

GREED

A Global Disease



TOMORROW'S
WORLD
SPECIAL REPORT

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Can Money Buy Everything?

Money is important, and it is virtually impossible to live without it in today's world. It buys food, clothing, and shelter—all of which are necessities of life. It also buys things that are not necessities, but which add enjoyment to an otherwise bare existence. It makes it possible to buy an extra pair of shoes, a motor vehicle for moving about in comfort, and that smart-phone that seems so important these days.

Money makes it possible to purchase a new home, to go out to dinner and the theatre, and to buy that new boat, dress, or set of golf clubs. It also attracts friends, and can even make it easier for a man to attract a wife. It is easy to think money can buy everything important in life, and that is why people pursue it so energetically—some work long overtime hours or two jobs to get “ahead.”

But the old saying “Money can't buy everything” is just as true today as it has ever been, and one thing money cannot buy is happiness. We at *Tomorrow's World* understand that this truth is a hard sell, but the evidence for it is overwhelming. Study after study shows that if someone has enough money for life's essentials—food, clothing, and shelter—increased wealth does not translate into increased happiness. This is not to say that having money is bad in itself, or that money is evil by nature, but money does not solve the fundamental problems that rob us of happiness.

Wealth has increased exponentially in China over the past 40 years, but happiness has not. Why? Part of the reason is that money does not solve problems of human interaction. Spoiled children grow up to want everything “right now,” including marriage. Speaking of her own marriage and divorce, one 24-year-old Chinese woman explained, “Marriage requires forgiveness, understanding, tolerance and compromise. Yet we [of the] post-'80s generation neglect this entirely. No one will compromise. We just argue. Of all my friends who are married, 100 percent are unhappy” (“Lightning Divorces' Strike China's 'Me Generation,” *NPR*, November 17, 2010).

Money and material possessions often complicate rather than facilitate relationships. Consider the

many celebrities who seemingly have everything, yet fail the “happiness test” of marriage.

Some years ago, *The Independent* reported the conclusions of Professor Elizabeth Dunn and her colleagues at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, who had studied the relationship between wealth and happiness. Her conclusions?

Indeed, although real incomes have surged dramatically in recent decades, happiness levels have remained largely flat within developed countries across time.... One of the most intriguing explanations for this counter-intuitive finding is that people often pour their increased wealth into pursuits that provide little in the way of lasting happiness, such as purchasing costly consumer goods (“Want to be happy? Give your money away,” March 21, 2008).

In fact, as the article explains, the research points to a way of life that is quite the opposite of *greed*—the intense desire for more and more. It notes that the study “found how people spend their money is at least as important as how much of it they earn in the first place. The greatest joys of all, they discovered, can be attained by giving money away, either to someone they know or to charity.”

This *Tomorrow's World* Special Report explains that the roots of greed are deeply embedded in the human condition—expressed in both our culture and our society. Records show that the ancients wrestled with this problem, and while science and industry have progressed through the centuries, human nature has not. That is why we look to an ancient source for wisdom. There is a reason this source has been around for so long, why its text can be read in an unequalled number of languages, and why more copies of it have been distributed throughout the world than any other book. It shows the ugliness of human greed, but also the solution to it, and the rewards that come when this tendency is suppressed. What Professor Dunn and her colleagues discovered was a piece of wisdom uttered nearly 2,000 years ago: “It is better to give than to receive.”

—Gerald E. Weston



Service or Selfishness?

Corruption in government is an age-old problem. Will rulers always choose their own interests over the interests of the governed? Scripture tells of a wonderful future of perfect government under Jesus Christ!

By **Rod McNair**

Are governments always corrupt? Are individuals always greedy? Is there an answer to the problem of corruption?

A recent public opinion survey by Transparency International states, “Nearly six in ten [American] people now say that the level of corruption has risen in the past twelve months, up from around a third who said the same in January 2016” (“Corruption in the USA: The Difference a Year Makes,” *Transparency.org*, December 12, 2017). The report notes that “7 out of ten people believe the government is failing to fight corruption”—more than half of the total surveyed.

