

Introduction: When I was ten, eleven and twelve years old, our extended family of fifteen to twenty people camped for a week at Emerald Lake Campground in East Dorset, Vermont just off US Route 7. The other families all slept in tents, but we always slept in a lean-to. I thought we were camping in luxury. The tents were only made of canvas and were small. We had a structure made of sturdy, thick wood. The floor was about twenty feet across the front and over ten feet front to back. The back, towards the dirt access road, was barely four feet high, but we put two cots along the back wall and it was plenty high enough for sleeping. Its highest point, near the front, was almost ten feet high, and then it sloped down slightly, with an overhang extending over the front of the floor by some three feet. The floor was about two feet above the ground. There was a big fireplace facing the open front of the lean-to to keep it warm at night. *** I will always remember our last year camping there. A family brought one of the first RVs to a tent site near our lean-to. I was reading a book in my sleeping bag when Dad came back and told Mom he was 'green with envy'. After dinner and singing, he had been invited inside and given a tour. It had a small kitchen and a private built-in bathroom. (Dad always had to get up at least twice every night, and the bathroom could be a bit of a hike with a flashlight.) Adults thought I was a pretty good kid, but my response to what he said to Mom was, 'Dad, you just broke the tenth commandment. You are coveting what they have'. As I said this in the hearing of Mom and my sister I was guilty of the great sin of self-righteousness. Children tend to see everything in black and white, and to oversimplify. *** With this as our introduction, let's look at what God actually says about coveting, understand what it taught the apostle Paul, and see what He said about sacrificial LOVE as the answer, so as to apply all this to our lives.)

I. God's people will not covet anything which is their neighbor's; and, if they do, this is a sin that exposes them as spiritually dead.
(*Exodus 20:17; Romans 7:7-13*)

A. God's people will not covet the shelter, wife, workers, manner of food production and distribution, or anything which is to their neighbor. (*Exodus 20:17*)

1. Not thou will covet the house of thy neighbor ... (*Verse 17a*)

Definition: The best Hebrew dictionary says coveting is an excessive, ungoverned, selfish desire or lust for that which belongs to another person. It makes neighbor love (Matthew 22:39) impossible and is a breaking of the Second Great Commandment.

Family shelter: Here it means not to be discontented with the means of my family's shelter because my neighbor has better shelter than me.

2. ... not thou will covet the wife of thy neighbor ... (*Verse 17b*)

Marriage covenant: The 'one-flesh' marriage covenant between one man and one woman is sacred. No desire of a man outside the covenant should threaten it.

3. ... and his manservant and his maidservant ... (*Verse 17c*)

Also workers: It is wrong to desire the people my neighbor has working for him to be working for me. God always gives His people whatever they need, but not always what they want.

4. ... and his ox and his donkey ... (*Verse 17d*)

Also animals: Both animals did work for families, both in planting and harvesting food, and to bring goods to market. Today this could be: tools, instruments, machines, technology, information ...

5. ... and all which (is) to neighbor of thee. (*Verse 17e*)

Any and all else: After four specific kinds of coveting, God closes with a 'catch-all': no one may covet anything which belongs to his neighbor.

Do not violate neighbor: All God's people must be content with what God has given them, 'but it is great gain, godliness with contentment' (1 Timothy 6:6).

B. Because God's Torah specifically calls covetousness a sin, the apostle Paul realized he was spiritually dead and needed life. (*Romans 7:7-13*)

1. What then will we say: the law (instruction is) sin? May it never be! But the sin, not I knew, but by the law. (*Verse 7a*)

Torah: God gave His people His Torah of instruction through Moses so they will know they sin. So Torah-law is not sin, but reveals sin.

2. For covetousness I would not have known if not the Torah-law was saying: not thou will covet. (*Verses 7b-c*)

Lust: The excessive desire of coveting is as extreme as the desire to break the marriage covenant of a neighbor – the second of four specifics in the tenth commandment.

Application: Every time we read God's Word, let us be open to being convicted by the Holy Spirit of any sins we are committing.

3. But, having taken opportunity, sin by means of the commandment, produced in me all covetousness; for, without Torah-law sin (is) dead. (*Verse 8*)

Sin's work: Once Paul realized coveting was a sin, the sin nature he was born with was pulling him into deeper covetousness.

Torah: God's instruction in the books of Moses brings to light the contrast and conflict between God's Word and fallen human nature.

4. But, if I was being alive without the law at one time, the commandment having come, sin came back to life but I indeed died. (*Verse 9*)

Commandment: The contrast of the commandment about coveting, and Paul's sin nature tending to covet, caused him to covet more, and highlighted his state of being spiritually dead.

Coveting: the key sin to expose spiritual death

5. And it was found in me, the commandment which (is) unto life, this (is) unto death. (*Verse 10*)

Restate and expand: Paul restates the critical truth confronting him concerning the commandment about coveting: it was the hardest sin for him to overcome, and it is the hardest sin for most people. The end result was that he was spiritually dead due to coveting, as are many other people.

