***Lights in the World - PH53-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 2:17***

Trusting Christ as personal Savior enters a relationship which is twofold. One is called a position of eternal fellowship represented by an outer circle, and the other one is a position of temporal fellowship represented by an inner circle. A Christian can never leave the outer circle of eternal fellowship with God, but he can immediately leave the inner circle of temporal fellowship through sin–the act of sinning–the deliberate and willful denying of the will of God.

For this reason, it is critical that when we come to the study of the Word of God, we remind you again that the place outside of the inner circle, but inside the outer circle is called the place of carnality. The place of carnality is the place of nowhere. It is a place where there is no effective prayer; it is a place where there is no effective learning of the Word of God; and, it is a place where God is now dealing with you relative to sin, rather than being able to minister to you and through you. It is the practice of 1 John 1:9 in the confession of all known sins that brings us back into the inner circle of temporal fellowship. This is the place where you must be at this point in time to benefit by this study. Otherwise you can leave. You are wasting your time in this study.

Therefore, we begin this service with a time of personal, private examination of our own minds in order to bring confession of sins, if necessary, so that we are filled with the Spirit, which is what this means, and God can now teach us. If we are negligent of this, we are negligent of the first step of the educational process by which we take in divine viewpoint into our souls.

Please open your Bibles once more to the book of Exodus as we look today at verse 17. The grace (or the undeserved kindness) of a loving God has provided all of us with eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ. Most of us here have accepted that offer of grace. There may be a few who have not. The grace of God has given all men the opportunity of eternal life. This salvation, while it is given to us without cost (it is not something we earn), is, nevertheless, not free. It is a mistaken notion to think that salvation is free. It cost God the death of His Son upon the cross in bearing our sins and in paying the demands of the justice of God against us. So salvation, while it is without cost to us, was not without cost to God.

The grace of God that brought us salvation continues to set the tenor of our lives as believers after salvation. As Christians, we are not free to do evil. As Christians, we are free to do what is right. The Bible condemns sin. The Bible condemns human good in the lives of Christians. Both of those are evils flowing from the old sin nature. We are to live instead as per the standards of God's righteousness. This is a life of holiness which, in our human capacities, we are not able to produce. For this reason, God has provided us with the means to do this in the form of God the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, and in the form of the guidance of biblical principles, which we call Bible doctrine.

The Ten Commandments that we've been studying together are an expression of the basic personal morality which is compatible with the divine holiness which God expects of us as Christians. Grace has given us a salvation for which we did not have to pay, but which God paid for. Grace has given us a way of life which is a way of freedom and of great happiness. But grace is not a way of life to do what is wrong.

I'm happy to say that one of the things that people observe (who know something about the Bible) about this church is that while we are a grace oriented congregation, and while grace principles predominate in our methods, yet people do not get the impression here that they can go and live like the devil. They are not given the idea that they can be lawless believers. But the understanding comes through, and certainly should have come through over the weeks that we've been studying the Ten Commandments, that God has certain standards that he expects us to meet. There are things that we should do, and things which we should not do. The Bible is very clear about that. We are not lawless people because we are grace people, but rather we are people who have been in-lawed (the Bible says) to Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have a way of life which is characteristic of the Savior, not a way of life, which is characteristic of Satan's concepts and of human viewpoint.

Christians, while not under the Jewish law system, are under the expression of God's standard of righteousness which we found in the Ten Commandments. Christians who are to shine as lights of God in Satan's dark world are those who honor these principles of biblical morality.

So grace is a marvelous free way of living. However, I must stress to you that it is a do-right life style. That's what grace means. I'm aware of the fact that this sets ill with a certain type of believer. I have seen people who have attended this church who, when this point was made clear to them that the grace way of life is not a way of doing whatever you please, and that the grace way of life is a way of responsibility to do right, have suddenly evaporated. They didn't want to be around here anymore. That was because in their own practice, they were not doing some things right. They were violating the rules, the regulations, and the principles of the Word of God. Therefore, they preferred to absent themselves rather than be confronted with the fact that grace means to do right. God expects, therefore, certain things of us. This same requirement was placed upon the Jewish people who were given these particular expressions of righteousness in these ten moral principles.