The sad history of politics—in nation after nation—is that government leaders often serve *their own interests* more than the interests of those they govern. In fact, they often do so *at the expense of* those they have supposedly dedicated themselves to serving. As new officials take their seats in government, the same questions are always asked: Will

these public servants fulfill their people’s hopes, or confirm their fears? In the months and years ahead, will elections in various countries around the world bring new policies, better government, more service, and less selfishness?

Only time will tell. But if history reveals the answers, the same cycle of narcissism, corruption, and cronyism will be repeated over and over again.

When will the cycle end? *Will* it ever end? Will the nations around the world ever be governed in true equity, righteousness, and selflessness, by moral principles, for the benefit of the governed?

The surprising answer is, “Yes!” *But how and when will that happen?*

Governing by Self-Interest

Political scientists have long observed that greed and consuming self-interest among governing officials is perhaps “the most challenging governance problem afflicting many countries” (Tanzi, *Challenging Corruption in Asia*, p. 1). In recent years, high-level political leaders in the Philippines, Indonesia, China,

and Thailand are among those who have been involved in corruption-related charges.

Additionally, as many as four million Zimbabweans have *fled their country* as a result of the alleged corruption and brutality of their nation's former president Robert Mugabe. Even after Mugabe's removal from office in 2017, Zimbabwe's fate remains unclear.

In July 2018, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, was removed from office in a "landmark decision" by that nation's highest court. "Sharif 'is not honest,' one of the judges in the capital of Islamabad said in reading the verdict. The court also removed Sharif's son-in-law, Mohammad Safdar, a lawmaker in parliament, for corruption" ("Pakistan Prime Minister Sharif removed from office for corruption," *USA Today*, July 28, 2018). According to *USA Today*, this is the *third time* Nawaz Sharif has been removed from office in Pakistan—seemingly par for the course, since "No prime minister has ever completed a five-year term in Pakistan since it became a parliamentary democracy in 1971" (ibid.).

In Mexico, two prominent governors were arrested in the spring of 2017; "Mexico has struggled with corruption for a long, long time, but recent events indicate that the situation is now at a truly intolerable pitch. ... two fugitive state governors were arrested in a joint operation by Interpol and the Mexican police. Javier Duarte, who was captured in Guatemala, served six years as governor of the state of Veracruz, during which he allegedly misappropriated 233m pesos (USD\$12m) of public funds. Tomás Yarrington, onetime governor of the state of Tamaulipas, was arrested in Italy; he stands accused of co-operating with an extremely dangerous drug gang known as the Gulf Cartel" ("Mexico's corruption problems are still among the world's deepest," *The Conversation*, July 19, 2017).

But it is not just individual countries that struggle with corruption. The United Nations has itself been embroiled in charges of corruption, such as the "food-for-oil" scandal of 2005, which saw \$21 billion squandered in deals with Saddam Hussein.

Nations all over the world face the terrible effects of corruption and cronyism. Western nations are certainly not immune to these problems. Sitting U.S. President Donald J. Trump has been dogged, seemingly, by accusations of every kind of scandal and

corruption under the sun. Indeed, many American politicians, present and former, have faced their share of allegations, including those of security breaches, foreign collusion, and voter fraud.

Are leaders necessarily corrupt? God laid the ground rules for leadership thousands of years ago. He said through the prophet David, "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3). Moses delivered to the Israelites God's statute forbidding the corruption of justice in government: "You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous" (Deuteronomy 16:19). Too often our world turns a blind eye to God's word—and instead takes the bribe.

But can we call it "corruption" when nations or individuals set aside established justice or morality to pursue policies they say are in the "national interest"? Yes, we can. Again and again, we see that decisions guided only by one nation's "self-interest"—without regard for overriding principles of a higher morality and standard that would prohibit those decisions—often lead to disastrous results.

For example, many Americans today are troubled by Iran's hatred of the United States, but do not realize that the U.S. played a part in inciting that hatred. In 1953, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency played a part in the toppling of Mohammed Mossadegh, Iran's democratically-elected Prime Minister. Why did the U.S. disrupt another nation's democratic process? Was it to serve the "national interest" of U.S. ally Great Britain, which sought to ensure uninterrupted access to Iranian oil, over which it held a monopoly before the nationalization movement in Iran?

