

## THE FRUIT OF COVETOUSNESS

September 2, 2018

I Kings 21:1-29

**“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house.”**

Ahab’s murderous land-grab of Naboth’s vineyard is a powerful example of the evils of covetousness. Coveting seems very innocent. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I had not known lust, except the law had said, thou shalt not covet” (Romans 7:7). But biblical examples of covetousness reveal a fertile, corrupt seedbed from which grows many destructive sins, a source of many injuries and crimes.

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:1, 2). “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

What is covetousness? Covetousness is the assumption that life consists of abundant possessions. Jesus warned, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Covetousness is failure to be content with the things God has given you. “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5). Covetousness desires things but omits God. It is a failure to perceive that one who possesses Christ has all. Covetousness forgets the admonition, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

From the want and deprivation of prison the Apostle Paul wrote, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:18, 19).

Covetousness is not the desire to improve your lot in life, nor the ambition to obtain or the zeal to excel. Scripture commends diligence, and God has committed to humanity a stewardship over creation, a responsibility to make the best of all things. God is the creator and restorer, and when these elements of His image are manifest aggressively in His creatures, it is to His honor.

Yet this must be governed by biblical warnings regarding the deceitfulness of riches and the dangers with which they threaten the soul. “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch” (Proverbs 11:28). “There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (13:7). “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (I Timothy 6:9). “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25).

The divine image in man is susceptible to perversion, and when these qualities fixate upon possessions, upon having what another person has, desiring it only because another possesses it; when the desire to have is for the gratification of ego or any other lust; when denial produces a morose, heavy distemper and/or ill toward the one who possesses the desired object, the indications of covetousness are evident. How often is covetous desire expressed in the form of “sour grapes?” Is your desire to possess only that you might satisfy earthly ambitions, or that you might be of greater service unto God? Is it just to “keep up with the Jones,” or is it to glorify God and do more good for man?

### **Observations from the robbery and murder of Naboth:**

#### **1. Breaking one of the Ten Commandments resulted in breaking many.**

1<sup>st</sup> Other gods: possessions, self-will, lust, etc., etc., were put before Jehovah.

3<sup>rd</sup> The accusation, “Thou didst blaspheme God” (v. 10) was taking God’s name in vain.

6<sup>th</sup> Naboth was murdered, violating “Thou shalt not kill.”

8<sup>th</sup> Naboth’s land was unjustly taken in violation of “Thou shalt not steal.”

9<sup>th</sup> False accusation was made. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

10<sup>th</sup> “Thou shalt not covet.”

#### **2. Every evil begins with a bad thought, a covetous desire.**

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14, 15). “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23).

#### **3. Satisfaction is possible only in the spiritual realm, and is found only in Christ.**

Covetousness will never be satisfied. The momentary thrill of acquisition will quickly fade and be replaced by another craving. Ultimately, covetousness is discontent with God and what He has done for you. Its cure is to make God your greatest desire, which will prove to be the only means to satisfaction.

“Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings, from the wicked that oppress me, from my deadly enemies, who compass me about. They are enclosed in their own fat: with their mouth they speak proudly. They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a

young lion lurking in secret places. Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: from men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. **As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness (Psalm 17:8-15).**