somebody who is married—whether male or female.

"Neither shall you covet your neighbor's house..." Now it definitely means *the dwelling place*. Some people have better homes than others do and here it

definitely means "the dwelling place." "His field..." When they were going off into the wilderness, they didn't have fields to worry about. But now *field* is going to be part of their property. "Or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is your neighbor's."

Between the two listings of the commandment, the wording gives a seven-fold guarding of the other's interest. That is, somebody else's interest. And what this teaches you—right within the commandment, and it is very plain—is that they are given to guard somebody else's interest. It's not just YOU that are involved in this. And so we have, right in the commandment, the basic concept that is supposed to drive a Christian's life—and that is *outgoing concern* (rather than a grasping "getting" for the self). It is in this commandment that we step from the other world of "word and deed" into the secret place where all 'good' and 'evil' begins—in the heart. It is the inner life that actually determines a person's conduct and, therefore, the destiny of his life.

**Matthew 5:27-30** You have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say unto you that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye offend you, pluck it out, and cast it from you. For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that your whole body should be cast into hell. And if your right hand offend you, cut it off, and cast it from you. For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish, and not that the whole body should be cast into hell.

Here we have the word *lust* directly associated with sex. The Greek word here is *epithumeo*. It means *to set one's heart upon something*—for 'good' or for 'evil.' Here we are talking about adultery. A person could be setting their heart on a woman or a man for marriage. Is it wrong to desire a mate? Some can reach that kind of conclusion, but the answer to that is "No." But it is wrong to desire somebody else's mate. That is *forbidden territory*.

**Proverbs 18:22** Whoso finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor with the Lord.

It's not wrong to *desire* a husband or a wife, but it is wrong to *lust after* a husband or a wife. That is crossing a line that God forbids. When the object desired is *legitimately beyond the reach* of the one desiring, admiration merging into desire to "get" that particular person breaks the commandment.

It is interesting that the Jews had a concept that adultery was a kind of theft, and that's not entirely wrong. But that is not Jesus' emphasis here. His emphasis is on *purity*. And He is saying that *ruin* awaits those who are even *unchaste in their thoughts* if that kind of thinking is not changed.

Nowhere is the inwardness of Christ's teaching so evident as in this commandment because all of this happens on the inside of a person, and you can't necessarily see it on the outside. But on the inside the thoughts are churning. The tenth commandment very definitely steps into the area of that which is spiritual. It is here, inwardly, that the change must take place. It is here that the problems, and the solutions, lie.

What Christ does here is that He carries *impure thinking* back beyond the first touch of the hands, or the look in the eyes—the "across the crowded room" kind of thing—to the first inception of wrong desire. What He says is that we must **amputate the wrong desire** so that the sin will never become an act. And therefore, we will **remain pure**—and so will the object of our desire.

Imagination is a wonderful gift from God, but if it is fed dirt by the eye, then the heart will very likely be dirty. *Sin begins in the imagination*. In the book of Philippians, Paul says something that is helpful in this regard. It is interesting that this statement, this instruction that he gives, follows right after teaching on peace. And, a lack of peace is a pretty good indication of the breaking of the tenth commandment.

**Philippians 4:8** Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

It is what feeds the imagination that is important—to purity, and to sin. If lust, or coveting, is going to be *stopped*—one of the things that have to be done is that we have to stop feeding our imagination dirt. We have to *deal radically* with this sin.

The purpose of imagination is intended by God to be the enrichment of life, but it must be controlled by discipline. The discipline becomes much easier if the mind is fed the right things, because it will then have a tendency to think on the right things. But if it is fed the wrong things, and it's getting its nourishment from the wrong areas, then that is what it will process through the brain. The person who is condemned in Matthew 5 is the one who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust so that wrong desire is stimulated.

It's hard enough to avoid lusting after things that are natural, but there are many things in the world deliberately designed to awaken lustful desires. There are certain books, pictures, magazines, movies, certain places, certain activities, or certain people that cause temptation, and they must be **avoided**, regardless of the cost. *Not sinning* is that important, and that is why Jesus said, "*Cast it away...pluck it out.*"

We need to see where we stand within the scope of what is going on around us. Since the late 1800s, life has been speeding up—*rushing* to make more money, to have more things; *hurrying* to have a good time; and *seeing and doing* what everybody else seems to be "seeing and doing." Even hurrying in order to save time so that we have more time, so that we can squeeze every possible thing out of our lives, is something everybody does from time to time.