Governments everywhere, in every part of the globe, run all too often on selfishness and self-interest *rather than universal, overarching principles of morality*.

Does Selfishness Work?

Amazingly, there are some who believe that out-and-out corruption may be good for a nation's economy and society. Perhaps this is one reason why corruption persists—*there simply is no universal agreement that it is wrong*.

As political scientist Vito Tanzi pointed out, "Not too many years ago, the economic successes of the

countries of East Asia were attributed by some observers to a presumably positive impact of corruption in facilitating decision-making” (Tanzi, p. 1). And yet corruption places a huge financial burden on a nation’s economic success. For example, estimates placed the cost of Nigeria’s corruption at \$400 billion, according to official estimates (“The good, the bad, and the president,” *Economist*, January 3, 2008).

Some point to the astounding economic growth in corruption-ridden societies as a “stamp of approval” of their practices. The late Filipino economist

AMAZINGLY, THERE ARE SOME WHO BELIEVE THAT OUT-AND-OUT CORRUPTION MAY BE GOOD FOR A NATION’S ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Alejandro Lichauco, writing for the Manila daily newspaper *Today*, suggested that corruption had not prevented India from becoming a global economic power: “Today, despite pervasive corruption and cronyism, India is a fully industrialized economy, self-sufficient in food, a nuclear power with a growth rate over the last several years of 6 percent to 7.8 percent... India today manufactures just about every category of consumer goods, has a highly developed capital goods industry... and is supplying the world with experts in information technology” (“The ultimate corruption,” March 11, 2000).

But does economic growth really argue the case for corruption? How much more might a nation have grown without the corrosive and downward pull of corruption?

Some justify corruption because they see it as vital to doing business and increasing sales. They believe that “playing by the rules” would actually handicap them in their competition with other businesses (Tanzi, p. 3). But as author Daniel Jordan Smith notes, government corruption creates a climate like that which we see today in Nigeria, where people believe they must “resort to any means available to achieve their own economic aspirations,” including breaking laws of the land (*A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, p. 30).

In the West, we are often shocked and surprised at the justifications some offer for corruption. We may be quick to deplore the bribes and “gift exchanges” we see practiced in Asian and African nations—but what do we see when we look closer to home? Ted Stevens was a “successful” U.S. Senator—the longest-serving Republican in the Senate before his defeat in November of 2008. Even though he had long been dogged by charges of corruption, and had been convicted on seven felony counts shortly before the election, nearly half of Alaska’s voters wanted to return

him to Washington. “He’s good for Alaska,” some said, excusing his corruption because they felt they and their state were its beneficiaries.

Can people’s greed be good for those they are supposed to serve? In the movie *Wall Street*, the character Gordon Gekko infamously declared, “Greed is good,” a comment often and widely repeated since. It could be said that the U.S. government has embraced the idea that greed can be good, running up trillions of dollars in deficits, unwilling to pay down debts or curb spending.

Greed in government—whether exemplified by corruption or simply excess and materialism—is definitely not “good.”

Even Solomon Fell for It

Modern nations are not the first to fall into patterns of greed and excess. Almost 3,000 years ago, King Solomon inherited from his father David the powerful empire of Israel. Solomon reigned over this inheritance during a period of great peace and prosperity. The Queen of Sheba was astonished at what a wise and understanding leader Solomon was, and how blessed his people were (1 Kings 10:8).

But Solomon’s prosperity went to his head. The king embarked on an ambitious program to experience the best of everything, withholding nothing from himself. He documented the results, writing, “I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.... I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards” (Ecclesiastes 1:12; 2:3–4).



As Israel's king—the head of its government—Solomon had at his disposal a tremendous amount of wealth, which he spent lavishly on himself! “I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me” (v. 7). Even in Solomon's day, leaders were vainly comparing their wealth with that of others!

What was the result of Solomon's massive spending program? Did it bring him happiness? “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind” (v. 11). It was empty. It was vanity. It had all been for nothing.

What was worse, Solomon's experiments had devastating and long-lasting consequences for his nation. Rehoboam came to the throne after his father Solomon's death, and all was not well in Israel. “Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you’” (1 Kings 12:3–4).

