

6. Greed – The Silent killer

June 7, 2009

There was an old greedy person in a town who could care less for anyone except getting rich at any cost. Nobody liked him, but they didn't dare to say anything against him because he owned the most of the businesses in the town.

One day a new pastor of the only church in town chose to talk with him about his greed that consumed him and his family since the old man's wife attends his church. So the pastor invited him to his church office for a cup of coffee.

The old man reluctantly came. They had a small talk and the pastor tried to explain to him about his greed that caused troubles to so many people in town. It seemed that the conversation went nowhere. The old man insisted that he was not greedy, but just taking care of his businesses.

The Lord gave the pastor a great inspiration. He took the old man to the window where they could see a group of children playing in the church playground. The pastor asked, "What do you see?" The question had an obvious answer. The old man blurted out, "I see children playing in the playground."

"Very well," the pastor replied him as he led the old man to the full length mirror on the office wall. "Now, what do you see?" Now the old man was really irritated by the pastor's question. He answered sharply, "I see myself."

"Hmm, the window pane and mirror are both made of glasses. The only difference is that one of them is covered with silver and you can only see yourself."

Greed is a silent killer of a person. It consumes a person. Greed is the insatiable desire for more – more money, more power, more prestige. The greedy heart is never satisfied. This explains why the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, because when a person craves more money, he will commit any sin to satisfy that craving. He has already broken the first two of the Ten Commandments, because money is already his god and idol. It is then a simple step to steal, lie, commit adultery, take God's name in vain, and so on.

That is exactly what we will see in the life of Gehazi, the servant of prophet Elisha.

A. RATIONALIZATION

2 Kings 5:20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him."

When a leprous Syrian general Naaman came to prophet Elisha, he told the general through his servant to go dip himself seven time in the Jordan River. When he did that, his flesh was restored and he was completely healed by the Lord. The general went back to Elisha and offered him what he brought – about \$2,000,000 worth gold, silver and designer clothing. The prophet said, "No thank, hombre."

Gehazi couldn't believe what he just heard. His boss said, "No" to that general's generous offer. He couldn't just let this golden opportunity slip by.

Note one very important thing that Gehazi didn't do. He didn't discuss with Elisha about his idea to take something from Naaman. The reason why he didn't do was that he wanted the reward all for himself, not to share with Elisha.

Once greed kicks in in our hearts, we can rationalize just about everything to get what we want. It is the first step of compromise that leads us to destruction.

Jesus clearly told us against greed and covetousness:

Luke 12:15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

B. AN ANALYSIS OF GREED

Greed has many faces, or should we call it "disguises". But at the end of the day, greed is simply covetousness: an unhealthy hunger to get more, whether ethically or otherwise. The temptation toward greed comes at us in almost every area of life: financially (money), materially (possession), socially (fame and power), and physically (pleasure).

Just look at the lives of many corrupt Washington D.C. politicians whether they are Republicans or Democrats and corporate executives of the Wall Street in New York City. How about the rich and famous people in Hollywood? Recently I heard a news that one Hollywood actress demanded three million dollars for three days' work.

The real danger begins in how greed comes at us: subtly. Whether you are in the position of rich or poor, greed does not know race, age, sex, intelligence and cultural background.

Three things we must notice about greed:

- 1) The people with greed do not care about others. To fill their bottomless pit of greed, they will do anything including lying in a heart beat.
- 2) Once they start their lies to fulfill their greed, they will justify with their means any way they want. They start to believe in their own lies and get offended when someone dares to call them dishonest.
- 3) The people with greed never think about what would happen when they get caught from their deceptions. Greed blinds them. Yes, greed is a silent killer.

C. DECEPTIONS

2 Kings 5:21-24 So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" 22 And he said, "All is well. (1) My master has sent me, (2) saying, 'Indeed, just now (3) two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. (4) Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.'" 23 So Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. 24 When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed.

When a person's heart is filled with greed and his or her lips are filled with lies. That person can not enjoy the peace of God.

Note what the noble thing Naaman did when he stopped his chariot. He stepped down to meet Elisha's servant. For a Syrian general to show such respect to a Jewish servant was certainly an indication that God had changed his heart from the arrogance that he had before to a humble believer of God of the universe.

