

Spirit-Filled Pastor: This Sin Has Deadly Consequences

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the commandments prohibiting murder and adultery to illustrate the truth that obedience begins in the heart. The religious leaders of His day didn't understand this truth; they believed a person was obeying God if he simply refrained from committing the physical acts of murder, adultery and stealing.

Their outward compliance to the law with no regard for the heart had reduced God's statutes to cold, sterile, legal precepts, separate from their true meaning and intent. God wants us to fulfill the law, or His commandments, through the way we express our love for Him and for others. When we study the 10th commandment, "Thou shall not covet," we must understand that true obedience to God begins in the heart.

Coveting is not necessarily an initial physical act, though it almost always leads to a sinful action. The Hebrew word for covet, *hamad*, means to desire, crave, long for or lust for. Like the love (lust) for money, the sin of coveting is the root of all sorts of evil behavior. That is why God addressed it in His commands to the Israelites:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17).

Here are some biblical examples of coveting:

Coveting often begins with the lust of the eyes. A person sees something and begins to be consumed with a desire to possess it no matter what the cost, as we see in the case of King David (2 Sam. 11-13; 15-18). One evening David was on the roof of his palace when he saw a beautiful woman bathing close by.

He inquired about her and discovered that she was married.

David should have dropped the matter immediately, but he allowed his attraction to blossom into coveting his neighbor's wife. He then abused his power by sending for Bathsheba and having sexual relations with her. He may have gotten away with it (in man's eyes), but she became pregnant. In an attempted coverup, David ordered that Bathsheba's husband be put in the hottest part of the battle so he would be killed by the enemy. Then David took Bathsheba as a wife.

The result of David's sin opened up and brought pain and tragedy, including to himself and his family:

- The death of Bathsheba's baby.
- The rape of a daughter by a half-brother.
- The murder of his son Amnon by his other son Absalom.
- Rebellion by Absalom that ended in his death.

All this tragedy came because David coveted another man's wife—he lost the battle with sin in his thought life before he committed the physical acts that brought judgment on his house and kingdom. It was the covetousness in his heart that led to adultery and murder.

David was not the only king to fall to covetousness. Ahab was ruler over the northern kingdom of Israel. One of his desires was to possess a vineyard that belonged to his neighbor, Naboth (1 Kings 21). Ahab tried to purchase it, but Naboth refused to sell. Up to this point, Ahab had done nothing wrong. But when he could not have the land legally, covetousness gripped his heart. His desire for the land was so strong that he became depressed and pouted like a little child who does not get his way.

Through an elaborate scheme devised by Jezebel, Ahab's wife, Naboth was wrongly accused of treason. Though he was innocent

of the charges, he was declared guilty and stoned to death. Once Naboth was out of the way, Ahab was “legally” able to come acquire the land. Once again, the innocent suffered because of the covetousness of a man’s heart. But God is a God of righteousness. God cannot be mocked. He is the God of truth and justice. As in David’s case, the Lord did not allow this act to go unpunished. He sent his prophet Elijah to pronounce judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel for the murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard. Soon after, Ahab was killed in a battle and Jezebel was thrown from a balcony in fulfillment of the prophecy.

The message of the Lord is clear: Flee covetousness at all costs. Be content with the things that the Lord has given you. This is not only true of wives and land, but position as well.

Korah was a Levite, the tribe chosen to minister before the Lord and the congregation. He should have been satisfied with such a privileged position, but he wanted more. He coveted Moses’ position so much that he led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Moses was grieved in his heart and fell on his face to ask God what he should do. God replied to Korah:

Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; and that He has brought you near, Korah, and all your bothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord (Num. 16:9-11, NASB).

Korah was guilty of not recognizing that all position and authority are given by God, and in his lust for power and influence, he forced a confrontation with Moses and Aaron. He didn’t realize that his rebellion was actually against God Himself. The Lord vindicated Moses and Aaron in the presence

of all the people when He caused the earth to open up and swallow Korah and his followers. Their covetousness resulted in the destruction of them and their entire families.

I once heard someone explain God-given authority and position like this: If other people overheard when God was giving Moses the blueprint to the tabernacle in the desert, and they ran out and constructed it according to His specifications, would God be obligated to honor the duplicate or the one built by the person He gave the assignment to?

Every one of us has giftings and callings, and it's a privilege to be a part of what God is doing. But we need to be content with what He has given us. Too often we covet what others are doing or what they have. We compare ourselves. But God is no respecter of persons. He does not want us to compare ourselves but to steward what He has given us to do.

The destructive fire of covetousness rages in the heart and thoughts of man until it births sin and destruction. David and Ahab obtained the object of their lust, but lost much of the good that they possessed. Korah never saw his lust fulfilled, and was destroyed just the same.

The battle against covetousness is waged in the heart and mind and it is there that the victory must be won.

(You can also listen to the "10 Commandments and Golden Rule" series on the *A Word in Season with Doug Stringer and Friends* podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network or your favorite podcast app). {eoa}

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