

“The Seven Deadly Sins: Avaritia (Greed)”

15 July 2007

Galatians 5:13-24

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

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Galatians 5:13-24

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Prayer.

Of the thirty-three unique parables found in the Synoptic Gospels - that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke - I discovered in a quick analysis that six-teen - or roughly one half - were about money, treasure, or the accumulation of wealth. And this doesn't even address the direct, non-parable teachings of Jesus; for example Luke 12:15 “And he said to them,

‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’”

It always makes me smile when someone makes the comment to me about how they hate going to church and hearing about money. I think to myself, “then the preacher must be doing a good job teaching the Gospels.” Jesus says in Matthew 6:21 “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

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Truth be told
 I know why people
 don't want to hear about money
 when you come to church.
 It is the same reason
 I don't particularly like
 to address the issue
 any more than necessary:
 It is so much easier
 to justify our behavior and our
 lifestyle
 if we are never challenged about it.
 All of which is to say,
 "I like having greed in my life.
 If no one else appears to be
 subduing greed in their lives,
 why should I be the only one
 not making a grab for all they can
 get?
 After all,
 if I don't get it,
 someone else will."

Oh, we are so good at justifying our
 sin.

And you didn't think that I know?
 I am, after all, one of you
 when it comes to sin.
 Clergy don't get a pass
 or a get out of jail free card.

When it comes to money and greed
 one of our biggest hang-ups,
 I believe, comes from our childhood.
 Most modest, Christian families
 teach our children about
 the selected topics
 we never discuss in public:
 sex, politics, religion, and money

(specifically, how much you make
 or how much you give).

I attended a worship service last
 year

(through my work
 at the Alzheimer's Association)
 that was an ethnic congregation
 that had a little different
 understanding.

When it came time for the offering,
 the pastor invited all the tithers
 to come forward.

Down the center aisle they came,
 walking with eyes forward
 in front of the 80% of the
 congregation
 that remained in the pews.

Meanwhile the choir sang
 "Give all you can,
 he'll surely give you more."

They placed their tithe
 - 10% of their income -
 into a large basket
 in front of everyone else
 for all to see.

When the finished
 the ushers then passed the plates
 to the rest of us.

Hum.

When the only people who know are
 the IRS, your tax preparer, and the
 financial secretary
 there is no cause to challenge our
 own giving.

But when the whole community of
 faith knows,
 there is incentive
 for introspection, reflection, and for
 growth.

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There is incentive
to stand up, step up, and to be
included
in that special group of faithful,
known each week by their name
"tithers."

The Rich Fool built bigger barns
in Luke 12:13-34
only to discover that
that very night he died
and now faced the judgment
of his heavenly God.
The Lord's words are biting:
"who will get what
you have prepared for yourself?"
"Life is more than food,
and the body more than clothes,"
Jesus teaches his disciples (v.23).
Laissez-faire capitalist would
disagree
(and they would be wrong).
Their perspective is that
greed is a healthy characteristic
of an open market-place.
They pitch their justification
that greed is nothing other than
benign self-interest.
Have not the excessively wealthy
learned in the past four thousand
years
what happens
when they starve the masses
for their individual gains?

Greed is, like Lust and Gluttony,
a sin of excess.
Too much of any one thing is not
good.
But you didn't need to hear that from
me.

You can hear that anytime
by making a trip to your doctor.

An excess of wealth,
Thomas Aquinas believed
was "a sin against God,
just as all mortal sins,
in as much as
man condemns things eternal
for the sake of temporal things."
In other words
greed is described as
making long term sacrifices
for short term gains.
"I'll give up on eternal salvation
for a 75 year life
of wealth and excess."
This may not seem
like a bad deal,
especially if you are young
and impressionable.
But the older one gets
the more one begins to regret
a life of greed.
The body begins to fail
and one is reminded of the
temporal nature of the body.
One attends the funerals of peers
and comes to the recognition
that "you can't take it with you."
One becomes increasingly
suspicious and paranoid
about the intention of others
(whether they are based
in either truth or fiction),
and relationships are destroyed.

