



Luke 12:13-24, I Cor. 5:9-13
“Greed: When Enough Is Not”

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(3rd Sunday In Lent)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 12:13-34, 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-13
"GREED: WHEN ENOUGH IS NOT"

Not A Kingdom Parable But A Single, Indirect Parable
12:1-53 Is Spoken To Disciples, 12:13-34 On Possessions

A. 12:13-21 THE WRONG ATTITUDE TO TREASURE AND POSSESSIONS.

//Thomas 72; Sirach 11:14-20 (esp. vv18-19); 1 Enoch 97:8-10

1) vv.13-15 INTRODUCTION AND FIRST GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

Is God Enough?

13	One of the multitude said to him (Jesus),	Family Matter, Assumes Justice Is On His Side Assumes Massive Crowds Of 12:1
	"Teacher (Rabbi), bid my brother to divide the inheritance with me."	Specific Situation: Justice Issue, <i>Rabbi</i>
14	But he (Jesus) said to him,	<i>Divide//Divider</i> , Dt. 21:15-17 Eldest Got Double
	"O Man, who made me a judge or divider over you (pl.)?"	Sharp Rebuff To Family Conflict Over Inheritance
		He Wants To Use Jesus To Get What He Wanted: Property Meant Honor/Status
15	And he said to them,	Heart Problem, Beyond Needs, Desire To Hoard, Gk. <i>pleonexia</i>
	"Take heed and beware of all covetousness (i.e. <i>every insatiable desire</i>);	Ex. 20:17, Dt. 6:21, Mic. 2:2, Col. 3:5
	<u>for a man's life (self) does not consist in the abundance of his</u> POSSESSIONS ."	v.33, You Are Not What You Own, 9:25 Personhood Not = To Possessions

2) vv.16-20 THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL.

//Thomas 63, Sirach 11:14-19, 1 Enoch 97:8-10

1:51-53, 6:24, 8:14, Example Of v.15

a) v.16 Plenty Of Goods Given (By God).

Parable Is Meant To Shock The Listeners

16	And he told them a parable, saying,	Then = 2 Brothers? Crowd?
Occasion	"There was a certain rich man whose land (holdings) brought forth plenty.	Gift = Field Prospered, Already Prosperous, To Be Envied 1:51, 2:35, 12:2-3, Self-Talk Reveals Priorities

b) v.17 Problem Of Self Talk: I/I/My

What Are The Conversations In My Head?

Problem		Soliloquy, All Alone, We Overhear His Honest Thoughts
17	And he discussed with himself, saying, "What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?"	//Ecc. 5:10, Bounty Exceeded His Expectations Initially Perplexed, Necessary Prudent Question 2 I's + 1 My's, Hold For Later Sales Foolishly Trusts In Possessions

b') vv.18-19 Solution Of Self-Talk: Store/Enjoy It Within The Circle Of Self.

Solution		Isolation: No One Else In The Story: Only A Rich Guy, His Stuff!
18	And he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger barns; and I will store all my grain and my goods.	His Plan, Prosperity Revealed A Corrupt Soul/Life 4 I's + 4 My's + 1 Soul, Self-sufficient/Autonomous/Invulnerable Has A Plan! Hoard? Drive Up Price? Whoever dies with the most toys wins? Giving Never Crosses His Mind
19	And I will say to my soul 'Soul! You have ample good laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and enjoy yourself."	Error Revealed! Sentences of Sextus 21, "Soul as trust from God" Oops! Idolater, Test. Judah 19:1 His Goal = Retire, Good Life: Hedonism, Ecc. 8:15 LXX 9:25, Ps. 36:9, Practical Atheism, Disregards God/Neighbor

a' v.20 Goods And Life Taken By The Giver.

Slogan Of 1 Cor. 15:32, Not To Be Envied

Interruption		Soul (vv.19, 20, 22, 23)
20	But God said to him, 'Fool! this night your soul/life is required of you, and what you have prepared, whose will these things be?'	Many years → This night! Practical Atheism, Ignored God, Ps. 14:1, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Uncertain Life, Little Control, Accountable Before God! Un-Answered, What You Trusted Is Now Gone! One You Did Not Trust/Follow Is Now Unbearable Present

1') v.21 CONCLUSION AND SECOND GENERAL PRINCIPLE.

v.21 = *Nimshal* (Summary)

The Two Are Antithetical, What Accountant Measures riches for God?

