

## Greed

1 Tim 6:1-11

During the 1980's, Michael Milken worked for the Wall Street investment firm Drexel Burnham and was involved in one of the biggest cases of insider trading ever brought to court.<sup>1</sup> He was assessed a \$600 million fine and spent 22 months in jail. President Trump pardoned him in 2020.

Milken was rich – filthy rich. Besides his normal salary, which for 1982 was about \$45 million, he was involved in more than 500 trading partnerships, one of which paid him \$473 million. In one 4-year period in the 1980s, he earned about \$1B.

Ivan Boesky was one of Milken's trading partners. Boesky was rich, too. He owned an apartment in Paris, another one in London, a condo in Hawaii, and a suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Part of his money came from insider trading with Milken, which is illegal.

What would make very rich men like Milken and Boesky resort to illegal trading practices? The desire to make more money; i.e., GREED. Most of us would retire if we had a few million salted away. Yet these guys could only think of getting more, and they were willing to violate the law to do so.

Milken and Boesky are just two examples of a very common problem. Most people are not immune to the sin of greed. Much crime, abuse, and violence are motivated by the desire to get money. Even if we do nothing overtly illegal, greed can still have a negative effect on our lives and families.

Greed is one of those sins of the spirit that may be within our hearts this morning. It's a sin that we must root out of our lives if it is there. We must seek to overcome it and put it to death.

What does the Bible say about greed? Today we'll be considering a text that deals with this issue: 1 Tim. 6:3-11.

Notice several important Biblical principles regarding the love of money/greed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unknown original source for the information on Milken; probably copied from a magazine or newspaper article.

## I. Greed prevents true contentment (.5b-8)

.5b The context here is false teachers (cf. vss. 3-5). One of the characteristics of false teachers is that they think that financial prosperity is a sign of godliness—“gain is godliness,” i.e., godliness is a means of financial gain.

Many false teachers today suppose the same thing. E.g. “health and wealth” “name it and claim it” prosperity gospel—the Word Faith movement, e.g., Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn teach that wealth is the natural result of godliness. The godlier you are, the wealthier you will be. The more you give to them, they claim, the more God is going to give to you.

Paul asserts that godliness with contentment is a great means of spiritual gain. Our goal should be contentment, not financial gain.

**Quote:** Material things should freely be used and enjoyed to the glory of God if one has them (cf. 1 Tim 4:3–4; 6:17), but in no way do they contribute to godliness.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of financial gain, we should be seeking contentment (αὐτάρκεια). The word means, “a condition of life in which no aid or support is needed;” i.e., to be satisfied with what God provides; to find that what one has is sufficient.

Phil. 4:11 *I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content* (αὐτάρκης).

**App:** Contentment is a rare commodity. Human nature is rarely content with what we have. Even when we get nice, new things, we are seldom content for long.

.7 Several things to remember when you feel discontent:

1. We started with nothing—when we entered the world, we had no possessions.
2. We will end with nothing—you can’t take it with you; you leave it all behind when you die. You don’t see a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer. When a person dies, he leaves all his possessions behind.

---

<sup>2</sup> A. Duane Litfin, “1 Timothy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 746.

Job 1:21 [*Job*] said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there. ...

After a famous millionaire died, someone asked, “How much did he leave behind?” And the answer was “All of it; every penny.”

Those who love money are striving for something that is essentially temporary. No matter how much material wealth you accumulate, you can enjoy it only during this life.

Mark 8:36 *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*

3. .8 We really need only basic provisions—food and shelter.

“raiment” = covering/shelter – clothing, housing

Christians should be content with a simple lifestyle. An eternal perspective gives us a detached attitude toward the things of this world. The more stuff we accumulate, the more complex and difficult life becomes.

Colossians 3:1–2 ... *seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Even the unsaved world is coming to recognize that an accumulation of money and things does not guarantee a happy life. There is a movement today to simplify and minimalize life. People are buying tiny homes and keeping only the things that they need and use regularly. They are intentionally avoiding the accumulation of goods. A simple life is often more satisfying and rewarding than a life devoted to materialism. “Minimalism”

I’ve heard that money can make you happier only up to a certain amount. No matter how much more money you have after that, it does not make a person much happier. I.e., the boundary is around \$75k today. If you go from poverty to \$75k per year, it increases your enjoyment of life; life becomes more pleasant as you move from poverty to the middle class. But after that, additional money does not add much to your enjoyment of life—for most people.

