

LSB Ephesians 5:3 - 6 pt 2

3 But sexual immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 nor filthiness and foolish talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no one sexually immoral or impure or greedy, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Last week we took a rather extensive look at verse 3. And we pointed out the contrast between what Christians are supposed to look like in vs 1 and 2 in direct contrast with what the world looks like in vs. 3.

And we drew comparisons. Imitators of God's holiness in vs 1 as opposed to the direct opposite of holiness which is sexual immorality. We walk in love that gives to others as Christ gave His all to us, in vs. 2 as opposed to the opposite of agape love which is the world's impurity in vs 3, which always has the motive of taking for itself and rarely gives anything back. And then finally in vs 2 we have the comparison of Christ's sacrifice as opposed to the world's greed or covetousness.

Last week we spent time talking about the sexual component of Paul's trifecta in vs. 3. But to continue and understand the dire warning of vs 4 - 6, I was fascinated to do some digging in God's word.

And the area that got my attention is the connection of covetousness to idolatry. There's a direct connection between coveting what you do not have, and idolatry. This is a fascinating and convicting study. I hope you'll come along with me and listen and give your hearts to learning what both pleases our God and what He hates.

I'll return to verse 4, but to launch us into our study I'm going to jump to verse 5, because that is where the Spirit of God directed me as I studied and considered what to say about these things this morning.

5 For this you know with certainty, that no one sexually immoral or impure or greedy, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

There's a direct connection in that verse of covetousness, or greediness, with idolatry. *or greedy, who is an idolater* (LSB) *or a covetous person, who is an idolater* (NASB 1977)

There's a direct link with covetousness and idolatry. It shows up just exactly this way in Paul's parallel letter to the Colossians 3:5

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. NKJV

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. LSB

Again, the translators can't make up their minds between using the more descriptive but increasingly obsolete word *covetousness*, or the more generic word, *greed* which seems too broad to me.

None of the translators, I hope, has changed the 10th commandment to *you shall not be greedy*. The word *covetousness* forces us to look inside of us at our motives. Everyone is greedy. It's too broad. I want more good things. I'm greedy to have my next breath. I'm already thinking about the spaghetti that the good cook I married is making tonight. My belly is a tattle tale of my greed. I enjoy pasta and bread and sauce sprinkled with parmesan. greed.

But covetousness looks inside my heart of hearts. Covetousness is connected to the eyes and the evil inside my heart. Covetousness is a discontentment with what I have connected to some bitterness that someone else got it. And then the next step is I take what I feel should have been mine to begin with.

Let me read you a story about covetousness. We all love stories, right? If you'd like to read along it is in the old testament book of Joshua chapter 7. 1451 BC. Israel with God's help is taking the promised land.

Joshua is taking Canaan, one village at a time. God is doing it. God is going before Israel and purging out the wicked Canaanites, winning every engagement for Israel. Josh mentioned that miracle in his sermon 2 weeks ago. God sends the hornets ahead of the Israelites to move the Canaanites out of their places. God is winning every battle . . . for Israel . . . Until chapter 7.

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." So the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 Then they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not have all the people go up; only about two or three thousand men need go up to strike down Ai; do not have all the people toil up there, for they are few."

Joshua sends a group of men for discovery. Go see how much of a challenge this is going to be. What will we need for the job. And the spies come back and God's been winning all the battles and they're feeling completely confident in what God has promised and is doing, and they come back and tell Joshua, it's not a big deal up there. Don't send the whole army. 2 or 3K will be plenty

4 So about three thousand men from the people went up there, but they fled from the men of Ai. 5 And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Huge defeat. The hornets chased out Israel! 36 dead soldiers, but worse than that, the confidence that God would be before them and fight their battles with them, gone. Their hearts are melted into mush. Confidence is

replaced with fear and loathing.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of Yahweh until the evening, both he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. 7 Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord Yahweh, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to make us perish? If only we had been willing to live beyond the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? 9 And the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?"

All is lost. They found out we're wimps if you're not fighting for us. Now they'll surround us and annihilate us. And then who will be the nation that will represent your great name.

10 So Yahweh said to Joshua, "Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face?"

Get up! Get on your feet Joshua! Apparently God doesn't buy into flagellation and drama. He's not impressed. No drama needed because there's a perfectly logical reason for this failure. Spelled out by Moses in Deuteronomy ch. 7.

