

Of Rules to Find Out Covetousness

by William Gouge

To avoid covetousness, one must be mindful of their inward desires, means of getting wealth, and disposition in hoarding and spending, and strive for contentment with what they have.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:12, Isaiah 5:8, Jeremiah 22:17, Matthew 6:19, Luke 12:19, Luke 14:18, 1 John 2:16

Topics: "Covetousness", "Wealth Management"

Description

William Gouge preaches on the dangers of covetousness, providing seven directions to help identify and avoid this sin. He emphasizes the importance of examining one's inward desires, preferences, means of acquiring wealth, satisfaction levels, effects of desiring riches, hoarding wealth, and manner of spending as indicators of covetousness.

Transcript

It is in vain for any to search after that which he knows not how to find out. God himself having exhorted Joshua and the elders of Israel to search out the accursed thing that was hid in the camp, gave him advice and direction how to do it, Josh. vii. 13, 14. I hold it meet, therefore, here to add a direction.

1. Observe the inward wishes of thine heart. If they be especially for the things of this world, they argue a covetous disposition. Covetousness is styled 'the lust of the eye,' 1 John ii. 16; that is, an inward inordinate desire arising from the sight of such and such a thing, Josh. vii. 21. Many things may be seen which are not desired, but if desired, and that inordinately, there is covetousness.

2. In things which differ, mark what is preferred. If earthly things be preferred before heavenly, temporal before spiritual, that disposition is covetous. Such was the disposition of those who are invited to the king's supper, and refused to go, Luke xiv. 18, &c.; and the disposition of the Gadarenes, Mark v. 17.

3. In the means of getting, consider whether they be just and right, or no; for all unjust and undue ways of getting, arise from covetousness. A mind free from it will rest content with that portion which by the divine providence shall be allotted, Jer. xxii. 17, Micah ii. 12.

4. Compare with the stint which thou first settest to thyself, the issue that followeth. If, upon the obtaining of the first desire, a man remain unsatisfied, and his desire be more and more enlarged, he hath a covetous heart. For example, a poor man thinks if he could get ten shillings a week, it would serve his turn; he hath it, but then he desireth ten shillings a day; he hath that also, yet is not satisfied; from shillings his

desire ariseth to pounds, and yet is not satisfied. These are such of whom the prophet thus speaketh, 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth,' Isa. v. 8. Such a one is said to 'enlarge his desire as hell,' Hab. ii. 5.

5. Well weigh the effects of thy desire of riches. If thoughts thereupon break thy sleep, and care thereabouts consume thy flesh, and labour and toil therein take up all thy time, and impair health and strength, that desire is immoderate-it is plain covetousness, Eccles. ii. 23, and v. 12. This argueth a greediness after 'filthy lucre,' as the apostle terms it, 1 Tim. iii. 3.

6. Take notice of thy disposition in hoarding up and keeping wealth, and sparing to spend it; for covetousness consisteth as much (if not more) in keeping as in getting. The rich man in the parable herein especially manifested his covetousness, Luke xii. 19. The Lord, therefore, for avoiding covetousness, forbids from laying up treasures on earth, Mat. vi. 19. See Sec. 51

7. Observe thy manner of spending. If it be too sparingly, niggardly, and basely, if under thy degree and means, if against health and strength in general, not affording what is needful thereunto; or against special occasions, not affording physic or other requisites in sickness, or help of surgery in case of wounds, sores, or other maladies; or against the charge that belongs unto thee, as wife, children, servants, kindred, and neighbours; or against the duty and due which thou owest to the poor, state, and church; or in what thou doest in any of the foresaid kinds, thou doest perforce so as otherwise thou wouldst not of it, surely this kind of spending savoureth rank of covetousness, Eccles. 4:18.

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