For a minority of people, the more money they make, the happier they are—probably those who love money and want to be rich.

**Trans:** We should never set our affections on material goods, and we must strive to be content in whatever circumstance God allows (Phil 4:11).

II. .9-10 Greed produces a wide range of problems.

“Those who will be rich” = Those who purpose/desire/want to be rich. Those who are greedy, those who love money. They desire wealth, who crave the material goods and luxuries that money can buy, who are determined to accumulate money and things.

Notice what happens to greedy people (results of greed):

A. .9 Greedy people are entangled in temptations, snares and lusts.

1. .9 Temptation—a solicitation to evil from the world, the flesh, or the devil. Money presents a large temptation for many people.
2. Ensnarement (the word originally referred to a trap for catching birds)—Greedy people fall into traps like gambling, shady business deals, and get-rich-quick schemes. Their greed often leads directly to all sorts of crime, abuse, and violence.

**Illus.:** Bernie Madoff conned thousands of investors out of \$20B. He was arrested in 2008 and sentenced to 150 years in prison. He was ensnared by his greed; he loved the things that money can buy; he enjoyed the millionaire lifestyle. Both Madoff and many of those who invested with him were ensnared by their greed.

3. .9b Drowning desires—many foolish and harmful lusts (desires) drown (sink, submerge, drag to the bottom) the greedy in
  - (i) destruction (ὄλεθρος)—ruin—the desire for wealth often leads to bankruptcy, family failure, and prison time.
  - (ii) perdition (ἀπώλεια)—the word implies eternal misery in hell.

Greed drags the wicked to the bottom, ruining their life now and leading to eternal damnation. Cf. Achan (Josh 7) and Judas (Mt 27:3-5).

**Illus.:** Martin Siegel was one of Boesky's sources of inside information. He served 2 months in prison for his crimes.

**Quote:** [Siegel] seemed to have it all: a beautiful wife, a spectacular Connecticut oceanfront estate, glowing press. But Mr. Siegel came to feel he couldn't live on his earnings of more than half a million dollars a year. His house had cost \$750,000. His wife needed full time help with their baby. Their Manhattan apartment was too small, and one they considered appropriate would cost another \$1 million.... So Mr. Siegel convinced himself he needed to provide Mr. Boesky with inside information.

Greed led to temptation, a snare, and hurtful and foolish lusts.

The lust for money has many negative results. Note some startling stats:

- ⊗ The average credit card debt per American family \$6,270. Americans owe \$986 billion in credit card debt.<sup>3</sup>
- ⊗ American households carry a total of \$17 trillion in debt, and the average household debt is \$101,915; about \$12T of that is mortgage debt.<sup>4</sup>
- ⊗ The outstanding federal student loan balance is \$1.6 trillion. The average federal student loan debt balance is \$37,717.
- ⊗ For some, digging out of debt proves impossible. Last year (2022), there were 374,240 non-business bankruptcy filings. For 2023, bankruptcy filings are up almost 20% over last year.

Some of that debt and bankruptcy, no doubt, is *not* driven by greed. But certainly some of it is. The love of money and the things it can buy ensnares and submerges people in foolish and harmful lusts.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.valuepenguin.com/average-credit-card-debt#:~:text=The%20median%20credit%20card%20debt,most%20prominent%20trends%20that%20emerged.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fool.com/the-ascent/research/average-household-debt/>

B. .10 Greed results in all kinds of evil.

Notice: “The *love* of money,” not money itself. People often misquote this verse by saying that money is the root of all evil, but that’s not what it says. Money is just a tool; we can use it for good or for evil. Some people love money itself, but most people don’t love money; they love the things money can buy.

- (a) Love of money is a root which produces all kinds of bad fruit. Virtually every sin in the book has been committed for the sake of money.

.10b The verb “coveted after” (ὀρέγομαι) means, “grasping for, stretching out for, reaching after or desiring something.” The grammar of the verb (present tense) suggesting a continual pursuit of money.

Those without money can be greedy as easily as those who have lots of it. Sometimes, those with the most money are the least greedy.

