

# A Word on Covetousness

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“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth ; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”

(Prov. 11: 24, 25.)

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**T**HERE is a sin against which the Word warns in the most solemn manner, but which, more often perhaps than any other, is, in differing degrees, indulged in by Christians, but always to the detriment of their souls, and it is to-day eating out the life of many, and hindering their progress in the ways and knowledge of God. I refer to the sin of covetousness, which Scripture denounces as idolatry. That it is accredited by the world when it does not openly trench upon the rights of others, and brings not reproach from men, for “men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself,” and that it can be excused upon the ground of justifiable prudence, makes it more difficult to detect and judge. In the hope that God may use it to exercise the hearts of some on this point, a few thoughts and passages from the Word are here presented, in the assurance that those who desire to be honest before God in the judgment of all that grieves His Holy Spirit, and who have not fuller light, will value whatever helps them in that direction. And although the flesh may shrink from exposure and judgment, yet it is surely our privilege, as well as respon-

sibility, to be true and honest with ourselves in His sight. Upon no other principle can we walk with Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. May we know more of the "blessings of the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit is no guile;" as it is said also in the same Psalm: "Be glad in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

In our English version there are two words rendered by "covetousness." In the Greek they define different aspects of the sin. These words are "*pleonexia*" and "*philarguria*." I quote from Archbishop Trench's "Synonyms" what will serve to distinguish them. "Between these two words the same distinction exists as between our 'covetousness' and 'avarice.' . . . *Pleonexia* is the more active sin; *philarguria* the more passive—the first seeks rather to grasp what it has not, and in agreement with its etymology, to have more; the second, to retain, and by accumulating, to multiply that which it already has. The first, in its methods of acquiring, will be often bold and aggressive, even as it may, and often will, be as free in scattering and squandering as it was eager and unscrupulous in getting. . . . But while it is thus with '*pleonexia*,' '*philarguria*' on the other hand—the miser's sin—will be often cautious and timid, and will not necessarily have cast off the outward appearance of righteousness. The Pharisees, for example, were '*philarguroi*.' (Luke 16: 14.) This was not irreconcilable with the maintenance of the outward show of holiness, which the *pleonexia* evidently would have been." In Scripture *pleonexia* is found in company with '*harpax*,' rendered 'extortioner' in 1 Cor. 6: 10. *Philarguria* is found in profane authors in connection with '*mikrologia*'—penuriousness, meanness, reckoning trifles."

Thus far we have a definition of the sin—not that the extreme of what is named above is necessary to constitute one guilty of the sin before God, of which there are many degrees, as with other offences contrary to sound doctrine. The root of all lies in having turned from God, and made

an **object** of that which cannot satisfy, and does but degrade its followers; and as the Lord Jesus says: "You cannot **serve** God and Mammon." Walking with God, conscience is maintained in healthy exercise about all things; whilst as to difficulties, the knowledge of His love and care keep the heart in rest. Serving Mammon cannot but degrade, however naturally strong the principles of those who do so. Even though nothing gross or shocking to man's dull sense of right and wrong may be found, yet conscience in some particulars is sacrificed to gratify the desire for more, and this is a proof of itself that the heaven is working. With some the daily need is what the enemy presses upon them; but as to that, God has not left His people to a mere chance, nor to our own resources, and "seek **first** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," is His word. When the heart is with God in these things in the confidence he invites to, what is received, even though as the apparent fruit of one's regular calling, is doubly sweet as the evidence of a Father's care; and instead of alienating from Him, draws the soul closer, and one is saved the misery of having to resort to one's own plans. If it be looked at fairly, most of our troubles will be found to come from seeking to look into the future and anticipating what may never happen. If God has cared for us so far, in spite of many fears—fruit of the distrust of God's love, so natural to our hearts—let us go on with Him in the path He marks out for us, seeking to prove what is His "good, and acceptable, and perfect will," and we shall find each day something to thank Him for, and learn that the love that gave Christ for us **never** fails, and "will with Him also freely give us all things." If I am in the path of obedience, I can leave results with God. If comfort and ease, an independent fortune or a resting-place in the wilderness are the **objects** sought, be sure that they will fail to satisfy if attained to. God loves us too well to let us be satisfied with any plans but those He Himself is perfecting for His own glory and our eternal blessing; and He **works** all

\*things after the counsel of His own will. Happy are they who are found in the path of delight in, and obedience to, that will.

It seems almost needless to refer to the Scriptures which speak of the sin of covetousness, yet some are so solemn that it is well to insure our looking at and pondering them. God's estimate of things is different to man's, and things that are highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God. In Ephesians 5, it is spoken of in connection with the sins of uncleanness, and the apostle says, "Let them not be so much as **named** among you, **as becometh saints,**" and in verse 5 is added that no one who has that character "hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The same language is found in 1 Cor. 6: 10, and in chap. 5: 11, if one that is called a brother...be covetous, or an extortioner, he is to be put away from the fellowship of the saints, that there may be the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth brought to the sacred feast that God has spread for His beloved and redeemed people.

We see in Israel weakness before their enemies brought upon the people, and judgment on himself, by this sin in Achan. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was defiled with the same evil, and was cursed with leprosy; and in New Testament times, the same sin led Judas to betray his Master, and when the Holy Ghost was come, after the ascension of Christ, Ananias and Sapphira brought summary judgment upon themselves by the same sin and the lying it led to. May God give us to detect and judge every root we discover of that which is so evil in His sight, and be the more watchful against it, as it is the sin of the day, and one that men think little of who make haste to be rich. Alas! their riches will be found to be but poverty and their gold corruption, when God judges. R. T. G.