So we read in Deuteronomy 27:26: "Cursed be he who does not confirm all the words of this law to do them, and all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" So today we begin with admonishing you as we come to the last moral principle to think back upon all that we have studied, and to be sure that in your own mind, you have done this which God called upon His people to do–to recognize that the judgment and curse of God is rightly upon those who violate these principles, and all the implications of these principles in practice, and that your heart should yell, "So be it, Lord. Amen. And may that judgment come upon me if I do not obey these principles." That should be our attitude. That's what "amen" meant to these people. May the judgment of God indeed come upon me if I do not recognize these principles as divine viewpoint which I am obliged to obey.

**The Tenth Commandment**

So now we come to the final and the tenth moral principle to which we must say, "Amen." This is in Exodus 20:17 where we read, "Thou shalt not covet you neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

**Coveting**

First of all, we begin with the Hebrew word "covet," which is "chamad." The "D" in Hebrew is pronounced as "TH" in English. Grammatically, this is a "Qal" active imperfect. The "Qal" stem means that this is a simple statement of fact that God is giving. Active means that it is a personal choice. Covetousness is something you decide to do or not to do. Imperfect refers to the future, so that at no time in the future are you by choice to practice covetousness. This is stressed by the negative, which in the Hebrew is the strong negative "lo," meaning "thou shalt not." The word "covet" itself means "an intense desire for something," or "to take pleasure in something." That is, we would say, "to set your heart upon something." It connotes a concentrated desire. However, the word "covet" is not a bad word. To covet something is not a bad thing to do. Covetousness is sometimes good, and sometimes it is bad. It depends on the object that you covet.

For example, in Colossians 3:5, the Bible says that covetousness is idolatry. There it is speaking about covetousness in a bad sense because the object of your coveting is bad. It is something that you are so desiring that in your life it replaces God's will for you, and God's plan for you. That kind of covetousness is bad. However, in 1 Corinthians 12:31, we read that we are to covet earnestly the best things in the way of spiritual gifts, and so on. But here, this is a good covetousness. This is coveting something that we should covet.

So first of all, let's learn that's the word "covet," while meaning an intense desire, can be a desire that is a good thing or it can be an intense desire which is a bad thing. Covetousness is actually sinful according to the object of the intense desire. Some of the desires indeed are legitimate. We find this in Habakkuk 2:9 where we read, "Woe to him that covets an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil." This says, "Woe to him that covets an evil covetousness." So the Bible indicates that there is a good covetousness, and there is a bad covetousness.

In Exodus 20:17, we are reading about a type of covetousness which is bad. It is forbidding the covetousness which has an improper object. What is an improper object for coveting? It is whatever you do not have a right to have. It is whatever belongs to another and is not yours to have, but which you want to take from him. That is an improper object of coveting.

The word "covet" also connotes something else that we should observe, and that is that covetousness means "gaining something for yourself." It has the connotation of the attempt to gain what belongs to another. It is not simply a mental desire. That's where it begins. You look out there; you see something that someone else has; and, you want to have that thing. Now, may I immediately clarify this for you? It is not wrong for you to see something that somebody has and for you to say, "I'd like to have one of those," so you go down to the store, and you buy one of those. That is not covetousness.

But if somebody that has some object that attracts your attention and your interest, and it's a one-of-a-kind, and you try to take that one from him, then you have entered evil covetousness. You have been coveting. Just because that here you see something that someone has and you say, "I'd like to have one of those things," that is not coveting. But the evil desire begins with wanting something that you have no right to have. It is something that is another's. So it begins with a mental attitude, as all sin does. Then it expresses itself overtly in some action on your part where you try to take away from this individual that which belongs to him that you don't have the right to have–the attitude of covetousness in action.

