

Greed: It's All About Me

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have. (Hebrews 13:5) NASU

This morning, the news is talking about a man in Long Island, New York, who was trampled to death in a Black Friday shopping spree. Walmart workers had tried in vain to restrain the crowds, who wanted the doors opened before the 5 A.M. time. Some had been waiting at the store since 9 P.M. the night before. Three children and a wife lost their father and husband because of greed. A family lost a loved one because big-screen displays were on sale.

Most, if not all of the laws found in the Old Testament involve selfishness and greed to some degree. Sin comes from within us, not the devil. Jesus said, "From within, out of human hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside." Satan tempted Eve by playing on her greed. "You'll become like God!" he promised.

Greed is what helped lead Israel into captivity. Referring to their prophets, who were supposed to be shepherds of the people, he writes:

They are as greedy as dogs, never satisfied; they are stupid shepherds who only look after their interest, each trying to get as much as he can for himself from every possible source. (Isa 56:11)

Sounds like today's politicians, doesn't it? In a parable concerning self-centeredness, Jesus spoke of a man who had it all but wanted more. I've highlighted the many personal pronouns:

The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, (emphasis mine) 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21) NIV

Our culture reeks of self-centeredness. On our computers, we have *My Documents*. We talk on iPhones. We eat burgers made *our* way. Madison Avenue marketing gurus spend millions placing *you* at the center of whatever product they're selling. If you buy a particular thing you'll become the envy of society—you shall be like God—worshiped and admired by others. The fact of the matter is that others, including those closest to you, will hate your guts.

What About Us Christians?

One of the biggest problems God had with Israel was that His people wanted to imitate the other nations. They coveted everything from how they worshiped (usually in drunken sexual orgies) to ways to get ahead financially (typically by sacrificing their children to pagan gods.) Scripture says, "They mingled with the nations, and learned their practices, served their idols, which became a snare to

them.” (Psa 106:36)

Are we any different? In the story about the Rich Man and Lazarus, the former went to hell. Jesus never explains why the Rich Man went there, but the principle is clear: he knew Lazarus, who “longed to be fed from the crumbs that fell from his table,” and cared not a wit about him. He had more pressing matters vying for his attention. His time and agenda were above the needs of some beggar.

In Matthew 25, there is a single issue that divides those who enter heaven and those who don't: *concern for others*. Dr. Kenneth Beckman, who taught at Boise Bible College for about 60 years, hammers this definition into his students:

Love is an overwhelming concern for the well-being of another without regard as to what you receive in return.

This kind of love is the exact opposite of greed. It's made clear in 1 Corinthians 13:

I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, **but if I have no love**, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—**but if I have no love, I am nothing**. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned—**but if I have no love, this does me no good**. (1 Cor 13:1-3)TEV

If you are self-centered and greedy, forget about an eternity of bliss in heaven.

The following is an article that I thought would be appropriate to the study of greed.

America's Disease is Greed by Andrew Greeley

The most serious spiritual problem in the country today is reckless and untrammelled greed. Greed caused the disgraceful corporate scandals that fill our newspapers. Greed is responsible for crooked cops and crooked politicians. Greed causes the constant efforts to destroy unions that protect basic worker rights.

Greed has produced rash tax cuts that have given money to the rich and in effect taken it away from the poor. Greed has led to the immigration policy in which hundreds of poor men and women die every year as they struggle across the desert for the jobs that *el norte* promises them. Greed accounts for the efforts to take profitability out of the pensions and health insurance of working men and women. Greed is responsible for the fact that so many Americans have no health insurance and the fact that the recent reform of Medicare was a fraud. Greed causes newspapers to overestimate their circulation.

Greed is responsible for the obscene salaries of CEOs. In the '90s the ratio of CEO compensation to average workers' compensation was 250 to 1, meaning that the boss earned on his first day of work during a year as much as the worker did in a whole year. In European countries the ratio is closer to 100 to 1. Recent estimates put the current ratio at 500 to 1—the boss makes as much before lunch as the worker does all year. Greed is the cause of the high wages paid to the bosses even if the company is

failing.

Greed is responsible for the endless stress and ruthless competition of the workplace and the strains and tensions of professional class marriages. Greed (in this instance another name for relentless ambition) explains much of the cheating on college campuses. Greed is responsible for outsourcing, which is incapable of comprehending that the employees who lose their jobs are also the consumers who sustain the economy. Greed generates the reckless ventures that in part caused the bubble of the late '90s. Greed causes expensive wars that shatter the budget. Greed is the reason that only the wealthy are benefitting so far from the economic upturn that is allegedly happening. Greed drives loan sharks. Greed is responsible for the success of big box stores that tax the poor with low wages to provide bargains for affluent suburban shoppers. Greed is the reason poor white Appalachians, poor African Americans and poor Native Americans must fight the wars that the wealthy start. Jessica Lynch joined the Army so she could go to college. Her Native American roommate, killed in action, joined so, single mother that she was, she could support her children. Greed is the reason why the country is being run by those whom the president has described, however inelegantly, as the "haves and the have mores."

No one said during the bizarre deification of President Reagan that he taught us that greed is good and that we should feel good about our greedy country. Greed is the reason that the country is being run by the insurance, pharmaceutical, weapons and petroleum industries. Greed causes worldwide sex slavery of women and children.

Greed drives the murders of the narcotics world. Greed is responsible for the exploitations of teen sports stars by colleges and for the mess in the pro sports world. It is also the cause of the use of performance drugs by young athletes. Greed is responsible for the bad advice lawyers gave the Church years ago to beat victims of sexual abuse into the ground. It is behind the scam artists who steal from the elderly.

Greed may have been a more serious problem for Americans, say, in the era of the robber barons. But the Garys and the Morgans and the Carnegies were a small bunch of men. Now their greed has seeped down to a much larger segment of the population.

The Catholic Church speaks of four sins that cry to heaven for vengeance. Two are cheating workers out of wages and exploiting widows and children. Both happen every day in our greedy country.

Ambition is not evil within limits. The struggle for success is not bad within limits. Hard work and fair rewards are good within limits. It is not good to take from the poor and give to the rich, and that's exactly what this country is doing today.

Don't let anyone tell you that lust is the most deadly of the deadly sins.

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