

Covetousness

Spiritual Battle

Last week we ended with the understanding that our lives are to be lived in spiritual battle against false teachers and false doctrine. Paul gave instructions to the Christians in Ephesus that were experiencing false teaching in their communities. The solution to identifying false teachings was putting “*on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. and ... To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.*” (Ephesians 6:11 and 18) This morning we continue examining the spiritual battle we live in. The words of Paul to the Ephesian church rings true and is needed today just as desperately as when he penned his letter. This morning we are called to identify the deadly sin of covetousness. This is the focus of verses 6 to 12. As with all Christians the foundation of their belief is faith based on the truth of the testimony of Jesus Christ, the truth of the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Through faith and the love of Christ our lives are changed from those belonging to the world to those belonging to God.

Just as we saw last week that false teaching leads to eternal death, so too, there are others paths. There are those in churches who, when they die, will hear from Jesus say, “*I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*” (Matthew 7:23) They have lived disobedient lives showing they have not been born again spiritually. Their claim to Christ is in name only, not in body, mind and soul. Jesus said the proof of one’s regenerated soul is “*the one who endures to the end will be saved.*” (Matthew 24:13) There were people in the church at the time of Paul and Timothy and in this day who were “*living according to the flesh*” *and were destined to “die”* eternally. (Romans 8:13) I do not want people to come to Canyon Bible

for 10 to 30 years and then die mortally, spiritually and eternally because they never learned that faith in Christ is not based on works or the living of the Law, but rather, a life of faith that lives the Law because of ones love for Christ. Christians are called to live by faith grounded in the person of Christ and by the evidence of what the Holy Spirit does in their soul and heart and mind and the evidence of this regeneration is obedience to God's Word and persevering until the end of life here on earth.

We also saw last week there is a way to pursue works of holiness that backfires and leads to spiritual death. Paul wrote, "that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works." (Romans 9:31–32) Unlike the cults we talked about last week, righteousness is found when we pursue the Law of God by faith and not by works. We need to fight the spiritual battle God calls us to by faith, by faith in Christ!

Our prime objective in life is pursuing holiness by faith and letting God receive the glory. A life of righteousness is one holding fast to the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17) and living God's Word in faith with love, grace and mercy. However, if God is **not** glorified in our pursuit of righteousness and our pursuit is **not** based on faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior all is lost. Even if we accomplish great things, if our life is not based on faith that God is everything, just as He says He is, well then, He is not glorified and we were not saved. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9) God is glorified when we believe to the point we completely trust Him. Paul wrote of Christians, "No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." (Romans 4:20–21) Our

power to live holy, to be holy, comes from our trust in God and faith in His promises. So unless we learn how to fight by faith, even great achievements are only temporal – only by faith in Christ is one sanctified and becoming more holy before God.

My heart's desire when I prepare messages based from the Word of God each Sunday is that we, you and me, learn what it means to live by faith and that our faith would continue to grow throughout our lives for this is what marks holiness and brings glory to God. As we strive to live more holy and battle unbelief there are many stumbling blocks the world throws in our path and by faith we climb over them or go around them or at times meet them head on to destroy them in battle. This morning Paul deals with the sin of covetousness that takes our focus off of Christ and places it on us. The world loves to covet power and material wealth.

Please stand while brother **Shawn** reads the Word of God that we will study this morning - 1 Timothy 6:6-12. ... Amen! Please be seated.

PRAY As we prepare to study God' Word this morning let us begin in prayer.

Battle Against Covetousness

We now turn our focus to battling the unbelief of covetousness. Our text in 1 Timothy makes clear what covetousness is and that the battle against it is - a battle against unbelief and a battle for faith in the promises of God.

The word "covetousness" is not used here in 1st Timothy chapter 6, verses 6 to 12, but the reality is this text is all about the sin of covetousness. When the end of verse 5 says that some are treating “**godliness as a means of gain**”, meaning they are seeking worldly gain by feigning godliness, Paul responds in verse 6 saying, “**godliness with contentment is great gain.**” This statement gives us the key to the definition of covetousness. Verse 6 says the opposite of verse 5. Verse 6 says there

is contentment in Christ and godliness and this is of great gain. Godliness brings spiritual contentment and peace.

Are you content? Are you content with your spouse? After an argument have you ever wished you were not married! Are you content with your children? Or at times have you wished they belonged to someone else. Are you content with your house? Your car? Do you covet when you see someone with a newer and nicer truck? Do you covet when you visit someone in their home and it is nicer than yours? These attitudes are a challenge every day. The world tells us we should never be satisfied. I remember being trained that when I hired a new person I needed to encourage them to go out and buy an expensive car. This way they would work harder to make more money because of their debt. If they made more money, I made more money. I am reminded of John D. Rockefeller who founded Standard Oil. Rockefeller was at one point the world's richest man and first ever-American billionaire. Considering he was a billionaire in the early 1900's he is still considered as the richest person in modern history. When a reporter asked him, "How much money is enough?" He responded, "Just a little bit more." The world says, "More, we must have more!"