Coveting: the key sin to expose spiritual death

6. For sin, having taken opportunity, by means of the commandment, deceived me and by means of it put (me) to death. (*Verse 11*)

Deceived and murdered: The sin of coveting is deceptive. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). So, without God's grace and LOVE, the sin of coveting resulted in Paul being spiritually dead.

Coveting: the key sin to expose spiritual death

7. So, indeed, the Torah-law (is) holy, and the commandment (is) holy, just and good. (*Verse 12*)

Holy: God gave His words to Moses because they are holy, just and good. But, when people are controlled by their sin nature, God's Word cannot save them.

8. Did what is good to me become death? May it never be! But sin, that it might be seen sin, through the (intended for) good to me, bringing about death, that it might become exceeding sinful, the sin through the commandment. (*Verse 13*)

May it never be: Paul repeats the strong negation with which He opened this paragraph. God would never bring bad out of what He intends for good.

Commandment exposes: The specific commandment against coveting of all kinds exposes how offensive coveting is to God, and causes people to have to find a way out from the death it causes.

Coveting: the key sin to expose spiritual death

Gospel: God sent His Son into the world, born of a virgin, in order that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17). Starting at age thirty, by words and deeds He showed the power and LOVE of God. Then, in His great love for humanity, He offered Himself to death on the Cross (Acts 2:22-36; Ephesians 2). He rose from the dead on the third day, and all who can receive this by faith are not only forgiven of all sin (including covetousness), but given new life starting now and forever – a life of service to both God and people.

In another letter Paul describes God's sacrificial LOVE, by which Jesus triumphed over the sinfulness of coveting, for all who receive Him and are IN Him by grace through His faithfulness.

II. The fifteen qualities of Christ-like sacrificial love include: forbearance, trust, hope and perseverance. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

A. Sacrificial love is forbearing and kind. (*Verse 4a*)

1. The love is forbearing ... (*Verse 4a*)

Longsuffering: God's sacrificial love IN His Savior-King Son is patient, enduring and long-suffering.

2. ... it is being kind ... (*Verse 4b*)

Kind: Sacrificial love is always being and acting kindly, and in gentleness.

B. Sacrificial love is not: jealous, conceited, being made proud, improper, self-seeking, being made irritable, considering evil, rejoicing in injustice. (*Verses 4b-6a*)

1. ... the love, not it is being jealous . (*Verse 4c*)

Not jealous: Sacrificial love does not boil over with envy of anyone to covet what is that person's.

2. ... the love, not it is boasting about itself ... (*Verse 4d*)

Not conceited: Sacrificial love does not brag, it is not conceited with boasting over others.

3. ... not it is being made arrogant ... (*Verse 4e*)

Not made arrogant: Sacrificial love does not let itself get puffed up about itself, but acts in humility.

4. ... not it is being disgraceful-improper ... (*Verse 5a*)

Not improper: Sacrificial love does not act against God's grace by improper behavior.

5. ... not it is seeking herself ... (*Verse 5b*)

Not self-seeking: A person filled with God's sacrificial love as a fruit of the Holy Spirit would never seek to love in such a way as to seek credit for loving.

6. ... not it is being made irritable ... (*Verse 5c*)

Not made irritable: Sacrificial love will not allow any outside force to provoke it to lash out in anger.

7. ... not it is considering the evil ... (*Verse 5d*)

Not considering evil: Sacrificial love will never consider doing harm to or acting wickedly to others.

8. ... not it is rejoicing in injustice ... (*Verse 6a*)

Not rejoicing in injustice: God works justice to all oppressed because He loves the poor and needy. Sacrificial love never finds any joy in anything unjust.

C. Sacrificial love is rejoicing in truth, all things enduring, all things believing, all things hoping, all things holding firm. (*Verses 6b-7*)

1. ... but it is rejoicing with the truth ... (*Verse 6b*)

Rejoicing in truth: Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). Sacrificial love is able to sacrifice as Jesus did and find joy in suffering for His truth (Hebrews 12:2-4).

2. ... all things it is enduring ... (*Verse 7a*)

Enduring: Sacrificial love can bear any hardships for others and itself.

3. ... all things it is believing ... (*Verse 7b*)

Believing: Sacrificial love believes IN God, His Word, His Ways, and His strong life-giving, life changing LOVE.

4. ... all things it is hoping ... (*Verse 7c*)

Hoping: Hope, the expectation that God always works all things for good (Romans 8:28-30), is one of the three great virtues concluding this chapter (1 Corinthians 13:13).

5. ... all things it is holding firm. (*Verse 7d*)

Persevering: People giving sacrificial love will persevere until they see Jesus, either when they die, or when He returns to earth.

Bottom Line: God's sacrificial LOVE, as expressed in the life and work of His Son, rescues people from all sin – even coveting.

This is because: *Love trusts, hopes and perseveres.*

Conclusion: God tells His people, individually and collectively, they will not covet anything which is their neighbor's.

The apostle Paul said this particular command woke him up to the truth that he was spiritually dead and needed to have life in himself. Elsewhere, he described fifteen qualities of God's LOVE that rescues people from every sin – even coveting.

This is especially important in our consumer culture.

Coveting: the key sin to expose spiritual death