

**1 Timothy 3: 3 – "Not Greedy for Money; Not Covetous", Sermon # 12**  
**in a series on the Eldership, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall**  
**on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In thinking about the function and duties of the minister of God's Word, the pastor of God's people, perhaps nothing is more opposed to it than these sinful desires and propensities; of being greedy and covetous. To be greedy is to have an excessive desire to have money and everything money can buy, in order to please ourselves, or to feel safe and secure. To be covetous is to have the sinful desire to possess what belongs to another, or something which God would not want you to have, at least at this time. An elder is to be a man who points people on to heaven and to God. His teaching is supposed to inculcate the message that godliness with contentment is great gain; not greediness and discontent are a means of personal gain. So there is a fundamental inconsistency between the desires of greed and covetousness and the advancement of Christ's kingdom and His glory. Let me show you how they are inconsistent with godliness, through our study this afternoon.

**1<sup>st</sup> – Greed and covetousness amount to idolatry.**

Turn with me to Ephesians 5, verse 1. "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." "Therefore do not be partakers with them." We are told here to be imitators of God as dear children." "God gave us His only-begotten Son, out of love. And our Lord Jesus, gave Himself for us in love, both in His life in the way that He lived it; and in His death on the cross. This is called "walking in love". This was, and it is, a sweet-smelling aroma to God. This is what we are to do, as well. We are to become imitators of God and Christ. But fornication, and uncleanness, and covetousness it says here, are not even to be named. Covetousness and love are opposed to one another. There is no love in covetousness. There is nothing but selfish desiring and taking from others in these sins. It is a stench in God's nostrils. Then Paul explains – "For this you know that no fornicator or unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of God. Why is a covetous man an idolater? Because he makes a god out of his own desires. He is desiring something that God does not want him to have,

something which God does not want him to have, (at least at that time) something which would hurt him or others if he obtains it in the time that the way that he goes about to get it. It is this kind of sin, which if we do not put it to death when we find it in ourselves, may harm others, or even kill them.

There are many examples of covetousness in the Scripture. But let me turn you to one, to show you how harmful it is. 1 Kings 21, verse 1. "And came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria." "So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it.'" "Or, if it seems good to you I will give you its worth in money." "But Naboth said to Ahab, the Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.'" "And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food." Now let me pause here, and tell you that the sin of covetousness begins with a desire for something, or someone, that God has not given to you. When the sin of covetousness is laid out for us in the law, it says in Exodus 20, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." If you have covetousness in your heart, it will often lead you to act in a demanding way with people around you. A Covetous man is often impatient. He cannot wait for God or man to give him what he wants. "Give me your vineyard," Ahab says. Covetousness will often lead to demanding of that which does not rightfully belong to you, nor has God deemed it fit that you should have it. But you will demand it because the desire within you is so great, if you are a person who is falling into this sin. It is often a sin which is related to immaturity in spiritual things. It is God who gives us every good thing. It is God who is good and gives us life and breath and all things. But often we think that we have to be very forceful, and very clever in order to get what we want out of life. The righteous person will live by faith, asking and praying God to give them the things that they need and the things which would be good for them.

But let us go on. Verse 4 says, "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, 'I will not give the inheritance of my fathers to you!'" "So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.'" "And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food." Now notice what this sin of covetousness has done to Ahab; it has turned all of his life bitter with disappointment. His attitude has turned bad and sinful in other ways. He is sullen. To be sullen is to display on your face your extreme disappointment in regard to what others have told you that you may not have, or may not do. Often, it is seen in children who can't get their own way.

They will stick out their lower lip, and they will continue to display this attitude until you tell them that they can't do it, or have what they want. This is why, parents, it is important for you to discipline your children for their attitudes as well as their actions. A sullen attitude is sinful in a child because it is based on covetousness. It is a form of subtle defiance. It is saying, "I will hold my good and cheerful countenance captive to your giving me what I want. " I will not speak to you, or look you in the eyes, or look at you with anything but an attitude of sadness and deep disappointment when I am around you, until I get what I want.

Let's go on further – Verse 5 – "But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?" "He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, "Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it." "And he answered, "I will not give you my vineyard." "Then Jezebel his wife said to him, 'You now exercise authority over Israel?' "Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." "And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth." "She wrote in the letters, saying, 'Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him saying, 'You have blasphemed God and the king.'" "Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die." (And that is exactly what they did) Verse 15 says, "And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead that Jezebel said to Ahab, 'Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.'" "So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." Now what I want to show you from these words is that we find that from covetousness can also proceed abuse of authority, assuming authority to one's self, and all this leading to murder and theft. This is one of the main reasons that a man who would be an elder cannot be a covetous man. What a terribly weak man Ahab was morally, to let his wife assume the authority of state and write lying letters and plan the murder of a righteous man! But covetousness may lead a man to do and to permit many evil actions, just to be able to get what he wants. That is why it is essential that an elder, or any Christian, not be a covetous man.

