

# AGAPE LOVE DOESN'T COVET

## EX 20:17; Micah 2:1-2; Dt 19:15; I Ti 6:10; Mt 6:24

**DEFINING COVETOUSNESS/AVARICE:** Heb *hamad*="enthusiastic desire;" thus: to "desire, yearn for, lust after" something or someone, seeking self-gratification at others' expense; *assenting* to a process designed to attain one's end. Apt Latin phrase *libido dominandi*. It's the will-to-power, the desire to possess, an intent to get something which is not mine. More than mere wishful thinking, or daydreaming, the Hebrew word implies envisioning/assenting to taking necessary steps to get what we desire. Gk *betsa*=dishonest gain & *pleonexia*=infinite craving, insatiable desire. Unlike envy ("sorrow at another's good"), or jealousy ("intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness"), covetousness focuses on possessions and powers.

### I. COVET NO ONE'S HOUSE (or land or possessions)—cf. Achan (Josh 7:6-15)

- A. Admittedly healthy desire for shelter, house, home, personal place, land for sustenance, security; but limited in scope: legitimate needs (intellectual and aesthetic as well as physical)
  1. As soul-formed *bodies*, uniquely need shelter that's more than survival-dictated (N.B. the sadness of homeless, dispossessed, rootless, displaced persons)
  2. Properly desire to secure and protect our homes
    - a. Dr Samuel Johnson: "To be happy at home is the end of all human endeavor."
    - b. Bret Harte: "Nobody shoulders a rifle in defense of a boarding house."
- B. Coveting=desiring to get another person's house (because it's larger, nicer, more impressive) wrong; thus Micah 2:1-2—includes:
  1. Land Grab: whether Ahab's or Assyrians' or Alexander's conquests or US taking Indians' lands—Sitting Bull: "we have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers first met them but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them." {CF *Jacksonland*}
  2. Class Envy—"social justice" *rationale* of Absalom (2 Sam 15:1-6); Lenin, Castro, Chavez et al; N.B. Aristotle: "Such legislation [against private property] may have a specious appearance of benevolence; men readily listen to it, and are easily induced to believe that in some wonderful manner everybody will become everybody's friend, especially when someone is heard denouncing the evils now existing in states . . . which are said to arise out of the possession of private property. These evils, however, are due to a very different cause—the wickedness of human nature" (*Politics*, 1263b, 11).
  3. Includes love of money (I Ti 6:10) & serving Mammon (Mt 6:24) condemned for disproportionate concern
  4. Disputed implications:
    - a. Gambling? (difference between temperate recreation & limitless addiction? commodities market? risky investments?) Why no clear biblical injunctions?
    - b. Consumerism? (difference between enjoying good things & seeking happiness in them?)

### II. COVET NO ONE'S SPOUSE OR SERVANTS

- A. Wives (or husbands)—e.g. David & Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1 ff)
  1. Wanting another's position (e.g. wealth)—"gold-diggers"
  2. Wanting another's appearance (e.g. beauty)—"trophy wives"
- B. Servants (in our day, machinery gracing households—dishwashers etc.)

### III. COVET NO ONE'S POWER for WORK and TRANSPORT

- A. Oxen (strong, carefully-bred, docile cattle): power for work in ancient world
  1. Today's tractors & computers & windmills—vehicles/devices enabling productive work
  2. Powerful position as employer/employee (discontent with own place, seeking to advance by supplanting others)—join "inner ring" condemned by C.S. Lewis, present in universities, churches, nations, etc.
  3. Fame (entertainers; politicians) entails influence (allegedly for public "service")
- B. Donkeys—transport (automobiles, airplanes)

**German Proverb: "Charity gives itself rich; covetousness hoards itself poor."**

# CONCERNING COVETOUSNESS

“I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, to take no thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul.” --Socrates, in Plato’s *Apology*

“I can never assent to the doctrine that the rich man will be happy—he must be good as well as rich. And good in a high degree, and rich in a high degree at the same time, he cannot be.” -- Plato, *Laws*, V, 742

“Some persons are led to believe that . . . the whole idea of their lives is that they ought either to increase their money without limit, or at any rate not to lose it. The origin of this disposition in men is that they are intent upon living only, and not upon living well; and , as their desires are unlimited, they also desire that the means of gratifying them should be without limit.” --Aristotle, *Politics*

“Beware of an inordinate desire for wealth. Nothing is so revealing of narrowness and littleness of soul than love for money. Conversely, there is nothing more honorable or noble than indifference to money, if one doesn’t have any; or than genuine altruism and well-doing if one does have it.” --Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 20

“Without doubt, the highest privilege of wealth is the opportunity it affords for doing good, without giving up one’s fortune.” --Cicero, *De Officiis*, II, 18

“It is not the man who has too little who is poor, but the one who hankers after more. What difference does it make how much there is laid away in a man’s safe or in his barns, how many head of stock he grazes or how much capital he puts out at interest, if he is always after what is another’s and only counts what he has yet to get, never what he has already. You ask what is the proper limit to a person’s wealth? First, having what is essential, and second, having what is enough.” --Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 2

“Natural desires are limited; those which spring from false opinions have nowhere to stop, for falsity has no point of termination.” --Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius*, 2

“It is impossible for man’s happiness to consist in wealth.” --Thomas Aquinas, *ST, I-II*

“Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail  
And say there is no sin but to be rich;  
And being rich, my virtue then shall be  
To say there is no vice but beggary.” --Shakespeare, *King John*, II, i

“I cannot call Riches better than the baggage of virtue. The Roman word is better, *impedimenta*. For as the baggage is to an army, so is riches to virtue. It cannot be spared nor let behind, but it hindereth the march; yea and the care of it sometimes loseth or disturbeth the victory.” --Francis Bacon, “Of Riches”