But on every side—through mass communications—we are taught to compete with our neighbor for honors and for material advancement. We are taught to crave things—luxuries that were unknown a generation or two ago. So often the marketing teachers are selling us an image. The drumbeat is that you owe it to yourself. "*Wouldn't you rather have a Buick?*" "*Move up to Chrysler.*" "*You deserve a break today.*"

In that Positive Thinking Rally, Earl Nightingale said this: "The Protestant work ethic has been so successful, that it has spawned advertising and

monthly payments in order to consume what it produces." It has been the Protestant work ethic. Protestant theologians approach the Bible from a different perspective than the Catholic Church. They saw in it principles of material success, and they openly proclaimed them in their pulpits. But, brethren, people didn't get the whole picture, and it produced what we have been born into and caught up in.

We are now going to kind of "leap frog" through Jeremiah 5. I want you to understand what is going on here. What Jeremiah was inspired to do was to give a description of the cultural attitudes and actions in Judah, just before they fell to the Babylonians. Jeremiah came long roughly one hundred years after Isaiah. He was a contemporary of Daniel and of Ezekiel. He was probably the oldest of those three, with Daniel being the youngest of the three. But they all lived about the same time. The time was somewhere just before Nebuchadnezzar came into the land. We'll say ten or fifteen years before Nebuchadnezzar came into the land. Maybe it was even quicker than that—when Jeremiah 5:1 was written. But notice this description.

**Jeremiah 5:1-2** Run you to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if you can find a man, if there be any that executes judgment, that seeks the truth; and I will pardon it. And though they say, 'The Lord lives,' surely they swear falsely.

That's very clear. He's given a command to go through the city and see if he can find one righteous person. One! Just to give you another idea of how bad this is, when Abraham was dickering with God over Sodom and Gomorrah, he was undoubtedly concerned about Lot being there—and Lot's wife, and Lot's family. He wanted to make sure that, somehow or another, they would be able to be saved because God had told him what they were going to do. They were going to destroy the cities. You know how it went from 50, to 45, to 40, until finally it got down all the way to 10.

Now, I want you to think. God said, "If there are 10 righteous people there, I will spare the city."

You know what a bad reputation Sodom had. I mean, was there ever a worse place on earth? Yes. Jerusalem! God said, "I'll spare the city if you can even

find ONE." Not ten, but one! It was that bad. And Jeremiah couldn't even find *one* righteous person. So first he describes a perverse and hypocritical people who put on a show of righteousness. But he shows here a series of areas of sin. In verse 7 was adultery, which I'm sure is just a title for all kinds of sexual sins; because later on, Jerusalem is called "Sodom" and "Egypt"—which indicates that there were other kinds of sexual perversities going on besides 'merely' adultery. Sexual sins were running rampant.

I want you to think about this in relation to the United States of America. I'm not so familiar with Canada, or any of the other nations; but, I'll tell you, there's an awful lot that we can see is available in the United States of America. In verse 10, Jeremiah comes back to their *spiritual impiety*, as it is called in my Bible. What this is, is their *disrespect towards God* and their *blindness* in thinking that God would continue to endure their *lack of truthfulness* about their relationship with Him. They were HYPOCRITES—breaking His commandments left and right, and telling everybody, "*Well, it's alright. It's okay. This is normal stuff. It's no worse than it was in the previous generation.*" But, oh yes, it was!

In verse 18, it begins to show their **idolatry** and their **rebellion** against all that is decent. And then he finally led up to verse 28.

**Jeremiah 5:28** They are waxen fat[meaning, they are very prosperous], they shine:...

That's an interesting word. It means that they were slick. You've heard of people who were "slick"—such as slick salesmen. So they were slick. That's what that word "shine" means.

**Jeremiah 5:28** . . . They overpass [that means, they exceed] the deeds of the wicked. They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

Tremendous *antisocial behavior*—all sorts of problems within the community! And then in chapter 6, God tells them through Jeremiah, the Benjamite, to get out of there.