21	So is he who TREASURES up for himself, and is not gathering riches for God."	Are You Like This? Retirement/Ease Is Not The Goal Of Life What Mean? //Mt. 6:19-21, Is God/The Next Life On Your Balance Sheet? 16:13 Is Yours Only A Now Orientation? Or Also A Next Orientation? Use Of Money Reveals Heart Rich In Love? Service? Giving? Justice? Relationships? Worship? Prayer? Joy? Enrich Self? Or Enrich Relationship With God? Run Away From Practical Atheism Towards Kingdom Living Story Asks, "What is the meaning of life?" Commentary On 12:15, Life Is Not Mere Possessions If My Desire Is To Be Like The Rich Fool, I Have A Greed Problem And Have Believed A Lie! No Response From The Younger Brother! Is He Silent?
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B. 12:22-31 JESUS TEACHES THE DISCIPLES ABOUT ANXIETY & GENEROSITY.

1) vv.22-23 Command: Do Not Be Anxious: Eat/Clothing.

And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you,
do not be anxious about your life (soul), what you shall eat,
nor about your body, what you shall put on.
For life (soul) is more than food,
and the body more than clothing.

2) v.24 Example Of The Ravens (Lesser to Greater Argument).

- a Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap,
they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.
b Of how much more value are you than the birds!

3) vv.25-26 Example: Human Life.

And which of you by being **anxious** can add a cubit to his span of life? **No One!**
If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you **anxious** about the rest?

2') vv.27-28 Example Of The Lilies (Lesser to Great Argument).

- a Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin;
yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
b But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,
how much more will he clothe you, O men of little faith!

1') vv.29-31 Command: Do Not Be Anxious: Eat/Drink.

- a And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink,
b **nor be of anxious mind.**
c For all the nations of the world seek these things;
c' and your Father knows that you need them.
b' Instead, seek his kingdom, **Call For Disciples**
a' and these things shall be yours as well.

A' vv.32-34 THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO TREASURE AND POSSESSIONS.

"Fear not, little flock, *Fear 12:4-5, 7, 32; Worry 12:11, 22, 25, 26 //29*
for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
Sell your **POSSESSIONS**, and give alms;
provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a **TREASURE** in the heavens that does not fail,
where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

I CORINTHIANS 5:9-13 PAUL'S STANDARDS OF FELLOWSHIP: GREED INCLUDED

5:9-11 GENERAL DISCIPLINE FOR ALL MORAL OFFENDERS IN 2 PARTS.

- a *I wrote* to you in my (previous) letter **not to associate** with immoral men (women); **Letter Before I Cor.**
not at all meaning the immoral of this world, **1 Thess. 4:12, Lost People, Prophetic Counterculture**
or *the greedy* and robbers, or idolaters, **In But Not Of The World**
since then you would need to go out of the world. **He Corrects Their Misunderstanding, Church Is Not Isolationist**
Unlike Covenanters At Qumran
b But rather *I wrote* to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother **Discredits The Family**
if he is guilty of immorality or *greed*, **Vice List (4 + 2 From Deut.: Death Penalty)**
or is an idolater, reviler (slanderer), **Dt. 22:21-22, 30; 13:1-5, 17:2-7, 19:16-19, 21:18-21;24:7**
drunkard, or robber (kidnapper?)— **OT Reasons For Exclusion From Covenant Community**
not even to eat with such a one. **No Eucharist, Social Isolation, 5 of 6 Are Non-Sexual**
Holiness/Integrity Of The Church Is Matter Of Internal Discipline

1') vv.12-13 CHURCH & OUTSIDERS, COMMAND TO DRIVE OUT (OT AUTHORITY).

- For what have I to do with judging **OUTSIDERS**? **See Mt. 7:1, Often Misunderstood As Unlimited Tolerance**
Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? **Internal Quality Control, Discipline, Mt. 18:17**
God judges those outside. **Our Tolerance Is Actually Indifference**
Sinful Behavior Cannot Be Allowed To Corrupt Community

"Drive out the wicked person from among you."

