

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 20, 2021 • WEEK 2



SEVEN DEADLY SINS AND CIVIL SERVANTS

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Verse of the Week

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The Sin of Greed (Part I)



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., according to former President Obama, was among “...the majority of the great reformers in American history—[who] were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause.”¹ Dr. King was a Gospel preacher before he was a civil rights leader and a political activist. In his honor on MLK Day 2014, I posted this comment on Facebook: “Deep gospel peace makes for strong social warriors.” His “I Have a Dream” speech (Lincoln Memorial, August 28, 1963) showed his courageous care for Biblically-based social justice. I recall his convicting voice quoting Amos 5:24, “Let justice roll down like waters... righteousness like a mighty stream.”²

Thank God that King had religious roots and moral conviction to springboard him into political action, vocalization, and protest against the immoral laws in America (some with pre-Civil War roots). King and all good, moral, and Biblical people (like Dr. Billy Graham) had “had enough” of the demeaning and crushing effects of the sin of racism upon our culture. Unfortunately, legislators pass immoral laws all the time. Immoral laws like these codify the “morality” of racism (which is actually immorality). Let us be clear: just because something is legal does not make it moral. The Jim Crow laws in the South were legal but were immoral, unbiblical, and damaging to culture. Thank God, King’s dream was rooted in Christian morality that he courageously infused into the political realm.

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(This study is adapted from an earlier series by Rev. Gauthier, 1960–2020.)



INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of a world where men would be judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. Sadly, the “immorality” of racism was codified in the laws of segregation that resulted in men who had a good work ethic, and who deserved equal benefit for equal work, being denied both simply because of their God-ordained ethnicity and God-given skin color. (They were irrefutably “born that way.”) Greed has historically played a large part in racism and slavery. Four thousand years ago, in Exodus 1:8-14, we see Egypt’s African Pharaoh enslaving the Semitic Hebrew sons of Abraham for 400 years. The greed and pride of those Egyptian elites produced the multi-century, backbreaking enslavement of that entire race. Let us beware and be on guard concerning the fact that greed always plays a large part in depriving others of economic fairness and equal opportunity.

1. GREED DEFINED: WHAT IS IT, *REALLY*?

Defining a problem can be 80% of its solution. Likewise, if we can define greed clearly, we will be better equipped for our Bible study, meditation, interpretation, conversation, and personal application.

A. Greed Is a Desire for Too Much Money

As we saw last week, each of the Seven Deadly Sins is a desire for “too much” of a part of God’s created order. Wealth is part of that order. Out of His infinite wealth, God created a “good” planet filled with “good” people, both brimming with wealth. In Genesis 1:31, God said that His entire creation was “very good”—that is, it was filled with value. The value inherent in the “stuff” of God’s planet is what we call wealth. It has monetary value. That wealth can be measured in bushels of grain, nuggets of silver, bars of gold, paper dollars, livestock, or “stock” on Wall Street. It is God’s desire for us to possess and cultivate great wealth but to do it according to the rules and principles revealed in His Word.

**GREED IS A DESIRE FOR TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING:
GOD’S WEALTH AS HE HAS EMBEDDED IT IN CREATION.**

B. Greed Is Not a Desire for Money

God “gives us all things freely to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17³). God is not against our enjoyment of material things or the value embedded within them. He is not against material goods, wishing in heaven that we would all make vows of poverty on earth. He would not be more pleased if we all wore monkish habits, all had bowl haircuts, or all wore the warm, wool, brown hoods like the Italian friars of Capuchin.⁴ God delights in wealth and created His planet as a veritable gold mine of wealth. He intends for us to explore, develop, and enjoy it. He praises (literally “highly prices”) the value of human resources, talent, and skill. God has ordered His creation and planted great wealth in His planet and His people. To recognize, praise, and desire such wealth is *not* greed.



C. Greed Is Not a Synonym for Possessing Great Wealth

Greed is not about the quantity of wealth or volume of cash flow. Some erroneously think greed is the mere possession of a great quantity of wealth. Ironically, the measure of how much wealth “those greedy people” have always seems to be more than the wealth possessed by those who are standing in judgment over them. However, possession of wealth in highly profitable corporations, for example, is not a *de facto* indicator of greed. While the Bible warns against the temptations of riches, riches themselves are not evil. Many godly people in the Bible were very wealthy.

D. A Tale of Two Citizens: One Greedy, One Not

Let us look at two Nebraskans who want wealth to illustrate how one could want “too much money.”

First, let us say a twenty-something *really* wants \$700, but he does not particularly want to work for it. Though his parents paid for his college degree, he cannot find a job “he likes.” He has also had a “failure to launch,” living in his parents’ basement, playing X-Box all day, and eating all their cereal. He does not give to charity, rarely shares with friends or family, and does not have (or plan on opening) a savings account. For some reason this twenty-something feels entitled to this \$700, desiring it in the next two days and preferably delivered to his (parents’) door.

Now let us look at a businessman in his 50s. In the next two years, he really wants \$7 million (10,000 times the wealth desired by our younger Husker). In contrast, he married in college and has always faithfully provided, at one time having had up to six mouths to feed. He also earned a doctorate in his field of expertise. As a business leader, he has worked for decades and now leads a corporation that produces millions of goods that benefit people (proven by their willingness to buy them). He generously gives to his church, missionaries, and charities. He has disciplined himself and saved slowly for decades, which has resulted in a sizeable nest egg. As a risk-taking leader, he has employed hundreds of Nebraskan breadwinners over the last decade. One million dollars of the money he wants is for a building, which will expand his business, create 50 jobs, and reduce the cost of his product, which he can then sell for less money. By doing this he can serve more people and increase cash flow within his “for profit” corporation. This man has always paid taxes (never cheating) and will pay significantly more taxes based on the profits that come in from the \$7 million he so desires to have.