**Jeremiah 6:1-2** O you children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa [that, incidentally, was where Amos was from], and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appears out of the north, and great destruction. [A prophecy that Babylon was coming.] I have likened the daughter of Zion [Jerusalem] to a comely and delicate woman.

**Jeremiah 6:9** Thus saith the Lord of hosts, "They [meaning the Babylonians] shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine. Turn back your hand as a grape gatherer into the baskets.

They are going to be so thorough in what they do—it's like the gleaners going through the field, and turning back the leaves to see if there's any more fruit hiding behind things.

**Jeremiah 6:10-13** [Jeremiah is speaking:] To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken [listen]. Behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord. I am weary with holding in. [God begins speaking again.] I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together. For even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together. For I will stretch out My hand upon the inhabitants of the land," saith the LORD. [Now look at this. This is what He's been leading to.] For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to *covetousness* . . .

So what is driving these people is their *mad desire* for anything that will please, that will stimulate, that will fill the yearnings that are within them. Is it another man's wife? Is it another man's field? Is it another man's this or is it another man's that? "*It doesn't matter if people get unjust decisions in the courts. We'll just take from those people.*" There was no social justice anywhere.

**Jeremiah 6:13-15** . . . Every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one deals falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace;' when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush. . .

Sin, in all of its forms, had become so common that it was thought to be the way to do things. So there were no guilty consciences.

**Jeremiah 6:15-16** . . . Therefore they shall fall among them that fall. At the time that I visit them they shall be cast down," saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Stand you in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest...

Notice again that *restlessness*. Where again will people find rest? Where will they find peace? It's in the old ways—the ways that they had given up. That is, the keeping of the commandments of God.

**Jeremiah 6:16** . . . and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah indicts a whole nation for its **covetousness**. And I don't think that I have to say anymore to you. You are able to see it with your own eyes, and you can hear it with your ears—that this is the direction that America is heading in. People are set upon filling their desires, regardless. Each man becomes gradually a law unto himself. In his relationships with others, people are just pushed aside, and there is concern only for the self and not the outgoing concern that the commandments demand.

One of the major reasons why coveting is so *dangerous* to a culture is revealed by our credit system, which is based on possessing something before one is actually able to afford it. Remember what Earl Nightingale said about the Protestant work ethic being so successful that it has spawned

advertising and marketing. He also mentioned credit, by the way. Advertising is credit's companion in this, but their purpose is to speed up the process of business and possession.

However, the American capitalistic system is wounded by a fatal flaw. Based as it is upon banking and manufacturing, it must constantly expand or go into a depression, or possible collapse. It must find new products to sell, and find new markets to produce expansion. And one of the major tools to accomplish this, but it is illusory, is credit buying. The reality is, though, that buying things on credit actually slows down possession because, over the long haul, it makes things more expensive. It creates debt and economic slavery.

The same principle is at work in every other unlawful act in which *coveting* is a part. But, as God says here, Who will listen? Remember that God is showing here what happens in a culture just before it is ready to collapse. People are *given over to their covetousness*. Their mind is *given over to their desire*.

This truth is one of the reasons why tithing comes as such a shock. Usually, our desires run virtually unchecked, and we are sucked into the vortex of marketing's ploys and living way over our heads. Then we learn that God has a prior call on our money, through tithing. And the penalty for the previous "stealing from God" really hurts because then we have to learn to pay—tithing in adversity. Evelyn and I know what we are talking about here because we experienced this very process.

**Isaiah 56:9** All you beasts of the field, come to devour. Yes, all you beasts in the forest.

There's some symbolism here. The beasts are the Gentile nations. God is calling the Gentile nations to "come to devour." Who? This beautiful comely girl—Israel!

**Isaiah 56:10** His watchmen are blind. . .

Israel's watchmen are blind. In other words, they don't see the danger on the horizon because they are blinded by what they are committing themselves to.

That is, *coveting, lusting, idolatry and ignoring God*. And so the watchmen are blind!

**Isaiah 56:10** . . . They are all ignorant.

He's telling the beast of the field, "You are going to have an easy time here. Israel is 'easy pickings.' They are paying so much attention to themselves that they won't even see you coming."

**Isaiah 56:10-12** His watchmen are blind. They are all ignorant. They are all dumb dogs [That's pretty bad, to a Hebrew especially, to be called a dog.], they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yes, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough [Isn't that a picture of covetousness? To never have enough!], and they are shepherds that cannot understand. They all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his quarter. Come you, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.