- (b) .10b Erred (ἀποπλανᾶω) from the faith—they have wandered away, strayed from the truth. Paul probably has in mind here the false teachers and those who follow them. They have gone astray from the right path because of their love for money.

- (c) .10end Experiencing many sorrows—much grief and pain pierces/skewers the lives of the greedy. Once greed ensnares someone, it results in all manner of negative consequences.

“Many are the sorrows of the wicked” (Ps 32:10).

Think of all the evil done because of greed—theft, fraud, cheating on taxes, bribery, political corruption.

**Illus.:** Milken spent almost 2 years in prison for his crimes, plus he paid millions in fines.

Most greedy people don’t go to jail--what do they do? They work 12 hour days, they try to keep up with their neighbors, they give their kids things instead of quality time and attention, they sacrifice their marriages on the altar of materialism.

What problems are you going through because you are pursuing financial gain? What problems in your life are associated with the accumulation of things or debt that you've taken on because you want things?

**Trans:** Greed produces a wide range of trouble—temptations, snares, lusts, destruction, perdition. We must avoid greed.

II. Greed does not motivate godly people (.11)

The words “but thou” set up a stark contrast between the pagan attitude toward money and the Christian attitude toward money. The “man of God” must be known for pursuing godliness and contentment, not for loving money. While the false teachers are chasing after money, the man of God pursues personal virtues and godly character.

A. .11a A man of God flees from some things.

1. Given the context, what the man of God flees from are the evils associated with the love of money, i.e., he avoids materialism and consumerism.<sup>5</sup> He avoids debt when possible. He's not striving to be rich or to hoard earthly possessions.

*Matthew 6:19–20 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

2. “Flee these things.” We must intentionally stay away from things that cause us temptation, snares, and foolish and hurtful lusts. We don't want to drown in destruction and perdition, so we must “flee these things.”

*Pr 23:4 Labour not to be rich: ...*

B. .11b A man of God follows after some things.

1. “Follow after” (διώκω) means to pursue, to run swiftly in order to catch something. The man of God has spiritual goals; he's

---

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 261.

pursuing godly character. He's not materialistic or consumeristic. What is he pursuing?

- a) Righteousness: to do what is right, in relation to both God and man, with the emphasis on *outward* behavior.<sup>6</sup> A man of God is committed to right living, honesty, and integrity. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Mt 5:6).
- b) Godliness: this word emphasizes the *inner* aspect of right behavior. External righteousness is based on godliness in the inner man. Reverence for God and for his commands results in a righteous lifestyle.
- c) Faith: the man of God has a deep trust in God and loyalty to him. He's walking by faith and not by sight.
- d) Love: the man of God loves God supremely and his fellow man sacrificially.
- e) Patience: the word refers to remaining upright under a load. It describes one who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose even through great trials and sufferings.
- f) Meekness: gentleness, humility

These spiritual qualities are far more important than financial gain. Instead of pursuing money and what it can buy, the man of God pursues moral excellence, spiritual growth, and good character. Money is not a primary motivation. What really matters are good character and good behavior.

Our pursuit is spiritual maturity, and part of that is contentment with what God gives us. We don't love money or the things it can buy. We love God and others, and we use money to accomplish godly goals.

---

<sup>6</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997)

**Conclusion:** Even after paying out hundreds of millions of dollars for his crimes and spending time in prison, Michael Milken is still a very wealthy man. His net worth today is about \$6B; he's among the richest people in the world. And, to his credit, in the last few years, he's been giving away a lot of his money, especially donating to cancer research.

None of us will ever approach the level of wealth of Michael Milken. But that does not mean we are not susceptible to greed. Poor people may be greedier than rich people. Greed is a very common problem.

We should flee greed and its dangers. Spiritual realities should motivate us more than financial gain. We should be pursuing God and spiritual growth and family strength much more than we pursue money.

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Don't get caught in greed's entangling snare. If you find yourself motivated by money, repent of that sin. The blood of Christ can cleanse us from all sins.

*.6 godliness with contentment is great gain.*

Value from God's point of view is godliness without reference to money. We need to learn to be happy/content with what God provides. Our affections must be set on things above, not on the things of this world.

Phil 4:11 *I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

