

The Cure for Coveting



By faith ^aAbraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place ^rthat he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in ^sthe land of promise, as in a foreign land, ^tliving in tents ^uwith Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to ^vthe city that has ^wfoundations, ^xwhose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith ^ySarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered ^zhim faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and ^ahim as good as dead, were born descendants ^bas many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith, ^cnot having received the things promised, but ^dhaving seen them and greeted them from afar, and ^ehaving acknowledged that they were ^fstrangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, ^gthey would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they **desire** a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed ^hto be called their God, for ⁱhe has prepared for them a city.

Unless you are an extremely disciplined person, now that you have made it through the last month of holidays, you are seriously thinking about eating less food and fewer cookies than you have in the past four weeks. There is something about human nature that tells us the more food we have in front of us, the more we will eat. And this is true of more than just food. The holidays are known for indulging in too much food, too much alcohol for some and too much materialism for nearly everyone. Black Friday has now moved to the Thursday night of Thanksgiving and now we have Black Monday for online purchases. And the advertising just keeps getting smarter

and smarter. If you do a Google search for a good deal on a microwave, every time you click on a new webpage you will see an advertisement for guess what? A microwave?

What I am talking about is what the Bible calls coveting. The foundational Scripture for coveting is the tenth commandment. *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.* If we were hyper literalists we could look at this verse and conclude, "Well I'm off the hook on this one because I haven't coveted my neighbor's wife, my neighbor doesn't have any servants and even if that guy a mile down the road has a donkey, I can confidently say I haven't coveted that either."

We would probably all agree that there is a much more to coveting than just this one verse, but how much more? This morning we are going to ask two questions:

1. What is coveting?
2. What is the cure for coveting?

What is Coveting?

Here is our first principle in defining coveting. Coveting may be the tenth commandment but it can cause us to break the other nine commandments. Here is the list of Ten Commandments.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. 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.

If you covet your neighbor's wife that could lead to breaking the seventh commandment. Moreover, Jesus taught that this would be adultery of the heart. If you covet your neighbor's belongings, it could lead to stealing. If you covet or desire for harm to come to your neighbor, Jesus taught this was murder of the heart. If you covet something eventually it will become an idol to you and you will break the second commandment.

Coveting will either lead you to actually breaking the other commandments or at least violate them in your heart. Therefore, coveting is the heart matter of the other nine commandments. In a very real sense, coveting reaches into and through every other commandment. Most people define coveting simply as wanting something that does not belong to you.

[The little girl in this video](#) has it all figured out. Her conclusion was that the "the companies who makes these try to trick the girls into buying the pink stuff..." Is that true? Are the companies

trying to trick us into buying stuff? Of course it is true. Companies, as the little girl calls them, appeal to our covetous nature. They are geniuses at turning our coveting into dollars in their bank. So in one sense, coveting is simply desiring what does not belong to you but when if that is your main definition, it seriously downplays the true danger inherent in coveting.

Second, coveting is always the first step toward every other sin. We see this clearly with Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:6 tells us that *when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be **desired** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* The word translated as desire is the word for coveting. Long before she committed the actual act of eating the fruit, Eve coveted the fruit. She saw it and then she coveted it.

The same thing happened when the Lord defeated Jericho by bringing down the great walls. Immediately after this victory they defeated the city of Ai and Achan took some of the devoted things. Achan's explanation was driven by coveting. *When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold, I coveted them and took them.* King David fell into the exact same trap with Bathsheba. The sins of adultery and murder began with coveting this beautiful woman. If you remove the coveting, murder and adultery disappear.

The third principle is that coveting always starts small and may appear innocent. This is the deceptive nature of coveting because most of us are not keenly aware when it is happening. For example, much of our coveting begins as admiration or appreciation. We may admire an article of clothing that someone else is wearing. We might appreciate the new car that pulls into the church parking lot. We may appreciate the beauty of someone's wife and the handsomeness of another woman's husband. At one level, all of this is perfectly natural. Just as we can appreciate the beauty of an early Spring day or a freshly fallen snow, in the same way we can appreciate the natural beauty of another person or creations of man such as clothes and cars.