Boy, I'll tell you—does this sound like America? God is speaking here of the political, business, educational and religious leadership. And God calls for Israel's enemies to devour His people, because His people and their leadership are blind to the nation's real needs—because their collective mind is on their own **lust**. "Greedy dogs" who can never have enough. By the time we get to verse 12, He shows these leaders as having a drunkard's *irresponsible abandonment of duty*. Instead of providing real leadership—by setting the right example in their own lives, and speaking out, and acting upon issues of morality, they all look to their own **gain** in whatever their desires lay.

So what does he tell us here? "Come you, drink. It's going to be better tomorrow. If you think it's 'good' now, it's going to be even better tomorrow." In modern language, what they are doing is that they are marketing a certain *vision*, which God is saying is so much *fog* (vapor, or

mist). "Tomorrow will be even better." Better in what way? Technology? Maybe—but all the while, the social and cultural conditions keep getting worse.

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

We looked at the word *epithumeo* in Matthew 5:27, where it was translated lust. But here's a different word. It's *pleonexia*, and it is translated covetousness. On the surface, *pleonexia* has an innocuous appearing meaning. It simply means, "to desire to have more." But in his commentary, William Barclay describes it as one of the most ugly of sins because it involves idolatry, and because of its effect on others. The idolatry factor drives the one coveting to make "self" the center of the universe. The Greeks defined *pleonexia* as the insatiable desire to have what rightfully belongs to another. It is described as *ruthless self-seeking*—as the arrogant and ruthless assumption that others and things exist for one's own benefit.

The desire for more money can lead to theft, or to murder; the desire for more prestige, to evil ambition; the desire for more power, to tyranny; the desire for another's body, to adultery or fornication and rape and who knows what else. In this sin—*coveting, lusting*—*self-interest* puts the self in the place of God. Here comes the idolatry. *It puts the self in the place of God!*

Why does a man set up an idol? The answer is simple. He wants to *get* something from it. So he serves, he worships it, to get it. Before you start just thinking of a statue of a supposed god, I want you to extend this "idol" out to modern things like an automobile, a house, a certain image. What do we do? We *serve* it to *get* what we want from it. The essence of idolatry is *to get* for the self. But, brethren, we are to *give* ourselves to God. That is why it is so ugly. It is all the while, as it is being committed, subtly taking the person 180 degrees *away from* the image of God. In idolatry, the focus of life is backward from what it should be.

The verse here says that we are to *mortify*. That doesn't mean to practice ascetic self-discipline. This is a very strong command. It means *put to death, kill*. It sounds just like Matthew 5, and what Jesus said. *"Pluck it out. Cast it*

*away.*" The Christian must *kill self-centeredness*. There must be a radical transformation, a deep shift in the center of his life. And everything that keeps one from fully obeying God and surrendering to Jesus Christ must spiritually be surgically excised. The tenth commandment has a function that is very similar to the first. Both the first and the tenth commandments act as a governor, thus controlling whether we keep the other eight or, we might say, the other nine.

**James 1:2** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different temptations.

I want you to make a comparison, as we begin here, by going to verse 12.

**James 1:12-15** Blessed is the man that endures temptation. For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord that promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted of God." For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin. And sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.

*Temptation* is mentioned in verses 2 and 12, where it is mentioned in a rather positive way, but it is different from the temptation that begins in verse 13. The first one is *external*. It comes upon a person externally, and the context makes it very clear that type of temptation cannot be avoided. Therefore, when those temptations come, they are to be *endured*. However, the one beginning in verse 13 is *internal*. These are to be *avoided* at all costs! These are the ones that lead to sin. Just for a little confirmation on that, Paul says:

**Romans 13:14** But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

The "lusts of the flesh" is going to provide a temptation to sin. And he says, "*Don't make any provisions to take care of it. Get rid of it!*" Paul says a similar thing, when he is advising Timothy.

**II Timothy 2:22** Flee also youthful lusts: but follow after righteousness...

In brief, this section in James 1 (beginning in verse 13) teaches us that *sin* results from *desires brought to fruition*; and everybody—from peasants to kings—are subject to wrong desires. Everybody is subject to these things.

