

Covetousness or Contentment?

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Hebrews

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Bible Text: Hebrews 13:5-6
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So we're going to be focusing this afternoon on Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5 and 6.

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say:
"The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

When we think of the topic of covetousness, we have to realize that we live in a time where it has been very, very easy for us to get what we want. Compared to most people in most places and in most times, we have a lot. Not only that, we have a lot of temptations to covetousness. You can think of the flyers that come in the mail each week. You can think of the internet. You can think of the billboards that line your way as you drive into town. And you can even think of the conversations that we have or even when our friend pulls in in a new truck or somebody gets a new tractor or whatever it is. We seem to live in a world filled with shiny things, with appealing things, with tempting things and the reality is, that's a unique challenge. Most people do not live in that kind of world and perhaps even in that way have different struggles with covetousness or even more struggles with covetousness. The Hebrews certainly lived in a time of challenges. We read in chapter 10, they joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods knowing that they had a better and an enduring possession for themselves in heaven, that there had been a time in the past for these Hebrew Christians that they actually had faced a time of losing a lot of their things and that God had given them grace. And most of us, you see, we live in the far opposite situation, and yet isn't it strange how powerful covetousness can get? We who have the most seem to struggle with this the most, especially if the Lord has been working on your conscience and you've been hearing God's Ten Commandments, and you hear that call to not covet, we can begin to realize just how powerful this can be, how much time, if we're not careful, we can begin to start thinking about all the things that we don't have. And that's not just material things, is it? I mean, covetousness. can be coveting, as the commandment says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or house." It can be coveting somebody else's marriage or their relationship or their family situation

or their possessions. It tells us in the commandment, don't covet anything that is your neighbor's.

So this is a commandment that is so internal, so deep, so affected by your culture and your surroundings, so different in different people's hearts. I have no doubt that there is somebody sitting here who has very little attraction to the material things, just doesn't get their heart, but maybe it's jealousy over a different job or jealousy over a different location or a different situation that works their way into their hearts. Well, we can be thankful that God's word equips his people, guides his people, and teaches his people, and reminds us again and again how to not go after these things, but to lean and to trust on the Lord. And today we're going to be looking at the theme, exchanging covetousness for contentment, exchanging covetousness for contentment. For this passage, it points us away from covetousness, but then towards contentment.

First, rejecting covetousness. We start with this first line. "Let your conduct be without covetousness." Now, there's different words for covetousness in the Bible. They all focus in the same direction. This particular word in New Testament Greek actually at its root is, don't love silver. Don't love silver, which is interesting, that was their way of exchange, and if you were to take this literally, it's don't love money. Let your conduct be without the love of money.

Now there are different words that can be used for covetousness, but if you look at the structure of this passage, Hebrews chapter 13, it's definitely following through something of the pattern of the Ten Commandments. So we've seen marriages we've been looking at and we've been looking at various commandments as we work through this, part of the Ten Commandments in a nutshell, and here we're focusing on covetousness, and here it's that word, don't love money or don't have the love of silver, but it's definitely pointing to a broader category than just the love of money. It's any covetousness or desire for what is not ours. This is the same as the 10th commandment. It's the same concept, and it's probably a broader and a more challenging concept with more fingers than we like to realize. By that I mean it relates to other sins.

Colossians 3 verse 5 actually very simply defines covetousness. You know what it says there, it says covetousness is idolatry. Idolatry. Now that may confuse us at first glance, but it helps us in our definition. Covetousness is idolatry. What it's saying there is that when you begin to slip into covetousness, what you're really doing at the root is you're being unhappy with God, and when you start to covet and go down that road, you're saying, "I know better what I need in my life," and you're fighting against God, and you're making up for yourself your own god, and you're even making those things your god. And so what is covetousness? Well, covetousness is the desires of our heart for what's not ours to have and it has fingers that reach out and touch into all the other commandments. If you think of the Fall again, we looked at the Fall briefly this morning when Eve reached out and Adam joined with her, what happened at the root of that? It was covetousness. It was the desire for that fruit. And if you think of the commandment of stealing, what's at the root? Covetousness. People want something that's not theirs, so they take it. What is the root of a marriage breakdown? People either they want a

different marriage, or they want different things happening in their marriage, or they just want to be married to a different person and so the marriage breaks down. You think of idolatry when they used to make up different gods and make statutes of them. What was at the root of that? Well, at the root of that was wanting a different god. It was covetousness.

