

## Covetousness and Violence – Deuteronomy 25:4-19

**Introduction** – Of all the Ten Commandments, covetousness is the quietest – at first. It rests in the heart and for a time, it can be kept hidden. But, covetousness can't stay in the heart; it gives birth to more sin (James 1:14-15). In Deut 5:21, we see that we are excluded from coveting – anything. In James, we learn that covetousness breaks forth in violence and is enmity with God (James 4:1-4). In the passage before us, we see how covetousness leads to defrauding others in order to get what they have.

**Muzzled Ox** (v4) – If the ox is muzzled, the owner will get more of the grain. Coveting greater profits, he is tempted to deny the ox enjoyment of his labor. Paul argues in 1 Cor 9:8-12 that the apostles should be able to plow in hope and be partakers of that hope in the form of material pay. In 1 Tim 5:17-18 he argues from this text and from the words of Jesus (declaring the gospels as Scripture) that elders who rule well should receive wages for their labor.

**Denying the Deceased Brother** (vv5-10) – The practice sounds strange to our ears, and so we miss some of the details and principals. The two brothers are living together (the other is not married, probably their inheritance is intertwined). The surviving brother is to marry the sister-in-law and the first-born is to be given the right as the son of the deceased brother. This is about inheritance, property, and covenant succession. It existed prior to this law (consider Onan, Gen 38:1-10) and this is what was going on with Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:6ff). When the brother-in-law refused to do this (for he could legally refuse), he was declared to be a miserly opportunist and publicly disgraced. Most likely he was coveting the opportunity to see the whole inheritance pass to himself.

**Improper Intervention** (vv11-12) – Most likely this is not an issue of simple immodesty; the man she attacks is most likely affected in his ability to conceive an heir (hence the connections). While intending to help her husband, she has been willing to give too much in order to gain too little.

**In Order to Get a Better Deal** (vv13-16) – Short-changing another in a purchase or sale is “*an abomination to Yahweh your God.*” Dealing justly with others was key to seeing to it that God lengthened the days in the land (which means short-changing others would bring about shortened days from the Lord).

**Do Not Covet the Amalekites** (vv17-19) – This is the first nation to attack Israel shortly after the Exodus (Ex 17:8-16), but in this section, certain details emerge regarding what the Amalekites did. They assaulted those who were in the rear, the stragglers (most likely those who were the weakest, oldest, most vulnerable), looking for the easy kill and gain – and they did not fear God. They had no fear of divine punishment for their offenses. This warning is prophetic, for Saul lost his kingship due to refusing to destroy the Amalekites in an act of covetousness (1 Sam 15). Later, Haman, a descendant of Agag, nearly succeeds in wiping out the Israelites (Esther 3).

**Hating Covetousness** – We often think too lightly about covetousness, allowing our hearts and minds to lust after this or that, not realizing the poison we are giving ourselves and the additional sins we will soon fall into. Covetousness is on the list of sins which excludes one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10). It is identified with other vile and dirty sins to which are not even to be named among Christians (Eph 5:1-7).

**“Do Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife...or anything that is your neighbor’s”** – Often, covetousness is very sensual in nature. It therefore is no surprise that it ends in all kinds of sexual sins. But it is possible to covet anything, good things and wicked things – they just are not *our* things. Soon, hardened against the fear of God, we begin to be willing to do anything to get that which we desire. Envy and covetousness soon embitter brothers against one another and bring forth all kinds of violence (James 4:1-2).

**Better than We Deserve** – The covetous hate grace and love to talk about fairness. They complain when God is overwhelmingly gracious to others (Matt 20:1-16) and they hate it when forgiveness extends to others when they have worked so hard (Luke 15:11-32). The covetous think they are the ones who worked all day, they are the son who worked hard for his father; they don't see themselves as the ones who were paid a day's wage for an hour's work, or the prodigal son who is forgiven and restored.

**A Covetous Society** – A nation which covets will develop systems whereby men can covet anything and do so legally, because men who covet power know how to control the masses. “...*socialism, communism, a welfare economy, rugged individualism, fascism, and national socialism are a few of the names common to history.*” – Rushdoony.

**Put it to Death (Col 3:5-7)** – The way out is mortification of these old ways, setting your mind on Christ (vv1-4) which means faith in the One in Whom your life is hidden. Deuteronomy 26 will help us deal with combatting covetousness. What should be emphasized here is how subtle and sneaky this sin is, and how accepting of it we are in our own hearts and in our society.