

# Luke 12:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

## Analysis

**And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.** This verse introduces Jesus' warning against materialism and the parable of the rich fool (verses 16-21). The double imperative "Take heed, and beware" (*horate kai phylassesthe*, ὁράτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε) emphasizes urgent vigilance. *Horaō* (ὁράω, "take heed") means to see, perceive, or watch carefully. *Phylassō* (φυλάσσω, "beware") means to guard, protect, or be on guard against. The repetition indicates serious danger requiring constant watchfulness.

The object of vigilance is "covetousness" (*pleonexias*, πλεονεξίας), from *pleonexia* (πλεονεξία) meaning greed, avarice, or literally "having more." It combines *pleon* (more) and *echō* (to have)—the insatiable desire to acquire and accumulate. This vice appears repeatedly in vice lists throughout the New Testament (Romans 1:29, Ephesians 5:3, Colossians 3:5, where Paul calls it idolatry). Covetousness is fundamentally idolatrous because it places ultimate trust and hope in possessions rather than God.

The explanatory clause, "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (*hoti ouk en tō perisseuein tini hē zōē autou estin ek tōn hyparchontōn autō*, ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῷ περισσεύειν τινι ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ), makes the profound philosophical and theological claim that life's essence and quality are independent of material abundance. The noun *zōē*

(ζωή) means life in its fullest sense—not merely biological existence but meaningful, flourishing, abundant life. The verb *perisseuein* (περισσεύειν, "abundance") means to exceed, overflow, or have surplus. Jesus declares that surplus possessions do not create or enhance true life.

## Historical Context

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This teaching occurred in response to a man requesting Jesus to arbitrate an inheritance dispute with his brother (Luke 12:13). Jesus refused to serve as civil judge but used the request as opportunity to address underlying spiritual issues—greed and misplaced priorities. First-century Jewish culture, like most agricultural societies, was concerned with inheritance and property. Land was primary wealth, and its division among heirs was crucial for family survival and status.

The economic context of Roman Palestine featured stark inequality. A small elite controlled most wealth and land, while the majority lived as peasant farmers, day laborers, or craftsmen with little economic security. In such contexts, inheritance disputes were intense and common, often tearing families apart. Jesus' refusal to arbitrate the dispute and His warning against covetousness challenged both the wealthy (who accumulated excessively) and the poor (who envied and coveted).

Jewish teaching condemned covetousness. The Tenth Commandment explicitly prohibits coveting a neighbor's possessions (Exodus 20:17). Proverbs repeatedly warns against greed and declares that "Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Proverbs 15:16). However, first-century culture also viewed wealth as divine blessing and poverty as curse (based on Deuteronomy 28-30), creating theological tension. Jesus consistently challenged the equation of wealth with blessing, teaching that spiritual poverty can accompany material wealth (Revelation 3:17) and spiritual riches can accompany material poverty (James 2:5).

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

## Study Questions

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1. Why does Jesus emphasize vigilance ('take heed and beware') specifically regarding covetousness rather than other sins?
2. How does the equation of covetousness with idolatry (Colossians 3:5) illuminate this warning's seriousness?
3. In what ways does contemporary consumer culture make covetousness seem normal or even virtuous rather than sinful?
4. What is the difference between wise stewardship and prudent saving versus the covetous accumulation Jesus warns against?
5. How can believers cultivate contentment and resist covetousness while still working diligently and planning responsibly?

## Interlinear Text

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εἶπεν	δὲ	πρὸς	αὐτοῦ	Ὅρατε	καὶ	φυλάσσεσθε		
he said	And	unto	the things which he	Take heed	and	beware		
G2036	G1161	G4314	G846	G3708	G2532	G5442		
ἀπὸ	τῆς	πλεονεξίας	ὅτι	οὐκ	ἐν	τῷ	περισσεύειν	τινὶ
of	G3588	covetousness	for	not	in	G3588	the abundance	a man's
G575		G4124	G3754	G3756	G1722		G4052	G5100
ἡ	ζωὴ	αὐτοῦ	ἐστίν	ἐκ	τῶν	ὑπαρχόντων		
G3588	life	the things which he	consisteth	of	G3588	possesseth		
	G2222	G846	G2076	G1537		G5224		
αὐτοῦ								
the things which he								
G846								

## Additional Cross-References

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**Hebrews 13:5** (Parallel theme): Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

**Proverbs 15:16** (Parallel theme): Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

**Proverbs 16:16** (Parallel theme): How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

**Luke 16:14** (Parallel theme): And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

**2 Timothy 3:2** (Parallel theme): For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

**Colossians 3:5** (Parallel theme): Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

**Psalms 62:10** (Parallel theme): Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

**2 Peter 2:3** (Parallel theme): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

**Luke 8:14** (Parallel theme): And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

**Psalms 37:16** (Parallel theme): A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.