



SEVEN • Greed

Welcome to week three of our discussion on the Seven Deadly Sins. Before we get started on today's topic, greed, let's take a moment to pass the collection plate, shall we? Let's begin with some sordid stories of greed.

From Salon.com

"Another tale of corporate greed." by Arianna Huffington:

Every day the morning paper brings a fresh example of the flotsam bubbling to the surface following the collision of corporate greed and post-Enron reality: Golden boy executives forced to walk the plank, formerly high-flying companies "restating" fraudulently inflated earnings, internal e-mails exposing the depths to which Wall Street firms have sunk to boost their bottom lines.

Yet the word emanating from on high – from the well-appointed congressional committee rooms of Washington to the elegant dining rooms of L.A. – is that the worst is behind us. Yes, they say, Enron was a bit of a wake-up call, but let's not overreact. We've learned our lesson, so please pass the truffle sauce and let's move on.

CNN.com

"Greed threatens world wildlife: UN."

June 17, 2002 Posted: 9:00 AM EDT (1300 GMT):

LONDON, Britain -- A United Nations environmental group has warned a choice has to be made between greed and humanity if Earth's wildlife is to survive.

The United Nations Environment Programme, a warm up to the Earth summit in Johannesburg in late August, painted four possible scenarios ranging from a greed-driven "markets first" future to the caring and sharing "sustainability first" outlook.

The third Global Environment Outlook report, GEO-3, warned of a worst case scenario in 30 years' time with three percent of the Earth's surface disappearing under concrete and more than half the population living with drought.

"The planet is at a crucial crossroads with the choices made today critical for the forests, oceans, rivers, mountains, wildlife and other life support systems upon which current and future generations depend," the UNEP's report said.

Already one quarter of the world's mammals and 12 percent of birds are under threat of extinction. The animals at risk range from rhinos to tigers and eagles, it added. Life-giving forests are being ripped apart, fertile land is disappearing under concrete or into the sea and waterways are drying up or dying of pollution. Dire poverty, hunger and sickness are rampant across the planet and the globalization of trade is carrying with it oil spills, litter, persistent organic pollutants and discharges of heavy metals, the report said. The world's seas, already under attack from pollution, are also being plundered by man to the extent that nearly one-third of the world's stock of fish is now ranked as depleted, overexploited or recovering, it added.

But if a sustainability approach is adopted, fewer roads and buildings will be built on agricultural and grazing land and carbon dioxide emissions stabilize at just half the "greed policy" route.



Salon.com

“The Wacky World of Television.” by Gavin McNett:

On American game shows, you answer questions and win money. On television in the rest of the world, you get naked and bob for false teeth in a bucket of pig eyeballs.

1. What are some other national and global problems you see as being a direct result of greed?

Introduction

On many occasions, Jesus spoke to the issue of greed, seeing it as one of the greatest competitors, vying against God, for the affection of our hearts. This section is from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:19-24:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

In this passage, Jesus sets up a number of contrasts. In the first paragraph, He talks about two places to store our treasures. In the second, He talks about two perspectives, and in the third, two masters. Let’s look at each in turn and see what He was teaching about greed.

Two Treasures

Matthew 6:19-21:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

From Theonion.com:

REDMOND, WA – In what CEO Bill Gates called “an unfortunate but necessary step to protect our intellectual property from theft and exploitation by competitors,” the Microsoft Corporation patented the numbers one and zero Monday.

Above: At a press conference beamed live to Microsoft shareholders around the globe, Bill Gates announces the company’s patenting of the binary system.

With the patent, Microsoft’s rivals are prohibited from manufacturing or selling products containing zeroes and ones – the mathematical building blocks of all computer languages and programs – unless a royalty fee of 10 cents per digit used is paid to the software giant.

2. The last article is obviously a joke (from theonion.com), but it brings up the question: How do you know when you’re officially “wealthy”? Who do you use as a comparison? Are you wealthy?
3. In 6:19, Jesus says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” Another word for “store up” is “stock-pile.” Make a short list and include the number of: pants, shirts, shoes, and DVD’s you and your family own.
4. Is all stockpiling bad? What about savings accounts and investments? How do you know when you’ve gone too far?



Jesus says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jesus is saying, look where you invest your treasure, and that will tell you where your heart is. College students usually don’t have a lot of money, but time is a valuable commodity (time is money).

