

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 27, 2021 • WEEK 3



SEVEN DEADLY SINS AND CIVIL SERVANTS

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Verse of the Week

Luke 12:15

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.

Fighting Greed (Part II)



GREED IS A DEADLY SIN AND A SERIOUS SUBJECT. However, on the humorous side, Andy Rooney (print, radio, and television commentator) said, “I’d like to be rich enough so I could throw soap away after the letters are worn off.”¹ The American writer Ambrose Bierce cleverly proposed this dictionary entry illustrating how someone could want “too much” wealth: “**HAND** (noun): A singular instrument worn at the end of a human arm and commonly thrust into somebody’s pocket.”²

Why would a Nebraskan (living “The Good Life”) thrust their hand into someone else’s pocket? The reason is that greed tempts us into thinking that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. We falsely think that being on somebody else’s side of the fiscal fence will buy us happiness. It is all about perspective. An anonymous author assures us, “Money doesn’t always bring happiness. A man with ten million dollars is no happier than a man with nine million dollars.”

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



INTRODUCTION

Greed is a deadly sin. In fact, expert religious commentator Phyllis A. Tickle says “that every system from Hinduism to Christianity has agreed over the centuries that of our seven demons, greed is the mistress.”³ If the love of money *is* the root of all sorts of evil, the Nebraska senator will do well to learn how to fight greed personally and politically.

1. FIGHTING GREED PERSONALLY

Before thinking professionally, let us look at four ways to fight the golden monster of greed personally.

A. Hear Christ’s Warning: “Beware!”

With ears wide open, we need to listen to the ultimate role model of the Christian faith—Christ Himself. Note that we saw this week’s “Verse of the Week” in last week’s study under “Barns, Barns, and Bigger Barns.”

Luke 12:15

[Jesus said], “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.”⁴

How can you fight greed personally?⁵ “Beware” of *any nearby* temptations of greed that would make you ravenous for wealth and a hoggish Scrooge. Further, by using the words “be on guard,” Christ intended to alert us to *more distant* temptations of self-indulgence. Like a watchman on the wall of an ancient city, stand guard over your own heart, scanning your financial horizons for two inevitable enemies: possessiveness and egocentricity. Christ taught that the good life consists of more than having (too much) money.

B. Look to Role Models: Elders and Deacons

With eyes wide open, look at the living examples of Biblically qualified elders and deacons. Christ is in heaven. We are “stuck” here on earth. Are there any role models here with “skin on” from whom we can learn? Life coach Tony Robbins says the best way to achieve your goals is simply to find people who have achieved similar goals who can be role models for you. Biblically, we see two kinds of leaders in the New Testament church. Note some of their specific qualifications for office that can help us battle greed.

1 Timothy 3:2-5, 8

An elder, then, must be ³...free from the love of money. ⁴He must be one who manages his own household well... ⁵(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?) ... ⁸Deacons likewise must be men of dignity... not fond of sordid gain.

Elders and deacons are to be fiscally fit role models of godliness in fighting greediness. Find spiritual leaders who you can look to as financial role models. Look (not to the *perfection* but) to the *direction* of



their faith-filled fiscal lives. If such leaders have been “on guard against every form of greed,” we can learn from their examples with our eyes wide open.

**FINANCIALLY MATURE SPIRITUAL LEADERS
ARE NOT TIGHT-FISTED, HOGGISH, GRABBY,
PIGGISH, RAVENOUS, OMNIVOROUS, OR MISERLY.**

C. Be Content

Two seemingly contrasting virtues need to be discussed. The first is the desirability of financial contentment. The second is the excellence of financial ambition. Both are Biblical. Regarding financial contentment, consider these texts:

1 Timothy 6:8

If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content....

Philippians 4:11

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content....

Hebrews 13:5

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”

One sure cure for graspy hands is a contented heart. Be conservative financially when you should be.

**BE CONTENT: DO NOT LONG, ACHE, CRAVE, ITCH,
PINE, YEARN, CLUTCH AT, SET YOUR HEART ON,
BURN FOR, OR LOVE MONEY.**

D. Be Generous

Be financially liberal in the right seasons and for the right reasons. Be like rags-to-riches King David. (Remember his “dump trucks” of gold?)

Proverbs 11:25

The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.

Proverbs 22:9

He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.

1 Timothy 6:17-18

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....¹⁸Instruct them to... be generous and ready to share.

We live in possibly the most pampered, consumerist society since the Roman Empire. Generosity is good exercise for the tight-fisted cheap-o who needs to learn to “let go” of his gold and his goods. One more example of being liberal and ready to share follows:





MANOJ BHARGAVA, WHO FOUNDED *5-HOUR ENERGY*, IS THE RICHEST INDIAN IN THE U.S. AND GIVES 99% OF HIS EARNINGS TO CHARITY.⁶

2. FIGHTING GREED PROFESSIONALLY

A. Be Bold: Legislate Morality

If you are not yet convinced that God delegated to civil government the duty to moralize culture through legal force, I encourage you to explore this essential Biblical truth. You will give account for this very thing to the God who has ordained you to office. Your job to legislate morality in this fallen world is unenviably difficult. But in simplest terms: decide what is moral (good vs. bad) and codify that morality into law.

