

## *Money and Possessions: Interpretations Resources or the Use Scripture in the Church* by Walter Brueggemann

### **Chapter 2 Israel's Core Narrative *No Coveting!***

The Tenth Commandment is

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

— *Exodus 20:17*

This commandment refers to an attitude of desire

#### **Desire**

- Being propelled in ways we do not understand
- What is not properly one's own becomes a powerful seductive force that skews one's life.
- The things that the neighbor has evokes the seductive energy of desire (spouse, house anything)
- Occurs with our consumer society
- History reveals Augustine is the great theologian of desire, he reveals that our true desire is for God, but our distorted desire focuses on many lesser objects that interrupt a proper desire for God.
- In modern day Adam Smith noticed the way human persons can be propelled by wants.
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#### **I No Coveting**

- a. To covet concerns not only an attitude of wanting but also an action of taking.
- b. The wanting/taking is prohibited because it is contrary to the will of the God
- c. The term "neighbor" occurs 3 times; concerns the well being of the neighbor

#### **II History of Coveting**

- Begins in creation

#### **Genesis 3:6**

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

- a. Claus Westermann observed there is delight and sensual pleasure is something that is prohibited –the fruit
- b. The attraction was intensified by being prohibited
- c. Attraction to pleasing sensual objects is natural. The desire of one to seize what is not one's own is the act of coveting.

### **III Pharaoh**

- a. Genesis 12:10 indicates that Pharaoh already had an ample food supply yet in Genesis 41:1-7, Pharaoh is anxious about the scarcity of food

### **Genesis 41:1-7**

After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream.

- b. Irony in the fact that the one with the most is the one who has dreams of scarcity.
- c. Although the narrative is about food Pharaoh felt he did not have enough control. His desire was propelled by an anxious desire to be self-sufficient.

### **IV Bread from Heaven**

#### **Exodus 16**

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?' And Moses said, 'When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.'

Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, "Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining."' And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God."'

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents."' The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. And Moses said to them 'Let no one leave any of it over until morning.' But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

- a. The Manna story suggests:
- b. There is enough, but it must be shared
- c. The gift of food must not be stored up
- d. The narrative ends with provision for Sabbath

## **V Augustine**

- a. Augustine's teaches that we love persons in relationship and use commodities
- b. Pharaoh would do the exact opposite – Use persons and love commodities.
- c. The tenth commandment, "You shall not covet" comes from a long history of coveting:
- e. Adam and Eve in the garden of abundance, in their inordinate desire, brought huge trouble for themselves
- f. It addresses Pharaoh by a summary of condemnation of rapacious economic systems and practices that are driven by anxiety about scarcity into a frantic pursuit of more.
- g. It acknowledges the neighbor as a figure of dignity and respect that enunciates the curbing of greed. "The respect for boundary of the neighbor leads eventually to the prayer "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The maintenance of proper and just boundaries guarantees a viable and peaceable society.

## **VI Moses' Construction of the Tabernacle**

- a. Idols are products of valuable commodities that are transposed into

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objects of desire and worship. They are without passion. They command or prohibit nothing. They are easy gods that make no covenant and have on their horizon no neighbor.

Exodus 25-31

Moses had received detailed instructions from God for the construction of the tabernacle

Exodus 36-40 Moses followed God's instruction. In order to do what God instructed he needed proper building material Chapter 35- 36 are an accounting of the accumulation of the required materials for the construction of the tabernacle. Upon hearing what was needed for the construction of the tabernacle the people responded with great generosity. The outcome of their joyful generosity was a rich offering of money and possession.

- b. The narrative of anxiety seeks to control God and oppress the neighbor
- c. The narrative of trust yields to God to the God who stands with and by and for the neighbor.
- d. Those who generously brought their money and possessions to the God of emancipation and covenant had arrived at the assurance of the psalmist: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1)

Exodus 36- 40

### Reflections

Materialism, acquisition, and possessions are not sufficient to live by, or to die by. At some point followers of Jesus must decide whether they will listen to the wisdom of the world or to the wisdom of God.

One must decide what is lasting, eternal, and of infinite value from what is temporary and untrustworthy.

Our ultimate worth is derived from the assurance that we are children of God, created by God, and infinitely loved by God.

What Christians earn belongs to God, and they should use it wisely, not foolishly, on things that enhance life not diminish it.

What Christians give belongs to God.