

## **“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: GREED.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

**April 2, 2017, 10:30AM**

**Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 5:10; I Timothy 6:6-10; Hebrews 13:5-6**

### **Introduction.**

We live in one of the most affluent countries on earth, we are better off than every previous generation, we have access to an abundance of goods and services, yet somehow it isn't enough.

Modern American advertising skillfully and subtly fuels our desire for more, making us feel like our quality of life depends on having this or that. We are barraged with messages of what we need, must have, even deserve.

Facebook is brutal. I can see what my high school and college classmates are doing, where they are traveling, what they are driving, what their house or second house looks like.

The battle against this sin will be tough because everything in our culture is against us. We are all supposed to pursue the American Dream. We are all called to pursue our happiness and happiness is found in money, possessions, and achievements.

We invented the bumper sticker: He who dies with the most toys wins. We live out the motto: some is good, more is better and too much is just right.

### **What is greed? A good desire gone bad.**

Let's make sure we understand this sin, what it is and what it is not.

It is not a sin to work hard and earn money. In fact the Bible commands it. He who doesn't work doesn't eat (II Thessalonians 3:10). We are created to work, create, build, design, think, explore, subdue, acquire and possess.

It is a good desire to have food and clothes and a place to live, to have the necessities of life. Do honest work with your hands so that you don't have to steal and have something to share (Ephesians 4:28).

It is not a sin to save or invest money. Consider the ant who labors and stores up for winter (Proverbs 6:6-11).

Having wealth is not necessarily a sin, depending on how you got it, what you are doing with it and what your heart attitude is about it. There were many people in Scripture who were very wealthy. Wealth is a blessing from God as long as it is used that way, and used to bless others.

The problem with all of God's gifts and blessings is the enemy can quickly turn them into curses. This gift can quickly become bondage, enslaving, addictive.

There is a healthy desire to work and earn, to gain and acquire and possess. When that desire becomes excessive, or for things we shouldn't have or out of proportion or misdirected, then it becomes sin. Greed is a good desire gone bad.

### ***Definitions of Greed.***

***Greed is a heart issue, a disorder love.***

All three of our texts say money is not the problem, love of money is the problem.

Greed is an inordinate or excessive love for money or for whatever money can buy. It's a craving or desire to acquire, hoard, gain and keep. "Get all you can, and can all you get."

In the Bible, it's commonly called covetousness. It's laying up treasures on earth, whether bigger barns, bigger houses, bigger storage units or bigger retirement accounts.

Greed is a sin the lurks in all our hearts, rich and poor and comfortably middle class alike.

Greed is not just a sin of the rich, it is in all of us. A person who doesn't have much money or possessions can still have the sin of greed, the love of money.

***Greed is insatiable.***

**Ecclesiastes 5:10** He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.

Greed never says enough, only more. Everyone thinks they just need a little more. Everyone thinks if they just get to the next level they would be good.

Greed is restless, always striving, never content. It's like drinking ocean water. It leaves you thirsty for more.

It starts young. Can a child have too many Legos or Barbie clothes?

***Greed is idolatrous.***

Scripture calls covetousness idolatry.

**Matthew 6:24** No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.

Greed causes us to rebel against God. To love money is to hate God. What an irony that all our money is stamped with In God We Trust.

Greed dishonors God. Greed spreads the lie that God is not enough, not sufficient, not to be trusted for the present or for the future. We don't think His provisions are enough.

Greed ties our hearts to earth, to stuff that's passing away. Greed prefers temporal goods over eternal goods, limited goods over infinite goods. Idols over God.

***Greed is a root sin.***

**I Timothy 6:10** For the love of money is *a root of all kinds of evils*.

As *a root sin* it leads to many other sins. Greed may be the parent to more kids than all the other sins. **Pope Gregory** identified the names for a bunch of them.

“From avarice there springs treachery, fraud, deceit, perjury, restlessness, violence, and hardness of heart against compassion.”

What do they say about solving lots of crimes? Follow the money. Start with the money and follow the trail through a host of other sins.

That quote from the movie All the President's Men about the Watergate scandal is now being used about the Russian interference in the elections.

Greed has justified a myriad of unethical behaviors and practices in business and government. It fuels jealousy and contempt, it causes marital rift and family fights.

There are few better ways to expose the sinful depravity of our hearts than an inheritance battle.

***Greed is deceptive.***

**I Timothy 6:9-10** But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Greed is a snare, a trap. The reason the trap works is because it is disguised, camouflaged. The love of money and of this world has led many to abandon faith and hope in God.

For thirty pieces of silver, Judas betrayed His Lord. It doesn't take much for us to make shipwreck of our faith.

***Greed is deadly.***

The wages of sin is death.

**Ephesians 5:5-6** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

The kind of heart that finds more contentment in money and possessions than in God is a heart that is dead toward God and a heart that breeds all manner of other sins.

It killed Achan in Israel when he stole banned goods from Jericho. It killed Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the apostles.

We must be killing it or it will be killing us.

**Am I guilty of greed? The Greed Test.**

Since it's easy to be blind to the sin of greed let me ask some questions to test and see if there be any greedy way in our hearts. Be honest with yourselves. Talk about these at home with your spouse and your kids. (some questions from Jared Wilson).

