# Covetousness (Exodus 20:17)

## Exercise

* **SLIDE: Match Words to Pictures**
* Before we begin let’s do a little exercise to help us.
* In groups of two or three discuss the pictures and try think of:
* What are the differences between desire, want, craving, coveting, envy, greed and jealousy?
* One or two people can share their answers.
* Indeed, it is difficult to know the differences between those words as we will see.

## What is the translation of the word and what is its meaning?

* **SLIDE: What does it mean to covet?**
* You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.” Exodus 20:17
* The Hebrew word translated “covet” here is “tmh (tamhod)”.
* It is sometimes translated; desire, covet, pleasant, precious, dear, delights, pleasant,
* **SLIDE: What does it mean to covet?**
* And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.’ Deuteronomy 5:21
* More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Psalms 19:10
* So, we can see that the meaning of this word tahmod greatly depends on the context.
* **SLIDE: What does it mean to covet?**
* In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek words to this are “pleonexia” and “zeloo”
* They are sometimes translated; jealous, make much of, envy, feel, covet, greed, greediness, coveting, exaction.
* **SLIDE: What does it mean to covet?**
* And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Mark 7:20-23
* They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! 15 2 Peter 2:14-15
* **SLIDE: What does it mean to covet?**
* And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him Acts 7:9
* Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 1 Corinthians 13:4
* Given these broad ways in which this word “to covet” can be used, we will first zoom in on our passage to see what covetousness means and how it looks like, we will then see how it relates to other commandments, what are its effects, and finally how to fight it.

## Zooming in on Covetousness in our passages:

* **SLIDE: Zooming in on Covetousness in our passage**
* “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.” Exodus 20:17
* And you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.’ Deuteronomy 5:21
* Zooming in on passage Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:20, we see that covetousness means desiring, longing for, craving for what belongs to another, whether money, house, care, wife, job, degrees, publications, or anything else.

## What does coveting look like?

* It is so difficult to keep this command in this world with hearts like ours.
* We live a deeply want and craving driven society.
* In a deeply unsatisfied society.
* The norm is climbing up the career ladder, always looking for more salary, better house, better car, most beautiful wife.
* To be honored in our world one needs to be rich.
* In fact, sad to say, but in some churches only the rich and wealthy are made leaders.
* To get married in some cultures one needs great wealth.
* In addition to all these we are deeply unsatisfied ourselves, always comparing to others, comparing our skills, our countries, our skin color, our degree, our income, our houses, our church sizes, and so on.
* So, it is hard not to envy what belongs to others when we really think we need what belongs to them in order to be honored, respected, married and so on
* It is not easy to see another marry the lady we longed for, to hear another praised at our expense, to see a newcomer get the better job, after we worked for so many years.
* **SLIDE: The Rich too can Covet**
* It is important also to Note that this command is for all of us. Not only the poor amongst us. This may be surprising, but wealth does not cure this.
* AS Charles Spurgeon said, “A man’s contentment is his mind, not in the abondance of his procession”, one can say, “A man’s covetousness is his mind, not in the abondance of his procession”,
* Picture:
* Example 1: Ahab & Naboth, the desire for another man’s vineyard caused a king who had everything to be deeply dissatisfied
* Example 2: David and Bathsheba, the desire for another man’s wife caused a king who had so many wives in addition to everything to kill a man and take his only wife
* This is also certainly for the poor and afflicted to be in lack, in want perhaps of money, perhaps of health, perhaps of marriage. Still the Lord tells us here not to covet. This verse applies broadly in spite and despite of how painful our circumstances may be, for our Lord and our neighbors especially as this commandment is related to the previous commandments concerning our Lord and Neighbors.

