

“THE SIN OF GREED”
Sinning Like A Christian #6
I Chronicles 29:10-18, Psalm 49:5-20, Luke 18:18-30
October 9 & 10, 2021

“Two little boys were each given a box of chocolates by their grandfather. The first boy took the package into his bedroom, tore into it, and stuffed the candies into his mouth until he was one big mess of smeared chocolate.

“The other boy unwrapped his package there in front of his grandfather. He opened the box and looked at all the candies. Then he raised the box to his grandfather and said, ‘Thank you for giving me this candy. Here. You have the first piece.’”¹

This story clearly illustrates the fifth of the Seven Deadly Sins – Greed. But the story also gives us the remedy to Greed. We’ll get to that in a few minutes.

As with all of the Seven Deadly Sins, **Greed is so very prevalent in our world today.** It does not take us too long to see the sin of Greed running rampant in the lives of others, and if we’re honest, in our very own lives. It’s the mindset of ‘Earn all you can, can all you earn, and then sit on the can’ to protect it from getting away from you. Greed grows powerfully with Pride at its side, since Pride makes you believe that you deserve the very best because you’re worth it more than others are. Greed becomes consuming when saddled up with Envy, where your desire for more and more, focus your attention only upon yourself. As the Seven Deadly Sins work together, they empower and authorize the others in our lives so that we float between them, thinking them to be a natural part of our life as a human being.

We see Greed powerfully displayed in the book of Charles Dickens called *A Christmas Carol*. The main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, displays a very bad case of Greed, as he hordes all of his income, earned both honestly and dishonestly. Rather than help out in the community, he chastises those who come to him asking for support to help the poor in the city of London. He barely supports his workers, and demands all of their time accounting for his business dealings, even to the neglect of their own families. Dickens describes Scrooge, “Oh! But he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone,

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 341)

Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.” Unfortunately, there are many in our world today just like Scrooge. And to a point, each of us is just like him.

Yet there are many in our world that encourage Greed. *Wall Street's* Gordon Gekko's infamous 'Greed is Good' speech demonstrates the mindset of many, lending the thought that we were made to get as much as we can, as fast as we can, from whomever we can, for as long as we can.

Advertisers focus our attention on doing just that, as they solicit us with their products in such a way that tells us that we just have to have it. They prey upon our wants that go way beyond our needs, and they create in us the desire to get, Get, GET, more, More, MORE! **So the line distinguishing between desire and necessity grows very thin, and we begin to convince ourselves that we just have to have it all.**

William Willimon states it like this, “The effort to distinguish between true, absolute need and merely accidental desire is therefore not as easy as one might think. Desire – restless, seemingly unquenchable desire – leads us toward some of the best things that we do. It also leads us into some of our worst misery. We want more.”²

Sure, we all need clothes, food, and a warm, safe place to call home, but most of us find ourselves surrounded by a whole lot more than what we really need. God blesses us with an abundance, and yet we find that it is never enough; we want more. And the problem is that our desire often turns into wanting the wrong things. **That desire within us creates a yearning to get that which can never fully satisfy our hearts or our souls.** We build and buy stuff that we really don't need, but feel we have to have it. And it gets to a point that we grab at all that we can just so that we don't miss that which we think will really satisfy our hearts. **And that is the essence of the sin of Greed – not quite knowing when to say “no” to the peripheral things that we don't need but want.**

² (William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005] pg. 100)

But lest we are very careful, Greed has a way of turning everything of value into garbage. “As James Ogilvy says, ‘Greed turns love into lust, leisure into sloth, hunger into gluttony, honor into pride, righteous indignation into anger, and admiration into envy. If it weren’t for Greed, we would suffer fewer of the other vices’³ of the Seven Deadly Sins. **But since Greed impacts our whole life, it works hand in hand with all the others, making what was once good into something that is bad.**

So like the first little boy who received the box of chocolates from his grandfather, we tend to let good get out of hand and it turns into Greed. The things we receive become “mine” and that possession drives us to wanting even more than what we already have. We start out with very little, and as we work our way into a few more things, it becomes an even greater drive within us to get all that we can, so that we can completely control it as “mine.”

But we hear in 1 Chronicles 29 that what we have really isn’t ours. King David prays to God, saying, “*Lord God...All riches and wealth come from You; You rule everything by Your strength and power; and You are able to make anyone great and strong...O Lord, our God, we have brought together all this wealth to build a temple to honor Your holy name, but it all came from You and all belongs to You...*” **The way to combat Greed in our life is to understand that nothing is “mine,” but it all belongs to God,** who has given it to us to manage in order to fulfill His work here on the earth.

Though David and the people of Israel gave freely to the Lord for the building of the Temple, we see quickly that “gratitude is sparse in those with Greed, Pride, and Envy... Greed is that great lack that enables sin to flourish, that great misreading of the true condition of your situation, that refusal to worship God, the giver of all good gifts. Meister Eckhart said that if the only prayer you ever pray is ‘thank you,’ then you have prayed well enough.”⁴ But it is so easy for us to consider all that we have as “mine” and overlook the fact that the Lord is the One who owns it all.