God Speaks, Deut. 13:5b, 17:7, 22:21-24, Church As Israel

Deut. Text Referred To Capital Punishment, Synagogues Allowed By Rome To Banish

A BEGINNING ANALYSIS OF *GREED* (Latin *avaritia*)

CATEGORY	GREED
Bodily Location	Grasping Hand
Synonyms	Avarice, Acquisitiveness
Brief Definition	The insatiable desire for more than needed, particularly wealth, power
T.V. Mnemonic: <i>Gilligan's Island</i>	The Howells (1 vice, 2 people)
Equal but opposite vice	Prodigality, Waste, Spendthrift, Not caring for family
*Corruption Of Something Good *Life as....	Appreciation of the good and necessary things for life Life as insatiable acquisition to falsely secure the false self
Healing Virtue Blessed are... One word: <i>A</i> *Healing Discipline	Charity / Renunciation/ De-accumulation The merciful, Matthew 5:7 Aid Offering of self, Offering of goods, Detachment from goods
Desire for...	Something more
*Stereotype	The Miser
Impairs a....	Sense of priorities
Biblical example	Ananias, Sapphira in Acts 5,
Commandments	8: No Stealing, 10: No coveting, Love the neighbor
Effect on others	Distrust you, Question your motives to use people
Key verses	Mt. 6:24, 1 Tim. 6:10, Heb. 13:5, 2 Pet. 2:14
*You become... *Loss:	Isolated and Insulated Community
*“M” word	MINE/MORE
*Hell is...	Inability to obtain
*Leads to...	Dishonest business, Overwork, Miserliness, Self-indulgence
*Household item	Desk, Computer, Wallet, Credit Card
*Theme song	Abba, Pink Floyd: “Money....”, Tevye’s “If I Were A Rich Man”
Emerges as a new layer of the 8 stages. Focuses On...	3) Play age Ownership and control
How Dante’s Punishment fits the vice	Those in hell hurl boulders at one another
Social mapping of deadly sins in Nevada	Compare average incomes with number in poverty
*Institutional, Cultural Forms	Wall Street, Gambling Industry
*Personal Evidence	High credit card debt, gambling, always know “what’s next” to buy, hoarding,
*Excuse	“I love the power and security that comes from money”
Secular Form	Unregulated capitalism, Unthinking consumerism

GREED: WHEN ENOUGH IS NOT

“This night your soul is required of you!”

God recalls a loan.

L U K E 1 2 : 2 0 a

A demon once owned a large box of gold coins he kept buried under an old house. One day his superiors ordered him to leave his assigned turf for another part of the world. It posed a problem. What to do with the treasure? If a guardian was hired, it would cost a great deal. If left under the house, it could be dug up and stolen. At last the dark spirit came up with an idea: he took the treasure to the home of a miser.

"Dear Sir, I wish to give you a gift before I leave. I've always been fond of you. Feel free to spend all the gold- however you desire. There is but one stipulation. Should you die, I am your sole heir." The miser was delighted with the terms.

Twenty years later the demon returned to find the miser had recently died. He also found the treasure; not a single coin was missing. A fiendish laugh was heard; the miser was a guardian who cost him not a penny.

The Russian sages who told the folktale often ended with a question, "Is it not true that when we hoard money we are merely guarding it for the demons?"¹

Greed- fifth in the classic list of seven deadly sins (i.e. pride, envy, anger, sloth, *greed*)- has two sides. One is miserliness, which is an obsessive desire to keep what you have. The words *miser* and *misery* are closely related. Money- which is a means- is mistaken for an end. Love is turned back on itself, not a love of the good money can do, the problems it solves or the joys it might bring, but love of the stuff itself and what it symbolizes about present power, future safety, and abiding status.

Here the character of Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* comes to mind. Scrooge sat alone with a single candle flickering in his cold bedroom.

¹ W. White, *Stories for Telling* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986), 113-114.

“Darkness is cheap,” wrote Dickens, “and Scrooge liked it.”² Scrooge was an isolated miser, until by the power of divine mercy he was shown several visions and came to deep repentance and new joy. Scrooge was a convert, and it was good for Tiny Tim.