Solomon's excess had placed a heavy burden on those he governed. Yet, instead of wisely lightening the burden of the people, Rehoboam threatened to make that burden even heavier. A civil war ensued, and ten tribes broke away from Rehoboam's leadership. Rehoboam was left as king over Judah and Benjamin, while the other tribes formed the northern nation called Israel. Solomon's grand plan to enjoy the ever-expanding wealth of his kingship degenerated into utter failure, bringing emptiness to himself and the kingdom into division under his son.

Government Meant for Service, Not Selfishness

In the Bible, we see that the God of Israel made it clear that He never intended for the nation's leaders to use their positions to serve their own vanity and greed. In fact, when speaking to the Israelites, God said that a king of Israel should not “multiply horses for himself” nor “multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself” (Deuteronomy 17:16–17). A king was not to live to excess at the expense of his people.

Neither was he to base his rule on self-interest or expediency. He was to base it on God's laws! How would he know God's laws? He was to study them as a part of his job. “Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites” (v. 18). The king was to write out his own personal copy of God's law—and study it!

“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (vv. 19–20). God decreed that the leaders of Israel should read—and follow—His book of the Law, and that it would be the guide for governing the nation.

Canada, America, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and other nations of Northwest Europe *are the modern descendants of Israel*. **Will the leaders of those nations study God's word to guide their decisions and direct their course?** Or will they continue the national trends of removing any mention of God from public places and dishonoring His name, His laws, and His ways in modern Israel? For more information on who the modern nations of Israel are, you can order a free copy of our booklet *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*, or read it on our website.

A Coming Servant King

An age is soon coming in which humanity will see an end to the rampant corruption and feverish greed

that affects so many nations and individuals today. When the risen Jesus Christ returns to Earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will usher in a prosperous millennial reign (Revelation 17:14; 20:4).

What will His reign be like? One of His first priorities will be to punish the leaders who, instead of feeding His flock, have been fleecing it for personal gain. “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD.... ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,’ says the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:1–2).

God is not pleased with leaders who feed only themselves—serving only their own self-interest—at the expense of others. He is the One who sets leaders up and takes them down (Daniel 4:32). He will hold them accountable for how they govern.

Jesus Christ will show great care for His flock as He takes His place as the supreme King on planet Earth. The modern Israelite nations, having been taken into captivity because of their sins, will be released from their bondage, and Christ the King will comfort and encourage them. “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,’ says the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:3–4).

Jesus Christ will not be governing alone. He will be assisted by the **glorified, resurrected saints**—the “firstfruits”—Christians who in this present age have lived their lives faithfully, yielding with the help of the Holy Spirit to obey His law of love. Yes, this means that you and I, living today, can assist our Savior in ruling in the Millennium, if we truly accept Him as our Lord—our “Boss”—and strive to do what He says! We can be a part of His plan to bring sanity and justice to the whole world!

What a wonderful world that will be! “Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and

carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:10–11).

Jesus Christ, the most powerful ruler the world will ever have known, will rule not as a tyrant, but as a loving shepherd. He will judge fairly and righteously, without partiality (Isaiah 11:3–4).

Overcome the Love of Money

If we want to be with Jesus Christ in His soon-coming Kingdom, we have to learn *now* to reject the prosperity gospel of consumption, consumerism, and greed! Almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote about this to Timothy. He said, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Each of us should practice contentment. We should learn to appreciate what we have, and not always seek to have more. *Greed is not good.*

Paul continued,

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,** for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (vv. 7–10).

The love of money—selfishness, greed, and covetousness—causes untold misery, both individually and nationally. Jesus Christ cautioned us, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). If we want to reign with Christ, we must heed His advice and resist the temptation to follow materialistic pursuits. We must instead follow Him.

Do not fall for greed. With the help of God’s Holy Spirit, develop a spirit of contentment and selflessness in service to God and others. In doing so, you will be doing God’s will, and preparing for a better world to come. TW

**MAY WE
SUGGEST?**

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Is There an Alternative to **GREED?**

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

Some have said, “Greed is good!” Others have protested “Wall Street greed.” Which point of view is right? Is greed a matter of “good business”? Does it play a positive role in the world?

