

Doctrine of Covetousness

1. Covetousness is an inordinate longing to possess what others own. The *Scriptures* forbid the coveting of certain items such as a neighbor's house, another man's wife, another person's servants or another person's possessions.
 - *Exodus 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*
 - *Deuteronomy 5:21 Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.*

2. Covetousness breeds great sins.
 - Covetousness caused the children of Israel to take by force what did not belong to them. *Micah 2:2 And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.*
 - Covetousness led Eve to plunge herself into everlasting shame when she desired the forbidden fruit. *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 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.*
 - Covetousness led Lot into an environment for moral failure by setting himself up in the place of temptation. *Genesis 13:10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. 11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.*
 - Because of covetousness Laban determined to give Rebecca to be the wife of Isaac. *Genesis 24:29 And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. 30 And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. Etc.*
 - Because of covetousness Laban determined to deceive Jacob into serving him for seven years for Rachel *Genesis 29:15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be? Etc.*

- Not wanting to pay Jacob a just wage Laban deceived Jacob in his earnings due to a covetous heart. *Genesis 31:7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me.*
- Years later and still covetous Laban tried to defraud Jacob of his flocks and herds. *Genesis 30:35 And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. etc.*
- Despite having been the victim of a covetous heart Jacob was not innocent of the same transgression. .
 - Jacob defrauded Esau of the family blessing. *Genesis 27:6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, etc.*
 - Coveting the birthright of Esau Jacob slyly negotiated for it. *Genesis 25:31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.*
- Coveting money more than righteousness Balaam sold his prophetic office. *2 Peter 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; cf. Numbers 22.*
- The personal sin of covetousness can have a direct influence on the welfare of others. When Achan hid forbidden treasure in his tent he brought military defeat to the nation of Israel. *Joshua 7:20 And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: 21 When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.*
- The sons of Eli coveted the best portion of the animal sacrifices designed to be offered to the Lord and took the flesh of the sacrifice. *1 Samuel 2:13 And the priests' custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; 14 And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. 15 Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. 16 And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force. 17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.*
- With a lust for money the sons of Samuel accepted bribes. *1 Samuel 8:3 And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.*

- Enjoying military success and wanting to keep the spoils of war Saul sinned against the Lord in sparing a national enemy in the person of Agag. *1 Samuel 15:8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.*
- Coveting the wife of Uriah the Hittite, David took Bath-sheba for himself. *2 Samuel 11:2 And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. 3 And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? 4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.*
- Ahab, king of Israel, coveted the vineyard of Naboth to the point that his death was order to acquire the desired property. *1 Kings 21:2 And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3 And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. Cf. 21:4-16*
- Gehazi, the servant of Elisha coveted the gifts that the prophet of God refused. In a desperate attempt to have something was not his Gehazi thought he found a way to take costly garments from Naaman. *2 Kings 5:20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. 21 So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? 22 And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. 23 And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him. 24 And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. 25 But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. 26 And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive yards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? 27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*

- Some Jews were covetous of money reflected in the way they gained money from their brethren during days of hardship after returning from the Babylonian exile. They exacting usury from their brethren. *Nehemiah 5:1 And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.*
- Some covetous Jews refused to pay the ministers their due. *Nehemiah 13:10 And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field.*
- The post-Exilic Jews displayed a spirit of covetousness when the people built fine houses while the house of the Lord lay waste. *Haggai 1:4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? 5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. 7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.*
- Many people followed Jesus merely for the loaves and fish He could produce by way of a miracle. *John 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*
- Certainly the money-changers in the temple were filled with covetousness as they found an easy way to make money off of God's people. *Matthew 21:12 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*
- Coveting his riches more than his soul a particular Young Man who had come to Jesus seeking the way of salvation lost both. *Matthew 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

- Coveting the possessions of time the rich fool of Christ's parable neglected the state of his soul. *Luke 12:15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. 16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*
- Loving money more than the Master Judas betrayed Jesus for twenty pieces of silver. *Matthew 26:15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*
- One reason why the Pharisees opposed the ministry of Christ was because He condemned their covetousness. *Luke 16:14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.*
- Simon Magus coveted the power of the apostles and tried to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. *Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*
- Certain sorcerers filed complaints against Paul and Silas when they saw their illicit resources drying up. They had been exploiting a demon-possessed girl. *Acts 16:19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,*
- Demetrius, motivated by money, raised a riot against Paul and Silas when the gospel was preached. *Acts 19:24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Acts 19:27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.*
- Festus, in love with money, hoped for a bribe from Paul. *Acts 24:26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

- Demas in forsaking Paul for love of the world. *2 Timothy 4:10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*
3. The divine prohibition against covetousness caused Paul to understand the essence of his own particular failure.
 - *Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*
 4. Love can be manifested to others when the heart is not covetousness.
 - *Romans 13:9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*
 5. There is a type of covetousness that is without sin.
 - The believer is to desire spiritual gifts. *1 Corinthians 12:31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*
 - The believer is to desire to prophesy. *1 Corinthians 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.*