Biblically speaking, the baby boomer who wants 10,000 times more money is less greedy than the slothful millennial.⁵ The “too much” of sinful greed’s desires is defined not by cash flow but by one’s attitudes about the principles found in God’s Word. God’s Word illuminates and regulates important financial principles like industriousness, self-control, service to society, hard work, saving, providing for a family, giving, frugality, generosity, and paying taxes.





GREED IS NOT DETERMINED BY THE MERE DESIRE FOR MONEY, EVEN IN LARGE AMOUNTS.

2. FOUR KEY SCRIPTURES ON GREED

A. The Big Ten: Thou Shalt Not Be Greedy

The Mosaic Law code had 613 commandments that codified a morality as laid down by God for Israel. The Ten Commandments are the ten “legal headers” for the other 603. These “Big Ten” give prominence to **legal** *and* (unlike Jim Crow or U.S. slavery laws) **moral principles**. The *Tenth* Commandment addresses the sin of coveting (wanting “too much”). It relates primarily to greed and the coveting of the material and private wealth of a neighbor.

Exodus 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's ...male servant or his female servant or his ox or his don-key or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The value of human service (employees) and material resources are to be entrusted to God’s sovereign provision, not our covetous hearts. Greed is the sin of financial apostasy, shouting at God, “I will not trust my wealth or financial future or status to You!”

B. It’s Not the Money, It’s the Love

We emphasized this Scripture last week:

1 Timothy 6:9-10

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

To recap, riches present temptations that few can fully resist. It is the love of money and not the money itself that is the root of all kinds of deadly sins.

C. David’s Dump Trucks

A young shepherd boy named David rose from humble beginnings to become an accomplished warrior, a hero, and the golden boy of Israel. He eventually ruled politically as Israel’s greatest king (1000-960 BC). In his desire to give generously to the civic and religious building project called Solomon’s Temple, David contributed immensely out of his own personal wealth and private property. He said:

1 Chronicles 29:2-4

Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, and the silver for the things of silver... and all kinds of precious stones and alabaster in abundance... ³Moreover... the treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God,



over and above, ⁴namely, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver....

If we run the numbers on wealthy King David's contribution of gold, it amounts to 120 million ounces, 2/3 as much as the gold in Fort Knox.⁶ David's contribution of gold, silver, and precious stones to the Temple project was in the billions of dollars.⁷ Staggeringly, his contribution of gold alone could have filled several dump trucks. The redheaded runt of eight brothers, King David's rags to riches story is inspiring. In spite of his faults, also revealed in Scripture, he was a godly man and an extremely generous one. I know of no Scriptural rebukes against David as a financially greedy man. He possessed and enjoyed wealth, but not "too much."

D. Barns, Barns, and Bigger Barns

The Old Testament David could fill dump trucks with gold for a good and godly cause. A New Testament rich man, as we will see, could fill multiple barns with harvested grain. He also *really* wanted more wealth.

Luke 12:15-21

[Jesus said to the crowd], "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." ¹⁶And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry. "' ²⁰But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' ²¹So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

God personally calls this unnamed coveter a fool. What is the problem here? It is not the desire for a building project or more wealth. The problem is that this man did not have his wealth, but his wealth had him. Money is not evil, but this collector of wealth loved his money, we are told, even to the exclusion of God. He forgot to beware. He was not on guard against the deadly sin of greed. He "forgot to remember" this command: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth..." (Deuteronomy 8:18, KJV).

CONCLUSION

We have clarified what greed is not. We have seen that greed is a desire for "too much" money. The "too much" is defined by the Word of God and its multiple principles that address proper attitudes about the possession and use of wealth. Leonardo da Vinci painted a dingy word picture of the greedy, saying, "Poor are those who crave too many things."





Next week, as we turn to applications, we will sit at the feet of godly men and role models who can show us more about freedom from the love of money. We will also listen to Jesus, the supreme role model for our faith. We will turn our attention to further faith-based, fiscal fact-finding about the Deadly Sin of Greed.

Yours for His Name's sake,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

FOOTNOTES

1. Barack Obama, "Call to Renewal Keynote Address," Washington, D.C., June 28, 2006, <https://sojo.net/articles/transcript-obamas-2006-sojournerscall-renewal-address-faith-and-politics>, Quoted in Dr. Timothy Keller's *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*, pages 168-169, Dutton, © 2010.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update* unless otherwise noted.
3. 1 Timothy 6:17 — "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."
4. The origin of the warm, brown drink named Cappuccino.
5. This "Tale of Two Citizens" about the millennial and the boomer is not implying that all millennials are greedy or only millennials are greedy. All generations (which would also include the Silent Generation, Boomers, Gen X-ers, and Gen Z-ers) are all merely human and equally susceptible to the grip of greed and losses due to laziness. "For all have sinned..." (Romans 3:23).
6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Bullion_Depository
7. At \$1,800 per ounce, 120 million ounces is \$216 billion.

Personal Study Notes
