



## SESSION 11

# DO NOT COVET

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Coveting is a sin more covert than most because it is almost exclusively an issue of the heart. Other sins are easy to discern through external actions, but coveting can be concealed. We may not even be conscious of how our covetous heart affects our relationships with others and with God. But ultimately, coveting speaks to a dissatisfaction with God and what He has done for us.

A movie that depicts the sin of coveting is *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Touchstone, 2002), based on the classic novel by Alexandre Dumas. Edmond Dantes, a successful merchant sailor, receives a promotion to take over as captain of a ship. This promotion affords him the ability to support a family, urging him to return home and propose to his love, Mercedes. Fernand, Edmond's friend and rival for Mercedes' affections, is so moved by jealousy over the engagement that he enacts a plot to accuse Edmond of being a traitor to his country, resulting in banishment to a prison known as Chateau d'If. Fernand forsook his friend, destroyed his reputation, and stole his fiancée, all fueled by his hatred and jealousy of Edmond.

Just like Fernand, we too can be consumed by coveting. This story demonstrates that coveting is a sin that can lead to disastrous consequences.

# The Tenth Commandment Reminds Us That...

## God Forbids Coveting

Coveting is a sin that cannot be policed because we can never see it on the outside. Much like the First Commandment, which commands us to worship God, coveting is played out primarily in the heart. We do not commonly use the term *coveting*; we are more familiar with the term *jealousy*. Yet the essence of coveting involves the misplaced cravings of the heart, and the Tenth Commandment lists different things that people should not covet.



At the heart of coveting is discontentment with God. God is the One who provides opportunity and supplies all of our needs. Everything that we have comes from His hand.

► Based on the specific objects listed in Deuteronomy 5:21, what are some comparable objects in our lives that we might covet?

### Deuteronomy 5:21

*Do not covet your neighbor's wife or desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male or female slave, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

## The Grass Is Always Greener...

I live in a great house, but it's a rental. In fact, it's one of three houses in a row that are all owned by the same landlord.

This summer, we got new next door neighbors. Soon after they moved in, I started seeing lots of work done on the house. Their air conditioner got serviced and replaced. They got a whole new roof. Finally, I found out the landlord had hired a lawn service to mow their yard!

I had been very happy in my house. But when my neighbor got a new roof, I started to think, "Hey! Why can't I get a new roof?" And when I found out they didn't need to mow their own yard, I thought, "That's not fair. The landlord is making me mow my yard."

Eventually, I found out the house next door had a leaky roof, so they needed a new one. And as for the lawn mowing service, the neighbors had only signed a six-month lease with the landlord so they didn't want to have to purchase a lawn mower. Instead, that service got worked into their rent.

Moreover, my landlord was entirely faithful to me. My house was in great shape. I had no need to express any dissatisfaction. But just because my neighbor started getting new things, I thought I needed them as well. My heart started coveting. It's a sad picture of how easily my heart fails to trust God when he says that contentment with godliness is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6). When I let this promise sink into my heart, the Holy Spirit was gracious to restore me to a contented state. I'm still super thankful for my home; it's a great place to live, and I have a terrific landlord. May the Spirit work so that never again will my eye be evil for greed because of God's generosity to someone else (Matt. 20:15).

► **What are certain things you long for? What is an instance of coveting with which you've been tempted in the past month? In what ways can we battle resentment toward God and the people who have the status or possessions we crave?**

God is the true Provider of all that is good in our lives. He is the Creator who gives good and perfect gifts to His children. We are not to look back at the Father who has given us life and redemption and tell Him that we are dissatisfied with what we have. We have already been given more than we deserve.



# Coveting Lacks Eternal Perspective

Coveting keeps us focused on our immediate circumstances and prevents us from looking ahead. But we need to make sure that we live our lives with the proper perspective that what we experience now is temporary and eternity awaits us. Jesus lived His life with this perspective. He did not seek the riches that this world has to offer but instead sought after something much greater—our eternal salvation.

The rich man in this parable did not know that his life would be required of him that very evening, and all of the wealth and crops in the world would not be able to save him. Jesus' words help us understand that we do not have ultimate control of our possessions. We merely manage them for a moment and then leave them to subsequent generations.

## Housewares

My grandfather was one of thirteen children: six girls and seven boys. When their parents (my great-grandparents) passed away, the will laid out that all the property was to be sold, and the money split equally among the thirteen children. With one exception. That exception was that the “housewares” were to be divided among the six girls.

Unfortunately, the ambiguity of the word *divided* resulted in a tremendous fight among the siblings. Disagreements about whether or not a doll or a piece of furniture was a houseware ultimately resulted in an ugly legal battle, leaving the brothers on one side and the sisters on the other. Neither would speak to each other.

This cold division went on for several years until my great-uncle, Will, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. When he realized his end was near, all the fighting about the housewares became unimportant to him. Instead, he longed for reconciliation with his lost sisters, along with the other brothers. After considerable talking and counseling, the Lord gave the family reconciliation. A few weeks later, Will passed away. Sad as the story is, it shows us that coveting takes our eyes off eternity. Housewares suddenly became more important than flesh-and-blood human beings. But when death entered their lives again, suddenly the eternal perspective came back strong. Housewares faded into the moth-eaten shrouds they would become, while eternal human beings became significant again. May the Holy Spirit grant us, too, eternal satisfaction such that coveting isn't even a temptation.





# Contentment Comes Through the Gospel

The Bible shows us that possessions and relationships cannot satisfy. But we all still have an inward desire to search for satisfaction, and the road to satisfaction eventually leads us back to God. He is the eternal One. He will never leave us or forsake us.

Paul found his joy in the Lord continually, and he found yet another reason to rejoice in the fact that the church in Philippi cared for him. He was glad that they provided for him in his moments of need. But Paul's heart was not dependent on his circumstances. He would not allow his surroundings to steal his joy. Even as he wrote this letter in prison, he was still able to say that he could be content in whatever circumstance he would find himself. It is easy to say these words in times of wealth and prosperity but harder behind prison walls and in chains.

## Philippians 4:10-14

*I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it. I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. Still, you did well by sharing with me in my hardship.*

► **Think of the last time you were irritable or depressed. What did you lack that made you unhappy? How should you have sought your happiness in Jesus instead? In what ways is the gospel the answer to coveting?**

A heart gripped by the gospel finds its satisfaction in God and enjoys His gifts. We do not have to wonder about fulfilling our needs because God has already promised to take care of them.



## GOD'S STORY, YOUR STORY

Everyone, no matter what age, has experienced coveting in one form or another. Whether from coveting another child's toy when you were a kid or the new car your friend got as a gift when he or she turned sixteen, our hearts has experienced coveting in some measure.

*What are some examples of coveting you can think of from childhood? from your current stage in life? What do you think coveting will look like when you enter into adulthood?*

One of the great truths highlighted in this session is the reality that coveting reflects a heart of discontentment with God. Whenever we allow covetous desires to linger within our hearts, we are essentially saying that God and His provision over our lives is not enough—that we also need whatever it is that we are coveting. And when that is the case, we end up idolizing something or someone over and above God Himself.

*What does coveting reveal about ourselves? about our hearts?*

It is important to see the dangers of coveting, as well as the proper way in dealing with a covetous heart. For instance, the session instructs us to think biblically about it, noting particularly how coveting lacks eternal perspective. Not only that, but we see, once again, how lasting heart change comes through the gospel and not human effort alone. If our covetous hearts are to find lasting contentment and satisfaction in God, it will first require that the gospel of Christ take root in our hearts in order to change our desires from the inside out.

*How is our mission hindered by coveting? How is our mission supported by being content and generous?*