We have an excellent example of this in the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard that you read about in 1 Kings 21. You will remember that that's the story where Ahab looked out his window and he saw a piece of land that belonged to a modest man named Naboth, a Jezreelite. And Ahab decided he wanted the land. So he offered to buy it. Up to that time, Ahab had not been guilty of covetousness. He simply saw a piece of land, and he said, "I'd like to buy that property. I'd like to own that. I'd like to attach that here to my palace." So he sent an agent and said, "Make an offer to Naboth." Up to that time, he was not coveting. Everything was in order. The agent came back and said, "Naboth says, 'I own this land, and this land has been in my family for centuries. I can't sell this. This is family property. There is no way I would sell this to the king." So when they came back and reported this to the king, the king pouted. Remember that the story tells us that he went to bed and he turned his face to the wall.

A little later, in comes his wife, Jezebel, who was a real doll of the day. She came tripping into the room and saw him pouting, and said, "What's the matter, Ahab?" So he told her what was the matter: "That no-good miserable goofball Naboth won't sell me his vineyard. You can see how beautiful it would be to attach this here to our property." He just carried on. She said, "No sweat, Ahab. I'll make him an offer he can't refuse." So she took charge.

At that point, covetousness entered the heart of Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Now they were going to take away from Naboth that which was properly his, and which the king and his wife had no right to. They were going to take it by force. The quality of dishonest gain is involved in covetousness in this principle. As the Bible speaks in this tenth principle, it is talking about dishonest game. It is getting what you do not have a right to–taking it by a dishonest means.

Well, you know the rest of the story. They set Naboth up. He did refuse their offer, and they killed him. The result was that God brought judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel, and their lives were forfeited for what they had done.

Covetousness is the desire to take what does not belong to you. Its full expression is in going out and taking the thing that you want. This is actually the normal expression of the evil type of covetousness.

Micah 2:2 indicates to us that this is the normal expression of covetousness–to begin with a thought, an idea, or a desire, and then to move in to actually take it. Micah 2:2 says, "And they covet fields and take them by violence, and houses and take them away, so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." They covet something, and they take it away. They covet his fields. They take it away. They covet his house. They take it away. So the two things go together: the desire; and, the forceful securing of what you desire. That is the meaning of covetousness. It connotes any attempt to gain by fraud; by coercion; or, by deception, something that belongs to one's neighbor. It carries the idea of dishonest gain.

There are several Old Testament examples of covetousness–what the Bible describes as covetousness. It's the Hebrew word "betsa" which is covetousness, and "betsa" means dishonest gain. We have this described in several places. For example, in Exodus 18:21, the helpers of Moses in ruling the people are to be men who hate a bribe. It uses the word "betsa." These are men who hate a dishonest gain. In Psalm 119:36, we are told that the heart of a man is not to be inclined to gain (to "betsa"). His heart is not to be inclined to dishonest gain. That, again, is the idea of covetousness.

Proverbs 28:16 says, "He who hates unjust gain shall prolong his days." The Jews were promised that they would live longer if they avoided covetousness. That's true for several reasons, including the emotional effect upon your body of covetousness. Jeremiah 6:13 and Jeremiah 8:10 say, "Everyone is greedy for unjust gain." Again, this is using "betsa." Everyone is greedy for covetousness, including the rulers. Jeremiah 22:17 says, "The people had eyes and heart only for dishonest gain (for covetousness)." Ezekiel 33:31 says, "Their heart is set on their gain." Again, it means "betsa," dishonest gain.

So again and again, the Old Testament refers to this quality of desiring something that you have no right to, and then muscling your way in and taking it. It is roundly condemned.

The idea of covetousness is also described in the New Testament. Basically, the word for covetousness in the New Testament is "pleonexia." "Pleonexia" literally means "the desire to have more." "Desire and more" is always used of covetousness in a bad sense. In the Greek and Roman world, this describes something that everyone detested–the attitude of wanting more and getting it in the ugliest way. The ancient world defined this as "the accursed love of having that which belongs to another." Even the unregenerate world looked upon "pleonexia" with horror, and they recoiled from it as something detestable in a human being.