And so this commandment, "You shall not covet," it's kind of like the back door of the commandments in that sense. It's like a back door that leads into breaking any one of the commandments that when you let desires take over your heart, and you want things that are not yours to have, that it will corrupt your life and it will lead, if you're given over to that, to all kinds of doors opening to different sins. We could go on and on. Substance abuse, given over to excessive materialism, gambling issues, or debt issues, and go on and on where covetousness is this root, this idolatry, this desire for what is not ours to have. And here the call is, "Let your conduct be without covetousness." It's interesting that the focus here though is on conduct. It's very practical. Your conduct is your customs. It's your way of life. It's the way that you walk through life. And so this is taking covetousness and it's bringing it into the realm of actually more also relationships and how we interact with others and how we present ourselves. It's specifically the call to examine how we walk and how we talk and how we live and whether our conduct, our daily walk, communicates covetousness.

Now that's a challenge, isn't it, to examine our conversations, to examine the words that come out of our mouths, or the purchases that we make even, or the things that we desire, the things that we talk about, or maybe even the way that you use social media. Here the call is, "Let your conduct be without covetousness," your day-to-day way of life. And covetousness certainly starts in the heart. It starts when we allow desires for what's not ours to take over, but I want you to think about this for a moment because we live in a culture that preaches at you day after day, live your conduct by covetousness. That's what makes the world go round. It should actually make us question the capitalism of our day. Now I am all for historic capitalism where each person owns their own property and each person has their garden and their little plot of land and that belongs to them and it's God-given and that's at the foundation of commandments like, "You shall not steal," but that's turned kind of strange and ugly in our day, where greed seems to be required to make the world go around and continue, and you've got to buy the latest and the greatest, and they're selling us products that fall apart just so that we'll have to buy the next one and the next one and the next one, and we're not happy with our economy unless it's growing and growing and growing and they're selling more and more and more and nobody's happy as an investor of a company unless it's bigger and bigger and better and better and next and next, instead of let's have the good gifts of God, and the quality products, and the quality gifts, and be happy with them and even be happy with the ones that would maybe last us 30 or 40 years. But instead our culture now surrounding us is saying you need a new one every year, whatever it is, a new dishwasher or a new phone or new this or new that, and that's what will make you happy. And it's even going further and further this covetousness, now it's going even into our bodies, our lives. Need a new face, new plastic surgery. Have to look 20 when you're 60. It just goes on and on and on, fingers of covetousness into all these areas of life until now we have young people who even think

they need a different body and that they need to follow the covetousness of their hearts reaching out after what God has not given them. And you see that the root is that our culture is being programmed and being taught and it's really demonic, it's satanic. You need to reach out for this, then you'll be happy. You need to take that, then you'll be happy. All the Instagram and the shiny things and the billboards around us. And we need to be on guard. And we need to walk upstream. And we need to be those who are content with such things as we have.

The Apostle Paul warns "those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown people in destruction and perdition, for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." It's the same language. That's from 1 Timothy 6, verse 9 and 10. Same language is here. He warns that if you desire to be rich, that will get you into all kinds of problems. If you are always looking for the next thing and more things and more and more, it will actually pierce you with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6, verse 10. He sees it as a picture of if you're chasing after all these things of the world and all this trying to find your contentment and having the next thing or more things, it's like stabbing yourself with a knife. You're going to destroy yourself. You're going to cut your own heart out. You're going to pierce yourself with many sorrows. And don't we see this happening? We see a world that with having more than any generation before is more anxious, more addicted, chasing after the next drug and the next drug and the next thing being legalized, and we have different opinions on that. It's fine. But it seems that our world is not happy with this. We have to go after another, the next, and further and further and further, and what's happening is people are piercing themselves with many sorrows.

