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REVELATION 18 POINT TWO
AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE
the IDOLATRY of COVETOUSNESS

At the end of an incredible life, John the Apostle wrote some arresting words. He had met and followed Jesus as a very young man. After those climactic days of the Crucifixion, resurrection and birth of the church -- John had outlived them all. As the final Apostle he closes his message with this warning:

First John 5:21= the last words of John to believers are a warning against idols.

1 John 5:21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (NIV)

Why would the first two of the ten commands of the OT and the last of the NT be on idolatry? When we come to Revelation 18 we are looking at the fully grown evils of this world system. As we saw in our study of Revelation 17, Babylon is at the same time an ancient city, a kingdom of the past, as well as a system of religion and a political-economic direction.

Revelation 18 spells out the end of the political and economic system of our world. In one brief chapter all the age of man's greed comes to a halt. What are the elements of this world system that God hates so much that He destroys it?

Many Bible scholars believe it is the ungodly worship of money or The System of Materialism. Look back at the way John Introduced Babylon in chapter 17.

17:5 "abominations" This is the Greek word *bdelugma* that Christ used in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 for the image of the Beast set up in the Temple during the Tribulation. The worship of idols has always been warned against by God to His people. God even warns that the worship of the True God in a false way is totally unacceptable to Him. Note these verses:

What are the elements of this world system that God hates so much that He destroys it?

One is covetousness. God hates the lust for things. Look at the last of the Ten Commandments: Deuteronomy 5:21 "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (NIV)

Now, look at:

Colossians 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (NIV)

Ephesians 5:5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a man is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (NIV)

Covetousness is "to long for, be preoccupied with having what God has not given us". Possessiveness is "to be selfish and unsharing with what God has given us".¹

¹ Alcorn, p. 55.

A sure sign of the materialism of covetousness is its INSATIABILITY. "The legitimacy of a desire lies in the ability to satisfy or fill it. All true needs -- such as food, drink, and companionship -- are satiable. Illegitimate wants -- pride, envy, greed -- are insatiable. By their very nature they can't be satisfied."²

The Bible has many grim markers that show where illegitimate desire has given birth to immense disaster:

- ⇒ Achan's lust for more lead to his death and all his family. [Joshua 7]
- ⇒ Balaam's greed made him fail to hear his own message. [Numbers 22:4-35]
- ⇒ Delilah betrayed a man who trusted her, for a payoff. [Judges 16]
- ⇒ Solomon's insatiable desire for more of everything led him away from God. [Deuteronomy 17:16-17]
- ⇒ Gehazi was not content with serving God, he lied to get more and paid dearly for it. [II Kings 5:20-27]
- ⇒ Judas measured the inestimable value of Jesus in pieces of silver. [
- ⇒ Annanias & Saphira could not let go of the money they possessed nor the applause they coveted so God killed them! [Acts 5:1-11]

The Lord Jesus Christ says two things in Luke 12:13-48, very clearly:

- Watch out for covetousness.
- Watch for my return.

Luke 16:13 = our Lord said we can't serve God and Money.

Luke 16:13¹³ "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (NIV)

CONCLUSION: Covetousness or Greed is not just a harmless pastime but a serious offense against God.

Just as the lustful man is an adulterer in Matthew 5:28;
The hateful man a murderer in I John 3:15;
so the greedy man is an idolater in Col. 3:5.³

Application:

What some modern day idols? Look at some old ones the Lord condemns, and we can see the new.

The idol of Career, job, occupation or technology:

Habakkuk 1:15-16 The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. (NIV)

² Barnett, Wealth p. 139.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, p. 55.

The idol of appetite, desire:

Philippians 3:19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. (NIV)

The idol of Money:

Job 31:24-28 "If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high. (NIV)

What does God truly want from us? Listen to Jesus:

Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. (NIV)

How can we do that? David framed his love in a Psalm, the 63rd:

Here are some questions we need to answer:

Who or what is my God?

What is the center of my life?

What do I rely on?

Imagine standing before God and answering:

Do you truly love me more than these?

Do you truly love me?

Do you love me?

"Fairest Lord Jesus"

"When I survey"