Furthermore, much of what we covet also springs from things which are useful. Maybe you need a new or newer truck to haul firewood. Perhaps one of your kitchen appliances is not running well. Maybe you need a new power tool do finish that project at home. Anything that can fit into the category of useful falls into the difficult gray area. We may think that we can't covet things that are useful but we certainly can and because they are "useful," we deceive ourselves into thinking that we aren't coveting.

Fourth, each of us have particular weaknesses when it comes coveting. Everyone is so different but each of us has at least one area of weakness. Men tend to covet different things than women. See if something I mention tends to be on your list: guns and fishing equipment, cars and trucks, power tools, computers, laptops or some other technology device. Women, you have your own list: home decorating, clothes, sewing, crafts and scrapbooking, computers and cell phones. Just because you purchased one of these things does not mean you first coveted that object—but it might. It's easy to see coveting displayed in our children, especially around Christmas, but it tends to be much more difficult to see it in ourselves, especially if it related to a hobby or something useful.

The fifth principle is that wealth and poverty are not good indicators of your level of coveting. It would be easy to say that people who have a lot of stuff have obviously coveted more than the rest. The occupy movements are case studies in coveting. The so-called 99% are locked in severe and addictive coveting toward the wealthy. In saying that, I don't mean to make a purely political statement. I also believe that the free market system has its own set of evils. As I have already clearly stated, the corporate world's number one goal is to create a lack of contentment and a drive toward coveting in all of us, but you would be horribly nearsighted to think that the occupy movement is purely seeking justice and fairness. They are locked in a prison of envy and coveting. Do you think the people in Haiti covet any less than we do? Granted, their coveting is different. They probably covet things like a brick house instead of a tent, but they covet nonetheless. Your ability or lack of ability to purchase the object you covet is not an indicator of your level of coveting. You could make a case that once you purchase the object you no longer covet that thing but someone who can't purchase an object continues to covet. But what usually happens is that the object is purchased and the coveting continues because you are already thinking about replacing what you just bought with something even better.

So far we have answered the question, what is coveting? It is not as simple as it first appears, but based upon all of this, I have to ask a simple question. Is coveting wrong? Is coveting always a sin? Would it surprise you if I told that coveting is a really good thing? The Hebrew and Greek words for coveting can have both positive and negative connotations.

For example, the word covet in the tenth commandment in Exodus 20 is the same word in the Genesis 3:6 I quoted earlier. *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be **desired** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* (Ge 3:6) This is obviously a negative use of the word but the exact same word appeared in Genesis chapter 2 in a very positive sense. *And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is **pleasant** to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* (Ge 2:9)¹ The trees that the Lord had made were pleasant and desirable. God created them so good that they naturally elicited an appreciation of them and a desire to eat them. Fundamentally, the word covet simply means a desire or a longing for a particular thing.

Similarly, the word *covet* in Deut. 5:21, the second listing of the ten commandments, has both negative and positive connotations. In Proverbs 21:10 it is negative. *The soul of the wicked **desires** evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.* But the same word in Job 23:13 is very positive. *But he (God) is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he **desires**, that he does.*² It is impossible for God to desire something bad or to have a wrong desire for something good. Therefore, the word covet is a neutral word whose meaning is determined by the context.

Let me give you one more example from the New Testament. The negative example comes from 1 Tim. 6:10. *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this **craving** that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* You see, it's not just money that is evil but the love of money and in this case, craving for money. But is it wrong to desire to have money? Money, like desire, can be neutral but what matters is the motivation behind the desire. If you crave money for your own personal use or to impress others

or to waste it on sinful or useless things, then desiring money is a sin. But if you desire money in order to take care of your family, support the church and world missions, to better your community and develop stewardship, then the desire for money can be a good thing. But even then it's never an either or situation, is it? I might desire money to give it away to missions but in the process become somewhat of a workaholic which in turn negatively effects my health, family life, etc.