It feels good but the frightening thing is, with covetousness, is that it also feels good just to engage the thought sometimes, doesn't it? To pretend or vicariously in our heart to dream about having that new thing gives a little high, a little hit, a little excitement. But the call here is let your conduct, let your life through and through, starting from the heart, be without covetousness. This will be a daily battle. This is, by the way, why working through God's word and hearing the commandments week after week after week, like we do every morning, and being reminded as we work through passages like this, we need these reminders because it's so easy to slip into covetousness. And here's the thing, I've no doubt everyone here is struggling with covetousness on some level or another, and as we come to this passage today, be reminded, examine your heart, search the Scriptures, and pray with repentance. Confess to the Lord, "Lord, I've been covetous. I've wanted what's not mine to have. Please forgive me. Please forgive me in Jesus' name." And pray that the Spirit would guide you away from covetousness.

And so we need to clean covetousness out of our hearts and our lives. We need to be willing to detach and there might be some practical things you have to do. I'll leave that with each one of you. Maybe some of you do need to digitally detox for a while. Maybe some of you should put away the phone or change some habits. Talk about that in your families. Talk about that with one another. "What should we step back from? What can we do to clean out covetousness and to sweep away some of these things?" How can you start your day maybe with better habits or turn your mind around or start to train yourself

to clean out covetousness? But you see, in the Scriptures, cleaning out is never enough. The Lord Jesus gives a parable of this. We find ourselves coming back to it again and again, he gives this parable of this person who has a problem with a demon in their life and they sweep out their life, so to speak. They clean out their house and then what happens is, some time later, the demon comes back along and sees this life swept out and says, "Wow, this looks like a nice clean house," and he brings seven more with him. See, we need more than just a house cleaning. We need more than just to purge sins out of our lives. There needs to be a filling. And in verse 5, that's the second half of the verse, "be content with such things as you have." You can't just put away covetousness, you have to embrace contentment. You can't just evacuate sins. There has to be a new satisfaction, a new state of contentment.

And this word, "be content," it has the idea of being satisfied or being filled. It begins with knowing the Lord Jesus Christ and with our contentment in being spiritually restored. That's what we need to begin with, that we would repent, that we would confess our covetousness, that we've desired the wrong things, and that Jesus Christ himself would become our treasure, that we would see that what he has done on the cross is worth more than everything in this world, and that we'd be willing to even let go of everything, and that he would be our contentment. That's the first part of Christian contentment, growing to treasure and to trust and to love God in Jesus Christ and through him.

The call here is very simple beyond that, and by the way, the whole first part of Hebrews we could fill in with that. It's been pointing us to how Jesus is greater than the angels. He's greater than the high priest. He's better than anything. He's all-sufficient. He ever lives to make intercession. He's everything that you need. And so our contentment in Hebrews, it's all about Jesus Christ. But here it's also calling us, "be content with such things as you have." Be satisfied. Be filled with what you have now. That takes learning to be content and being reminded and being taught wherever God has put you now. Even if that's in a place of maybe even some debt and some struggles, some weaknesses in your body, and even if that means being literally poor for a time, we are called be content with such things as you have.

I wonder how many of you have, I'm sure you've heard this, but have you ever been to a developing world country and been around poor people? Isn't it strange? I know I experienced this in South America. They're no less happy than we are. They have way less stuff and some of them living in abject poverty and eating out of the trash and you sit down and you have a conversation and it starts hitting you. It actually hit me more when I went, when I came back home than when I was there because when I went it was all kind of a blur and then you come back home and you have to rethink your whole life and think, "What's wrong with me? Compared to this, why am I so discontent and sinful and struggling when these people actually seem happier?"