The flip side of greed is *avarice*, a desire for more that’s never satisfied. The miserly say, “What’s mine is mine” and holds it tightly. The avaricious say, “What’s yours is mine,” and reach for it. Avarice is the large end of a funnel, miserliness the small end, but they are of single piece and grounded in fear of the future and unbelief as to God’s provision. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the greedy are pictured with their backs turned to heaven, their eyes fixed on the earth. They live and die pointed in the wrong direction, as one of them laments, “Greed quenched out love of good, thus all our labors were in vain.”³ The opposite of miserliness is liberality, as Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give,”⁴ and the opposite of avarice is contentment—which is to appreciate what God has given, including the talent- perhaps- of being good at business.⁵ In a letter to a younger colleague, Paul warns Timothy that greed—here defined as *the desire to be rich* and *the love of money*—is a menace:

"But those who *desire to be rich* fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men (women) into ruin and destruction. For the *love of money* is the root of all (kinds of) evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their heart with many pangs.”⁶

Notice the synonyms Paul uses for love: *desires* and *cravings*. Also the multiple words for consequences: greed is a *snare*, *senseless*, *hurtful*, a *plunge*, a *ruin*, *destruction*, *evil*, and *pierced* with *pangs*. Greed is about what you dream and scheme about. Paul piles up a long list of negative consequences to say, “Look at your inward garden; see what’s growing there.” If the dreams of your heart and the energies of life are dominated by the desire to be rich because you see it as the key

² Jeff Cook, *Seven* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 88.

³ *Divine Comedy: Purgatorio* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), Cantos XIX-XXX.

⁴ Matthew 10:9.

⁵ Peter Kreeft, *After Virtue* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1992), 110.

⁶ 6:9-10.

to a happy life, you have a greed problem, and it will be the cause of much pain: a foolish trap that snaps shut, a hurtful plunge into a deep dark fall, a heart pierced with pain, and in the end it will make you small and visit you with destruction. Stay away from the deadly sin of greed; not from ambition, not from the desire for excellence, not from diligence and good management, not even from creating a legacy, but from greed which is a different thing. Also remember that *contentment*- the opposite of greed- is praised in 1 Timothy, but only if it is paired with *godliness*. Paul writes:

"There is great gain in godliness *with contentment*; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content."⁷

All we take to heaven at death and finally into God's kingdom when it descends is our accumulated character which is the sum of our habits, how much love and wisdom has been built into us through following Christ among his people. The Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft reflects on the fact of *naked in, naked out*:

"The first skeleton archaeologists uncovered from the ruins of ancient Pompeii was grasping silver coins in his outstretched hand. The coins rolled away as the skeleton was uncovered, with a mocking clink. Alexander the Great was a little wiser. After conquering the world and despairing there were no more worlds to conquer, he soon died; but he directed that his bare hand hang out of his coffin, to show the world you can't take it with you. The wisdom of Job is literally true: 'naked I came into this world and naked I shall return.'"⁸

So the question is not, What do you own? but Who are you becoming? Not what is your net worth? but What is your true value? Today we expose greed, a deadly power which shrivels and finally renders the heart incapable of giving or receiving the only thing that satisfies, which is love from God and for people. The greedy cannot love since they see every relationship as an chance for their increase; life is an endless balance sheet, a perpetual score card. People becomes means to ends rather than ends in themselves; tools to be used, not persons to be valued. And since they see no need for mercy, none will be shown them.

⁷ 6:6-7.

⁸ Kreeft, *After Virtue*, 112.

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Related names for this deadly sin are *covetousness*- wanting what others have in a way that makes me miserable, and *acquisitiveness*- a roving eye that's always seeking more. But whatever its form, greed "implies an insatiable desire to possess or acquire something that is far greater than we need."⁹ Gluttony tests the limits of the stomach; greed tests the limits of social and legal propriety with what it can get away with.¹⁰ And since greed is linked to more than is needed- or ever could be, it is a form of insanity- out of touch with reality and so misses God.

Perhaps the most virulent form of greed is the rising gambling fever sweeping the nation. Do you think the Vegas and underworld national gambling bosses care anything for the moral climate of South Carolina? No! Do they care about the new addicts that will be created? No! All they want is to set up a vacuum cleaner from the pockets of our citizens into their already swollen coffers. All in the name of freedom and fun, a little innocent entertainment, a few tax dollars.

Yes, there have always been gambling addicts (8 to 10 million at recent count). But reduce the drinking age to fifteen and see how many more fifteen year old alcoholics you have. Make gambling more available and see how many more addicts you create; it is the church and social service agencies who end up feeding their children. I do not want Myrtle Beach or Charleston to become another Vegas with all the unsavory sidelines that go with such. I agree with Dr. Stanley Hauerwas who teaches at Duke Divinity School, "Using gambling as a form of taxation is an indication that your governments no longer have moral legitimacy."¹¹ It is political cowardice. Gambling- the idea of something for nothing- undermines the work ethic and is therefore bad for the economy, not good. You do not build up a nation by eroding what remains of the moral reserves of its people, which in our day are getting thinner and thinner, and I- for one- can already see the bottom of the barrel.