It is translated by such words as "greed" or "ruthless greed." This is used in Romans 1:29 as a characteristic of the heathen world. In Luke 12:15, this is used of the man who measures his life in terms of the amount of his possessions. He is the "pleonexia" man. This is used in 1 Thessalonians 2:5 and 2 Peter 2:3 of the one who exploits those he ought to serve. Because of his covetousness, he exploits people.

Another word that is used for the concept of the tenth moral principle in the New Testament is "philarguros" which means "money-loving." It's an adjective, and it simply means, literally, "money-loving." This is sometimes translated as a covetous person, meaning a money-loving person, which is one expression of covetousness.

Another word used in the New Testament is "orego" which means "to extend the arms for" or "to stretch out," which is so characteristic of the person seeking a bribe because he is motivated by his covetousness.

Then another word that we have had before is "epithumeo" which means "to crave passionately" or "to fix the desire upon." It is a deep-seeded passionate craving for something.

Finally, another word in the New Testament is "zeloo" which simply means "to earnestly desire." It actually comes from a Greek word which means "to boil." So it suggests getting heated up over something that you want that someone else has and you can't get it, and you proceed to devise some means by which you can take it away from them. That's what this moral principle is talking about–taking things away from people that you have no right to take from them.

What is it that is forbidden here in this passage? "Thou shalt not covet." You will not get a mental desire and then express it overtly for anything that is in the form of belonging to your neighbor's house. The word "neighbor" we have is the Hebrew word "rea," meaning anybody who is a citizen in your nation. The word "house" is the Hebrew word "bayith." But "bayith" means more than "dwelling place." This is just not simply a house that you live in. That's only one expression of "bayith." This expression "bayith" has to do with what is inside of this house that you live in. That is what we would call "the household." It includes, therefore: wife; servants; animals; and, everything else which constitute a person's possessions.

We have the idea of house used in this way in Genesis 7:1, Genesis 12:17, and Genesis 15:2. You can look those up for yourself. "House" there is used in terms of the people and the contents of that house. That's what this moral principle is speaking of. It's not simply speaking about a building. The details that are forbidden in this house are spelled out. In order to stress that he is speaking about the contents of the house, God the Holy Spirit repeats the expression, "Thou shalt not covet." So Exodus 20:17 says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shall not covet," and then He tells you what of thy neighbors: first, thy neighbor's wife. This is speaking to men as spiritual leaders. So it refers to the wife. But the implication is the same for women. Neither are they to covet other women's husbands. Nor is a man to covet another man's servants, which are a source of personal services to him. Nor is he to covet that man's animals, which are the source of economic production to him. Nor is he to covet anything, it says, that is thy neighbor's, which means any kind of possession whatsoever that he may have in his house.

You will notice that in this verse, personal ownership is stressed seven times. You have: "thy neighbor's;" "thy neighbor's;" "his;" "his;" "his;" "his;" and, "thy neighbor's." Seven times we have emphatically stressed that this is a personal possession. It belongs to someone else. It is not yours. You have no right to it. If you desire it to the extent of trying to take it away from him, you're out of line with a basic moral principle, and you have violated freedom. Remember that that is the point of the ten moral principles. It is God's way of preserving freedom during the era of the angelic conflict in which we live, when the hosts of heaven are in combat with the hosts of hell. We, as the representatives of Jesus Christ and His body, now become the objects of Satan's attack. For humanity to survive on the earth and not to be destroyed, it is necessary that the ten moral principles be observed by believers and unbelievers alike. Then you can see that the principle of freedom is readily evident here in the right to what people own, and not taking away from them that which is their possession.

It is not wrong in itself to desire to have a wife; to desire to have a manservant; a maidservant; an ox; an ass; or, anything else that is listed here. But to take it from someone else, when it is not yours to take, then it is evil. It is wrong to desire to try to take what is not yours legitimately to claim. Freedom is violated on the part of the person that you attack in this way.