## Relationship to other commandments

### Relationship to commandments concerning neighbors:

* **SLIDE: Covetousness and commandments concerning our neighbors**
* Honoring parents, murder, adultery, theft and lies were actions, while coveting is from inside the heart, as Jesus said:
* And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Mark 7:18-23
* **SLIDE: Covetousness and commandments concerning our neighbors**
* But covetousness does not end in the heart. Not fighting covetousness, but letting it grow will automatically lead to breaking the other commandments
* And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him Acts 7:9
* **SLIDE: Covetousness and commandments concerning our neighbors**
* Covetousness like other transgressions against the other commandments also comes in many forms, as we have seen, the Bible translates the same word for covetousness to envy, jealousy, and greed as well. And our Lord also points this out in Luke 12:
* Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” 16 And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:13-21
  + IT doesn’t seem that this guy asking for his own share of the inheritance is covetous.
  + His request seems to be a righteous one. But Jesus who knows the heart points out that there is some form of courteousness going on just like he also pointed out the greed in the young rich ruler’s heart.
  + So, we should always check our motives. Our hearts are more sinful than we think.
  + Yes, we should Work hard, pray for help to do well.
  + If we are poor, we should be the Lord’s poor as Charles Spurgeon said. We should not be poor because we are lazy.
  + But we should make sure we don’t make success our God, we should make sure we are not rich fools in the end, rich and plenty with the world’s riches, but poor towards God.
  + As Solomon warns us in Ecclesiastes, we should make sure we don’t end up chasing after the wind.
  + Yes, we should imitate good examples, be inspired by good examples and strive to become like them.
  + But we should always keep our hearts in check (and not let it become envy, jealousy and covetousness), because it is so easy to move from admiration to covetousness and as Jesus pointed out we may often be unaware that we are being covetous.

### Relationship to commandments concerning the Lord

* **SLIDE: Covetousness and commandments concerning The Lord**
* Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5
* Paul says covetousness is idolatry. In effect he says the thing we covet is our god. This makes a lot of sense as what we absolutely crave for and covet gets the center of our attention as we start obsessing about it and will not be satisfied unless we get it no matter what.
* And this craving that takes the place of God has disastrous effects both in this life, and if we are not careful, for eternity.

## Effects

* **SLIDE: Temporal Effects of Covetousness**
* Temporary:
* Wars (Helen of Troy)
  + Example 1: Helen of Troy, lust and desire for another man’s wife caused one of legend’s greatest wars between the Trojans and Athenians.
* Death (Ahab)
* Adultery (David)
* Family mess (Joseph),
* Bad witness (you don’t even have time to share the gospel),
* Rotting the bones and no time to witness or invest in family (Prov 14:30),
* **SLIDE: Temporal Effects of Covetousness**
* Eternal:
* Damnation
  + But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Ephesians 5:3-6
* How can we fight this disastrous sin then? What shall we do? Firstly, it is important to know the causes.

## Causes

* **SLIDE: What Causes us to Covet?**
* Dissatisfaction (Lack of contentment):
* Both for the rich as we have seen (Alexander the great)
* And for the Lord’s poor
* Lack of trust in the Lord
* Especially in hard times
* An Unregenerated heart
* This is just how are hearts are since the fall
* Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5
* A problem known is half solved, but knowing the causes and not how to address them won’t help us, so how can we address them?

## How to fight it

* **SLIDE: How can we fight Covetousness?**
* Dissatisfaction:
* Learn to be content (Philippians 4:13)
* Set your eyes on eternity, (Colossians 3:1-5)
* Remember that wealth will pass away, as pain also will end for the believer. (Matthew 6:19-24, James 5:1-18)
* **SLIDE: How can we fight Covetousness?**
* Lack of trust in the Lord:
* Pray (Mark 9:24),
* Study the word, and remember we serve the same GOD and that as Charles Spurgeon said “Would any other condition had been good for your salvation, the Lord would have granted you that” (Psalms 119:9-11)
* Surround yourselves with Elijah like friends who would be honest with you when you stray from the Lord like Elijah did to Ahab (1 Kings 21)
* **SLIDE: How can we fight Covetousness?**
* Unregenerated heart:
* Come to the Lord Jesus and plead with him to save you.
* You may think you are enjoying yourself here but let me tell you what Spurgeon said, he said:
  + “Here maybe the believer’s hell, but his eternal heaven is coming. Here may be your temporary heaven, but your eternal hell is coming”.