

A Common Yet Subtle Sin

by Samuel Logan Brengle

Samuel Logan Brengle's sermon addresses the subtle yet destructive nature of covetousness and its far-reaching consequences.

Scripture: Exodus 20:17, Proverbs 28:22, Ecclesiastes 5:10, Matthew 6:24, Luke 12:15, Colossians 3:5, 1 Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 13:5, James 4:2-3, 1 John 2:15-17

Topics: "Spiritual Vigilance", "Covetousness"

Description

Samuel Logan Brengle warns against the subtle yet deadly sin of covetousness, which has led to the downfall of many, including kings, apostles, and ordinary people. He illustrates how this sin is often overlooked, yet it has catastrophic consequences, as seen in biblical examples like Lot, Achan, and Judas. Brengle emphasizes that covetousness is not just a personal failing but a societal issue that can lead to the collapse of civilizations. He urges believers to combat this sin through self-denial, prayer, and a focus on Christ, reminding them that true contentment comes from godliness. The sermon serves as a call to vigilance against this pervasive sin that can ensnare anyone, regardless of their status or faith.

Transcript

There is a sin which a Catholic priest once declared that no one had ever confessed to him sin so deadly that the wrath of God comes upon men because of it; a sin so common that probably everybody has at some time been guilty of it; a sin so gross in the sight of God as to be classed with whoremongery, idolatry, murder, and such like; a sin so subtle that men most guilty of it seem to be most unconscious of it; a sin that has led to the ruin of homes, to the doom of cities, the downfall of kings, the overthrow of empires, the collapse of civilizations, the damnation of an apostle, of ministers of the Gospel, and of millions of less conspicuous men. Men in the highest and most sacred positions of trust, and enjoying the most unlimited confidence of their fellow-men, have, under the spell of this sin, wrecked their good names, and have brought shame to their families, and misfortune, want, and woe to their fellows.

When amid the thunderings and lightnings of Mount Sinai, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, one of the ten was against this sin. When Lot lost all he had in the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, it was primarily because of this sin. When Nadab and Abihu were suddenly consumed by the fierce fires of God's wrath, at the bottom of their transgression was this sin. When Achan and his household were stoned, it was because of this sin. When Eli and his sons lost the priesthood and died miserably, it was at root because of this sin. When Saul lost his kingdom, it was because this sin had subtly undermined his loyalty

to God. When Ahab died and the dogs licked his blood, he was meeting the doom of this sin. When David fell from heights of God's tender favor and fellowship, and brought shame and confusion upon himself, and incurred God's hot displeasure and lifelong trouble, it was because of this sin.

When Elisha's servant, Gehazi, went out from the presence of the prophet smitten with leprosy white as snow, it was because of this sin. When Judas betrayed the Master with a kiss, thus making his name a synonym of everlasting obloquy, and bringing upon himself the death of a dog and a fool, it was because of this sin. When Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead at Peter's feet, they suffered the dread penalty of this sin. When the great war burst forth in 1914, enveloping the earth in its wrathful flame, sweeping away the splendid young manhood of the world in storms of steel and rivers of blood, and engulfing the accumulated wealth of ages in a bottomless pit of destruction, the disaster could be traced to the unrestricted and deadly workings of this awful, secret, silent, pitiless sin.

But what is the sin that the Catholic priest never heard mentioned in his confessional -- this sin that apostles and priests, and shepherds and servants have committed, and upon which the swift, fierce lightnings of God's wrath have fallen -- this sin of which every one at some time has probably been guilty, and yet which is so secret and subtle that those most enthralled by it are most unconscious of it?

When the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham fell into strife, Abraham, the uncle, to whom God had promised all the land, said to the young man, Lot, his nephew, 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, we be brethren.' Then he bade Lot take any portion of the land which pleased him, and he would be content to take what was left. Lot looked down upon the fat plains of Jordan, and without a thought for his old uncle, to whom he owed all, he drove his herds into the lush pastures of the rich plain, near the markets of opulent Sodom and Gomorrah, while the rough and stony hill country was left to Abraham. But God became, more fully than ever, the Companion and Portion of Abraham; while Lot, through his covetousness, was soon so entangled in the life of Sodom that in the doom of the city he lost all he had, barely escaping with his life, and accompanied only by two weak and wilful daughters.

At the bottom of Nadab and Abihu's sacrilegious offering of strange fire before the Lord was their coveting of the priestly power and authority of Aaron, and it led to God's swift vindication of Aaron in their awful destruction. When the children of Israel entered the Land of Promise and the walls of Jericho fell before them, Achan saw gold and garments which he coveted and took to himself, regardless of God's commandment, thereby bringing defeat to Israel, death to his fellow-soldiers, and terrible doom of himself.