**Achan**

This principle is illustrated in a very marvelous way in Joshua 6 in the story which is related to us concerning the battle at Ai. It began a short time before at the Battle of Jericho. This is the case of Achan and the sin that he was guilty of during the Battle of Jericho–the sin of covetousness. Joshua 6:18-19: "And you in every way (speaking to the soldiers) keep yourselves from the accursed thing (this is preceding the battle), lest you make yourselves accursed when you take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it. But all the silver and gold and vessels of bronze and iron are consecrated unto the Lord. They shall come into the treasury of the Lord." Before the battle begins at Jericho, the soldiers are told, "Do not seek any loot." Everything which is found in Jericho of value goes into the treasury of the Lord. All that has to do with Jericho is under the curse of God. If you seek to take anything, you will come under that same curse.

Verse 21: "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass with the edge of the sword."

Verse 24: "And they burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and the gold and the vessels of bronze and of iron they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord." That's what happened in general. However, there was one soldier named Achan who, in the midst of the turmoil of the battle, came charging into a tent with his sword in hand, and discovered something that caught his eye: a beautiful suit of clothes. He looked at the label and found it said "Neiman Markup Babylon." It was the highest, finest kind of clothing you could find. He was immediately impressed. Here was a beautiful Babylonian garment. He looked around. Nobody was looking. He grabs the thing and sticks it into his sack under his robe. He sees a piece of gold and a wedge of silver. He grabs them and stuffs them into his pocket. Then he goes on with the battle. Who's going to know the difference? Who's to say? Who is going to tell on him? What difference does it make?

The battle of Jericho was a tremendous victory. The people of God rejoiced, and the Commander-in-Chief Joshua says, "Now it's on to Ai." That's the next town on our line of attack, and we're going to knock Ai off. As a matter of fact, Joshua sent out some spies to reconnoiter the area. They came back and said, "It's a piece of cake." So Joshua said, "In that case, we'll send out a small party. There's no need to send out the whole force of our army." It was considered a minor operation. They sent out a small detail to go out there and to knock off Ai, which was very adequate in itself, probably. But they got their ears beaten off.

Joshua went to the Lord and said, "Lord, why? Here we get defeated at Ai. We have a magnificent victory over a stronghold like Jericho, and you let us get torn to shreds at Ai." Then God explained to him that the trouble lay with sin that had brought a curse upon the nation of Israel, and it was the sin of covetousness. One man was coveting what God said, "You shall not take. You shall not seek." One man brought the judgment of God upon the whole nation of two million people. This is just as one believer, coveting what he should not covet in the age of grace, will bring not only judgment upon himself and upon his house, but he will bring it upon the local assembly of believers who suffered the consequences of his sin along with him. For we are related to one another, and we cannot escape the consequences of God's judgment upon one of us.

Achan was a classic example of negative volition to the explicit commands and directions of God for what is to do right, and he decided to do wrong. Joshua 7:11-12 spell out the results for us as God identified to Joshua the guilty man. God said, "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken of the accursed thing, and they have also stolen." Mind you, you notice that it says, "Stolen." You might say, "Well, wait a minute. How could Achan steal? This was battle. This was loot. That's just the spoils of war." But they had already said that all the gold and silver and things of value were to go into the treasury of God. So what Achan was doing was stealing from God. That is about the dumbest thing anybody can do. I'll guarantee you.

Christians do not live under the tithe system where people were very explicitly told, "If you don't give the tithe, you're stealing from God." Christians who live under the grace system where their giving is directed by the Spirit of God can also try to steal God blind just as the people under the tithe system did. But one of the things that brought about the judgment of God, which was the judgment of death here, was because this man, when he took those things, was stealing what God had already said belongs to Him. So in case God has placed something into your hands in the way of material possessions, and God has said, "This belongs to me, and this is what you will give to my work," take care, lest you steal from God by keeping for yourself that which God should rightfully have had, and for which He gave you that possession in the first place.

"They have taken the accursed things they have stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. Therefore, the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but their backs were before their enemies because they were accursed. Neither will I be with you any more, except you destroy the accursed thing from among you." God is talking about the whole people doing this. One sneaky soldier did it. Yet, all the people are brought under the judgment of God.