**Now 2ndly, not only do greed and covetousness amount to idolatry, but they are fundamentally inconsistent with the service of God.**

Turn with me to Luke 16: 1-10. "He also said to His disciples; "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods." "So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you?' "Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward." "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do?' "For my master is taking the stewardship away from me." "I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg." "I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they

may receive me into their houses." "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' "And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.'" "So he said to him 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'" "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' "So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.'" "And said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'" "So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly." "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light." "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail (or it fails) they may receive you into an everlasting home." "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." Now Jesus is telling a parable here to His disciples about the good stewardship of what God has given to us. The unjust steward was accused of wasting his master's goods. The master calls him in and says, "What is this I hear about you?" "Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be a steward." "The steward says within himself – what do I do now?" I am going to be kicked out of this stewardship. I can't make it by my own efforts. I know what I'll do. I will lessen the debts owed by other people to my master. So he has the person who owed his master a hundred measures of oil, sit down and re-write the bill that he owes, and make it fifty. He has the one who owed 100 measures of wheat sit down and re-write that bill to eighty. He wins friends in this way for his master, as well as for himself. The master doesn't commend his steward's unjust behavior. Rather, he commends his shrewdness and reproves the children of light with it. Daniel Whitby the commentator says this: "We are not lords of this life so as to get and use the good things of this life at our pleasure, but only as stewards who must be faithful in the administration of them." You see, the only way that you and I can be commended in our stewardship; we who are oftentimes very wasteful with the grace and privileges, and resources which God has given; is when we lessen the debt owed by those who are in debt to our Master, the Lord. We must make friends for ourselves with unrighteous mammon, and not think that somehow we shall not have to give an account for how we have used; what we have had given to us by God. There may be things which we've received as a trust from our God, and we have never used them well in His service. But we must ask the question; What shall I do? I should learn to use what has been entrusted to me in relation to those people who have debts which they owe to God, to make their debts lighter. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In this case, forgive us our debts as we help those who owe debts to God themselves. In the process we cause them to see just how kind and generous and forgiving our God really is. If we live our life wasting our stewardship, if we are unfaithful in the use of unrighteous mammon; lovers of money and covetous; greedy for earthly gain; how shall we be entrusted with the true riches? The Lord is speaking of spiritual riches of grace and truth and the people to minister them to. How shall this ever be, in a man who greedy and covetous?

It is interesting that after Jesus related this parable, he gave to those listening to Him a saying which we would all do well to remember. Verse 13 – "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." "You cannot serve God and mammon." And it says in verse 14, "Now the Pharisees who were lovers of money, also heard all these things and they derided Him." (They turned up their noses at Him it says in the margin.) They were only proving Jesus' point. They could not be serving God because they were covetous. They were those who were serving their moneyed interests. God wasn't being served at all. Judas Iscariot is a good example of the disobedience which covetousness leads to. Look with me at John 12: 1-6. "Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead." "There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him." "Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair." "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." "But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and give to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.'" "But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.'" "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Judas' besetting sin was greed and covetousness. This led to his stealing from the bag, the money box that he held as treasurer. You find that in Matthew 26: 14-16. But people who are lovers of money don't know when to save and when to be extravagant. They get them completely turned around. Mary understood. She knew our Lord was going to die. It was her love for Him as her Savior that she gave this costly gift. But Judas; he is secretly thinking of himself and outwardly pretending to be so spiritual that he would have sold this perfume and given the money to the poor. He was actually only a thief who cared for himself alone.

And his covetousness and his greed took him farther than he wanted to go. Satan entered his heart after this, and he begins to seek to find the value of the one whom he calls Master – the value of Christ to His enemies. Thirty pieces of silver – that princely price they paid for the Savior of the World, the Lord of Glory! The love of money led to the betrayal of the Lord of Glory. Now you can see why it is so important that a man who is going to be an elder of the church not be covetous; not be greedy for money. If he loves money more than Christ and His kingdom, then he will in the end betray his Master in the way that he serves Him. Really, he will be serving himself instead of Christ. He will fleece the flock and justify himself in doing it. Let me ask in closing; Is the love of money more important to you than the love of people? Do you refuse to spend a cent on your closest relatives because avarice and hoarding grips your heart? Truly this is a sin which hurts ourselves and others very deeply and it grieves God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. God gives to all men generously because He is bountiful in His goodness by nature.

You are called to be holy in this way, even as He is holy and good. An elder must certainly be able to hold to a budget, but he also should be able to still be a giver, and able to encourage others in the right way to give. In Acts 20: 32 we find the Apostle Paul telling us what he was like in terms of money. "So now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (There is the true riches commended) Then he goes on to say, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel." "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me." "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak." "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"