A sentiment expressed by movie character Gordon Gekko in 1987’s Academy Award-winning *Wall Street*, “Greed is good!” epitomized an era in which conspicuous consumption was seen as a virtue. Though director Oliver Stone intended Gekko as an anti-hero, many took his words to heart as positive reinforcement of their values and priorities.

Today, over a quarter-century later, things have changed. Real-life Gordon Gekkos have caused havoc in the world’s financial markets, sending economic shock waves across the United States and around the world. “Wall Street greed” has become a byword in the media and spawned a political movement in 2011: “Occupy Wall Street.”

Gekko’s famous line actually comes in the context of a larger speech in the film. He says, “The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms—greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge—has marked the **upward surge of mankind.**”

This certainly captures well the world’s mindset of “get” rather than “give,” and over the years,

many have conducted their lives by maxims such as Gekko’s. Yet, an ancient but highly respected book offers a different approach to life and success. This book, the Bible, records the teachings of Jesus Christ, and they reveal a truth of life that flies directly in the face of Mr. Gekko’s advice: “It is more blessed to *give* than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Can this book point us to a better approach to life and success? Can it guide the world to an alternative to greed?

The Wall Street Meltdown

The physical Wall Street is an eight-block stretch of road in the Lower Manhattan area of New York City. Because the New York Stock Exchange and some major financial institutions are based there, the term “Wall Street” has come to represent the financial sector of the U.S. economy, even though most of institutional Wall Street does not physically reside on that New York City boulevard.

How do Wall Street firms get themselves into so much trouble? Consider Lehman Brothers, for decades one of the nation’s largest and most respected firms in investment banking and financial services. Alongside its core businesses, one Lehman Brothers division found a way to earn huge profits by using low-rate loans from other banks to purchase high-yielding subprime mortgages. Initially, Lehman had held the highest possible credit rating (“AAA”), which let the firm profit from the spread

between the low cost of borrowing and the high yields from subprime mortgages. However, as the housing market declined, subprime mortgages became riskier and more prone to default. This caused Lehman’s credit rating to decline, and its lenders to demand paydowns of their loans. As losses mounted, the firm began selling its profitable investment banking and financial services divisions to cover them, but this was not enough to stanch the financial hemorrhaging, and the firm eventually filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

The shock waves of Lehman’s failure—and of similarly large implosions at other firms, such as American International Group (AIG)—reverberated throughout the world’s economy. Government “bail-outs” kept AIG and some other firms out of bankruptcy, but their stock prices plummeted and their finances were devastated.

Wall Street firms still conduct profitable investment banking activities that play a vital role in the U.S. and world economies. However, their excesses and dramatic fall from riches have made “Wall Street greed” a prominent idea in the public’s mind—an idea that continues to influence the thinking and judgment of many.

A Very Different Point of View

Wall Street has risen and fallen on the basis of economic principles, but what about broader moral principles? The ancient nation of Israel, whose history is recorded in the portion of the Bible called the Old Testament, also conducted its business according to specific economic principles. However, those economic principles were established on deeper *moral* principles expressed in the Ten Commandments.

The foundation and source of the moral law is God’s character. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” is the way the Ten Commandments are introduced. The Heb. name here used (Everlasting Eternal Almighty) intimates that the principles of law have their standing in the character of God. “I am...thou shall.” That is the connection. And that is what makes the moral law so [awesome] in its unchangeable majesty. It is law because God is. It cannot be changed without changing [God’s] character... Right is what it is, because God is what He is, and therefore it is as unchangeable as God (p. 1256, “Ten Commandments”).

Built upon the fundamental moral laws of the Ten Commandments, the statutes and judgments of ancient Israel express the character of the God Israel worshipped, displaying charity and love.

When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deuteronomy 24:19–21).