The positive use of the word comes from our text in Hebrews 11:16. *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. We could substitute the word covet for desire in this verse. But as it is, they covet a better country, that is, a heavenly one.*

Incidentally, the word Greek word for covet is *origamai*. It is not related to the Japanese word which means "to fold paper," but it inspired me to find and create an origami cross. This might be a nice, fun lesson for your kids. You can make a paper origami cross and explain how the word origami in the Bible means to desire. Therefore, an origami cross reminds you to desire Jesus above all else. I have put some [instructions](#) in the literature rack in the lobby.³

The author of Hebrews tells us that what Abraham desired were the promises of God. This is why he left his homeland and traveled to a foreign country. The Lord promised him that he would be given this new land, that he would become the father of many nations and that all nations would be blessed through him. First, Abraham had to have faith that God's word was true but he also had to desire that which he had faith in.

Verse ten is equivalent to verse sixteen. *For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.* The faith loomed large to Abraham because as the author reminds us, he never possessed what was promised to him. When Abraham died, he only owned a mere scrap of land as a burial plot where he laid his wife Sarah.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all desired to inherit the land that was promised to them but the author of Hebrews takes their faith and applies it to far more important inheritance. *These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*¹⁴ *For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.*

In effect, Abraham was not merely desiring the literal promised land but he was also looking forward to an eternal promised land. They recognized that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. In other words, this earth—even the precious promised land of Canaan—was not their true home. It was a foretaste of things to come. It was an earthly shadow of the heavenly reality. Their true citizenship was in heaven.

(Wheel out small suitcase) Tomorrow morning, seventeen of us will start our journey to Haiti and this is all I am taking. This is all any of us are taking as we are required to fit all that we need for nine days in a carry-on suitcase, which is a challenge all by itself. Based upon what I am taking with me, would you draw the conclusion that Haiti was to be my new home? If it were to be my permanent home, I would require a lot more than what's in this suitcase. In fact, tomorrow

we will be taking three of a new missionaries suitcases with us since he can't take them all himself. The obvious principle here is that you do not settle down in a place that is not your home.

This is the principle by which to evaluate our coveting. If you looked closely at the way you spend your money and your time, would someone draw the conclusion that this is your permanent home? What about your life demonstrates that you are eagerly awaiting a better home, a heavenly country?

To arrive at a cure for coveting we have to understand that desire itself is a good thing. Here is a shocking statement—God *created* you to covet! God wants us to have passions and desires that are directed at the right object for the right reasons. This is what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden. They delighted at the trees that God gave them. God did not merely give us food that nourishes our body. He gave us food that is beautiful to look at. He gave us food that is fantastically delicious. We can and should delight in good gifts like food. God wants us to covet as long as it is righteous coveting. To deny these passions and desires is to say that God created us not to have them. If that were true, we may as well move into a monastery and deny all earthly pleasures. But this is not how God made us.

The cure for coveting is to make sure we are coveting the right thing for the right reasons. Desire is good but what makes the difference between righteous coveting and sinful coveting is two things—the object of our desire and the motive of our desire. If the object of my desire is my neighbor's wife, then I am desiring the wrong object. If the object of my desire is a new truck so I can impress my buddies, then the motive of my desire is wrong. But if I want a new truck or a good used truck so I can build my construction business, then that may be a good kind of coveting, all other things being equal/

Peter has a straightforward application of this principle. *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul* (1 Pe 2:11). If we see ourselves as sojourners and exiles in this foreign land in which we presently, then we will not want to indulge in the passions of the flesh. Our minds and hearts will be occupied with an eternal perspective that impacts everything we do in life. I implore you to covet but our overarching coveting should be for the Lord and for eternal things. This creates an eternal perspective in us when in turn drastically effects our behavior.

But how do we create this desire, this coveting after God? The answer for the positive coveting is contained within our negative coveting. How do you nurture a negative coveting after something? To nurture a covetous desire for something you have to feed that desire. The other day Chris Eisermann was looking at a catalog with guitars and amps and I told him that he needed to stop coveting. I was totally kidding but it does illustrate our common experience. If you continually feed your desire for guitars, or cars or whatever it is you tend to like, this desire will inevitably grow larger. Is there anything wrong with guitars? Of course not, nor is there anything wrong with guitar catalogs? And I have to say this because the guitar catalog he was looking at was in my house! In the days of BI—Before the Internet—catalogs that arrived in your mailbox were a primary source of illiciting a covetous desire, but now all we need to do is log on to our computers. I realize that pornography is a particularly dangerous and addictive

problem, but is it possible to get caught up in guitar porn or car porn or home decorating porn? Anything that grabs a hold of us, anything that brings out a covetous desire in our hearts will gain more control over us the more we feed that desire.