Verse 18: "He brought his household man-by-man, and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. And Joshua said unto Achan, 'My Son, give, I pray you, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what you have done, and don't hide it from me.'"

Joshua said, "Achan, God has pointed you out. You're the guilty man. So there's no discussion about that. What's the story?" "And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord.'" Achan makes his confession and recognizes what he has done as sin. "I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done. When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment; 200 shekels of silver; and, a wedge of gold of 50 shekels weight, then *I coveted them*, and took them."

"First I saw it. Then in my mind I said, 'That would be great to have.' Then I reached out and took it."

"Behold, they are hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it." So Joshua confirmed this testimony to see whether it was indeed true. They found the stuff in his tent, and they found that it was indeed true. His coveting was the sin that he expressed, and his coveting is what brought him to the place where he brought this judgment upon the nation of Israel.

Well, he did confess it, but there are some sins that God views as sins unto death. In this case, this was a sin unto death. Therefore, though confession was made on the part of Achan, yet as you read the rest of the story, you will discover that they took Achan and his family out and they executed them. His confession had been made. Forgiveness came with confession. But God does not always remove His judgments as the consequences of our sins.

So some of you may tend to be violators of the grace principle by saying, "That means I can really exercise all the license I want. I can do and say anything I want. I can live any way I want. I can let conditions in my life go along any way I want, because the grace of God has covered me. How can I be hurt?" You can be hurt very quickly. Every now and then, we find somebody in the prime of life or on the threshold of life who just gets cut down. We say, "Isn't that so sad that such a young person should have died." Perhaps if we knew that young person in the prime of life and knew his real life as he really was, and the violations of the principles of the Word of God, we'd understand that the judgment of the sin unto death had been executed upon him, because God has a limit, even under grace.

So they took the family out in verse 25: "And Joshua said, 'Why have you troubled us? The Lord shall trouble you this day.' And all Israel stoned them with stones and burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones, and they raised over them a great heap of stones unto this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of the place was called The Valley of Achor, unto this day." That is, Achor means "the place of trouble." The divine judgment upon Achan for covetousness was execution, along with his whole family.

Covetousness is ingrained within us. In Proverbs 21, there is a proverb that is well to remember, and maybe to teach to yourself and to your children. Proverbs 21:26 says, "He covets greedily, all the day long. But the righteous gives and spares not." There is the contrast. There is a man who covets greedily all day long, and notice again that greed is associated with covetousness. There is a person who all day long wants more and wants more and wants more of what belongs to someone else, and of what he should not rightly have. It may not belong to someone else, but it may be something that you shouldn't have. It may be the fact that you've already got a house full of stuff, and you don't need another one of these things. Or it may be some item that you don't have any use for and would rarely use. Yet, because it is there and others have it, you covet to have it. But the righteous man is so different. The godly man is a giver. Whereas the covetous man is a taker.

Here's why this principle is so critical. A society where people are grabbers is the kind of society in which we live today. We're going to get into the expression of covetousness on the governmental level. It is fantastic what this has done to our nation. But the principle and the quality of covetousness is in the old sin nature. We all have one. Don't you forget it for yourself. It's one of the strongest desires of the lust patterns of the old sin nature. The drive to secure things can only be controlled by one thing. That is Bible doctrine and the building of a spiritual maturity structure in the soul which has the magnificent quality on one of its sides of the mastery of the details of life. Only doctrine is going to enable you to control your desire for possessions so that you will not fall into the sin of covetousness.

It's like nuclear power. It can either be good, or it can be bad. But this desire cannot be eradicated. You will never get to the point where the covetous quality will not be with you. All that you can do is to direct desires toward proper objects. It is not wrong to desire. Obviously, if a man does not desire enough income to support his family properly and to care for them, he has something wrong with his desire mechanism. He should covet for his family a good way of life. He should covet the employment to provide that for his family. Covetousness can be good when it's centered on the right objects–objects that you have a right to have. Covetousness is evil when centered on the wrong objects–on things that you do not have a right to have, but which you then proceed to insist on taking. We shall look at the further expression of that a few weeks' hence.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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