11 Israel has sinned, and they have also trespassed against My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things devoted to destruction and have both stolen and dealt falsely. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.

Deuteronomy 7:25 Utter destruction is the command. And specifically; Listen to God's distinct command through Moses. DE. 7:22 *And Yahweh your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to put an end to them quickly, lest the wild beasts become too numerous for you. 23 But Yahweh your God will give them over before you and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 24 And*

*He will give their kings into your hand so that you will make their name perish from under heaven; no man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them. 25 The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not **covet** the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to Yahweh your God. 26 And you shall not bring an abomination into your house and become devoted to destruction like it; you shall utterly detest it, and you shall utterly abhor it, for it is **devoted to destruction**.*

God was specific in His command. Destroy all of it. Do not covet their gold or their silver attached to their idols. Total destruction. Their wealth is an abomination to God and it is devoted to destruction. Very specific. Back to God's conversation with Joshua after the rout by the men of Ai.

*12 Therefore the sons of Israel cannot rise before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, (in other words run!) for **they** have become devoted to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things devoted to destruction from your midst.*

Israel had become the people devoted to destruction if they remain in defiance of God's specific command. If you keep booty that God has devoted to destruction, you yourself become devoted to destruction along with the abominable things you've kept.

One way or another, the things that God has assigned to destruction are going to be destroyed. So if Israel captures and holds what God has devoted to utter destruction, it's going to be destroyed, and Israel will be destroyed with it.

Here's what we'll do, Joshua . . .

13 Rise up! Set the people apart as holy and say, 'Set yourselves apart as holy for tomorrow, for thus Yahweh, the God of Israel, has said, "There are things devoted to destruction in your midst, O Israel. You cannot rise before your enemies until you have removed the things devoted to destruction from your midst." 14 In the morning then you shall come near

by your tribes. And it will be that the tribe which Yahweh takes by lot shall come near by families, and the family which Yahweh takes shall come near by households, and the household which Yahweh takes shall come near man by man. 15 And it will be that the one who is taken with the things devoted to destruction shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has trespassed against the covenant of Yahweh, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel. ’’

Gather all 12 tribes, and God is going to narrow all the families down by lot. 12 tribes, 1 tribe, 1 family in that tribe, and ultimately one man in that family, and sadly, all who belong to him.

Can you imagine the solemnity of such an occasion. We've all sinned. Tell me you wouldn't be standing there with your knees knocking together thinking, is it me?

Do you think perhaps there was some discomfort in doing it that way. All the families in all the tribes standing before Yahweh and He takes His time, OK, this tribe. OK this family. OK this son in this family. Yikes. I'd be a wreck because I know I'm a sinner . . . at best!

16 So Joshua arose early in the morning and brought Israel near by tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 And he brought the family of Judah near, and he took the family of the Zerahites; and he brought the family of the Zerahites near man by man, and Zabdi was taken. 18 And he brought his household near man by man; and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Achan. Not a good day for Achan. When God Himself picks you out of the line up for destruction.

19 Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I implore you, give glory to Yahweh, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and declare to me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.” 20 So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against Yahweh, the God of Israel,

*and this is what I did: 21 I **saw** among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Shinar is Babylon and this mantle would have been elegant like a kings' attire. A beautiful persian coat. Uncommon to these desert wanderers. Achan saw himself above all Israel with his babylonian royal attire and his silver and his gold) and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight; then I **coveted** them and took them;*

Notice the progression here because it's important in understanding this connection of coveting with idolatry. First I saw. Then I coveted. Then I brought the forbidden things home. Then I hid them.

Our eyes see. Our hearts want. Why? The bottom line, and now we're getting to the nitty gritty here. Our eyes see and our hearts say; this will satisfy my soul. This will bring delight. My soul longs for filling. But that emptiness is designed to be filled up with God who created you for His glory.

Anything else that your eyes see and your heart covets is a God replacement. Covetousness is abominable to God because it is the desire of the eyes and the heart to fill up that God shaped void with other gods. Idols. And there's an element of pride. With the silver and the gold and the royal attire, compared to these other dirty tent dwellers, I'll be raised up like a god.