Added to this is that, from the beginning of time, it seems as though one of our natural reactions to this sort of sin is to blame others for them. I just showed you, in Genesis 3:16, that Adam and Eve *coveted* after the wrong tree. Then, when God called them on it, what did they do? They blamed somebody else for it. *The solution and the problem* were both *inside of them*. It wasn't in the tree. It was **them!** God is showing us that each person is responsible for fighting this himself. He cannot blame it upon the other person, because it is being generated from within the person. James sternly rebukes this idea. He strongly claims that God does not cause these temptations, and neither do things.

Sin would be absolutely helpless—sin could do nothing—IF there was nothing within man to which sin could appeal. Sin's appeal in man is human nature, which works through *our desires*. Thus, if a man desires strongly enough and long enough, the consequence is inevitable. The desire will become *action*.

Desire is a feeling, and it is usually accompanied by an attitude that is similar to that feeling. But that feeling can be either *nourished* or *stifled*. Or, by the grace of God, it can be *eliminated* entirely IF one so gives himself to Christ by being so involved in righteousness that there is simply no time or place left for evil desire.

This sin never walks alone. Because we desire our own way, we dishonor our parents. Because we desire our own way, we will murder. Because we desire a thing, we will steal. Because we desire to be well thought of, we will lie. So, do you see what this commandment does? I'm trying to show you one way after another that this commandment pierces through "surface Christianity" and really shows whether a person has *surrendered his will to God*.

The spiritual requirements for keeping this commandment are in some ways more rigid, challenging, and demanding than any other—because it pierces right through to *our thoughts*. It goes right to the heart of the matter.

**Mark 4:19** And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

This is very interesting. Maybe some of us wonder, looking for reasons as to why we may not be growing—not producing fruit. It's possible that one of the answers might lie here. A lust or desire for other things makes us unfruitful.

I think that this might be one of our *major challenges* in these days of mass marketing and rapid communication. Today, a tremendous "window shopping" for things to do, and consume our time, and to keep us busy on the wrong things, is available on every side.

Jesus calls these things, in this parable, "thorns." The 'cares of this world' is a thorn. The deceitfulness of riches is a thorn. The lusts of other things is a thorn. These things, of and by themselves, may not be deadly; but there are many of these thorns. And they are constantly there. Sometimes they give us a very painful sting. They are a constant irritant. IF we covet material things, THEN we either serve them or serve to acquire them. IF we give them our time and our energy to the extent that we have only the barest minimum of time or energy for God, THEN we are practicing idolatry.

The idolatry may be revealed in us through the fear that, if we give ourselves to God, we will have nothing for ourselves. That's *a lack of faith*. And whatever is not of faith, is sin. It's as if God cannot be full enough to make up for the loss, which we fear will occur to us.

There's another place back in Isaiah 2 that I want to turn to. Remember that Isaiah lived earlier than Jeremiah.

**Isaiah 2:5-8** O house of Jacob, come you, and let us walk in the light of the LORD. Therefore you have forsaken Your people the

house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold [Has anybody ever been richer than America?], neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols. [Verse 8 is really telling!] They worship [serve] the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.

This is in a religious context. Only to a small degree is it really concerned with *things* per se. But there is an overlapping of the physical and the spiritual here. The people described desired to worship God according to the way of the heathens. He especially mentions those from the east. Most of us are aware that elements of Oriental religions are flooding into America through the New Age movement. So this is right 'up to date'—right in America today.

They worship things that came from their own mind—automobiles, homes, whatever. And one of the dangerous fruits that can come from material success—something that the Proverbs really show clearly—is *self-confidence* and *pride*, which has a tendency to make God unnecessary to the one who is successful. But since all men must have a god, and a righteous "God" asks awkward questions as to how the success was obtained and who it is that they are really worshipping, they turn to a god that they are more comfortable with. They actually turn to worshipping their own success and secularism—which is the confidence of men in their own power. So the danger here is that *material wealth* has a powerful tendency in a person to need the world from which the success was won. What a tangle that is! It almost seems as though the American motto is "*The chief end of man is to glorify prosperity and to enjoy it forever.*"

**Mark 7:18-21** And He saith unto them, Are you so without understanding also? Do you not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot defile him; because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out in the draught, purging all meats? And He said, That which comes out of

the man, that defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders [and He goes on and on].