People would not gamble unless it was *fun and exciting*. I'm not immune; if I gave myself over to it, I could become as trapped as anyone. But it is not harmless. Every time you experience the adrenaline rush and imagine what it would be like to win big, you're giving way to greed and weakening your moral fiber a strand at a

⁹ Donald Capps, *Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 35.

¹⁰ Kreeft, *After Virtue*, 35.

¹¹ Joe Atkins, "The State's Bad Bet," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 21, 1991.

time. When you gamble, you are not left untouched. You are weakened and set up for further compromise. And when it comes time to vote, you will find it hard to take the high ground and follow church teaching. Is it any wonder in literature and life that gambling, organized crime, drunkenness, sexual immorality, prostitution and political corruption cluster together? No. Compromise in one area bleeds over into others; the seven deadly sins are a web where ones leads to another, and where you start is never where you finish. Steve Farrar sums up the price: "Sin," he says, "will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you're willing to pay."¹²

In the greed of gambling you are selling your soul piece by piece and growing more morally feeble with each roll of the dice, each spin of the wheel, or each lottery ticket. Thomas Aquinas, the medieval theologian, wrote, "No man can live without delight, and that is why a man deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures."¹³ If you find delight in the carnal pleasure of gambling, it's a sign of how little delight you find in the goods God offers. You are headed in the wrong direction. Find pleasure in giving, not gambling. Seek first the kingdom of God, then watch as real joy erupts in your soul. Life without financial risk is impossible; life without gambling as a form of greed is very possible. Don't participate, and if you are, go through the withdrawal of quitting. And don't resent me for saying so.

Simply put, you cannot gamble and be a good steward of the resources God gives. The counter-cultural social teaching of the church is found in our *Book of Discipline* under *The Social Principles*:

"Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, and destructive of good government. As an act of faith and love, Christians should abstain from gambling, and should strive to minister to those victimized by the process."¹⁴

Preying on the weaknesses of human character is not the love of neighbor. Gambling is theft by mutual consent; it violates the tenth commandment against coveting and the eighth against stealing. I feel the same way about banks sending out

¹² *Finishing Strong* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 90.

¹³ Albert Wells, editor, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 127.

¹⁴ Paragraph 163.G: 131-132.

credit cards by the billions; they create a new financial slavery. Check your balances. If all you do is pay interest, yours is a greed problem. If servicing debt prevents you from tithing and giving offerings with joy, you have a greed problem. Writing my tithe each month, then being open to special giving, is a defense against greed.

I remember an incident where God tested me in this matter. Carolina Family Planning Center, a pro-life ministry we helped start in Hartsville, held a gala fundraiser. The Word came like a beam of light, "Empty your wallet of cash." So clear it startled me. "But Lord, there's real money in there," and as soon as I thought it I knew I was wrong. After a moment of embarrassment, I smiled inwardly, "Got me again! Thank you." It was a joy to give, an even greater blessing to know God was in the business of exposing unbelief in his servant. As the Book of Hebrews puts it, those whom God loves receive correction, and if no correction, you are not a son or daughter.¹⁵ My prayer is to be kept on a short string. I want to walk close enough to be guided by light touches, not hard jerks. A gift was given to save an unborn life; I got a loving reminder and had fear exposed. Such is the wise mercy of God, and one day I hope to obey more quickly without the interruption of unbelief and fear.

Saint Ignatius once proposed a question to his students, "What strategy would Satan use to seduce people to follow him?" He then answered his own question:

"First, Satan would lead people from legitimate striving for security to a wrongful striving after money- *greed*. Second, Satan would lead people from legitimate striving for acceptance to a wrongful striving after recognition- *honor or fame*. Finally, he would lead people from legitimate appreciation of their self worth to sinful self-indulgence- *pride*. Thus Satan's strategy is to seduce people gradually, leading them from legitimate self-striving to sinful self-indulgence."¹⁶

So with the seven deadly sins, each a perversion of an otherwise good desire. Greed, therefore, is not to be confused with initiative or ambition, hard work or thrift, investment or the accumulation of capital into wealth which are virtues for those who have already decided that the pursuit of God's rule is number one. Greed is a perverse hunger, never satisfied. It goes shopping when nothing is needed just to see what it can find. It loves the latest, the newest, the slickest. Greed is always

¹⁵ Hebrews 12:5-11.