Remember the Shema? Deut. 6:4 *"Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one! 5 You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

Loving anything else that your eyes saw and your heart coveted that your mind told you would satisfy your soul, is idolatry. A direct connection between coveting and idolatry. That's why it's so dangerous and rebellious to covet. OK, back to Achan. What happened to Achan who replaced Yahweh with some gold and silver and a rare and valuable royal garment.

" I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred

shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight; then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.” 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it. 23 And they took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before Yahweh. 24 Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us?

Notice that Achan's sin didn't only harm Achan. We hear that a lot these days. Leave them alone. Their sin isn't harming you.

Israel was down 36 soldiers thanks to Achan. And their corporate confidence had been shaken to the core. Achan had brought trouble on the entire nation of Israel with his rebellion. Because Achan had taken and hid items that God had devoted to destruction, within the boundaries of Israel, all Israel was devoted to destruction until those items were separated out and destroyed.

25 And Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? Yahweh will trouble you this day.” And all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. 26 Then they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and Yahweh turned from His burning anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day.

Covetousness is idolatry. God doesn't single out Christians for stoning in 2024, along with their wives and daughters. It's probably what should happen. Dig a big hole and shove my antique cars and my trailer and my modern cars and my house all into the hole, along with me and Pam, sorry Pam, and set it on fire and cover it up afterwards.

Acts chapter 5 is interesting. Ananias and Saphira. Sold their house. Brought the proceeds to the apostles. Told the apostles it was all the money from the sale. But they held back a portion. Oops. Might have tricked Peter, but didn't fool the Holy Spirit. God killed him. The young men carried his dead body outside. Then his wife came a few hours later and Peter quizzed her on the sale. Same rouse. Down she goes and the same young men carry her dead body out.

Covetousness is idolatry. My eyes want that thing that's going to satisfy my soul. I'll replace God with stuff. Worship my stuff. I'll fill up the empty hole in my gut with forbidden things that my eyes see and my soul covets. Instead of God.

We have these collections that come up for auction these days. It's getting to be more and more a thing. Because the collector gene seems to have hit the baby boomer generation hard. We collect ephemera. I love antique cameras and have more than I can ever use.

But lately I walk through these warehouses of stuff piled to the ceilings and I don't think to myself, this guy is a contender in the "he who dies with the most toys wins" contest. I think, big deal, you filled up warehouses, soon you'll be dead, so what.

Life is 5 minutes long. All the junk doesn't mean you win. Going where they pave the streets with it does. Invest in lasting treasure.

Remember the little song we sang when we were children. *Be careful little eyes what you see.* There's something to that.

In Genesis 3, Eve **saw** the forbidden fruit with her eyes and her soul wanted all the lies Satan told her would be hers if she took it and ate it. What a disaster.

Eve is the original participant in the lie of class warfare. You didn't get all you deserved. You should have gotten more. Life has been unfair to you.

You are oppressed by God who lied to you. You need to go and take what is rightfully yours. Covetousness 101, right at the root of the fall. Her ears heard and her eyes saw and she took for herself what was forbidden. The whole human race suffered that fall into sin.

David walked out onto the portico of his palace and **saw** Bathsheba. And he took her and murdered her husband and lost his firstborn baby with her.

Listen to Job who understood what most of us do not. Job 31:1 *“I have cut a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? We gaze at what we want. The idol that's going to fill up our souls in place of God.*

Proverb 23:31 Do not gaze at the wine. *Do not look on the wine when it glistens red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly; 32 At the end—like a serpent it bites, And like a viper it stings.*

Be careful little eyes what you see. In Matthew 5 Jesus tells His listeners 28 *but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 But if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

The eye gate is the beginning of covetousness which is idolatry. 1 John 2:15

15 *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

In 1964, when I was but a wee lad, the Rolling Stones produced a song with a lyric that became the mantra of generations. **I can't get no, satisfaction.**

In Luke 12, Jesus talks directly to the issue. It is the main issue, because God designed us and formed us to find our satisfaction in one way only. We are to be satisfied in fulness of God. Alone. Anything else is idolatry.

Luke 12:13 *And someone from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But He said to him, “Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 Then He said to them, “Watch out and be on your guard against every form of covetousness, for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” 16 And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you prepared?’ 21 So is the one who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

The whole problem of covetousness is driven by satisfying our empty souls. Filling the void with something, not God.

