

Lesson 1

LOVING GOD OR COVETING

God Gives

Love gives without any expectation of return. Love thinks of others first. Remember the acronym JOY: Jesus first, Others second, Yourself third. God reveals His love for us by giving.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:16–17)

It is only with God living in and through us that can we expect to learn the art of loving others and putting their interests ahead of our agenda. We are selfish by nature. Even the few philanthropic deeds we may do can be mixed with a selfish motive. We may do good deeds so that people will think well of us. Pure love and selfless giving come from God alone.

Love Rejoices with Others

Sandi and I have several friends who really love us. Their love is demonstrated in the genuine way they rejoice with us when we receive material blessings. Paul says in Romans 12:15, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” They fulfill this Scripture. Instead of wishing they had received the blessing, they are really happy with our good fortune. When you truly love other individuals, you are thinking only of them.

Coveting Thinks of Self

We each have a natural propensity to covet. Instead of rejoicing with our friends, we may be tempted to wonder why we did not receive a similar blessing. With this mindset, we are thinking of ourselves instead of our neighbor. Selfish coveting and gracious loving are polar opposites.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire your neighbor’s house, his field, or his male servant, or his female servant, his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Deuteronomy 5:21)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40)

Loving and coveting are unseen attitudes and are found in the inner person, in the hidden part of the heart. They are hard to discern outwardly. Love is selfless while coveting is selfish. “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5)

This attitude of putting others ahead of ourselves is a gift of grace which only comes from God. It is the antithesis of the selfish attitude of coveting. May this gracious attitude characterize all believers in Jesus.

I can’t cover all the bases on this subject, but if we recognize the seeds of coveting which are prevalent in the human heart, we will be forewarned and therefore forearmed. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) It is only God who has the power to change us from the inside out.

Love Your Neighbor

Jesus said the whole law and the prophets are built on loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself. When I read the Old Testament, I recognize how coveting is applied to specific injunctions and commands. We are not to covet our neighbor’s wife (adultery), or take his life (murder), or pilfer his stuff (steal).

Focusing on self and what our neighbor has-but wishing it were ours-leads to stealing. Remember the antithesis of coveting is loving. When we love our neighbor and focus on what he needs, we won’t take what belongs to him.

Love thinks of others and coveting thinks of self. Jesus is the most loving AND unselfish being to grace our planet. May we be more like Him.

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28)

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:4–7)

Robbing Hood

This principle of coveting, which leads to stealing, extends to a popular figure in literature, Robin Hood. I urge you to beware of the “Robbing” Hood mentality. Taking from the rich is theft, plain and simple, regardless of whether you give it to the poor or not. This has fancy names like socialism and redistribution of wealth, but it is still theft. This errant thinking seems to infiltrate many branches of our government today. Redistribution of someone else’s personal property is stealing, regardless of how noble it sounds.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us to love as You loved. Help us to love our neighbor and set us free in our hearts from all forms of coveting. Amen.

Lesson 1

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT WITH A PROMISE

After God created the world in six days, He rested. His next sovereign act was to make a helpmeet for Adam. God then officiated at the first wedding and declared Adam and Eve to be one flesh. He encouraged them to cleave to one another, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. Children were born to the first couple, and the first family was created.

Family is not only a good idea, it is a God idea. In keeping with God's plan and purpose, I want this course to be a family exercise. I have intentionally placed questions throughout the book that will encourage interaction between you and your parents.

In Deuteronomy 6:5–7, God commands parents to love God, love His word, and teach their children diligently—when they sit in their home, go for a walk, lie down, and when they rise. While parents are teaching and providing for their children, children are to have an attitude of deference and respect.

The fifth commandment says “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Deuteronomy 5:16)

Paul reiterates this command in the instructions to children in Ephesians 6:1–3. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’”

God guarantees that when we honor our mom and dad, (and this command is to all children, including myself) He will see that it will go well with us, and that our days will be long on the earth. Personally, I would rather have this promise from God than all the money in the world.

Jesus and the Commandments

Jesus affirmed the ten commandments in this passage when He was being quizzed about how to have eternal life. “A man came up to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘Why do you ask Me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.’ He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 19:16–19) Notice that He said, “Honor your father and mother.”

Honor

Honor is an attitude of the heart. When I honor someone, I respect them and treat them with deference. It helps me to think of the attitude of Jesus, who humbled Himself and

came to earth in the form of a servant. He provides the perfect model for what it means to honor and respect others. “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” (Philippians 2:3–5)

Jesus Honored His Father

God is the Father of Jesus, and Mary is his mother. In John 8:49, as Jesus was disputing with some religious leaders, He makes this comment, “Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.’” As you read through the gospel of John, you will not only see those words, “I honor my Father” you will also observe the honoring attitude and genuine affection that Jesus has for His Dad. He honored Him from the heart. This was not a difficult religious duty. Instead, it flowed from His heart, for He truly loved and honored God.

Jesus Honored His Mother

When Jesus was suffering in agony on the cross, He was mindful of who was going to take care of His mom. He was the eldest son and He committed her to the care of John. “When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:26–27)

Flawed Parents and God-Fearing Sons

You may be thinking that it was easy for Jesus to honor His Father and mother since they were wonderful parents. What about those of us who have flawed parents? There is quite a story about three sons and their father which shows us how important it is to think well of our parents even when they make mistakes.

“Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness.” (Genesis 9:20–23)

Ham did not honor his father, while Shem and Japheth did. Notice what transpired when Noah awoke. “When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.’ He also said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.’” (Genesis 9:24–27)

Another example of a godly son is David, who was the youngest child in a large family and did not feel included or cared for by his parents. He was not even in the home of his family when Samuel came to anoint the next king. Instead he was taking care of the sheep. Perhaps this gives us some insight into why in Psalm 27:10 he writes, “My father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.”

David was probably tempted to not honor his parents and for good reason, but when Saul was seeking his life, and the lives of his followers, David crossed over to the king of Moab and made arrangements for his mom and dad to be protected. “David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, ‘Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me.’” (1 Samuel 22:3)

Last Days

When Paul was giving counsel to Timothy and preparing him for the day when the world will not honor their parents, he wrote, “You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred.” (2 Timothy 3:1–2)

The world may dishonor their parents, but in the Kingdom of God this command is eternal and therefore always applicable.

Prayer

May God help us each to “love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other.” (Romans 12:10, NLT) Amen.