This sermon may or may not be of value to you, you will have to decide after you have heard it. But I am telling you the preparation and the preaching of it is of great value to me because I need to hear it. I struggle with my materialism. We live in a world that teaches we always need more. But this is not the most important struggle in my life and I dare say yours; this is not the most important question. The key question is "Am I content with God?" This is the question each of us must ask and the answer is of great importance.

The opposite of covetousness is contentment in God. When contentment in God diminishes, covetousness for gain increases. With this crazy election, do you see

contentment in Christ in most politicians in our country, or in the world, for that matter? No, why not? The answer is because their focus is on their gain and not God's glory. That is why Paul says in his letter to the Colossians that covetousness is idolatry. Reading from Colossians chapter 3, **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”** (Colossians 3:5) Covetousness is idolatry because the contentment that the heart should be getting from God is not there and it starts to get it from something else. Covetousness desires something so much that you lose your contentment in God. Verse 6 says, **“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”** So, what we come to understand is that covetousness desires something so much that you lose your contentment in God and begin to seek it elsewhere and this is sin, it is idolatry.

As I pondered contentment in God and covetousness of the world, I thought of the Ten Commandments. Have you ever considered that the Ten Commandments begin and end essentially with the same commandment? The first commandment says, **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** (Exodus 20:3) In order for us to keep our focus on God and have no others, we must be content and trust God. The last says, **“You shall not covet ...”** (Exodus 20:17) In order not to covet we must be content with what we have and who we are in God. We must be content with God and trust Him. Are not these comparable commands? When we are at peace and content with God we have great gain in Him and no other. On the other hand when we covet we are placing other gods before the one true God. Coveting desires anything other than God in a way that betrays contentment and satisfaction in Him. The sin of covetousness is a heart divided between two gods, the one true God and the deceiver god of this world, Satan. Therefore, Paul calls covetousness idolatry.

Paul wrote 1st Timothy 6, verses 6 to 12, to persuade people not to be covetous. We

need to be clear and we need to see how Paul understands this battle against covetousness is worked out in life. He gives his reasons for not being covetous in verses 6 to 10. But for now I want to skip ahead to verse 11 where he tells Timothy to shun or to flee all — to flee the love of money and the desire to be rich, which means to flee covetousness.

Battle of Faith

Paul says in the second half of verse 11, that one should not give into covetousness, But “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” Then out of that list he picks “faith” for special attention and says in verse 12, “Fight the good fight of the faith.” Paul is saying to properly and successfully do battle - it must be done by faith; it is a fight of faith. We are to flee covetousness and “Fight the good fight of the faith.”

In other words the fight against covetousness is nothing other than the fight of faith. This is one of the clearest proofs in Scripture that the way to obey the Ten Commandments including the 10th, not to covet, is by faith. Paul also demonstrates that covetousness is sin and it places one in a state of unbelief.

When you think about it, that is just what the definition of covetousness implies. We said that covetousness desires something so much that you lose your contentment in God. Or when one loses contentment in God, they begin to seek contentment elsewhere. For one to have contentment in God means living in faith. Jesus said in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” In other words what it means to believe in Jesus, is to experience Him as the satisfaction of my soul's thirst and my heart's hunger, my life is based on faith in Christ. Faith is the experience of contentment in Jesus. The fight of faith is the fight to keep your heart content in Christ — to really believe and keep on believing that He will meet every need and

satisfy every longing.

Well covetousness, then, is exactly the opposite of faith. It is the loss of contentment in Christ so that we start to crave other things to satisfy the carnal longings of our heart. There is no mistaking that the battle against covetousness is a battle against unbelief and a battle **for** faith. Whenever we sense the slightest rise of covetousness in our hearts, we must turn on it and fight it with all of our might with the weapons God gives by faith.

The main weapon of faith is “[the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God](#)” (Ephesians 6:17) So when covetousness begins to raise its greedy head, what we must do is begin to preach the Word of God to ourselves. We need to hear what God says with both our mind and heart. We need to hear His warnings about what becomes of those who live in covetousness and how serious it is to covet. We need to hear His promises that can give great contentment to the soul and overcome all covetous cravings. We need to hear and believe.

If we do not believe and live by faith, well then, all is lost. Ecclesiastes chapter 5 tells us, “[He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.](#)” (Ecclesiastes 5:10) This is God's word on money; it does not satisfy those who love it. If we believe Him, we will turn away from the love of money. The love of money is a spiritual dead end and at the end of that broad road is eternal death.

Jesus put it like this in Luke chapter 12, “[Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.](#)” (Luke 12:15) The popular teaching of “Prosperity Christianity” is in truth from the pit of hell for it robs those who give their money of their contentment in Christ and puts their hope in a person. Only those receiving the hard earned money of others find contentment and it is only for a season. If the Word of the

Lord needed confirming, one can easily observe there are enough miserable rich people in the world to prove that a satisfying life does not come from owning things.