Are you carrying large balances on your credit cards, buying things you can't afford right now?  
What does your check book or credit card statement say about what's most important to you?  
When the newest model or version of your favorite electronics comes out do you upgrade?  
Do you day dream about what it would be like to win the lottery?  
How many of us read the Forbes list of billionaires and wish we were in it?  
Is retail therapy a real thing for you? Do you go shopping just to go shopping?  
Do you fudge numbers on your taxes?  
Have you ever shoplifted or stolen or "borrow" something?  
Does it bother you when family, friends, neighbors or church members have things you don't?  
How important are money and stuff to you? Do you think about money a lot? Would your family or friends say money is really important to you?  
How much of your spending is on yourself?  
Do you frequently not have enough to tithe to your church?  
Do you resent the church or a charity asking for money or needing money?  
Do you think your needs, wants and desires should come before anyone else's or the churches?

The average US household has over \$16k in credit card debt.

The average US household with credit card debt pays almost \$1,300 a year in credit card interest.

Washington is 8<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation and Seattle averages over \$40k in credit card debt.

### **Loosening the grip of greed.**

First, recognize where greed has gotten into your heart, renounce it and repent daily of this sin. Ask God to expose it more clearly to you. Ask God to make Him your greatest treasure and your most satisfying joy.

Repent of listening to the lies of all the commercials and advertising and sales flyers.

Repent of wanting more and too much. Repent of coveting what others have or where others are going.

Repent of spending more than you make, of buying now and hoping you can pay later.

The Bible gives two swords for fighting this monster.

***The first is contentment.*** This is the antidote against covetousness and greed.

Cultivate contentment with what you have. Contentment is wanting what you already have.

Contentment is the inner peace knowing our Father in heaven loves us and cares for us and provides for us just what we need.

Paul is a great example of this. From a dark, damp, smelly prison cell he could with total honesty and sincerity write to fellow Christians:

**Philippians 4:11b-13** I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Notice Paul's words. I have learned. He didn't have it naturally, he had to learn it. So do you and I. And the main way we learn things is over and over through all kinds of experiences, especially hard and painful experiences, facing times of hunger and need.

**I Timothy 6:6** Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Paul's contentment guards his heart against greed. It gives him stability in the shifting and changing circumstances of life.

Greed focuses on what we want, contentment with thanksgiving focuses on what we have received. Contentment rests on the one who strengthens us, on the one who is with us always, on the one who never leaves us or forsakes us.

Greed is fueled by fear of not having enough, fear of not being in control. Contentment is fueled by confidence in God.

***The second is generosity.***

**Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore *be imitators of God*, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Trinity is a picture of generosity. God sends Jesus, the Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Gospel is all about the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus. God blesses us

with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Look at what God has done for us and be imitators of God.

Greed is about getting, greed is killed by giving. Generosity is freedom, it says we are not in bondage to our stuff.

God knows our hearts. God knew from the very beginning that it would be best for our hearts to give a minimum of ***ten percent*** of all we receive back to Him. He instituted a way to cultivate generosity, to keep our hearts free from the love of money. Ten percent is a sign of our freedom, a path to our true joy.

We should cultivate this in our own hearts and in the hearts of our children.

Grow in the grace of giving. Find new ways and new places. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to needs around you. Support the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever you can. Invest in the kingdom of God. It's eternal, that's a lasting investment.

Cultivate generosity. Show compassion to those in need.

Consider the poor and be willing to give when asked.

Don't be miserly when tipping.

Expand your heart capacity to give.

Be willing to share some food when asked to help someone.

You want a financial plan for the future. Give. Give generously, you can't out give God and He loves to bless and to provide.

Fan the flames of your faith in God concerning money by being generous, sacrificial, compassionate, giving.

Keep your heart open to making a true sacrifice. In other words, abstaining from fulfilling some need of yours in order to give to someone else. A life that never practices or experiences sacrifice is not fully Christ-like.

Our hope of conquering the sin of greed in our lives comes from One who sacrificed His own life for ours. He gave up everything, He became poor so we could become rich. Imitate Christ.

**Our best possession. Real riches.**

The Bible has a lot to say about money and it has a lot to say about real riches (from Jared Wilson):

- “the riches of His kindness, restraint, and patience” (Romans 2:4)
- “the riches of His glory” (Ephesians 3:16)
- “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33).
- “the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7)
- “the glorious riches of His inheritance” (Ephesians 1:18)
- “the incalculable riches of the Messiah” (Ephesians 3:8)
- “His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19)

All these riches and not one of them is financial. We have a superior possession in Christ.

**Hebrews 10:34** ... you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Make God in Christ your treasure. The more you treasure Jesus the less you will treasure stuff. If you have Jesus you have enough, make Him your enough.

“The things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.”

Brothers and sister, we are already rich beyond measure. Our inheritance in heaven makes everything on earth Monopoly money.

Be rich toward God, and see God as your greatest treasure. Remember the pearl of great price and the treasure buried in the field. God is more valuable and more satisfying than all our earthly possessions. It is worth giving up everything just to have Him, He is enough.

**Hebrews 13:5-6** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Consider the stunning promises of God. Consider who God is and what He has. The infinite God with infinite resources, the cattle on a thousand hills, is with us and for us. He can and will do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Live contentedly, live generously. Be imitators of God. In this is your freedom and your joy. Fight for joy by fighting against greed in all its forms.