¹⁶ Brian Cavanaugh, *More Sower's Seeds* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1992), 78-79.

comparing what it doesn't have to what someone else does, thus the craving for more. Greed's dream is that others see them as important because of what they display: houses, cars, clothes, vacations, luxuries. Greed is an ostentatious display of spiritual poverty. The Scots have a proverb: "The covetous man will never have enough until his mouth is filled with mold."¹⁷ Greed is an indicator a Christian does not understand true riches. You decide where you are with greed. I can't be your conscience; I have enough trouble being my own! I preach with fear and trembling; I can inform you, but only the Holy Spirit has the authority to make heart-level application. For someone to say to me, "You made me feel guilty," is to misplace the cause. If you are guilty and begin to feel so, then good; your conscience still works. And if you feel guilty but aren't in any objective sense, we have counselors to whom you can be referred to sort out your neuroses and stinking thinking!

Recent brain research gives new insight as to why the lure of greed is so hard to resist. Neurologists scanned the brains of people as they recalled times they felt close to God. The same area of the brain- the *caudate nucleus*- lit up in all these people when they reported feeling connected to God in prayer, worship, or solitude. The *caudate nucleus* is not a *God spot*, just the part of the brain most activated when we feel connected to the holy. The same doctors then tested another group, only this time exposing them to images of products tied to *cool* brands- IPAD's, Ferraris, designer clothes- and guess what? The exact same area of the brain lit up! People who buy certain items experienced much the same sensations as those who had deep religious experiences. This is why Jesus called *Mammon*- an Aramaic word for *stuff*- a rival God and why the *greed* that seeks *mammon* is so seductive, hidden and deadly.¹⁸ In his potent little book *Counterfeit Gods*, Pastor Tim Keller says this:

"I've had people confess they struggle with almost every kind of sin.... I cannot recall anyone coming and saying, 'I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me.' Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart."¹⁹

¹⁷ David Seamands, "David Seamands On How We Covet," *Good News*, July/August 1988, 16.

¹⁸ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010), 163-164.

¹⁹ (New York, NY: Dutton, 2009), 52.

Yet when you think about it, no thing can satisfy our hearts since all things are down the scale of being from us. How can money or what it buys satisfy a human heart? We may delight in novelty or beauty, but soon enough unfulfillment and longing returns. A new car looks old again. But to be possessed by the One who is greater than ourselves, to be known and loved by God, this satisfies the restless heart with God's attributes of truth, beauty, and goodness.²⁰ What the greedy long for is ours for the asking- which is more of God and eyes to see the kingdom in our midst.

Greed has many avenues into the heart, and one is inheritances. Having a clear will, and letting that will reflect your faith so that a minimum of a tithe of your estate is given to God's work through the church, is an good idea. I want the reading of my will to be my last, best sermon. I want the lawyer to lean back in chair and say to those gathered round, "I think Pastor Phil and Lori believed this stuff." Leaving wealth without safeguards to persons without proven character is a mistake. Why contribute to their further corruption? Especially your children or grandchildren! Making life easy is not the same as making life good.

So it was the day a man came to borrow some of the Master's rabbinic authority for a legal judgment, "Teacher, bid my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

Jesus was rude in reply, "Bug off. None of my concern. Who made me a judge or divider over you?" As we would put it, "Sounds like a personal problem to me."

Then- with insight- Jesus issued a general warning, "Take heed and beware of *all covetousness*; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." There may have been injustice here. The older brother may indeed have tried to rip his brother off, but his issue was greed, "If only I had this land, I'd have a good life."

"No," said Jesus, "that thought is a lie, the lie of greed."

Apparently the man hung around after being rebuked, so Jesus told a story about what's at stake- not a bit of property but his own soul.²¹ A prosperous farmer

²⁰ Kreeft, *After Virtue*, 112.

²¹ For the most recent research on the parable, see Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 389-400; Gary M. Burge, *Jesus, The Middle Eastern Storyteller* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 99-108; on the larger topic of riches and the New Testament, see Ben Witherington III, *Jesus and Money* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), especially Chapters 3 and 4, "Money in the Bartering World of Jesus," 43-56; "Jesus and the Treasure Hunt," 57-78.

