

Can Covetousness be Cured?

Once upon a time, there was a man who lived with his wife, two small children, and his elderly parents in a tiny hut. He tried to be patient and gracious, but the noise and crowded conditions wore him down. In desperation, he consulted the village wise man. "Do you have a rooster?" asked the wise man. "Yes," he replied. "Keep the rooster in the hut with your family, and come see me again next week." The next week, the man returned and told the wise elder that living conditions were worse than ever, with the rooster crowing and making a mess of the hut. "Do you have a cow?" asked the wise elder. The man nodded fearfully. "Take your cow into the hut as well, and come see me in a week." Over the next several weeks, the man--on the advice of the wise elder--made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother's children. Finally, he could take no more, and in a fit of anger, kicked out all the animals and guests, leaving only his wife, his children, and his parents. The home suddenly became spacious and quiet, and everyone lived happily ever after. *Leadership, Vol. 17, no. 1.*

In his book *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith wrote in 1726: "Man's basic most important motivating force in all economic matters is the drive of self-interest."

READ Luke 18:18-30

Q.9 What might have led this man to be sad and walk away?

Heart check-up

Check out the following texts and discuss a possible cure for covetousness:

- ◆ Luke 12:25-34
- ◆ John 4:13-14
- ◆ 1 Timothy 6:6-11
- ◆ 1 John 2:15-17
- ◆ Philippians 4:11
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- ◆ Hebrews 13:5



READ Philippians 4:4-19 to close and make it a prayer.

Q.10 What's the antithesis of Covetousness? How was Jesus an exemplar of this?



10 Commandments

#10 Forbidden Fruit

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

10 Ways
2 Live

A change of tack

When we compare the tenth commandment with the other nine there is a subtle shift in direction that is important for our understanding of all of God's commands.

Q.1 What differences can you see between the tenth commandment and the other nine that precede it?

Q.2 How might this commandment have something to do with all the rest?



Comprehending Covetousness

avarice *n* Latin *avere* 'to covet'

Definition:

- ◆ excessive or insatiable desire or greed; cupidity

covet *v*

Definitions:

French *coveitier* Latin *cupere* 'to desire'

- ◆ to desire wrongfully, inordinately, or without due regard for the rights of others: to covet another's property.
- ◆ to wish for, esp. eagerly: He won the prize they all coveted.
- ◆ to have an inordinate or wrongful desire.

Q.3 What are some of the good God-given desires humans display?

Q.4 Can the desire to acquire ever be a good thing? How?

READ some examples of godly desire:

- ◆ Psalm 19:9-10
- ◆ Proverbs 11:23-25
- ◆ Isaiah 26:8
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 12:31;14:1

Q.5 How accurate is it to say that covetousness is God-given desires gone wrong?

Distortions of Desire

Discuss examples and issues around the following:

1. Excessive desire

- ◆ Amos 4:1

2. Illegitimate desire

- ◆ Genesis ch. 3
- ◆ Joshua ch. 7 (story of Achan)

3. Exploitative desire

- ◆ 2 Peter 2:3
- ◆ 2 Samuel 11

4. Exclusive desire

- ◆ Luke 12:13-21
- ◆ Matthew 6:20

A Case of Covetousness

READ I Kings 21:1-16



A. Coveting Corrupts

The literal meaning of the word “coveting” is “to pant after” – like a dog!

Q.6 What condition of life was King Ahab in? Why might he desire Naboth’s possession?

B. The fuel of coveting is lack of Contentment.

Q.7 What feelings accompany discontentment in your experience?

Q.8 How might coveting lead to all kinds of sins and broken commandments? What is the chief sin of coveting?

Consequences of Coveting

Note these factors from Ahab’s story in 1 Kings 21:

- ◆ Ahab got the vineyard he wanted, but he did not get the satisfaction from it he had hoped.
- ◆ God also told him that there would be consequences for his choice to feed his coveting, it would cost him his own life!
- ◆ In the end Ahab would lose far more than he ever gained through coveting.
- ◆ Ahab’s callousness is evident in that he not only takes Naboth’s vineyard once his wife Jezebel has Naboth killed, but Naboth’s children are affected as well (see II Kings 9:21-26) so there are no descendants left to claim the land at any point.
 - a. Note too that Ahab and Jezebel are later both killed, and all their descendants are also killed.

READ Romans 7:7-13

Q. What role does the commandments of God have in relation to coveting?