Look what is listed first. In Jeremiah it was listed last, because he wanted to get to the root cause of the problem—which was *covetousness*. But here Jesus turns it around and puts it first, as the one that leads to the others. Jesus is saying here the same thing that I have said—namely, that this sin does not walk alone. It is always going to drag other sins along behind it. What Jesus is saying here—without saying it directly—is that, IF you want to stop these other things, THEN stop the *evil thoughts in the heart*. Get that heart cleaned up!

We don't sin because of brainlessness. We do sin because of a *confusion of values*. We do sin because of a failure to believe what is truly the most important, and therefore are unconcerned for the spiritual favors of God. Instead, *we choose* the shoddy rather than the pure.

Some sins are self-evident, even to the carnal mind. But Paul remarked in Romans 7:7 that he had not known sin except the law had said, "*You shall not covet*." He picked on that one specific commandment. Do you know why? It is the one that God has to absolutely tell us that it is wrong to do. Most people know, by nature, that it is wrong to murder, or that it is wrong to steal, or it's wrong to lie. But people do not know, by nature, that it is wrong **to covet**. That one has to be told because it is, in this sense, the most spiritual of the Ten Commandments. And the breaking of it is the one that leads to the others.

This commandment deals with *attitudes* and *motivations*. If we secretly reject God's standard and way in our heart, and covet after something that we cannot or will not lawfully possess or do, sooner or later, the *mental rebellion* will break out in sin. Action will manifest itself. That is, manifest what the mind has been doing all along.

This is what led to Satan's rebellion. He thought, and thought, and thought; and the first thing you know, he went to war because he was **coveting** what God is. He just didn't simply desire to be like God. He **coveted** what God is.

Hebrews 4:12-13 contains a very searching principle, because the answers to the keeping of this commandment are in God's Word. It's within the relationship with God! God can clean our heart. David appealed to God "*Create in me a clean heart.*" Our part in following through in the request that we make to God is to *get God's Word in us*. It is the right thing to direct and guide our thinking on.

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This commandment deals with attitude and motivation. The Bible, the Word of God, is a *discerner*. It is a *critic*, is what the word actually means in English. It is a *critic* of the intents and the thoughts of the heart.

**Hebrews 4:13** Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight. But all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

One commentator that I found when doing research on this sermon said that God's Word has what he called "instinct with life." I am sure that what he said is true for the converted, but it is not true for the unconverted. They lack the insight into God's Word that would really be helpful to them. When the word "instinct" is used as a predicate adjective, it means "replete with, full of, pregnant with, rich in or with, alive with." Now, put that in. "*The Word of God is **alive with**, the Word of God is **rich with**, the Word of God is **pregnant with...full with.***" You see, of what? OF LIFE! That is, *eternal life*—life the way that God lives it.

And so, if we are going to live life the way God lives it, we have to be guided and directed. We have to be thinking according to the Word of God. It is *the solution* on our part. God will clean up the heart. He can work the miracle there. He will create in us a clean heart but we have to do *our part* as well—in submitting to Him, in submitting to His Word.

Other writings will pass into oblivion; but the Bible, you see, is our critic. It penetrates into our psyche. It scrutinizes our desires, our intentions, and our motivations—so that we are exposed before it. God's Word clearly tells us that **coveting** is the beginning of sin. It is *in the heart* to do so, and that is the place that it has to be stopped from what it will inevitably produce.

So if nothing else warns us that we are *coveting*, the previous sermon dealt with what should be *a warning* as clear as a trumpet sounding. That is, the fruit that it is producing. It's better to stop it before it even produces that fruit; but *the fruit* is a warning bell. It will produce a guilty conscience. It will produce discomfort, and pain, and sorrow, and aches in the heart. And it will eventually lead to all manner of psychological symptoms.

So there is *hope* that we can recognize it. And there is *hope* that we can put the right things into the mind, into the heart so that we are thinking according to them, rather than the things that might lead us into temptation. That is, things that are so 'out in the world' and the things that our eyes, and ears, and nose, and mouth, and smell, and everything will take in and *build* into a sin. But if the heart is equipped with the right nourishment to work upon, it can lead us in a right direction—to **righteousness**; and then the sin fades from being a problem.