But the same is true if you feed the good desires. Your coveting for the good things will grow and the sinful desires and motives will weaken their hold over you. It is very difficult if not impossible to simply remove all of your sinful coveting without replacing it with God-honoring coveting. You can't starve out your sinful coveting without also feeding your righteous coveting. I used this illustration before, but I think it is very helpful. I am holding a jar of vegetable oil and if we assume that this jar was cemented to the stage, how would we be able to get the oil out of the jar without breaking it? There are only two options. You could either suck the oil out with a straw or you could fill the jar with water and push the oil out. If you try to suddenly stop your sinful coveting it is a bit like sucking oil through a straw. It is much more effective to replace, or I should say, displace your sinful coveting with coveting after good things.

Here are three quick principles to help cure your coveting.

1. Be thankful for what you have. We must develop contentment with what we have to kill our coveting.
2. Be aware of your personal weaknesses and the deceptive nature of coveting.
3. Feed your righteous coveting at the same time you starve your sinful coveting.

The best way to increase your coveting for good things is to spend time on God's Word. Think about it. If you required feeding on God's Word for your literal daily nutrition, how many of you would still be alive. I am not saying that reading and meditating on the Scriptures is the only way to develop a coveting after good things but it is certainly an absolute necessity for doing so.

Here is what you need to develop your feeding upon the Word of God.

1. You must have a good Bible reading plan. [Here is the plan I use](#) for reading the Bible through about every two years. Here is another one I recommend that is [driven by the calendar](#). And here is a [long list of ideas](#) and articles on Bible reading plans. Even if it takes you 4-6 years to read through the Bible, just do it.
2. You need motivation and I hope I have given that to you this morning.
3. We also need accountability. Before you leave this morning I want you to identify someone in your mind who you will ask to hold you accountable to your plan.

Let me leave you with this quote from David Platt in his book, Radical.

When we realize we have this responsibility to teach the Word, it changes everything about how we hear the Word. Now the Word that is being preached in a worship gathering or taught in a small-group setting is subsequently being translated into contexts and spheres of influence represented all across a church. God's Word is no longer just being heard in a building, it is being multiplied throughout a community. It is multiplying because the people of God are no longer listening as if his Word is intended to stop with them. They are now living as if God's Word is intended to spread through them.

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^q Gen. 12:1–4; Acts 7:2–4

^r Gen. 12:7

^s Acts 7:5

^t Gen. 12:8; 13:3, 18; 18:1, 9

^u Gen. 35:27

^v ch. 12:22; [ch. 13:14]

^w Ps. 87:1; Rev. 21:14

^x Rev. 21:2, 10

^y Gen. 17:19; 18:11–14; 21:2

^z ch. 10:23

^a Rom. 4:19

^b Gen. 22:17; 32:12; See Gen. 15:5

^c ver. 39

^d ver. 27; John 8:56; [Matt. 13:17]

^e Gen. 23:4; 47:9; [1 Chr. 29:15; Ps. 39:12]

^f Eph. 2:19

^g [Gen. 24:6–8]

^h Gen. 26:24; 28:13; Ex. 3:6; 4:5; [ch. 2:11]

ⁱ [ver. 10; Matt. 25:34; John 14:2]

¹ AV translates as “desire” 11 times, “covet” four times, “delight” twice, “pleasant” once, “beauty” once, “lust” once, and “delectable things” once. to desire, covet, take pleasure in, delight in greatly, desire greatly, desirableness, preciousness. Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. H183

² Deut 5:21 AV translates as “desire” 17 times, “lust” four times, “longed” three times, and “covet” twice. desire, incline, covet, wait longingly, wish, sigh, want, be greedy, prefer. to desire, crave (food and drink). to desire, long for, lust after (of bodily appetites). Strong, James: *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Test of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. Ontario : Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996, S. H2530

³ And if *I* can make an origami cross, *anyone* can do it!