

How do the greedy get caught? (11:6)

The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught by their own greed.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught by their own greed.

The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. Classic KJV - Proverbs 11:6

INTRODUCTION



The Hebrew word for “greed” is often translated with polite English words like “naughtiness” or “mischief.”

Greed and lust are forms of uncontrollable intense personal craving; passions that control us, rather than us controlling them. Greed is to money what lust is to sex. Greed and lust can't wait to take over. Both erupt from our own rebellious or evil inner desires.

Righteousness and greed don't mix, like oil and water. But isn't it true that our economy can't survive without greed?



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COMMENTARY

Some believe greed is the engine of capitalism. If they were right, then this text would argue that capitalism is doomed. The Bible teaches that a free market should be ruled by standards of just conduct, like honesty, industry, kindness, and forgiveness. Greed is not an asset in a free market economy. It is a poison in the market place, markets must have trust.

Greed and Warren Buffett



The Hebrew word for “greed,” הוֹרָה (hăw•wāh, pronounced “hav-vah”), is used to describe cravings, desires, and lusts. Such passions cloud perceptions and reasonable thinking, encouraging people to behave irrationally. “Greed” is not the fullest translation of the word; it entails “lusting” and “evil grasping.”

Greed is a trap we set for ourselves. Greed wants it now. Greed loves to get rich quick. To quote the celebrity investor Warren Buffett, on the buying and selling of stocks: “We simply attempt to be fearful when others are greedy, and to be greedy only when others are fearful.” I understand that Buffet is advocating contrarian investing, which often produces good results. However, his widely-circulated quote seems to legitimize greed. The Bible condemns it.

In the Tenth Commandment, we’re told not to covet—not to stoke an intense inner desire for—our neighbours’ possessions. Amazing. We can sin without any action or words, but by deliberately provoking uncontrollable passions. Even encouraging wrong desires is sin, and for good reason! Such substantial cravings come very easily to us.

Boomerang

How are the treacherous caught by their own greed? In awesome, indescribable ways, the deeds of a man’s hands return to him. The previous text in Proverbs expresses the same idea: “The wicked will fall by his own wickedness,” Proverbs 11:5.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers: “Their own strong passions are their ruin.”



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The Pulpit Commentary: “The indulgence of their passions destroys sinners.”

It's not always evident that the greedy get punished “in-kind.” The Bible says that punishment may be delayed, as described in Psalm 49:16-20. Very often, the greedy keep their assets, but lose any carefree ability to enjoy their wealth (Proverbs 1:19). Jesus tells a story of someone living a luxurious, leisurely, self-centered lifestyle, while ignoring the needs others (Luke 12:16-21).

Examples of Greed

The following examples illustrate the truth and power of this proverb:

Charles Ponzi (1882-1949) was a flashy operator who used a steady stream of new investors to pay off old investors. Since there was no real wealth creation, when the pay-outs outstripped new investment, the whole house of cards came crashing down. For a while, Ponzi took in \$250,000 per day (the greed of his investors?) in 1920 dollars, today worth \$2.6 million USD per day. After serving two federal prison sentences, Ponzi was deported to Italy, but died as a pauper in Rio de Janeiro in 1949.¹

Bernard L. Madoff (now in US prison serving a 150 year sentence) masterminded the world's largest Ponzi scheme, with cash flowing through the accounts worth \$170 billion. How did he do it? For years, Madoff built an excellent reputation with the American Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and their auditors suspected nothing. Yet some, like a Merrill Lynch senior vp, worried about the lack of transparency, plus the absence of an independent custodian (confirming Madoff's assets), plus the use of a little-known auditor.² Other flags were raised when Madoff's investments generated steady returns in every sort of market—virtually impossible year after year.³

Despite Madoff's obvious intelligence and education, his insatiable craving for money and more money blinded him to viciousness of his actions. Blindness affects the intelligent and educated just the same, or maybe more, than the rest of us (Exodus 23:8). Over-confidence mates with ravenous desire, clouding the judgment. He became the tool of his own craving.

Self-entanglement

I like how Peter Kwasniewski of Life Site News, puts it, summarizing theologian Thomas Aquinas' commentary entangling greed, choking the Word of God:



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The fundamental problem with capitalism is not exploitation of workers, bad though that is, nor over-payment of CEOs and CFOs, or the production of cheap, ugly, throw-away “goods,” or the divorcing of fathers from families and mothers from children. These are indeed terrible things, highly typical of the modern marketplace. But the worst problem of capitalism is the simple fact that it powerfully breeds, and in turn feeds upon, a soul-dominating love of this world - a preoccupation with possessions, riches, status, power so many ‘entanglements of the mind,’ as St. Thomas puts it. All the other problems mentioned above flow from this source.⁴

Instead of being entangled by the “stuff” itself, we want to be totally enthralled with the Provider of the “stuff” who gives us so many things to enjoy (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

Crave the Giver, Not the Goods

Many times in the scripture we are told to seek the Lord and crave conversing with Him. Real blessings like a wife, servant, house, and equipment are all temporary and short-term (except the wife). It’s God’s job to supply them for His creatures and it’s His creatures’ responsibility to seek Him. This message is summarized by Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34. In the text Jesus tells us to put the love of God ahead of the love for goods.

Righteousness is not as visible as riches, but righteousness has the power to save people from troubles much worse than poverty.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus did not trust Himself to any man because He knew what was in man (John 2:25).

Jesus warned that, “From within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting (emphasis added) and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man,” Mark 7:21-23.

We all need the help of The Friend to overcome our all our inner inclinations to sin! We all need to be saved from ourselves.



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APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Do you think greed infects others only? Think again. Greed tries to justify itself.
- List why other countries could legitimately call North Americans greedy.
- In business greed is sometimes deemed a virtue. Does your business always try to get the most in every transaction?

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

capitalism, charity, deliverance, generosity, greed, impatience, retribution, righteous, stinginess, treachery, worse life (quality)

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Quick Buck Betty?



Quick Buck Betty wants to make money fast, and is always looking for “hot tips.” Researching and understanding investments takes too long; she just cares about the returns—especially the short-term returns.

It doesn't matter how the money is earned—in fact she'd rather not know at all! Betty is just eager to “make it” or, even better, have someone else make it for her. She has little time for Steady Eddy and Diligent Daniel—their methods take too long.

Betty views the stock and bond markets like the lottery and casino. She doesn't invest; she gambles. She likes to “play” the markets. Day trading is one of her passions.



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FOOTNOTES

1. *History of Greed* by David E. Y. Sarna 2010, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. page 28
2. Ibid, page 163
3. Ibid, page 162
4. *Why Christians should give away their wealth instead of hoarding it.* October 25, 2018 Life Site News Blog, Peter Kwasniewski

