

Have You Ever Noticed that "Love It" Rhymes with Covet?

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How much time do you spend "window shopping"?—trying on clothes or shoes, browsing through catalogs or on the internet, admiring the latest car models, or loitering in the tool section of Sears or the hunting and fishing section of Wal-Mart?

Now please don't get mad or defensive—at least not right away. At least give me a chance to make my point. What I have to say might expose something ugly in your life—something you would be glad to have removed.

"Window shopping," in whatever form, is not necessarily wrong. We all need to buy things. I have a wife and five children with another baby due soon, so believe me, I know. Aside from food and water, we need shoes, clothes, cars, tools, cookware, furniture, soap, toothpaste, and lots of other items (did I mention diapers?). In a different way, we also need musical instruments, books, decorations for the home, flowers for the yard, and yes, even things like make-up, perfume, and hunting and fishing equipment. Though not all of these things are necessary for basic survival, they are necessary if we are to adorn our lives with beauty, intellectual stimulation, and just a bit of plain old fun. So before anyone gets the wrong impression, I am *not* saying that it is wrong to go out and shop for these things.



What I *am* saying is that we should heed a warning found throughout the Bible. Scripture warns us, repeatedly and in no uncertain terms, not to set our affections on the things of this world. As John said, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). The Apostle Paul writes, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). And the writer of Hebrews puts it clearly and sternly when he says, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have" (Hebrews 13:5).

The sin these men were warning us against was the sin of covetousness—the inordinate craving for the things of this world. And contrary to what you might think, covetousness is not a stumbling block only for the rich. Those who are financially secure might *gratify* their covetousness more easily than the poor. But those who are poor are just as susceptible to the temptation to covet, even though less able to gratify their sinful desires.

Covetousness is an attitude of the heart. It is not *owning* a nice car, nice clothes, or a nice house that makes you a covetous person. It is having your

affections fixed on these things. If you are rich and covetous, you buy whatever you want. No problem. But still you are not satisfied. You simply fix your covetous sights on the next purchase, and then the next, and so on. If you are poor and covetous, you look longingly at things you would *like* to buy. Sometimes you look a lot, even though you cannot buy much. If you are somewhere in the middle and have good credit, covetousness may lead you to charge things you do not truly need and cannot afford as you unwisely dig yourself deeper and deeper into debt. In each case, the root sin is covetousness. Extremes such as theft, gambling, and income tax evasion are other ways in which covetousness becomes evident.

Another warning is needed here. The sin of covetousness is not always seen in the *gaining* of money or material possessions. It also manifests itself through *clinging to* money and/or material possessions. I won't belabor this point, but the fact is, a wealthy Christian who dutifully figures his rather impressive 10% tithe to the penny may be struggling more with a covetous attitude than a poor Christian who gladly stretches his budget as far as he can in order to give what amounts to almost nothing.

In yet another form, covetousness does not relate to money or material possessions at all. Sexual immorality, in any form, is an outlet for this sin. It is another way of showing that your affections are set on things which are not yours and which God does not permit you to possess in your current situation. As God said to Moses in the Ten Commandments, a man is not to covet his neighbor's wife (cf. Exodus 20:17). Looking lustfully (Matthew 5:28) is coveting. Sadly, many people do a lot of "window shopping" in this way.

There is a difference between enjoying what God provides and desiring that which is excessive, or that which He has not provided in your situation. We should enjoy and be thankful for whatever God provides. But we should also remember that an attitude of discontentment exposes covetousness which, according to Paul, "amounts to idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

The question that discerns the difference for you is this: Regardless of what you possess or how much money you have, what (or who) is the object of your greatest affection? What (or who) is your true love? As Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24).

Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, **nor the covetous**, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.
(1 Corinthians 6:9-10)