"Be content with such things as you have." Now, I have no doubt that there are many, many people in developing world countries who who wish and dream for more stuff and desire to have more money and that they struggle on different levels and with discontentment, but we are called be content with such things as you have. Whether

you're poor or struggling or weak or even in a wheelchair, you can think of that example, that lady, Joni, I think she's called, who's in a wheelchair and yet has made it her goal after being paralyzed as a teenager that she will strive to simply be content with where the Lord has put her, even as a paraplegic. That's what we're called to as Christians, with our weaknesses, with our sicknesses, our disabilities, whatever it may, to be content.

And this word content, it has the idea of satisfied and filled. I heard this in a sermon many years ago and it stuck with me. It was a pastor from Mississippi and he used as an illustration of contentment a profound picture from our culture for this word "be content." He used the picture of Winnie the Pooh. I know that's not a normal sermon illustration, but can you picture Winnie the Pooh when he sits there with his honey pot and he's dipping his hand in it and he sits there with that smile on his face, and he has that aura of just he's so simply happy with his honey pot. That's what we're called to. We're called to be content with such things as you have, to be simply and deeply content that wherever God has put us, that we would work at being filled with contentedness. Sadly though, doesn't it seem that the more we have, the more we have to worry about? It seems that we in our culture only seem to get more and more worked up the more that we have and, you know, I think we should think that if we along with the people of Hebrews chapter 10 verse 34 accepted the plundering of their possessions, and if some of us as history begins to unfold, start to lose some material possessions, that'll probably be good for us. That'll probably help us to be contented that God will use that to help us to treasure him more and more. And as Christians, we are called, even if we're to get poor like these Hebrew Christians did, that we would learn to be content with less.

Well, how do we cultivate this kind of contentment? How do we grow in it so that we would fill our heart instead of covetousness, pushing away covetous, filled it with contentment? Well, we would start, of course, with knowing Jesus, trusting in him, but then also with our routines, beginning our days with prayers but not just prayers for help, thankful prayers. Thankful prayers. As a person myself who struggled with some pretty powerful anxiety in the past, I actually found that one of the keys to fighting that was turning my heart to start thanking God for things in my life. That's one of the keys. There's many different keys, but that we would begin in our prayers that even when we're in our darkest and our hardest places that we would begin to thank God for his work in Jesus Christ, thank him for future deliverance, trust that he will work things out, and that we would cultivate a prayer life and a singing life and a worship life that's filled with thankfulness. That's why we're supposed to actually gather together on the Lord's Day. This should be starting our week with thankfulness and starting our days and our weeks with thankfulness will be a first step that we would be content with such things as we have, that we would thank God even in the midst of if poverty would come or challenges would come or we end up having to live a much simpler life, that we would accept that lot in life. You know, the Apostle Paul was even able to say, as he talks about in 2 Corinthians 12, his thorn in the flesh, his struggles. He was able to say, "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities," so sicknesses. "I take pleasure in sicknesses and reproaches and needs and persecutions and distress for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am

strong." It's when we are emptied by our sicknesses and our weaknesses that we can take more pleasure in being filled with the work of Jesus Christ and growing in him.

And so we are called here, "be content with such things as you have," and this is, by the way, not just material things. Be content with when our family life is sometimes struggling along. That's not saying be content with it in the sense of being fatalistic and just giving up on working on our marriage or our life, but we also need to be content with when we're going through a struggle. We need to be content with when we're going through a sickness. We need to be content whatever state we're in and even be thankful for the causes to pray. But then comes now, so we've seen drive out covetousness, bring in contentedness, and then now the reason for it, the Lord's care. The Lord's care, finally, for he himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," so we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?" The author to the Hebrews here, he quotes two Old Testament passages to reassure these people that the reason for contentedness is when you have the Lord and his care. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Most of your Bibles, that's probably in slanted letters, italics, or it's indented in some way to show it's from the Old Testament. It's a quote from the Bible. But it's not just a quote from one place. That line, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," actually echoes through the whole Old Testament.