But look at the wise words of Psalm 49. The psalmist rightly describes the situation that we have

³ (Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, pg. 104)

⁴ (Ibid. pg. 105)

here on the earth. No matter how much we have, we will all face death, and he says, “*See what happens to those who trust in themselves, the fate of those who are satisfied with their wealth – they are doomed to die like sheep, and Death will be their shepherd. The righteous will triumph over them, as their bodies quickly decay in the world of the dead far from their homes...Don’t be upset when a man becomes rich, when his wealth grows even greater; he cannot take it with him when he dies; his wealth will not go with him to the grave*” (49:13-14, 16-17). **This is the warning not to put our hope and trust in the wealth of this world, but to lay up your treasures in Heaven**, where nothing in this world can take them away. There is nothing true in the statement, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” No, the one who dies with the most toys still dies, and then to whom will they all belong?

You see, we are to focus our life on obeying and following the Law of the Lord which is perfect and gives us new strength. Psalm 19:10 tells us that God’s Laws “*are more desirable than the finest gold; they are sweeter than the purest honey.*” Those laws are trustworthy, they give wisdom, they are right, and bring happiness to those who obey them. God’s commands are just, giving understanding to all who observe them. God’s judgments are always just and fair (19:1-9). In all of God’s ways we find abundance and more than enough to meet our needs. God is a loving and generous God, and He provides for us in so many extraordinary ways.

However, if we do not know God, we do not understand His generosity, and we are left to “fend for ourselves.” When we lose sight of the fact that even our life here on the earth is a gift from God, we tend more towards the likeness of Scrooge rather than Jesus. And as we become consumed by the messages of the marketing mongrels of our world, we begin to believe that in order to have, we must go after it, grabbing all we can in order to be truly happy. But it doesn’t make us happy. **An abundance of things will never satisfy our hungry, wanting hearts**, and unless we are very careful, we will find ourselves caught by the monster of Greed.

“Psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger, once asked a very wealthy patient, ‘What on earth are you going to do with all of that money?’ The patient replied, a bit reluctantly, ‘Just worry about it, I

suppose.’ ‘Well,’ Menninger went on, ‘do you get that much pleasure out of worrying about it?’ ‘No,’ replied the patient, ‘but I get such terror when I think of giving some of it to someone else.’”⁵

You see, Greed makes us think that what we have is “ours” and that we have to hang on to it for as long as we can and use it for our own private purposes. Through Greed, we fear that if we were to give it away, it would be gone, forgetting that when we give to the work of the Lord, God continues to bless us so that we can keep on giving. We cannot out give God, but Greed convinces us that what we have is all we’re going to get so we have to hold onto it with tight fists, and cold hearts.

And we see that’s how a young man found himself when he came up to Jesus and asked Him a question. Listen to Luke 18:18-30. (READ Luke 18:18-30)

Greed doesn’t make us happy. In fact Greed turns us into the most miserable people because it affects every part of our lives. The Jewish leader knew that he was missing something in his life. He had money, he had possessions, he had a position of power and authority, but he was still lacking something. His Greed got him thinking how he could gain eternal life. He had everything else and so he wanted it all – he wanted Heaven, too.

Jesus told him to obey 5 of the commandments, “*Do not commit adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; respect your father and your mother*” (18:20). The man gladly stated that he had obeyed all of these since his childhood. But what of the other 5 commands? How had he done on those? Worship only God; Do not make any graven images or idols; Do not use the name of the Lord in vane; Obey the Sabbath and keep it holy; Do not covet. Greed overshadowed all of these, so because he did not have his focus on the Lord God, this man was not able to comprehend Jesus’ directive that would enable him to gain eternal life in Heaven – “*Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow Me*” (18:22).

You see, Jesus’ words are the key to the remedy for Greed. Jesus tells us to live simply, sell the rest, and then give to the poor so that they might rejoice in the goodness of God, too. But because this

⁵ (Charles Swindoll, *Ultimate Book of Stories and Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 392)

man had so concentrated upon Greed ruling his life, he could not do what Jesus told him to do. He, like Dr. Menninger's patient, couldn't even think of parting with any of his wealth. They were "his" and he was not going to part with any of them. So he went away from Jesus very sad. Greed corrupted his heart so deeply that he could not think of anything else but the wealth he had amassed throughout his life. And there was no way that he was ever going to let them go.

Do any you feel the same pinch? OUCH! **Greed distracts us from the ways of the Lord and prevents us from truly serving Him.** With our eyes so focused on the things of this world, we have no more drive to attain the things of heaven. And Jesus tells us, even US, "*How hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God! It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle*" (18:24-25).

