26-1101p - Detailed Summary

26-1101p - *Covetousness, Steve Cain*

Bible Reader: Mike Mathis

See the transcript: Transcript HTML - Transcript PDF

Covetousness

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reading (0:04 - 0:52): Mike Mathis **Romans 7:7-12**: Mike reads the evening's Scripture from Romans 7, verses 7 through 12, using the New King James Version. The passage asks whether the law is sin and answers, "Certainly not." On the contrary, Paul states that he would not have known sin except through the law, and specifically would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in him all manner of evil	***Continued*** desire. Apart from the law, sin was dead. He was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and he died. The commandment, which was to bring life, he found to bring death. Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived him and by it killed him. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Mike concludes that this completes the reading.

Summary of Transcript (0:04 - 29:11), Preacher: Steve Cain

(1:58 - 3:23) Introduction to Covetousness and Its Challenge to Faithfulness

Steve states his desire to talk about covetousness. He notes that the evil of covetousness is introduced in the Ten Commandments with the command "Thou shall not covet," and that Paul alludes to this particular command in the passage just read. Paul said he would not have known what covetousness was if it had not been for the law; he would not have known that it was wrong to covet and that it was a bad habit and a bad thing to do. Reflecting on the question of what covetousness is, Steve cites the Webster Dictionary, which defines it as a desire for wealth or possessions. He adds that covetousness is one of those things that challenge one's Christianity and one's desire to remain faithful to God. Covetousness fosters distrust, not only in the individual but also in God Himself.

(3:23 - 7:38) James 4 and Practical Illustrations of Covetousness

Steve recalls that they have shared what covetousness does and the wrongness of it in James. Referring to James chapter 4, verses 1 through 4, he points out that covetousness is one of the reasons why God does not want us to covet, period. Reading from the New International Version, he quotes: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God, and when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Basically, when looking at covetousness, we are concerning ourselves with what we have or do not have and what we would like to have; those are our desires. As we look about, we see our neighbors

and want to try to keep up with the Joneses. We look at the things they have and say to ourselves, “Oh, wouldn’t that be nice to have?” Not only that, there are times when we do not have what we need, and we are complaining to God about the fact that all our money is going out to doctor’s bills, or why all our money is going out to repairs on the car or the house.

We start thinking in terms of what we do not have, comparing ourselves with one another and our neighbors, especially the Joneses, and we want to make sure we are not going to have to deal with them. Referring to the Wednesday night class, Steve notes that we have got to deal with the Joneses once in a while, but it is something we need to stop and think about. He illustrates with the thought that it would be nice if the kids were just beyond the medical stage; from birth to about age six they are constantly getting sick, requiring constant trips to the doctor’s office and shelling out not only to the pediatrician but constantly buying this or that for the child, draining one’s money. Then one looks at the neighbors, who perhaps have better jobs or are living in a better house and seemingly doing much better. The proverb writer points out something very interesting: sometimes we have a tendency to make decisions based on whether or not we are going to make money or whether it is going to help us, and it falls flat and does not materialize, and then we blame God for it. When it was our decision more than God’s decision, it was our decision to do it based on covetousness—we want that money and have the need to have it.

(7:38 - 16:35) Exposition of Psalm 73: Envying the Wicked and Finding True Refuge in God

Steve turns to Psalm 73 as a very interesting psalm that will comprise most of the evening’s lesson. The writer is talking about how he almost gave up, almost went to Satan’s side, and almost gave up God and his faith in God because of his covetousness. The psalmist starts by saying, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold, for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” He is looking and coveting, seeing how much better their household is, how much better their living is, and how much better they have it than he and his family. He goes on to say why he struggled, why he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and why he almost lost his foothold because he envied the arrogant. In verse 4, referring to the arrogant, they have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong compared to his. They are free from common human burdens and are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace. He is pointing out what their particular problem is, but that does not deter him because he would like to be able to have that kind of pride himself. They clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.

This is why he is recognizing what is wrong with him wanting to have what they have. They scoff and speak with malice. With arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, “How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?” He is observing that they are not concerned about God and really do not believe in Him. They do not give Him the time of day; they thumb their nose at the concept that there is a God and that they have to answer to Him. Verse 12: “This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure.” He is saying, look at all the benefits they have by being evil and all the riches they are getting. It is maybe because he is worshiping God and concerned about his righteousness in the sight of God. Is it all in vain? Is it worthless? Are they right? Could they be right? So surely in vain he has kept his heart pure and washed his hands in innocence. All day long he has been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.

He keeps looking at himself and comparing himself with his neighbors and those of the community, saying to himself, “Is it worth it? What I’m doing, is it worth being a God worshiper? Is it worth being righteous in the sight of God?” Rereading verse 12 or 13: “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted and every morning brings new punishments.” Verse 15: “If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” When he came to himself and realized the benefits of being a Christian and being righteous, he realized the benefits outweigh what they have and the discomfort and inconvenience that his life has. He is questioning whether he is being dumb or stupid in considering going and trying to live the way they live. If he had spoken out like that, he would have betrayed God’s children. When he tried to understand all this, it troubled him deeply till he entered the sanctuary of God; then he understood their final destiny. Surely God places them on slippery ground. He is talking to God now about what God has in store for them. Surely God has placed them on slippery ground. He casts them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. They are like a dream when one wakes. When God arises, He will despise them as fantasies.