A mentor long ago told me
that the happiest people in life are
those
who make it their priority to give

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assets away.
 Happy people are giving people,
 because they improve the well-being
 of others.
 The converse is true,
 I was told,
 the meanest, angriest, nastiest
 people in life
 are those who have
 never experienced the joy of giving,
 those who accumulate to no end,
 those who desire for more,
 even at the expense of others,
 that desire is never satisfied.

A life of greed
 is a life that is selfish:
 unconcerned for others
 and unconcerned for God.
 It becomes an open door
 for Lust and Gluttony.
 Greed can migrate from
 an excessive desire
 for money and wealth
 to an excessive preoccupation
 for power and control.
 It can become the catalyst
 for violence and hatred.
 Greed begets greed,
 and it becomes a destructive cycle,
 one that can be passed
 from generation to generation.

So, before it destroys the self,
 and, perhaps more importantly,
 before greed destroys
 my family and the generations that
 follow,
 what can I do?
 we ask ourselves.
 What tangible things can I do

to overcome greed in my life?¹

1. To destroy our greed for power,
 consider giving power away,
 generously granting power to others,
 empowering them to succeed.
 When appropriate,
 allow the self to be submissive.
 Experience and learn the benefits
 of submissiveness,
 either before others
 or before God.
 Share credit for success,
 and claim a fair share
 of responsibility for failures.
 The idea is to
 stop trying to control
 everything and everyone.
 In parenting,
 this means encouraging children
 to find their own way,
 and respecting their choices.
 It does not mean abdicating
 legitimate responsibilities,
 but loosening our grip
 on others' lives as well as our own.
 God will take care of us,
 "Consider the Lilies of the field,
 they neither toil or reap,
 yet, does not our heavenly Father
 cloth them in the glory of Solomon?"²

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- 1 The remedies for greed that are
 cited here are not my original
 thoughts and ideas. I am indebted
 to the authors of the "Whitestone
 Journal" as found at:
[http://www.whitestonejournal.com/
 seven_deadly_sins/greed.html](http://www.whitestonejournal.com/seven_deadly_sins/greed.html)
 There is, after all, nothing new
 under the sun.
- 2 Matthew 6:28

We can't control everything anyway,
so we might as well learn
to relax in God's hands.

2. Secondly, the cure may be
to embrace poverty.
We may not become homeless,
but we can learn to do with less.
Serious campers attempt
to leave their campsite
in the same state they found it.
Ideally, there should be no trace left
when they move on.
In the same way,
try to use less of the world's goods.
"Live simply, that others may simply
live."
Once this kind of freedom is
practiced,
we realize that
we don't need that much, anyway.
This knowledge, in turn,
reduces our fear
and builds strength and confidence.

3. Thirdly, divest oneself.
Get rid of the excess in your life
of as much as possible,
leaving behind only that which is
necessary
for God's mission and ministry.
If we are bound
by "mis-prioritized attachments"
to worldly goods,
the separation forced upon us by
death
is even more painful.
If we are destined for eternal glory,
the temporary enjoyment of trinkets
in this life
is simply absurd.

In the inter-testamental texts
between the Old and New
Testaments
found in the Roman Canon
is the book of wisdom known
as Ecclesiasticus, or simply Sirach,
authored by Yeshua ben Sira
in about 180 B.C.E.
which reads this following truth:
"He who loves money
never has money enough."³
If, at the end of the day,
you feel like you never have enough
Then I suspect,
(far be it of me to judge)
you have issues
of greed working in your life.
Welcome to the club.
You stand in good company.
But, just because you are here,
doesn't mean we have to remain
here.
We can change.
We have been given
the gift of free choice for a reason.
God wants us to change.
The Lord desires our obedience.
Let it be our vow
to journey together
in an effort
to make greed our servant,
instead of us being a slave to greed.

Do not covet.
Do not covet what the neighbor has.
Do not covet their spouse,
their family, their house,
or their accumulations.⁴

3 Sirach 5:8

Instead,
place your trust in the Lord,
and say,
“You are my God.”⁵
Amen.

4 Exodus 20:17

5 Psalm 31:14

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