We said last week, Paul spoke of a trifecta of sins. Sexual immorality, uncleanness and covetousness. Actually, sex gets all the press, but it's actually the smaller percentage.

Yes, people are trying to fill their empty souls with hedonism, but percentage wise, covetousness wins the day. Greed makes the world go around in the daylight, and illicit sex makes it go around in the darkness.

People are desperate to fill up the empty void in their souls. Some with sex. Some simply medicate themselves and dull the emptiness with alcohol or drugs. But multitudes are worshipping their retirement accounts. Like the guy in Jesus parable. Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry

Where does actual contentment come from then? If all these things are the

wide road to hell, where does actual contentment come from.

Jesus states the problem and the options and the solution in Matt. 16:24 *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Jesus is the source. The water of life. The light of the world. The forgiver of sins. The living water that causes my soul to never thirst. There is a quote that I love, that I use as my signature on web sites that allow signatures. Here it is; *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.* Jim Elliot 1949 It's like a paraphrase of what Jesus said; *25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

Paul tells Timothy what he already knows but we never want to stop hearing the same truth over and over; *6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.*

Contentment. Soul satisfaction. I am quickened from death to life. I have unspeakable wealth waiting for me in God's kingdom. For now, I have the downpayment of the Holy Spirit living inside me who fills me with hope for the glories to come that are already waiting for me to inherit them.

The author of Hebrews states the case as he closes the sermon to the hebrew christians; Heb. 13:5

5 Make sure that your way of life is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

I have Jesus. What else is better? Nothing. And I not only have Him, I have His promise. *"I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,"*

We have something . . . someone . . . far more valuable than all the worlds money or wealth or stuff or whatever else your eye might gaze on.

Be like Job and make a covenant with your eyes. The words of an obscure preacher you've never heard of come to mind. I was lucky enough to hear him say them with my own ears even though he was a generation older than my parents. L. E. Maxwell was the principle of Prairie Bible Institute up in Alberta Canada.

He disliked the tediously boring Canadian prairies of wheat. And he disliked the cold. And yet God had sent him to that place to raise up a generation of missionaries at that school. And about all the other stuff in other places that would have appealed to his senses, he says . . . I can't want it. I can't want it.

He made a covenant with his eyes and his soul and told them both, you can't want that stuff. He forbid himself to want warm sea breezes in lovely places. God sent him to the wheat fields in Canada. But what treasure he must be enjoying now with His beloved saviour.

5 Make sure that your way of life is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

I'm afraid you're going to have to endure a part 3 of the words in this little section. For me at least, it's exciting to see how the Holy Spirit directs my study into depths in these simple words. Depths we need. Or perhaps I'm just preaching to myself. For me at least the battle of the eyes never seems to ease up.

Let me finish these thoughts with some application. Where or what is the source of your joy? Is your soul satisfied? Let me give you a scenario.

If you go and ask google to give you the combined number of the dollars of wealth held by Americans of all ages in retirement accounts, it will actually

throw a number at you. Then go ask google what the national debt number is.

Same number. I hate to break it to you but we're not only bankrupt, but all of the money Pam and I are hoping will keep coming each month from our combined retirement schemes . . . isn't really there. Our government spent it. Foolishly, I might add. It's gone.

But Uncle Sam will say, I only borrowed it, it will be payed back. New wealth is being generated. We'll pay the money we spent back. Nonsense. It's a house of cards built on false confidence, and we all know it. It can collapse in a day. I think we all sort of know that too. Like thinking about a fiery wreck. We avoid those thoughts.

My question is; Where is your wealth? Where is the source of your joy? I hope it isn't in government shell games. Don't worry, the money is under one of these three shells we're moving around and hoping you've lost track of.

Do an inventory on your soul. If everything here vanishes in a day, will you still have a source of unquenchable joy? Will your soul be full or empty if all the retirement accounts are empty? It's rather amazing that someone 1960 years ago could write a sentence that challenges the scenario I just laid out in real time, in 2024.

5 Make sure that your way of life is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

I'll close with words spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount; Matt. 7

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and does them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and fell against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the

rock. 26 And everyone hearing these words of Mine and not doing them, may be compared to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Do a soul inventory and ask yourself; Is my soul satisfied with something, someone who will never leave me empty, no matter what happens around me in this world that is perishing. Jesus is the treasure that will never leave or forsake us. Fill up your souls with Him.