

Friday, October 13, 2017

EGO – Edging God Out

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. Deut. 8:17-18a.

Solomon reigned as king of Israel for forty years following the death of his father David. The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and offered to give him anything he requested. Solomon asked for a discerning heart so he could govern wisely and justly. Solomon's request pleased God, and the Lord promised to give him the wisdom he requested and the wealth and honor he had not requested. God's promise was fulfilled in the years that followed. Solomon became renowned for his wisdom, and the wealth and power of his kingdom increased.

However, as Solomon grew older, things changed. His policies and programs caused discontent among the people, and he started to worship other gods. What caused these changes? The Bible states that Solomon's "heart was not fully devoted to the Lord." 1 Kings 11:4. Solomon was proud of his accomplishments, and he considered his success and wealth to be the result of his own talents and abilities. He forgot the generosity of God that made his success possible.

Years before, as the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses warned against pride. Moses knew the Israelites would enjoy vastly improved lives in the Promised Land. As their lives got better, they would be tempted to attribute their good fortune to their own efforts. This attitude could lead to feelings of self-sufficiency and pride and to a selfish belief that their possessions belonged only to them. God and obedience to his commands would become secondary in their lives. Moses urged the people to remember God's role in their lives as the giver of all good things.

Years later, Jesus told a parable about a tax collector and a Pharisee who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood up and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Luke 18:11-12. The Pharisee's prayer was not a prayer to God; it was a prayer about himself. The word "I" appears four times in his two sentence prayer. The Pharisee really did not believe he needed God. He felt he would be justified through his strict adherence to the religious laws. He was self-sufficient.

Our society values self-reliance and self-help. We love stories about "self-made" men and women because the stories tell us that if we work hard enough, we can become whatever we want to be. We frequently hear that our efforts alone can make us wealthy and self-sufficient. It's the American Dream. The warning from Moses remains relevant today.