Luke 12:21-34, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 13

had a perfect season; the windfall posed a problem, "What shall I do, for I have no place to store my crops?" It's good to look ahead; it's better to look up.

His answer, however, was not a good one. I count six *I's* and five *my's* in his soliloquy. No *We* here, no sense of community, not a word about feeding the hungry, no friends or family with whom to discuss alternatives, no sense that his bounty was gift from above or a test of character. His dream of a self-indulgent life was about to come true. The American dream of cashing out early to live in splendid isolation was his, so he congratulated himself, "Soul! You have ample good laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, go to Vegas; leave duty and compassion behind, enjoy yourself."

The names for this ancient and modern philosophy of pleasure first are *Epicureanism* and *Hedonism*. A life full of brochures, wine and food magazines everywhere. Enjoy the finest. You deserve it. Live like a sheik. If that is a secret goal of life- now or in retirement- you've bought the lie. But how great was this man's surprise at being interrupted by God, "Fool! I gave you health and wealth and look what you did? Nothing but self, so a nothing you shall be!" No one ever retires from the demands of Christian discipleship, the greatest of which is to love God with all we are and our neighbor as ourselves. And in the farmer's calculations, neither God or the neighbor are found in his equation. What we most need is grace to follow Christ with everything we are and all we have all the way to the grave. That's what I need; that's what I'm asking for.

His first mistake was to think the crops were his, the second was to speak to his soul as if were not on loan. This man was an independent thinker in the absolute worst sense. That night God sent the angels with a recall order because the man no longer deserved to draw a breath. I wonder how many people die prematurely for this reason? One day we will know. God's patience was at an end, and the plug was pulled. No more free air for the greedy man, no more rich earth and abundant rain. Our farmer had the world by the tail when God jerked his chain, and in a flash he saw in light of God's truth what he had become, and it was not pleasant. He is labeled a *Fool*, which in the Bible means one who does not take God into account. "The fool," Psalm 14 notes, "says in his heart, 'There is no God,'" so I can do as I please.

Maybe our friend went to synagogue and was not an atheist in the philosophical sense. He was more likely a *practical atheist*, one who did not take God's perspective into his affairs. God was for the Sabbath; money was god the rest of the week. Any Christian who makes business decisions apart from prayer and the counsel of Scripture is in the same position. You can't afford to make decisions that

omit God. When you make business decisions, warns Jesus, your soul hangs in the balance. This man was fit only for the trash heap. He was busted, indicted, tried, and convicted for the crime of self-indulgent greed, and his last speech was Exhibit A of the kind of man he had become. Jesus told the story to give the younger brother a shock. He saw the windfall from his father's death as the key to life; Jesus saw it as a character test. Riches are a mixed blessing and spiritually dangerous. At a bare minimum, tithe off the top; pray for wisdom to use the rest for something other than self-indulgence. To seek God's kingdom and gather riches for it was Christ's advice. We are to follow him, no matter how little or how much we have. There is finally no good life now and no good future apart from him.

In an earlier letter now lost to us, Paul instructed the newly converted Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral persons because low behavior is contagious, the principle being that what a church tolerates it gets more of, as you well know.²² Tolerate gossip; the church becomes *gossipy*. Tolerate adultery or fornication; the church becomes *morally loose*. Tolerate bigotry; the church becomes *racist*. The immature believers at Corinth took Paul's counsel simplistically and apparently isolated themselves from pagans in the city who practiced immorality- which was practically everyone in Corinth, the effect being that it cut them off from those they were to reach. They became- at least for a short time- a holy huddle, but the problem was not outside the church; it was inside!

To correct the confusion Paul issued a correction. The issue is not staying away from heathens; how else are pagans supposed to act? The issue is brothers and sisters in Christ who are sexually immoral or *greedy*, robbers or idolaters, drunkards or slave traders- which is what the word *robbers* here implies. Stay away from them, says Paul! Don't eat with them. If they will not be reproved or corrected by loving, firm leadership, drive them out in hope that they will wake up and turn around once spiritual and physical consequences kick in.²³ God has ways to raise the pain level.

