

THE



“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

May 2017

No. 377

COVETOUSNESS AND THE LAST SIN

The sin of covetousness is widely described and prohibited in the Bible because it is a deadly sin that can be practiced by anyone at any time and be almost undetectable. According to Internet definitions, covetousness means to yearn to possess or have something (usually something you don't have, but it could be something you do have but want more of); to want something very much; to desire wrongfully. According to Strong, it means delight, desire, or lust. But keep in mind that the word delight can indicate something all-consuming (Psa. 1:2).

THE HARVESTER
141 County Road 474
Woodland, AL 36280
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



An encounter recorded in the gospels reveals the deadly evil of covetousness and the divisive effect it can have on our relationship with Jesus. Let's study this encounter and "read between the lines" to see more of what God is trying to tell us. In Matthew 19:16, one comes to Jesus and asks what good thing he could do to have eternal life. This encounter is recorded in slightly different versions in Matthew 19:16-22, Mark 10:17-22, and Luke 18:18-23. Details in these passages tell us this person was rich, young, and a ruler, so he is often referred to as the rich young ruler. Let's just call him Richie, for short.

So Richie came to Jesus searching for a "good thing" to do. This lets us know there was something missing in his spiritual life. Matthew later tells us that he was rich, but even his riches were not completely comforting. He wanted eternal life, but felt it was just out of reach. If he could only find the one "good thing" that he still needed to do...

So Jesus gave Richie the first of the two replies that would answer Richie's question. The first reply was simply to "*keep the commandments*" (Mat. 19:17). Richie indeed had a working knowledge of the commandments, as we will soon see, and he replied simply, "Which?" Jesus finished this first reply with a list of the six "ten commandments" that were between man and his fellow man (the other four were between man and God). Jesus said to do no murder or adultery, do not steal or bear a false witness, honor father and mother, and love his neighbor as himself.

Upon close examination, we can see that Jesus didn't quite get the commandments right, according to Exodus 20. Notice the difference? Jesus missed the last commandment on covetousness. Wonder if He meant to do that?

Regardless, Richie responded, "*All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*" He was obviously knowledgeable of the commandments. He considered himself a long-time keeper of them. In fact, Jesus said (Mark 10:19) that He knew Richie knew the commandments. Yet, Richie didn't feel complete, or completely satisfied with his spiritual

condition. Most of us can probably sympathize with that feeling at one time or another.

Richie was now right where Jesus wanted him. Jesus was about to give him the revelation the rest of us could only wish we could have in this life. Jesus said (Mat. 19:21), *“If you will be perfect, go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”* Mark (Mark 10:21) adds, *“One thing you lack...”* Who wouldn’t want to be in Richie’s shoes, in a position to hear Jesus say we only lack one thing to be ready for heaven? Jesus knew what Richie knew, and He loved him, and He is about to tell him the one thing he needs to be complete. What a defining moment!

But Richie wasn’t expecting the answer. Sell all he had? Give up the comfort of his wealth? Give it to the poor and become like one of them? Trade heaven on earth for heaven in heaven? He wouldn’t do it! And without asking for any more answers he simply turned and went away sorrowful.

What just happened was that Jesus had just convicted Richie on the commandment to not covet. This is the commandment Jesus intentionally misrepresented in His first reply to Richie. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He led Richie through the thought process to see his “last sin.” The scary part is that Jesus knows us just as well, too!

Let’s examine this sin of covetousness in light of its effect on a nearly perfect young man like Richie. The actual error of covetousness is not in being rich or having money. Read closely the account of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9). Here was a rich man that gave half of his goods to the poor, and if he defrauded anyone, he restored the mistake fourfold. Jesus had the perfect opportunity at that moment to condemn all rich men by condemning Zacchaeus, but He didn’t. Instead Jesus said (v.9), *“This day is salvation come to this house...”* Jesus left us with the principle that the error is not in having wealth if we use it righteously.

Conversely, consider the error of those who erred from the faith due to the love of money (1 Tim. 6:9,10). Notice Paul’s

leading phrase (v. 9), “...*they that will be rich...*” Here Paul included in his warning all those that want money, whether they already have it or not, whether they are poor or are already wealthy. Covetousness can be a stumbling block to both the haves and the have-nots. And to those that have, the warning is given by Jesus (Mark 10:24) to not “...*trust in riches...*” He also left us a parable lesson on this with the man who would build bigger barns (Luke 12:18-21). Let the man’s final words haunt us as a warning (v. 19), “...*Soul...take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*”

There is one more error we must not miss in this story of Richie. If we think this whole encounter is just to warn us about the singular sin of covetousness, the love of money, and trusting in riches, then we are missing the main point. It is really about the “last sin” we have that is keeping us from being perfect and complete and fully confident of our spiritual condition. Richie’s story could’ve been about any of the other commandments as easily as it was about wealth and covetousness.