5. Write down how many hours you spend each week on the following: sleep, eat, exercise, music, Video, TV, computer, studying, social time, time with God.
6. Does this reflect the commitments of your heart? Do you think it will change when you have a job?

Two Perspectives

Matthew 6:22-23:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Thoughts from Philip.greenspun.com:

Plato addresses some of these issues in the first book of The Republic (available online from www.gutenberg.net). Socrates asserts that people who’ve inherited fortunes tend to be light with their money but that people who’ve made their fortunes “have a second love of money as a creation of their own, resembling the affection of authors for their own poems, or of parents for their children, besides that natural love of it for the sake of use and profit which is common to them and all men. And hence they are very bad company, for they can talk about nothing but the praises of wealth.”

In the second paragraph, Jesus describes two different visual perspectives: one that leads to stockpiling, the other to generosity. There is a double entendre here; the word “good” can also be translated “single eyed” (on God), as well as “generous.” The word “bad” can be translated “evil eye” (not on God) as well as “stingy.”

7. Write out in your own words what you think Jesus is saying?
8. How does a focus on God lead to generosity? And why does a focus, that doesn’t include God, lead to stockpiling?

Two Masters

Matthew 6:24:

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

9. The word “money” is the translation of the Aramaic word “mammon,” which meant more than money, but was used of the animating spiritual force behind greed, and stood as a counterfeit of God. In what ways is money similar to God?
10. Why do you think Jesus makes the comparison so stark?



11. No one sees themselves as following money, but it's important to ask yourself what the controlling influence is that decides where you spend your time, energy, money, or even college major. Are you currently following the American Dream, your parents' dream, or God's plan and direction for your life?

Try TheSparks.com greed quiz:

1. Have you ever sued someone? Yes/No
2. Do you feel bad for homeless people? Yes/No
3. Have you ever stolen from your employer? Yes/No
4. Do you borrow money from your friends without paying it back? Yes/No
5. Do you rent movies on your friends' memberships, turn them in late, then act like you have no idea what happened? Yes/No
6. Money is essential for true happiness. Yes/No
7. Rich relatives should hurry up and die. Yes/No
8. It's okay to steal if the person you're stealing from doesn't need the money. Yes/No
9. The lazy people of Indonesia should stop whatever the hell else they're doing and work HARDER, because Nikes are still way too expensive. Yes/No
10. Your own mother owes you money. Yes/No
11. Have you ever charged admission to one of your lame parties? Yes/No

Countermeasures Against Greed

There are some counter virtues, which keep greed in "check" that are as old as the Seven Deadly Sins.

Thoughts from jwz.org/bruntle/greed:

Until last week, I hadn't driven a car in six months. After having spent two hours a day behind the wheel for the better part of a decade, I consider this fact a sign that my life has taken a significant turn for the better of late.

The last time I made this trip, the billboards along the freeway were hawking things. All computer-industry things, of course, but they were actual things that people made. Things like modems, or server computers, or database software. Now, none of the billboards were selling things. They were selling greed itself.

12. The opposite of greed is generosity. In what ways have you practiced generosity as a safeguard against greed?
13. In Isaiah 58:7 it says, "Share your bread with the hungry, your house with the poor." Many people have found that the antidote to greed is to spend time in the company of the poor. Have you ever done something that caused you to work or live alongside the poor?

A Disturbing Last Thought

Read. Mark 10:17-27:

As Jesus started on His way, a man ran up to Him and fell on his knees before Him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"



“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” He said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

14. If Jesus is suggesting that heaven can be “purchased” by giving all we own to the poor, this would be in stark contrast to the message of the rest of the Bible. Rather, it seems Jesus is trying to make him aware of something in his own heart. What do you think He is trying to surface?

15. Imagine you had gone to Jesus and asked how you could inherit eternal life. What heart issue do you think He’d want to raise in your life?

16. The disciples’ question is a good one. If this guy can’t be saved, who can? What does Jesus mean when He says, “With man this is impossible, but not with God”? How?

Summary

Some other questions that this passage may have raised in your mind, concerning Jesus and eternal life, are answered in the booklet *Would You Like To Know God Personally?* Take a copy home and read it through tonight.

End 

The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ’s Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We’d love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org