That means there's a lot of us who are in trouble, my friends, because Greed in our own lives has blinded us to the work of the Lord that is right here next to us. What will we do with the wealth that we have to make a difference in the poor, the hurting, the sick, the outcast, the hated, and the abused? When it comes to be our turn to stand before Jesus and ask Him, "What must I do to receive eternal life?" what will be the response from Jesus for us? If, as Christians, we earn eternal life by the way that we use our God-given wealth, how are you all doing with that? What would our judgment be? And then, what is our response when Jesus tells us to sell it all? Sadly, Greed has influenced each one of us to the point that we need our own awakening to the fact that we are found wanting because of our own selfishness.

But as I stated before, there is a remedy to Greed, a remedy to the thought that what I have is "mine" and no one else's. The little boy in the opening story found the remedy – it's giving! While he could also have gorged himself with the chocolate that his grandfather had given to him, just like his brother did, instead he shared it. He gave it back to the very one who had given it to him.

Giving of even what we have is the key to unlock the grip of Greed in our life.

Remembering that what we have is all God's in the first place puts us in the right mindset to begin

giving. Knowing that God will never forsake us as we give to change the lives of others, helps us toward using the wealth we have in ways that bring life and health and peace to the lost, the lonely, the accused, and the hated. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

“The film *Schindler’s List* chronicled the heroic efforts of a German industrialist named Oskar Schindler during World War II. Through his unselfish activities, over a thousand Jews on the trains to Auschwitz Concentration Camp were saved. Although the film, even on television, has some very graphic and disturbing scenes, the message itself is profound.

“After Schindler found out what was happening at Auschwitz, he began a systematic effort to save as many Jews as he could. For money, he could buy Jews to work in his factory which was supposed to be a part of the military machine of Germany. On one hand he was buying as many Jews as he could, and on the other hand he was deliberately sabotaging the ammunition produced at his factory. He entered the war as a wealthy industrialist; by the end of the war, he was basically bankrupt.

“When the Germans surrendered, Schindler met with his workers and declared that at midnight they were all free to go. The most emotional scene of the film was when Schindler said good-bye to the financial manager of the plant, a Jew and his good and trusted friend. As he embraced his friend, Schindler sobbed and said, ‘I could have done more.’ He looked at his automobile and asked, ‘Why did I save this? I could have bought 10 more Jews with this.’ Taking another small possession he cried, ‘This could have saved another one. Why didn’t I do more?’

“One day Jesus is going to split the eastern sky and come for His own. It will not matter then how much money we have in a mutual fund or how many bedrooms we have in our homes. The temporary satisfaction we have in vacations and nice cars will be gone. Only what we have done for the cause of Christ will matter.”⁶

But the sin of Greed closes our eyes and our minds to the needs around us. Greed convinces us that what we have is ours to enjoy, and more. Greed closes our hearts to the fact that there are

⁶ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 348)

thousands, even millions of people who are in need, and God has gifted us with just the right amount to care for them.

So how many people could we save from poverty and death if we were to support a group like World Vision? How many people could we save from starvation by working with a group like Feed My Starving Children? How many people could we bring health to by supporting Samaritan's Purse as they send out mobile COVID 19 emergency hospital units and send out recovery teams after natural disasters? How many people could we bring to Christ if we supported groups like Blazing Trees, or Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, or Campus Crusade for Christ, or Faith Comes By Hearing, or Wycliffe Bible Translators, or Empower International? How many women and children can we save from exploitation and human trafficking through groups like Life Outreach International or Freedom Cry? **God is calling us to make a difference in our world, but we can't do it if we're stuck with Greed in our hearts!** One of the greatest sins of Greed is the sins of omission – not doing what the Lord has called us to do with the resources we have to do it. Who knows but God might have blessed you just like Oskar Schindler to save those from certain extinction and annihilation? Open your eyes, people, and see what God is calling you to do. Let go of Greed and save a life!

But it takes us taking our eyes off of ourselves to break free from Greed. It takes us surrendering our hearts to the Lord and seeing His work set before us to give up our Greed and begin to do His work.

The people of Jesus' day asked him, "*Who, then, can be saved?*" If those with wealth find it so hard to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, then who is allowed? And "*Jesus answered, 'What is impossible for man is possible for God'*" (Luke 18:26-27). While it may be hard for us to let go of our riches, when we present them back to God as His, then He can open our eyes to see what we might be able to do with His riches bestowed upon us as His managers. God can change our hearts to allow us to share our blessings with one another, but it is up to us. Let's pray...

Father, thank You for all that You have provided for us. Thank You for sharing Your abundance

with us so that we might do Your work of saving those headed for death. Oh, Lord, all that we have is Yours, and You have entrusted it all to us to use for Your kingdom's work. But Greed tries to convince us that they are ours, for us alone. O Lord, convict us of this horrible sin, and change our hearts so that we might touch the lives of others right around us. So many people are in need, and we have been given the resources to save them, if only we will open our tight fists and let You use those resources for the good of another. How many people could we save, O Lord, if we but remember Your call on us to give? Soften our hearts today, O God, and move us toward making a difference in our world for You today. This we pray in Jesus' Name