Jesus told the parable of the soils in the Gospel According to Mark chapter 4. In this parable Jesus said that some of the seed fell among the thorns. The thorns quickly grew to choke out the new plants from the sprouting seeds. Then Jesus interpreted the parable and said that the seed that fell among the thorns is the Word of God. The seed sown among thorns is interpreted like this, “**the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**” (Mark 4:19) A real battle rages when the Word of God is preached. The desire for other things can be so strong that the beginnings of spiritual life can be choked out leaving only dissatisfaction with one’s life and always coveting more. This is such a frightful warning that we should all be on our guard every time we hear the Word of God to receive it with faith and not choke it with covetousness.

Contentment vs. Covetousness

1st Timothy 6:10 says, “**For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.**” Coveting opens the door to all kinds of evil. James said, “**What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.**” (James 4:1–2) Covetousness is a breeding ground for thousands of sins. This is why Paul is so strongly warning against the sin of covetousness as does many other passages in the Word of God. We are warned to flee from covetousness and fight it with all our might. To fight effectively we must “**Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,**

against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:11-12)

For those who find some sort of comfort or satisfaction in material wealth, fame or power I want to be clear it completely lets one down at death. No matter how much you have possessed it is empty at the end of life. Charles Spurgeon said, “You say, 'If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.' You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled.”

Paul also made this clear, “But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” (1 Timothy 6:6-7) So covetousness lets you down at the most critical time of your life, at death.

At the most critical point in one’s life, when you need contentment and hope and security more than any other time - your money and all your possessions take wings and fly away. They let you down. They are fair weather friends, just as those who were your friend because of your wealth. You enter eternity with nothing unless you have contentment in God, which is complete belief in Him.

Let me ask, “If you dropped dead right now, would you take with you a payload of pleasure in God or would you stand before Him with a spiritual crater where covetousness used to be?” Covetousness lets you down just when you need help most. Bad decisions at death are permanent and there is no time to recover.

Paul warns, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.” (1 Timothy 6:9) So you see, in the end covetousness destroys the soul to hell. The reason I am sure that this destruction is not some temporary financial fiasco but final destruction in hell is what Paul says in verse 12, that covetousness is to be resisted with the fight of faith; and then he adds, “Take hold of the eternal life to

which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” What is at stake in fleeing covetousness and fighting the fight of faith is eternal life.

Christians are called to “do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.” (1 Timothy 6:18–19) This is the life that is a testimony of one’s faith in Christ and God the Father.

So verse 9 is not saying that greed and covetousness can mess up your marriage or your career - although it certainly can! It is saying covetousness can mess up your eternity with ruin and destruction. Or as verse 10 says at the end, “It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Pierced literally means “impaled” themselves with many pains.

God has gone to extreme effort in the Bible to warn us mercifully that the idolatry of covetousness is a no win situation. It is a wide road that at the end is a dead-end street in the worst sense of the word, for it ends in eternal destruction. It takes you to a bottomless pit. So my word to you is the words of Paul found in 1 Timothy 6:11, “flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.” When you see it coming – maybe in a TV Ad or at this time of year – a Christmas Catalog or in what your fiends receive for Christmas – presents that are not really about Christ. I say run, run as if a roaring lion is trying to devour you. As Peter said, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith...” (1 Peter 5:8–9) Resist and flee.

Arsenal of Faith

But, the question now is, “Where do we flee? Where do we run?” You run to the

arsenal of faith. First, quickly take the mantle of prayer. Cry out to God, “**Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!**” ³⁷ **Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.**” (Psalm 119:36–37) Then quickly turn to do battle, take down two swords, a short one and a long one, specially made by the Holy Spirit to slay covetousness. Stand your ground. When covetousness shows his deadly face you strike him with the shorter sword found in 1 Timothy 6:6, “**godliness with contentment is great gain!**” Great gain! Great Gain is found in contentment in Christ! Command covetousness to stay away and leave you alone. Denounce covetousness as the roaring lion of Satan. Look it in the face and say, “I have great gain in Christ – He is my shield of faith!”

Then, before covetousness has time to counter attack, you take the longer sword, the very Word of God and say, I will “**Keep ~~you~~ my life free from love of money, and be content with what ~~you~~ I have, for ~~he~~ God has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’**” ⁶ **So ~~we~~ I can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’**” (Hebrews 13:5–6) Then you drive “**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**” home into the heart of greed and covetousness. Do exactly what Paul says to do in Colossians 3:5, “**Put to death ... covetousness, which is idolatry.**” O, brothers and sisters, do you see that all covetousness is unbelief? Learn with me, O learn with me, O may we learn together - how to use “**the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**”, to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life!

Lord we cry out to you - strengthen our faith through prayer, the study of Your Word and by submitting our lives to the Holy Spirit, You have given life within us! This is our cry, this is our plea and this is our prayer. Lord help us live with faith, faith in Christ. Amen!