

Spiritual Poisons, part 4, GREED  
November 20, 2016



Many years ago a major American company had an assembly factory in Panama. But they had a problem keeping employees. The laborers lived in a generally agrarian, barter economy. But the company paid them in cash. Since the average employee had more cash after a week's work than he needed, he would periodically quit working, satisfied with what he had made.

The company needed a solution to having their workers stop quitting. The solution was to give each employee a Sears catalogue. They learned of products they never knew existed. No one quit after that. They all wanted the previously undreamed-of things they saw in that book.

This is similar to an old "Dennis the Menace" cartoon has Dennis looking through a Christmas Toy catalogue saying, "This catalog's got a lot of toys I didn't even know I wanted."

That is what advertising seeks to do to all of us every day. Every day we are pelted with ads that prompt us to want more. Depending on your activities you see dozens of ads a day.

Adults have their own "toy catalogues" too. We get them in the mail each week. They come in the newspaper. And they pull at us. "Ooooh, that would be nice. Oh yeah, I could use one of those. Wow, having that would make one chore easier." And on and on our thinking goes, convincing ourselves that life would be better, happier, more fulfilling if we had one of those, and then one of those, and then that, and on and on.

**Advertising promotes greediness, a dissatisfaction with what we have.**

This is what Jesus was warning us about in **Luke 12:15 (NIV)** "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

Greed is a sin of the heart. This series of sermons concerns sins of the heart. These are sins that begin inside us and then work their way out into other sins. This morning we are looking at the sin of greed.

**Greed = "excessive desire for getting or having, especially of wealth";  
"desire for more than you need"**

So what do we need? What do we really need? We definitely need food and clothes. Paul says that is enough.

**1 Timothy 6:8 (NIV)** "... if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

He may have meant nothing more than food and clothing. We are not sure what he himself had beyond food and clothes. As far as we know, he did not own or rent a home. As a missionary, he moved from place to place. We know he spent a year in one

place, a couple of years in another place, but he spent a lot of time traveling and staying only a few weeks or months in any one place. He traveled by ship some of the time. But he often walked from town to town.

It is likely that he had some kind of tent, and maybe some tent-making supplies. He was a tentmaker by trade, and engaged in that business when his finances were low. He may not have included these as necessities. Other than food and clothes, Paul was not concerned with having anything. He did not need anything else. He did not want anything else. He chose to be content with his basic necessities. He chose... to be content with his basic needs met.

The basic necessities for us might be a little different. We have a spouse and some have children in the home. We need a place for them to live in security, with heat. Those of us who still have a job have to be able to sleep at night and have clean water so we can bath. If you can't sleep out of fear or cold and can't bath, you won't keep your job very long.

Some of us have medicines we are dependent on. And I have to have glasses to function, as do many of us. In order to keep serving as your pastor my glasses are a necessity. Depending on your job, you might also need a phone of some kind.

**Now why did Paul choose to be content with so little?**

**Material things have no lasting value.**

No matter how much food you gather, how many sets of clothes you obtain, or how many collectables you gather, you can't take even one ounce with you when you die. He pointed that out in verse 7 of this letter.

**1 Timothy 6:7 (NIV)** "... we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it."

You can't take material things with you. Jesus said to seek heavenly treasures instead of earthly treasures. The heavenly treasures have lasting value. The earthly treasures are only yours temporarily. That is why Solomon, the Bible book of Ecclesiastes, says that gathering up lots of earthly treasures is an effort in futility. You can't take any of it with you. Paul knew this. He was busy gathering heavenly treasures to be waiting for him in heaven.

**Paul was also concerned with the dangers of greed. Greed will trap you.**

**1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV)** People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap...

Greed lays a trap for us, the trap of thinking that things will make us happy. It is true that when we get something that we wanted for a long time there is a brief thrill. But the thrill never lasts. When the thrill fades we start yearning for another thing to satisfy us. The process begins all over again.

The truth is that money and possessions will never make you content or satisfied. They only lead you to want more discontent, more and more dissatisfaction. Greed for money and things traps you into a life of futile chasing after things that don't satisfy.