Just as all laws are moral, all laws have financial implications. An understanding of the theology of Biblical economics is integral to your task. Note these areas of culture and law that can be affected by greed: taxation, social care, business law, private property, economic development, money supply, free markets, economic stimulus, charity, corporations (for profit and nonprofit), poverty, and prosperity.

B. Be Biblical: Realize All Have Sinned

Lady Justice is blindfolded and impartial. She holds the scales of justice and equity, and she fittingly bears the sword of civil punishment and legal force. Legislatively, balance and impartiality are critical. When it comes to fighting greed in the political realm, wise is the legislator who is blind to age, race, sex/gender, party, and social affluence. Moses, speaking to the ancient civil leaders in Israel, spoke of a principle that is as relevant today as this morning's newspaper:

Deuteronomy 1:17a

You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike.

When I first became a born-again Christian, I was on fire for Christ. The church I was raised in did not teach the Bible in any depth and discouraged the reading and personal study of Scripture. So, with a soul thirsty for answers, I began soaking up the Scriptures like a sponge. As I spent hundreds of hours in the Bible, I was humbled and deeply affected by an important observation, which I expressed in this simple, personal prayer to the Lord:

“LORD, I AM LEARNING THAT IT IS *EASY* TO BE EXTREME. HOWEVER, YOU WANT ME TO BE *EXTREMELY WELL BALANCED*. THAT IS VERY DIFFICULT. HELP ME, LORD.”

I came to realize that it would be harder on me, but easier on others, if I were not an extremist, but extremely well balanced. What I prayed personally thirty years ago, I pray today, for you legislatively.



Impartial Judging in Three Areas:

Realize that greed grabs the hearts of everyone: all ages, races, genders, and political parties. Be impartial in your legislative judgment in three ways:

1. **Citizens:** May you be impartial towards all types and classes of people for whom you legislate: young and old, the haves and the have nots, all races, both sexes, and all political persuasions.
2. **Colleagues:** May you be impartial to your colleagues. Listen before judging and prefer logic to rhetoric. Respectfully, assume the best, fiscally, of those “across the aisle.”
3. **Yourself:** May you learn to be impartial even within your own heart as a lawmaker. May you be honest and realistic regarding your own financial weaknesses and tendencies. If you personally gravitate towards thrift, realize you might tend to be stingy. If you are like a squirrel stuffing his cheeks and clutching every newfound nickel, it will hinder your ability to legislate impartially. Conversely, you may have a personal weakness with spending (wishing you had a jillion dollars or were dripping with jewels). Materialistically, “*your ego is writing checks your body can’t cash.*” If so, be willing to learn from those who balance their books and budgets, even if you think they are tightwads.

C. Be Balanced: Have Full Fiscal Wisdom

Theologically speaking, the best senator in the Unicameral (and in the country for that matter) is the senator that most fully grasps a Biblically balanced theology of finances and wisely legislates that morality.

Unequal economic opportunity is bad. Rewarding the productive is good. Waste is wrong; generosity is good. Private property is good; theft is bad. Charity is good; greed is bad. Industry and ingenuity are good; economic laziness is bad. Taxation is good (in balance); tax evasion is bad. Government is good (and God’s idea); too much (and too little) government involvement is bad.

Good and bad, right and wrong: that’s *the stuff* of morality. Legislating morality: that’s *the job* of civil government. How can you legislate in a Biblically balanced way? Listen to the wisdom of the world-famous political leader, King Solomon, the human author of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 7:18-19

It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them. ¹⁹Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

The desire to have a good grasp of God’s perspective of fiscal principles will lead you to a good (and moral) place as a lawmaker. If you are a Christian lawmaker, such Biblically balanced wisdom will give you multiplied strength beyond your fellow leaders, who may be less concerned with legislating morality as God defines it.





May God, who infused His world with wealth, help you become extremely well-balanced in your understanding of the ethics of finance. May He give you Biblical balance, a good grasp of the morality of money, and strength to do your legislative duty in the office into which He has placed you. May the best Biblically balanced bills become the laws of our land. May these laws protect us from the economic evils of greed, so that Nebraska can continue to be a place for “The Good Life.”

CONCLUSION

Greed wants “*too much*” money, wanting wealth that is out of whack with God’s will for His creatures. May God richly bless you as you discipline yourself to apply these principles both personally and professionally.

For His sake and yours,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/obituaries/2011/11/05/andy-rooney-writer-caustic-commentator-for-minutes/n7vpNTTvdopU1ksrWGn1K/story.html>.
2. Ambrose Bierce, *The Cynic's Dictionary*, 1906.
3. Phyllis A. Tickle, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Greed*, The New York Public Library: Oxford University Press, 2004, pg. 12.
4. All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update* unless otherwise noted.
5. Greed is a shameless thief that will cause you great loss. Learn from the lives of these and other people in the Bible who suffered loss due to great greed: Lot lost his *wife*, Achan lost his *life*, Esau lost his *birthright*, Gehazi lost his *health*, and the Rich Young Ruler lost his *soul*.
6. Ilan Mochari, “Inside the Mind of the Billionaire Who Built the 5-Hour Energy Empire,” *Inc. Magazine*, <https://www.inc.com/ilan-mochari/5-hour-energy-billions-in-change.html>.

