

It's What's in Our Heart

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"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry". (Colossians 3:5)

When we try to make rules for dying to the flesh, we are likely to miss the core problem, which is not our behavior but what is in our hearts. There are many reasons we get caught up in the things we do. For example, many people maintain a posture of defiance. Perhaps they have been hurt in some way, so now they are going to have their way no matter what. They may be Christians, but that doesn't mean they are going to be doormats for Jesus! Others are just lost in the desires themselves. They enjoy the glory or the domination or whatever it is they want. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting things or with having things, but we should attempt to receive whatever God wishes to give us so we might use it to his glory.

What is wrong is when not getting what we want propels us into a state of bitterness, irritation, impatience, and anger, and we depend upon our own tricks and devices, our confidence in our own power, to get the things that we want. The right thing would be simply releasing it all and saying, "All right. God knows. I'm living in his world. He can give me what he wants. I will not put these things in the place of God." Putting things in the place of God is the central issue.

According to Paul, a covetous person is an idolater, as we find in the passage above. Someone is an idolater not because he carves little idols and bows down to them, but because he wants things to such a degree that he is dominated by those wants. He wants things that others have, resents them for having those things, and desires to take them. Simply desiring to have a house is not covetous—it's desiring to have someone else's house. The covetous idolater is prepared to see other people suffer in order to have his own way.

A covetous person is an idolater precisely because he has put his desires, rather than God, in the ultimate place in his life. Right or wrong, there is no limit to what he will do to get what he wants. When living at this level of the self-life, he is prepared to do what is wrong to gain what he desires. That is always the mark of the person in whom the flesh is alive—who has not died to self.

REFLECT

If you pay attention to news outlets, you see far too many examples of people in whom the flesh is very much alive. You may often find yourself saying, "The world has gone mad!" And it has. But it is also functioning just as we should expect given its estrangement from God. The chaos of the world we live in reflects the chaos of the untethered and uncrucified self.



In turning a critical gaze to those around us, how have we neglected the important exercise of examining ourselves? In what areas of your life is the flesh very much alive, those places where you have not yet died to self?

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