Take adultery, for example. Jesus could just have easily said to us that we only lack one thing yet...we must give up our adulterous eyes, our adulterous situations, our tolerance for fornication in what we watch on TV, our internet porn, our curiosity for strange flesh, our magazines, our adulterous media idols, etc. Or it could’ve been the sin of stealing. Jesus could’ve said the one thing we lack yet is to stop dodging our debts and taxes, quit hiding money from the IRS, stop our extortion and white collar crime, and stop taking advantage of our family and friends for money.

Jesus is trying to get us to see and give up our “last sin”. That is the last sin we’re hiding from God (we think), the last stronghold of our old self, the last thing that is between us and a complete surrender to the love and grace and providence of Jesus Christ. Jesus wants us to eliminate the one thing we lack yet that is keeping us from His riches. I’ve been through this personally. In the last few years, through memorizing and meditating on the Word, the Word revealed to me my “last sin.” But

it didn't stop until it revealed to me two more of my "last sins" after that! So I was guilty in more ways than Richie was. Now if I can just not follow Richie's footsteps to the judgement...

Please consider how applicable Richie's situation could be to all of us today. This was no accidental situation. Jesus knew all about Richie, and set him up perfectly for this unforgettable lesson. My desire for us all is that we all arrive at the judgement without fear of hearing the words, "I know what you knew, I loved you, but there was just one thing you lacked that you wouldn't give up."

BILL PRINCE, JR.
(Oxford, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. How did Korah and his family die after seeking priesthood duties beyond those they already had?
 2. How did Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, die?
 3. Who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image?
 4. What profession did Zebedee, father of James and John, have?
 5. In Revelation, what was the wife of the Lamb arrayed in?
...and remember last month's questions?
1. Which son did Jacob love more than all the others?
JOSEPH (Genesis 37:3)
 2. For how many years did the Israelites wander in the wilderness?
FORTY (Joshua 5:6)
 3. Why did Elimelech go to live in Moab with his family?
FAMINE IN HIS HOME TOWN (Ruth 1:1-2)
 4. Who gave gifts to Jesus when he was a young child?
WISE MEN (Matthew 2:7-11)
 5. Who did Jesus say was the "father of lies"?
THE DEVIL (John 8:44)

THE MYSTERY

Do you like a good mystery? A mystery is typically a story with many secrets or unknowns that are slowly revealed through careful investigation. At the end of the story, the secrets have been revealed and the mystery is then understood.

Are you aware that the Bible contains the greatest mystery of all time? You should understand that God is the author of this mystery; He developed a plan for mankind and kept it secret since the world began.

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Rom. 16:25-27)

The prophetic scriptures gave clues to the mystery. The main character in this mystery is Jesus Christ and the gospel is the revelation of the mystery.

Throughout time, prophets foretold about the Christ, but they did not understand all that they prophesied. They knew there was a mystery, and they tried to understand the secrets. The clues that were given to them as prophets did not reveal the full picture of the mystery. God intentionally kept it a mystery.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner

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The Harvester

141 County Road 474 * Woodland, AL 36280

Phone: (256) 449-9221 * Email: raymcmamus@hotmail.com

Web Page: www.churches-of-christ.org

of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

This mystery was even kept secret from the angels who desired to know the answers.

Why did God make the story of Christ and His salvation a mystery? If the secrets of the mystery had been fully revealed before their fulfillment, then Satan and the Jewish leaders and the Roman authorities of Jesus' time would have known what God was planning to do and they would have kept the plan from being accomplished.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2:7-11)

Some of the details of this mystery were that the Son of God would come into the world as a human, that He would suffer, shed His blood, and die on the cross and rise again the third day. In Him we would have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. The Gentiles would be fellow heirs with the Jews and partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel, and the church would be the kingdom of God on earth. The righteous would live with Him eternally. One summary of the mystery is given in 1 Timothy 3:16:

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
May 5 - 7	Van Lear Van Lear, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 14 - 19	Load Load, KY	Joe Hill & J.D. McDonald
May 18 - 21	Mount Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Hunter Bulger (Prattville, AL)

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Even while Jesus was on the earth, He did not plainly reveal the details of the mystery. He spoke many of the principles of the mystery in parables so that they would not be fully understood by the outsiders.

And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: (Mark 4:11)

I encourage you to read the Old Testament and search for the clues of the mystery contained in prophecy. Then as you read the New Testament, come to a better understanding of the plan held in a mystery that God had from the beginning of creation and how that mystery has been fulfilled in Christ and the church.

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36)

ED ANDERSON
(Sierra Vista, AZ)