

Someone came to Jesus in Luke 12, and said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." This man's brother may well have been in the wrong, but our Lord addresses what He sees to be so wrong in this man himself. "Take heed," He said, "and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

People may think that covetousness is not so bad, since it is an inward craving only, and not an outward action which affects others. But that ignores 3 important facts: (1) The 10th commandment is just as much a part of the moral law as the other 9. (2) While men see only the outward appearance, the Lord sees the heart – and it is the Lord's approval we need, not that of other men. And (3) If we are not right on the inside, we cannot be right on the outside either, and it is just a matter of time before such hypocrisy betrays what scoundrels we really are.

Covetousness is, in fact, the first among sins. It is so for 2 reasons: (1) Covetousness was the sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden. Eve coveted God's power to know both good and evil. Also, (2) The love of money (covetousness), says 1 Tim. 6:10, is the root, or beginning, of all kinds of evil. It is the breeding ground in which so much iniquity is conceived. And this is precisely the reason why we need to keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it proceed the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

Covetousness is an insatiable desire for getting, on the one hand; like an addiction, it is a thirst which is never quenched. It is also an inordinate love of things, on the other hand, assessing those things beyond their true value, which makes it a form of idolatry. Here are 4 quick tests to check whether covetousness is taking over in your life: (1) Do you set your *heart* on this world's goods? If you had to give up all your possessions except one, what would you keep – Christ or the world? (2) Do you set your *mind* on this world's goods? What someone thinks about all the time reveals who he really is (Prov. 23:7). (3) Is all your *conversation* of the world? (4) Is all your *doing* for the purpose of worldly gain?

If covetousness is destroying your spiritual life, here now are 4 things you can do about it: (1) Confess your sin and repent of it. Do not think that you can compromise with any form of wickedness; you must forsake it completely, and resolve never to go back that way again. (2) Learn contentment. No one is content by nature, that is true, but, with the Spirit's help, the Christian can learn it (see Phil. 4). (3) Devote the best of your heart and mind to what is pure and good, and continue to do that, for this is what will help you to keep on track. (4) One of the biggest setbacks in the struggle against covetousness is a fear of failure, that one cannot possibly win such a fight, but that is the devil's lie, and we must not give in to it. You may have a covetous heart, believer, but never think that nothing can be done about it!