

# IDOLATRY

Part 5a

The Cause of Idolatry  
(Covetousness)

Col. 3:5

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the American way of life is based upon covetousness. The craving to have that which someone else has drives certain segments of the culture. Such cravings have continued unabated for so long that they have become commonplace in the thinking of many. In fact, covetousness has become a tool used by advertisers and politicians alike to peddle their products and ideas. Scripture teaches that using the World System is not a sign of covetousness, but overusing the World System is a sign of covetousness. The Bible pictures the believer in this dispensation living by Grace in his position in Christ as being satisfied. Satisfied with who he/she is. Satisfied with what he/she has. And satisfied with where he/she is. Satisfied with whom he/she is in a relationship with. Satisfied with God's will for their lives. We will see today that covetousness produces dissatisfaction which is the basis for idolatry.

### I. THERE ARE SEVERAL TERMS USED IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT TO DEFINE COVETOUSNESS.

A. There are 10 Old Testament nouns and 7 verbs used to describe covetousness.

1. The prominent noun used to for covetousness is betsa which describes those gain things by unrighteous behavior.
  - a) The first occurrence in Scripture is Ex. 18:21 in which Moses' father-in-law Jethro advised him to gather to him men to help him judge matters among the people, of which characteristic was they lacked covetousness.
  - b) The word is used of those who strive to gain more in an evil manner.  
Hab. 2:9
2. The adjective bastsa describes the type of person who is characterized as craving more and more. Ps. 10:3
3. There are two verb forms used to define covetousness.
  - a) The primary Hebrew verb used for "covet" is chamad is equivalent to the Greek word epithumia and is used in the Old Testament of ***a longing or craving for that which doesn't belong to you.*** -- K.D.J. Josh. 7:21 (Achan demonstrated in his taking of the accursed Babylonian items); Ex. 20:17 (it was forbidden under law)

- b) Avah (one characterized by craving) is another word used to describe the mindset of the ungodly. Prov. 21:26

B. There are 9 New Testament nouns and four verbs used to describe covetousness.

1. Two nouns are used for covetousness in the New Testament. is pleonexia.
  - a) Philarguros is used note whose focus is upon money. Lk. 16:14; 2 Tim. 3:2
  - b) Pleonexia is a word used of those having a continual desire for more.
    - (1) The Lord gives definition to the term pleonexia when he warns a man who desired his brother share his inheritance with him. Lk. 12:15
    - (2) Pleonexia is a characteristic of religious leaders who have no desire for God's plan and purposes. 2 Pet. 2:3, 14
  - c) Good teachers do not operate by means of covetousness. 1st Thess. 2:5 (Paul didn't use among the Thessalonians); 2 Co. 9:5 (Paul did not desire an offering from the Corinthians because of covetousness)
  - d) Those characterized as covetous will not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. Eph. 5:5; 6:10
2. There are two verb forms used to convey the idea of coveting.
  - a) Epithumeo is used negatively to explain the teaching of the Mosaic law. Rom. 7:7 (the Mosaic law forbid coveting thereby revealing the depths of the sin nature); Rom. 13:9 (coveting was among the behaviors that produced enmity with one's neighbor -- another Jew).
  - b) Zealo is used positively of things a believer should covet. 1st Co. 12:31; 14:39 (spiritual gifts that build up the body)

## II. GOD HAS SHOWN A DISDAIN FOR THOSE AMONG HIS PEOPLE WHO ENGAGE IN COVETOUSNESS.

- A. God abhorred those characterized by covetousness. Ps. 10:3
  1. The wicked speaks well of the covetous man.
  2. God "abhorreth" -- **to spurn or forsake**.
- B. God disciplined those among the nation Israel that manifested covetousness.
  1. He was "wroth" with those in the nation and smote them because of covetousness. Is. 57:17
    - a) "Wroth" is from qatsaph (qal per.) which means **to become angry** -- Holladay lexicon
    - b) "Smote"
  2. He "smote" is the Hebrew term nakah which is used of **to strike or to kill**.
- C. God punished Israel because the nation, led by the prophets and priest were dealing "falsely" (sheker -- "**lie, deception in words**" -- Holladay lexicon Lev. 5:24 on account of covetousness. Jer. 6:13

III. THE PROBLEMS OF COVETOUSNESS ARE IDENTIFIED IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

A. Covetousness in the Old Testament hindered the heart from focusing upon God's laws.

Ps. 119:36

1. To "incline" the heart is to turn it in a certain direction. Cf. Numbers. 22:33 (of Balaam's donkey turning aside after seeing the Angel of Jehovah)
2. The word "testimonies" is used in Scripture of warning signs, reminders from the law. -- Holladay lexicon cf. 1st Kings 2:3

B. Covetousness in the New Testament is shown to hinder the believer's ability to overcome his spiritual enemies. 1st Tim. 6:10 (Paul instructed Timothy to warn the believers at Ephesus that covetousness caused some to err from "the faith").

IV. OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT SAINTS ARE WARNED TO AVOID COVETOUSNESS.

A. Solomon advised his sons that those steering clear of covetousness would "prolong" his days. Prov. 28:16

B. New Testament saints were warned to avoid:

1. Covetousness itself. Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5
2. People who are covetous. 1st Co. 5:10-11

CONCLUSION