In carrying out his evil deceptive plan, Gehazi not only used God's name in vain, but he also used God's work as a cloak of covetousness. Within one comment from his lips, he concocted four lies.

Out of his grateful heart to Elisha, Naaman insisted two talents of silver to Gehazi which weighted about 150 pounds plus two set of designer suit. In addition to that, Naaman had two of his own servants to carry them for him.

Gehazi knew that he was doing wrong, otherwise he would carry the silver and clothing to Elisha. It was all about himself.

D. THE CONSEQUENCE FOR A GREEDY SERVANT

2 Kings 5:25-27 Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where did you go, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant did not go anywhere." 26 Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? 27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.

Acting very innocent, Gehazi went and stood before his master, awaiting orders, but he found himself on trial. Gehazi had forgotten that nothing is hidden from God.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

God gave the word of knowledge to Elisha so that he not only saw what his servant had done, but he saw into his servant's heart and knew why he did it. Gehazi longed to be a wealthy man. He wasn't content to labor by the side of Elisha the prophet. He wanted to have security and comfort rather than serving God.

God judged Gehazi by giving him leprosy of Naaman and promising that his descendants would be lepers. The covetousness that ate away at his heart became leprosy eating away at his body. Gehazi had hoped to leave great wealth to his descendants, but instead, he left great shame and sorrow for generations to come.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with being wealthy. Nothing wrong with having money. You don't find anywhere in the Bible against being wealthy or having money. As a matter fact, the Lord blessed several people in the Bible with a tremendous amount of wealth – Abraham, Isaac, Job, David, Solomon, Boaz and so on.

But it is wrong to get that wealth through deceit and to make that wealth your god. Gehazi used the ministry God gave him as a means of deceiving Naaman and Elisha, and that is contrary to God's will.

I said this before, money makes a good servant, but it makes a horrible slave master. If money is your highest goal, the thing you long to gain, its power will enslave your soul and cause your life much pain.

E. AN EXTENDED THOUGHT

You may say, "I am not greedy. This study doesn't apply to me. It must be for someone who is a penny pincher." If so, ask yourself if you tithe. If not, you have three things going on in your life – unbelief, greed and disobedience. It is your unbelief, because you are holding onto your money and you don't trust God who gave you your life, job and everything. It is your disobedience, because you are told numerous times in the Bible to tithe.

Those who do not tithe often try to excuse themselves that we are living in the age of grace and the New Testament does not say that we should tithe. But they don't mention that everything belongs to God either. There is no place in the New Testament that speaks against tithing or forbids it. The ten percent – that is why we call it a 'tithe' – of our incomes are designated to give back to the Lord and to His work to grow our faith.

We should never, ever think that our God needs our puny wallets or bank accounts. He owns the universe. God can make whatever He needs come to existence. Tithing is totally for our faith to believe in His faithfulness and provision.

Since it is a clear commandment from God to tithe, when we don't, we become disobedient. Some of you might think, "OK, I will tithe." The Word of God tells us to be cheerful givers to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

If you are a reluctant giver and you feel forced to tithe instead of being privileged to be a part of His work and to bring the lost souls to the Kingdom of God, go see our elder Jerry Hamby who is the treasurer of our church. We will give you your money back. God doesn't want your reluctant money, nor do we.

F. HOW TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST GREED?

How to fight back against greed? Being content and being thankful for what we have from the Lord.

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

1) Don't let your imagination grow into greed.

The same creativity that helps us dream wonderful dreams can also assist us in forming destructive nightmares. We need to remember our role, remember what is godly and wise, not just what is available.

2) Don't let your rationalization harbor greed in your heart.

Rationalization is the art of self-delusion. We can talk ourselves into intensifying our covetousness and removes the constraints of an inappropriate process. However, it's a delusion we can only practice in private. That's why accountability is so vital to exposing sin. As soon as we begin to feel anxious about others knowing our intentions or motivations, we're much closer to sin than we realize.

3) Don't let your heart agree with greed to deceive others.

If we can lie to ourselves, we can easily lie to others, even those who are close to us. We must determine to keep all of our actions above reproach, out in the open. Examine your motives. When you feel greed in your heart, call it what it is, and confess it. Self-examination runs contrary to our natures, especially when we are under

the influence of temptation. Ask the Lord to reveal the truth to you about your motives.

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.