

Managing Materialism and the Desire for More

THE NINTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:17

Thirty years ago, a board game came out called Mall Madness. It's a board game like Monopoly. The description goes like this: Will you be the first to lose your money? You are let lose in a shopping mall with \$200. Go and spend it all. Empty your pockets first and you will win the game. When you've spent every cent your marker moves triumphantly into the winner's space labeled 'broke' and you win."

Since that game was introduced, the Home Shopping Network was introduced on TV and web sites like Amazon have come along. Now, you can shop from the convenience of your home anytime, day or night. Many people get addicted and do spend it all.

A survey of female teenagers discovered that 93% of teenager girls said that their number one favorite pastime was shopping. That beat out dating as the number one activity.

Last week I was in a home improvement store. All the Christmas outdoor lighting displays are there, waiting for you to buy. It is still August and yet it won't be long until we are deluged with Christmas catalogues.

All of these stir up the desire to acquire inside of us.

Today we're wrapping up our summer series on the Ten Commandments. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments says "You shall not covet ... anything that belongs to your neighbor."

What is coveting? Covet: the uncontrolled desire to acquire.

The desire to acquire in itself is not bad. God put it in you.

God made little squirrels and He gave them the desire to acquire nuts. And He made birds and He gave them the desire to acquire straw to build nests. And He filled the world with all kinds of exciting, wonderful, good, desirable things and He's given you the desire to acquire them. That in and of itself is not bad.

But anything uncontrolled is a problem. God says there are some things that are off limits. They are not yours to want. They will harm you. So, your desire to acquire must be controlled.

It is hard, in our culture, to want to be content with what you have. This morning, I want us to look at the effect of always wanting more. The Bible says there are **five effects when I don't control this desire to acquire**:

1. **Fatigue.** In our push to get more we overwork and take on second jobs. Everybody in the family works to get more and everybody's tired. ***"Do not wear yourself out to be rich, have the wisdom to show restraint."*** Proverbs 23:4 It's dumb to wear yourself out just trying to get more.

The second effect of an uncontrolled desire to acquire is 2. **Debt.** Ecclesiastes 5 says: ***"The more money you have, the more money you spend."*** Ecclesiastes 5:10 Coveting destroys budgets. We think the problem is I just don't make enough money. No, it's not that you don't make enough money. The problem is you want too much. A lot of things we think are needs are really greeds. Because we want more we get further and further in debt. It always costs more to have more. If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence you can bet the water bill's higher too.

The 3rd effect of not controlling our desire to acquire is 3. **Worry.** The Bible says, ***"A working man can get a good night's sleep. But the rich man has so much that he stays awake worrying."*** Ecclesiastes 5:12 When we focus on things we always inevitably worry. The more you have, the more you have to worry about. You worry about:
 · How am I going to protect it? · How am I going to save it? · How am I going to invest it? · How am I going to insure it? · How am I going to avoid taxes on it? · How am I going to keep from losing it?
 The more you have, the more you've got to worry about.

You add these first three together -- fatigue, debt, worry and you get the fourth effect, which is 4. **Conflict.** The Bible tells us, ***"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from the desires that battle within you?"*** James 4:1 Conflict comes when we're always wanting more. The number one cause of divorce is financial tension -- arguments over money, over possessions. When I want

one thing, and you want something different, there's going to be conflict over money.

And the 5th effect of greed is 5. **Dissatisfaction.** Ecclesiastes 5:10 ***"You will never be satisfied if you long to be rich. You will never get all you want."*** Things can bring happiness for a while. But the thrill doesn't last. The excitement wears off. When you get something and open the package you think, "Wow, this is great!" But after a while it's not so great anymore. You're bored with that piece of art or that furniture or that car. Pretty soon you have to redecorate, or remodel, or repair, or replace, or at least rearrange it. Things don't give permanent happiness.

We live in a society where enough is never enough. Jesus said, ***"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*** Luke 12:15

John D. Rockefeller made a fortune by starting the Standard Oil Company. His fortune would be equivalent in today's money to \$400 Billion, making him 3 times richer than today's wealthiest person. John D. Rockefeller was once asked, "How much [money] is enough?" Do you know how he answered? He said, "Just a little bit more." The uncontrolled desire to acquire is never satisfied. There is *never* enough.

God guided Paul to write and tell us what is the antidote for coveting. Paul says, ***"I've learned the secret of being content whether living in plenty or in want."*** Notice Paul says he "learned." Contentment is something you have to learn. It does not come natural. I am not by nature a contented person and neither are you. It is not automatic. You have to learn to be content. It is an education process.

How do you learn contentment? A place to start is to 1. **Resist comparing myself to others.** Comparing always leads to coveting. God guided St. Paul to write for us, ***"We do not dare classify or compare ourselves. It is not wise."*** II Corinthians 10:12 That means it's dumb! If you're comparing yourself -- houses, cars, jobs, looks,

clothes -- it's stupid. It's not wise. God says you just create dissatisfaction.

How do you react when you see somebody with a nicer car? Do you say, "I wish I had that" or can you just be glad that they've got it? How do you react when you see somebody with a nicer house? or more beautiful furniture? One of the greatest lessons you can learn is to admire without having to acquire. I don't have to *own* everything to *enjoy* it. If the only things you enjoy are the things you own, you're going to be miserable a lot of time. You can't own everything. Learn to admire without having to acquire.

Why do we compare? We compare because in our society the way we keep score is by possessions. We're insecure. We're always looking around and asking, "How am I doing?" as if net worth and self worth were the same thing. They're not! Your net worth has absolutely no relationship to your self-worth. You can be a millionaire and a jerk, or be poor and be wonderful. Don't compare net worth to self-worth.

