

March 22, 2009

**THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS: GREED**  
**1KGS 21.1-29; LK 12.13-21; 1TM 6.3-10, 17-19**

**1. THE CHARACTER OF GREED**

**A. DESIRE FOR DOMINION FRUITFULNESS: THE VIRTUOUS HOST**

When God created man in his own image, one aspect of that image-bearing nature was man's desire and mission for the dominion of creation. That is, man was to be creative like his heavenly Father, take proper possession over the world, and make the world fruitful.

God himself gives us the pattern. God himself desires to possess and enjoy the fruit from his labor. Cf. Israel as fruit tree/vineyard.

God desires to possess and be fruitful in order that he might share with others. He creates the world and gives it to man so that man might make it fruitful so that God and man may enjoy it together.

We are to desire to possess and be productive so that we might share with and enjoy others.

Greed is *not* the desire to possess. That is a God-given, God-imaging quality. The Christian faith wants to enflame proper passions and direct them toward their righteous goals.

**B. GREED: POSSESSED BY POSSESSING**

Greed takes this righteous quality of desire for dominion fruitfulness and distorts it into over-reaching to possess just for the sake of possessing. Greed wants to possess for its own sake. Greed is not interested in how fruitfulness benefits others.

Greed is sometimes very slippery and difficult to nail down. Sometimes it is very obvious in people who are totally given over to it, but rarely do we see Greed in such an obvious fashion.

Thomas Aquinas: "the immoderate desire for temporal possessions which can be estimated in money."

Greed is no respecter of persons. It afflicts the poor as well as the rich. It is a question of desire not possessions or lack thereof.

Immoderate desire to possess: There are no hard-and-fast lines in our hearts that mark the difference between the righteous desire to possess and the immoderate desire to possess. Must see how far we can stay away from it; not how close we can come without actually sinning.

Things/Possessions are not evil. Possessions as possessions are not bad. Money is good when it is in proper relationship to us; that is, when it is our servant. Money can serve us well in this world. But when it becomes our master, a good thing has turned bad because we have exalted it to the position of a god in our lives.

The inordinate desire for things turns things into an idol. Col 3.5: Greed/Covetousness = idolatry. Your immoderate desire to possess transforms the creation into an idol. You have then exalted the creation over the Creator.

Worship is a transformative act. That is, you *will*, without fail, reflect that which you truly worship. When you truly worship the one, true and living God through Christ by faith, you will be transformed into his image from glory to glory.

Those who worship idols become like them (cf. Psa 115.8). When you worship idols you die because they have no life in themselves and you become like them.

What characterizes the man who worships the idol of possessions?

Greed is an insatiable thirst. You can never be satisfied.

The two hands of Greed: one that is clenched shut and one that is wide open.

The miserly man is the one whose fist is clenched tightly on his possessions, unwilling to relinquish them for any reason. The miserly man believes that life is found in holding on to his possessions.

The miser hoards up money. E.g., Judas (John 12.3ff.)

If you have difficulty giving, if you are resistant to giving, whether that be your tithe or helping others when you have the ability, you might be in the grips of Greed.

Greed's possible rationalizations: "I'm being frugal" or "I'm being practical."

The other hand of Greed: wastefulness. There is nothing for which it will not spend its last penny to possess. It is prodigal (a word which means rashly or wastefully extravagant). Cf. Lk 15 and the prodigal son.

"I would be happy if only I had \_\_\_\_\_." If that blank is filled in with anything other than God himself, then you are possibly in the grip of Greed. Augustine: he who has God has everything; he who has everything but God has nothing; and he who has God plus everything else does not have any more than he who has God alone.

Do our possessions define us? clothing brands as status symbols; cars, houses, etc.

Church at times fosters Greed and enflames it. Willimon: "Perhaps we ought to think of the church as schooling in desire, learning how to want the right things in the right way and the right proportions. Unfortunately, many simply think of the church as just another way to get our needs met. Church is where I get one-stop shopping for the satisfaction of all my spiritual longs and urges. A capitalist economy tends to commodify [*sic*] everything, even Jesus."

But in all of these promises of Greed, it can never satisfy. In fact if Greed did satisfy, it would be self-defeating. If you could actually attain all that was promised, there would be no more need for Greed. Greed will not allow it to be so.

Greed will always drive you to possess but you will never fully possess. Therefore, you will always be frustrated, discontent, restless, and sad. Once you have possessed the thing you desire, it loses its luster and something else out there attracts you.

1Kg 21: Ahab, Jezebel, and Naboth's vineyard.

*Greed inordinately desires what it cannot and sometimes should not have.* Greed doesn't simply aspire to something, it is consumed with having it. It must possess. You become depressed when you cannot have it.

*Greed will seek to possess at all costs.* We may not endorse physical harm, but we will strap ourselves and families with insurmountable debt cause financial problem and murder our good names.

*Greed sees possessions as more important than people (and many times people as possessions or as means to possess).*

Lk 12: The Rich Fool.

*Greed believes that life is found in possessing.*

*Greed believes that security is found in possessing.*

*Greed does not consider giving away its abundance.*

## **2. THE CURE FOR GREED**

### **A. MERCY**

1Tm 6.17-19 - wealth is not bad, but it must be kept in its proper place.

- Wealth should not produce haughtiness; i.e., believing you are better than others because you have more.
- Should not trust in uncertain riches but in God.
- Wealth can only be enjoyed when it is not your ultimate desire.
- Works of mercy will stave off Greed.

### **B. CONTENTMENT**

Not possessed by possessing. Attitude of gratitude.

Contentment is freedom.