When the psalmist’s heart was grieved and his spirit embittered, he was senseless and ignorant; he was a brute beast before God. He is saying, look at what he considered and how dumb he was. He now recognizes that when his heart was grieved and his spirit embittered, he was senseless and ignorant; he was a brute beast before God. Yet he is always with God. He is now reflecting upon his relationship with God. We need to reflect our relationship on God and realize that God is with us and is divinely intervening in our lives. Verse 23: “Yet I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” This is what we will sing when we have our wits about us and realize what is in store for the individual who is anti-God. In verse 27, because of our righteousness and our desire to be righteous in the sight of God, those who are far from God will perish; He destroys all who are unfaithful to Him. But as for the psalmist, it is good to be near God. He has made the Sovereign Lord his refuge; he will tell of all His deeds. God desires to be glorified in the way in which He deals with us in our lives.

(16:35 - 18:23) 1 John 2:15-17: The Love of the World

When we look at 1 John, John tells us what we are battling when we are dealing with this particular thing. It is in chapter 2, verse 15, where he is talking about having covetousness. He is talking about the fact that we want what we cannot have or do not have, like James points out to us. John is pointing out to us about what covetousness is really all about. He says it is the love of the world. He is telling us, do not have the love of the world. What is the love of the world? It is what you see your neighbors doing and how much fun they are having or seemingly having, and how they party, and how they are getting away with various things. It is a lifestyle that is full of covetousness, and it is worldliness. John is telling us, do not love the world, verse 15: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”

(18:23 - 25:13) Galatians 5: Living by the Spirit Versus the Acts of the Flesh

Steve would like to close with the Galatian letter, chapter 5, because Paul is talking about the fact that we need to be living in the Spirit. He likes to refer to the fact that when we became Christians, as Peter would point out to us in Acts 2:38, that when we are baptized for the remission of our sins, to rise to walk in the newness of life, what is instilled in us? It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given for several reasons. They talked about that in the class this morning. The Holy Spirit is given by God as a guarantee, an earnest, if you will. It guarantees us that we are His child, and it guarantees us that He is with us. As long as we are walking in the light, as He is in the light, He is with us. And He is assuring us that we will have eternal life. Eternal life equates to heaven, being with God eternally in heaven. When we are baptized, we are given the Spirit to guide us. What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit? He is to give us guidance in the way that we should walk. When we see the job description that is given to us, Steve refers to that as the job description found in the Gospel of John, chapter 16. Jesus is telling us what the job description of the Holy Spirit is. But He is telling us here that this is what we need to adopt in our lives.

Closing with this: “My brothers, in chapter 5, verse 13, here’s what we need to realize. What is the life in the Spirit? You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge in the flesh. Rather, serve one another humbly in love, for the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself. If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” What kind of a lifestyle do we desire? Just stop and think. Don’t you want happiness, peace, joy? Don’t you want those things? Yes. Paul is pointing that out to us, that that is exactly what we have if we will walk by the Spirit and let the Spirit guide us. But if we allow the world to have its way, it is going to destroy love, peace, and joy. They cannot coexist. You will have one or the other. You have to make the decision as to whether or not you want to gratify the desires of the flesh, or if you want love, joy, and peace, which God wants you to have, and is giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us in this way. Notice what he says: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The acts of the flesh, and he tells us what the acts of the flesh are, and this is what we will get to if we are coveting. Coveting will bring about this particular line of thinking and the walk of life.

The acts of the flesh are obvious, and he starts listing them: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. “I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” What kind of a lifestyle does a drunkard have? What kind of a lifestyle does a drug addict offer his family? What kind of a lifestyle does a person with any of these particular things offer his family? It is nothing but sadness and a lot of discord. So he says, but the fruit of the Spirit, if you do this and try your level best to eliminate those other things from your life, and it gives you the power to do that, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be able to rid our lives of those particular acts of the flesh. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, against which there is no law. Take a look at the life of the flesh. There are laws that govern those things, aren’t they? And if you abuse them, you are going to be subject to the law and its penalties. But if you do these, there is no law against it, is there? That is why he is saying there is no law against being this. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-

control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh and its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other.

(25:13 - 29:11) Romans 8: Dying to Sin and the Invitation to Receive Power

Steve turns to Romans 8, and what we will see there is that when we become a Christian, we are dying to sin. He takes this literally and hopes that the hearers do too. We are dying to sin. Sin is what causes us to do these particular things. Paul talks about how he fights that particular urge to do the things that he does not want to do, and not do the things that he does want to do. And so he says, what am I fighting? It is sin. And sin, Paul says, we are going to die to it, and therefore sin cannot have its effect on us. I can do what I want to do, and I do not have to do what I do not want to do. Why? Because I am dead to its impulses. I am dead to its way of wanting to encourage me to do those things. I am dead to that. So when we became Christians, we died to sin, and we have the ability to live a righteous life if we will just exercise it. Sin does not have to keep us from doing what we are wanting to do. We can control it. We can have a mastery over it. So therefore, he says, Romans 8: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

So he condemned sin in the flesh.” He is saying it is not to be done. He is giving us power to be free of it. He is giving us power to be free from addictions. He is giving us power to be free from the lust of the world, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. He is giving us the ability to die to that. Sin is dead. He condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. So Steve is suggesting that covetousness is the very thing that Paul is trying to point out to us. It has a way of fighting us and challenging our faith and whether or not we are going to continue to remain faithful to God and continue to worship Him and to live our lives the way God wants us to live. And we do not have to, and we can die to it. And if you have already been baptized for the remission of sins and died with Christ and put Christ on and acknowledged Him, you have that power. You have that ability. But if you have not, you do not have that power. We would like to extend to you the opportunity to have that power because everything is ready. We can assist you to become a Christian, to die to sin, and to put Christ on. Altogether, we stand and sing the song of encouragement.