One writer compared it to being in a life boat. You have been shipwrecked and are floating on the open sea, and getting very thirsty. You think, "I am surrounded by water. I'll just drink a little."

**Greed leads to other sins.**

**1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV)** People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Greed leads to other sins. We see such people in our nation today. We see people who are addicted, addicted to shopping, addicted to gambling, addicted to hoarding, addicted to lying. I recently read that 25 % of married people hide money from their spouse. This is living a lie against their life partner. Some people, so addicted to greed, become workaholics, neglecting their families in the pursuit of more and more and more.

Greed leads to other sins. And the worst sin that greed leads to is that...

**In Greed we drift away from God.**

**1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV)** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith...

Greed drifts us away from God.

**Why? Because, as Jesus taught, you can't serve two masters.**

Jesus said you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and serve money. You cannot serve God and serve possessions. It is impossible. It leads to conflict.

One of our members, before he retired, had two bosses, from different departments. He was always getting rebuked by one or the other because they had different expectations of him. He could not satisfy them both. If he tried to please the boss from one department, the second boss was unhappy with him, and if he tried to please the second boss, the first boss was unhappy with him. He was in a no-win situation.

The reason you can't serve both God and possessions is that they aren't taking you to the same place. Let me illustrate. If you want to travel from Baltimore to Wilmington, Delaware, you can take US Rt. 40 or Interstate 95. They run somewhat parallel and both get you to Wilmington. At different points on the journey you can jump from one to the other, sometimes following 40 and sometimes following 95.

But trying pursue things is like getting on US Rt. 50. Rt. 50 does not go to Wilmington. It doesn't even go to Delaware. God is taking you someplace that the pursuit of money and possessions won't take you.

You can't serve two masters. That is why Jesus condemns greed.

(Jesus condemns greed: Matthew 23:25; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:5)

**This points us to the spiritual side of greed. Greed is discontent with what God has provided.**

God is sovereign over your life. God is intimately aware of all that you need and all that you have. Every good and perfect gift is from God. As your master, it is God's responsibility to provide for your needs. It is your responsibility to trust Him to do so and be content with what He provides.

Our job is to look to Him for how He wants us to live, and to be content with what He provides us to live on. Let's read all that Paul says here, gathered together in context.

**1 Timothy 6:6-11 (NIV)** But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

**The antidote to greed is to choose godliness and contentment.** The word godly means to seek God's will and then live it out. Contentment is choosing to live on what God provides without seeking more.

Choosing to be content with what you already have will bring many blessings to your life. But choosing to be content with what you already have is a very different way to live in America. It goes against the grain of advertising. Advertising tries to make you dissatisfied with what you have. Instead, we can choose to be content with what we now have.

Could you choose to be content right now, with what you have right now?

If not, name that thing you want: \_\_\_\_\_.

Ask yourself: Why do I want this? Do I need this? Really? (Be honest.) A need means you can't get along without it. Can you really not get along without the item above?

How much is the desire for this thing filling your thoughts, guiding your actions, affecting your prayers? Is the pursuit of this got you drifting from God? Do you think of this more than thinking of God's will for you?

Is this desire, and your efforts at acquisition taking over your life, even a little? If so, then it has become an idol. It is poisoning your spirit. It is poisoning your focus on God's will. It is taking over your heart.

Repent! Repent today, before it is too late. Repent before it takes you so far from God that you cannot think straight about such things. It will poison your thinking, poison your reasoning.

Maybe you are already that way. Maybe God has gotten your attention this morning to a greed problem in you. Now you see the dangers. You may have already experienced them to some extent. Praise God for opening your eyes today.

Turn to God right now. Jesus can deliver you from this and every sin. That is why He died. He died to pay the penalty for your sins. He came to rescue you, to save you. Put your faith in Him today.

Receive Him as your Savior. Put your life into His hands, receiving Him as Lord. He will begin bringing you back to sanity, purifying you from the sin of greed and all other sins.

Many of you are Christians already. Maybe you have had your eyes opened this morning the creep of this poison into your spirit. It is not too late to choose godliness and contentment in Him. The Spirit in you is greater than the spirit that is in the world. Turn to the one who is in you today.