Second, you can learn contentment when you **2. REJOICE IN WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN ME.** Appreciate what you've got and be grateful to God. Open your eyes. God's Word tells us, ***"If God gives a man wealth and property he should be grateful and enjoy what he has. It is a gift from God."*** *Ecclesiastes 5:19* God says I want you to enjoy and be grateful for what you've got. It's a gift.

You wouldn't have anything if it weren't for God. It's all a gift from God.

We get into a trap of "When and Then Thinking." When and Then Thinking says, "*When* I get _____, *then* I'll be happy." You fill in the blank. When I get married then I'll be happy. When I get out of this marriage then I'll be happy. When I have kids then I'll be happy.

You are as happy as you want to be. It's your choice. Forget the When and Then Thinking. Happiness is not getting whatever you want. Happiness is enjoying whatever you have. The fact is God wants you to enjoy what you've got. He commands you to enjoy what you've got.

A third way to learn contentment is to **3. Release what I have to help others.**

God doesn't want to just bless you for your own benefit. He wants you to share it, to help other people with it. Paul writes for us in the Bible, ***"Tell those who are rich, ... to use their money to do good to give happily to those in need By doing this they will be storing up real treasure for themselves in heaven -- it is the only safe investment for eternity."*** I Timothy 6:17-19

This is a very, very important verse. But who are the rich people he's talking about? ***"Tell those who are rich"***. Who does that involve. If you're an American you're rich. I don't care if you're on welfare, if you're an American you're rich. In the world, the people in this room are in the top 2% of income of the world. You're rich, no matter how little you make, because you're an American. This verse is talking to us.

So, this raises the question, Is it possible to be wealthy and not be materialistic? And the answer Paul tells us is Yes. Yes, it's possible to be wealthy and not materialistic.

Materialism is an attitude. You can be poor and greedy or rich and greedy. You can be poor and contented or wealthy and contented. It's an attitude not the amount that God's talking about here.

How can I be wealthy and not materialistic? Follow what this verse says. As long as you follow the four things you can be as wealthy as you want and you won't be materialistic.

1. Don't become proud of your wealth. Don't think you're better than somebody because you've got more money than they've got.

2. Don't put your trust in money. Don't look to it for your security. Security is not in your bank account. Your security is in God. Bank accounts can be lost overnight in a million different ways. Don't put you security in money, no matter how much or how little you have.

Then God's Word says, **3. Use your money to do good.** Don't waste it. If you've got a lot of money, don't squander it. Don't blow it on yourself. Use it to do good.

Fourth, **4. Give cheerfully.** The Bible says that the more we receive the more we are to give. Giving is the cure for the disease of materialism because it is the opposite. The root of materialism is the word "get" -- get, get, get, get... The opposite of getting is giving. So, every time I give to somebody I'm breaking the grip of materialism in my life.

This is one of the reasons that giving a sacrificial offering to God is so important. It's important for us, not for God. God doesn't need what I give because He owns it all anyway. He always has owned it and always will. I just get to use some of what God owns during my short lifetime.

And God wants to set us free from the burden of always trying to get more and more and more. And so, giving God an offering teaches me that things are not the most important in my heart, but God is the most important. Giving God an offering teaches me to trust Him and rely on Him to provide everything I need to live, and that strengthens my faith. It's a spiritual victory every time you're generous.

Acts chapter 20 in the Bible says, ***"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."*** Acts 20:35 It is more blessed to give because then you are more like Jesus is. When you give you grow spiritually as you trust more in God, who always gives generously because of His great love for you.

And the way for wealthy people like us Americans to not be materialistic is to **5. Refocus on what's going to last.**

I want you to look at this picture.



That picture kind of makes us laugh, doesn't it? It makes us laugh because we know you will *never* see a funeral hearse with all that stuff tied onto the roof. You will never take your stuff with you to the graveyard. All of us die. Because of sin, one day your body will die, and you will leave all the things you were obsessed to possess behind.

Your stuff may outlive you. It may all be sold for pennies on the dollar at an estate sale. Strangers will trapse through your house and carry the things you once desired to their cars and drive to their homes. The rest of your stuff will be thrown into a dumpster. Your possession, your ownership of stuff doesn't last. So why not focus your life now on what *does* last? Give your attention to permanent values. Reorganize your life around eternal priorities.

II Corinthians 4:18 says, "We fix our attention, not on the things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever."

Everything you see is temporary. Nothing you see is going to last. Everything you see in the world is eventually going to decay or rust or wear out or fall apart -- it will eventually not exist, because all possessions are temporary. The only things that really last for eternity are things you can't see -- your relationship to God, relationship to others, faith, hope from Jesus, love for God and love for others -- things you can't see.

In the Bible, Paul said it this way: ***"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength."*** Philippians 4:12-13

Just think: Jesus loves you. He died on the cross to forgive you. God offers you heaven for FREE -- not because you deserve it or have earned it, but because Jesus paid for it with His own life. And nothing can change those facts. God's love for you doesn't change depending on your life's circumstances. In Jesus you can find contentment, and JOY, and peace, and the motivation to give a gift of thanks to Him. And it doesn't change regardless of whether

you have a lot or a little, -- storm warnings or smooth sailing in your life.

When you know Jesus' love in your heart, you have all you really need. You have forgiveness for your past, His love for today, and heaven waiting ahead. Today He is coming to you through His Word, and reaching out to forgive you in Holy Communion. These are treasures that the world can't match. When you have a relationship of receiving Jesus' free gift of grace, please know Jesus' unconditional love for you. Jesus is the treasure that truly satisfies. Jesus brings contentment the world cannot change and cannot match. When you have Jesus you have all you really need!

What Paul wrote in the Bible long ago, can be your words today: ***"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength."***

Philippians 4:12-13 AMEN.

And now may the peace of God that passes all human understanding, keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.