I'll give a few examples. Genesis 28. Jacob was exiled. Remember he got in a fight with his brother Esau and his brother was going to kill him and he had to run away to the east. He was all alone and on that night when he had nothing but a rock for his pillow, imagine the loneliness, big family fight, kicked out of the home, running on his own back towards the east in the middle of the wilderness sleeping with a rock for his pillow and that's where the Lord comes to him in a vision, a dream, and these words are there to Jacob. "In all your loneliness, Jacob, in your brokenness, I will never leave you nor forsake you." Or another example. In Deuteronomy 31, Israel, the land of Israel, Moses is about to die. He's getting older. He's not going to be with them anymore. They're seeing that a funeral is about to happen and the Lord says to the land of Israel, to the whole nation, sorry, of Israel, they're just about to go enter into the Promised Land. He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And then in Joshua 1 verse 5, man, Joshua is supposed to take over for Moses, and he's scared, there's a sense, and he's worried, and he has these huge shoes to fill to take over and to fight the battles for God's people and to defend them and to lead them, and there's a sense of nervousness and insufficiency and God says, Joshua 1 verse 5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Another example, 1 Chronicles 28. David is assigning Solomon to take over with building the temple. He has this huge task ahead of him. David is going to die. It's another takeover situation. Solomon has to build this temple and take over this land. He has this massive assignment of duties before him and it's challenging and frightening. Maybe children, there's going to be this time, or maybe it's happened to you already, that you have to babysit for the first times, take care of younger siblings, and your parents are going to leave, and you're scared, and you wonder how you're going to handle it, and you're filled with fear. Well, Solomon was kind of in that state, and actually so was Joshua, having to take over and run things, and there's this fear and the reassurance came to Solomon, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." It's in the Psalms and the history. God says to his people, "I will never leave you nor forsake

you." And the promise here is, don't worry about the stuff of this world. Don't worry about your house, your possessions, or any of that. The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you, even if you're homeless. and completely in poverty. When you are right with God in Jesus Christ, when you have the Lord Jesus Christ and are right with God, he will never leave you nor forsake you. You have more, you have more even if you were to die poor and alone in a wilderness with Christ and with God than you have with the greatest riches this world could offer because he gives this promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And actually, Jesus gives the same promise when he talks about how he will abide with his disciples. He'll send his Holy Spirit to be the comforter and here, right now, he dwells in us and with us, and he's working through us and comforting us and guiding us by his Spirit. He will not leave or forsake. So we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?" This is a confession of faith. We confess our faith with the Apostles' Creed every day. Here's another confession. "The Lord is my helper." There are all kinds of helpers in this world, friends or you think of rich and famous people, they hire a group of bodyguards to surround them, usually they hire the biggest and the strongest men they can find to walk with them or to walk just behind them to keep them safe, and here the bold confession is, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me?" That that when we are people of prayer and trust in God, he will help us, he will take care of us, the God who exists, this is Jehovah, our helper. Better than the greatest company of bodyguards or an army, "The Lord is our helper. I will not fear."

Now God's people sometimes slip into fear. That's clear from the Psalms, clear from many places in the Scriptures, but we need to be called to this bold testimony, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear." And when we're giving in to fear, or if you're continuing to live in fear, fear of losing your possessions, fear that you might lose your life, when fear takes over, that's a time to examine your heart and to consider are you clinging to the Lord? There should be a call to repentance. When fear has taken over to the point that we're clinging to this life or the things in it, there needs to be a repentance and a coming to Jesus Christ, a faith in him. And the call of the gospel is turn from sin. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that the Holy Spirit would make this real and then there will be no more reason to fear. Why would you fear? When you are right with God through Christ, not even death itself is a threat. Death has lost its sting. What can man do to me? There's nothing that can separate you from the love of God, believer. Romans 8 verse 38, "I'm persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." If we have, if you have, the Christ Jesus of this book of Hebrews that we've been looking at outlined in all of his glory, nothing can separate you from his love. Don't fear what you might lose and be content with such things you have. And so let your conduct be without covetousness, be content with such things as you have. Amen.