Paul was a realist on church discipline, which meant loving correction with genuine consequences for stubborn persistence because the integrity of the church is

²² For a review of scholarship on this text, see Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 12-19; for application by a missiologist, C. Peter Wagner, *Effective Body Building* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publications, 1982), Chapter 4, "Is Excommunication Scriptural?" 57-66.

²³ See Matthew 18:15-22 for a parallel perspective in another early church.

at stake. The principle is free association outside the church, but accountability inside to preserve the salt and light. Then come words which are so cross-grained to what we hear about tolerance these days, verses 12 and 13 of 1 Corinthians chapter 5: “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those *inside the church* whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.” We often do just the opposite; we complain about wickedness in the world and wink at it in the church under the liberal banner of tolerance and being non-judgmental. It’s a double loss. The church grows weak internally because of ethical compromise, and the lost world sees us as a bunch of self-righteous Pharisees complaining about their bad behavior. I remember a man who once said to me after a member stiffed him on a bill, “If this is the quality of people you produce, I’m looking for a better factory.” It stung, and he was right. In the words of John Wesley, we are not to be busy-bodies and meddlers; we are, however, “to watch over one another in love,”²⁴ and when we used to meet in weekly Methodist class meetings where hard questions were asked and accountability expected, we were a much more credible people than we are now.²⁵ The sand castle of the mainline churches is now being dissolved by the incessant waves of the culture which beat upon us and for which we have lost nearly all resistance. This is what God’s wrath look like as God gives us what we want.

Paul asks two questions we ought to ponder. Verse 12: "For what have I to do with judging outsiders?" The answer is *Nothing*. Outsiders, unbelievers: they’re God’s to judge. Then the tough question, "Is it not those *inside the church* whom you are to judge?" The expected answer is *Yes*. Church leaders and all members have the God given responsibility not only to keep their own lives free of gross sin but to protect the church from the spread of such. Only a few times in 30+ years of ministry have I exercised this duty and asked persons to formally withdraw or face trial. Both were over repeated adultery- one a board member and Army colonel, the other a Scout Master, and both thought nothing of it. Their pleasures were more important than keeping promises. They couldn’t see what the big deal was: didn’t God love us all and what us all to be happy? Taking formal action came only after long appeals and much spiritual reasoning and support, including an alert to the Superintendent. Outside counseling was refused. Neither repented; both withdrew, left their spouses and married others with whom they’d had affairs. I remember sitting in one man’s

²⁴ *The Book of Discipline* 2012, 76.

²⁵ For a plan to recover a modern version of the Class Meeting, see Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014); Steve Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2000).

living room and- with another respected church leader- pleading with him. It was as if I was speaking to a dead stump.

But what is remarkable here is that Paul lists *greed* right alongside sexual immorality as a cancer that cannot be allowed to grow unchallenged. Greed is deadly to loving community because the greedy cannot say *We* and mean it. In our *Book of Discipline* there are 11 actions for clergy and 10 for laity that are chargeable offenses, meaning they are grounds for formal discipline.²⁶ The first in both lists is *immorality*, and oddly, greed is not among them- though maybe it should be. So while the lists change with circumstances, boundaries remain. Churches that lose internal discipline soon lose their way and succumb to the pressures of conformity to the culture around them, and so it is today in our churches. Many of our bishops and clergy are in open rebellion. Our judicial processes were never designed to handle so many offenses against church teaching and church law. I often find myself asking two questions: How do I preserve and transmit the content of the faith? and, How to engage the culture while maintaining the boundaries that keep the church healthy and holy?

Why is greed among the seven deadly. Because it can exclude you from the church in this life and from heaven and the kingdom in the next. A check on greed consists of three questions: 1) How did you get the money: legally and justly or exploitively? 2) What am I doing with it: indulging in needless luxuries or honoring God? And finally: What's it doing to me?²⁷ Who's in control?

I close with a quote from the medieval saint Bernard of Clairvaux who sums up all the Bible says about greed, "Theirs is an endless road, a hopeless maze, who seek for goods before they seek for God."²⁸

May God expose, then save us from the deadly sin of greed, and may God also give us a heart to seek and enjoy the delights of all his good provisions. May God recapture our hearts, and thus all we are, with the beauty and power of Jesus Christ.

²⁶ *The Book of Discipline* 2012, 776ff.

²⁷ PreachingToday.com search under *greed*.

²⁸ Wells, *Inspiring Quotations*, 127.