Old Eli's sons, unsatisfied with the rich provision made for the priesthood coveted that which God had reserved for sacrifice, and against protest took what was forbidden for themselves. Besides, despite God's command, they coveted the wives and maidens that came up to worship at God's altar. When soft-hearted old Eli heard about their sin, he only feebly reproved them; consequently, God's wrath swiftly followed, with its doom of death and the loss of the priesthood.

It was Saul's coveting the good will of the people, rather than the favor of God, that led to his disobedience and loss of the kingdom.

Among all Ahab's other reeking iniquities, it was his covetousness -- leading him to destroy Naboth and steal his vineyard -- that brought down upon him God's sleepless judgment, till he died in battle and dogs licked up his blood.

David coveted Bathsheba the wife of another man, and to this day blasphemers sneer and God is reproached, while David only escaped the doom which falls upon those who are guilty of this sin by his humble confession, deep repentance, and brokenness of heart. But he could not escape endless shame, sorrow, and trouble.

Gehazi cast longing eyes upon the gold, silver, and rare changes of garments which Naaman pressed upon Elisha, the prophet, out of gratitude for his cleansing in Jordan, and which Elisha refused. But, blinded by the glitter of gold, and steeped in covetousness, Gehazi had no heart and no understanding for the austere self-denial of the fine old prophet, and he said to himself, 'As the Lord liveth, I will run after him and take somewhat of him!' And run he did, and 'somewhat' he received! Then, to hide his sin, he lied to Elisha; but the old seer's eyes were like seraph's eyes -- they saw -- and he said to the covetous, lying Gehazi, 'Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever! And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.'

Covetousness ruled the stony, ashen heart of Judas, and for thirty pieces of silver he betrayed the Master!

Covetousness possessed the selfish hearts of Ananias and Sapphira; they wanted the praise and honor of utmost sacrifice and generosity while secretly holding on to their gold. And God smote them dead!

As we study the history and Biblical examples of this sin of covetousness, we see the deep meaning and truth of Paul's words to Timothy, 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.'

This sin led to ingratitude toward his uncle, and neighborly association with vile sinners in Lot; to envy and jealousy and sacrilege in Nadab and Abihu; to disobedience in Saul; to sacrilege and licentiousness in Eli's sons; to adultery and murder in David; to brazen robbery in Ahab; to greed and lying in Gehazi; to the betrayal of the innocent Christ with an impudent kiss in Judas; to bold lying to the Holy Ghost in Ananias and Sapphira. Truly, from its poisonous root has sprung up the deadly tree of all evil, and upon it in manifold ways has been outpoured the wrath of God, showing His holy hatred and abhorrence of it.

A close study of the awful ravages of this sin in its manifold workings would show that again and again it has undermined thrones and led to the downfall of empires; that it has rotted away the strong foundations of chastity and honesty and truth and good-will in whole peoples, ending in the collapse of civilizations.

Once its workings begin in a human heart there is no end to the ruin and woe it may bring about in that soul, and then in the lives of others. There is no height of honor and Holiness from which it may not pull men down. There is no depth of pitiless selfishness, lying evasion, brazen effrontery, and self-deception into which it may not plunge men. When proclaiming the Ten Commandments from the flaming mount, God reserved the last to hurl at this sin, not because it was least of all the sins forbidden, but rather because it was a pregnant mother of them all, an instigator and ally of all evil.

Covetousness is a sin that reaches out for men of every age. In some of its forms it makes its most successful assaults upon men well advanced in years. A man in ardent devotion to Christ may successfully resist it in his youth, and yet fall before it when his head is crowned with honors and white with the snows of many winters. The fear of want in old age, the natural desire to provide for his children

and loved ones, may silently, secretly lead him into the deadly embrace of this serpent -- like sin; may cause shipwreck of his honor, his faith, his 'first love,' his simplicity in Christ, his unselfish devotion to the interests of the Lord and the souls of his fellow-men, and thus may bring about his final rejection in that day when the secrets of men's hearts shall be revealed and their works made manifest by fire.

How may men avoid this deadly, secret, subtle sin? There is but one way; that is, by following Jesus in daily, resolute self-denial, by watchfulness and prayer, by 'walking in the light as He is in the light,' by openness of heart, by humility of mind, by utter surrender to the Holy Ghost. by counting all things loss for Christ, as did Paul; by learning and not forgetting that 'godliness, with contentment, is great gain,' by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, by joyfully trusting and obeying those words of Peter, 'casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you,' by keeping the heart clean.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' Said Jesus, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness.'

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