THE FAMOUS LINE “GREED IS GOOD!” EPITOMIZED AN ERA IN WHICH CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION WAS SEEN AS A VIRTUE

Unger’s Bible Dictionary describes the Ten Commandments this way:

From an economic point of view, the function of this statute is especially interesting. A landowner who gleans his own field must go back after it has been harvested and expend a lot of labor to try to take every last grape, olive, and stalk of grain. Yet the cost of the labor to complete this task thoroughly will eventually outweigh the profitability of collecting every bit of the harvest. But the landless poor had plenty of time available, and it made economic sense for them to spend it gleaning to obtain the food they needed.

How this law helped the poor is obvious. By requiring them to exert labor to obtain the gleanings, it gave them food while also preserving their dignity. But how did this statute benefit landowners? It prevented them from being so focused on gain that they would wring every last bit of production out of their fields and vineyards, denying it to others who could benefit the most from it. The law helped protect landowners from greed, since they were required to “leave something on the table” for others.

In today’s business world, people often have a policy of, “Don’t leave anything on the table, not even the varnish!” They remind us of these words: “Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his own territory” (Isaiah 56:11). Such aggressive businesspeople do not think they have succeeded until the other party suffers. Their approach is to take as much as they can from others in every situation. Thankfully, this approach was discouraged—as was the avaricious character it develops—by the divine legal system of ancient Israel. Fairness and honesty—not greed—were built into the law, reflecting the moral character of Israel’s God.

An Honest Ephah?

The eighth of the Ten Commandments states, “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15). In addition to forbidding theft, this commandment acknowledges that people may own private property. Yet Scripture also counsels respect for others’ property, and points out the wrong motives that can produce theft, covetousness, and greed.

The Apostle James wrote, “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not

come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have” (James 4:1–3).

To combat the wrong impulses of human nature, honesty and integrity were built into the statutes of the God of Israel. Here is a good example: “You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:35–36).

In ancient Israel, an ephah was a dry measure of about a bushel, often used to measure grains. A hin was a liquid measure of about two gallons. Applying this principle today would go beyond simply measuring out quantities of groceries or gasoline; one modern application of the just or unjust ephah can involve how we measure out our labor. If we are on the job for eight hours, do we give our employers the eight hours of work they are paying for—not merely six hours’ worth? These laws and statutes teach us to give the full value we have promised. This is godly and good business!

The God of the Bible plainly forbids the personal corruption that greed will foster, and the descriptions of God given within its pages make plain that greed is alien to His character. However, He does not forbid His people from bargaining for a fair price or making a profit. There is no biblical admonition against working for gain or engaging in productive efforts to create wealth. In fact, there are dozens of biblical admonitions—in both the Old

Testament and the New Testament—about how to gain wealth and conduct commercial relationships in ways that help people become better employees and businessmen. The Bible clearly teaches that God’s blessing is crucial to any en-





The Bible's principle of fair and just weights has life-changing applications that go far beyond the marketplace.

terprise. “And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Many people mistakenly think that the Bible calls money “the root of all evil”—but such a condemnation is not within Scripture. Rather, it is the *love of money* that is the problem. Consider the actual words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy: “For the *love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). The Apostle John wished good things for his congregations, saying, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

Sadly, the pursuit of wealth often brings evil rather than good, and stress rather than enjoyment. Greed is insatiable—a constant hunger for more—and it turns the greedy into slaves of their wealth, rather than masters: “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

By contrast, those who work hard and prosper in their labor in a *right and balanced way* can be blessed for doing so. “As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his

labor—this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19). The Bible describes God as a good Father who wants blessings for His children, and those blessings do not exclude prosperity.

Give vs. Get

Oxford Living Dictionaries defines greed as an “intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food.” Greed is an *inordinate desire* for gain, motivated by covetousness—a violation of the tenth of the Ten Commandments. The Apostle Paul wrote that no covetous person will inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10). This is because a covetous person is focused on self and “get” whereas God is love and outgoing concern for others. “Give” is inherent in God’s character, and it will characterize those He appoints to rule in His Kingdom.

Jesus Christ Himself warned us against covetousness, saying, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Similarly, the Apostle Paul taught that covetousness—greed—should not be found in a Christian: “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (Ephesians



5:3). Greed is not to be found in those ordained for Christian service; Paul wrote to Timothy that elders and deacons of the Christian Church must be “not greedy for money” (1 Timothy 3:3, 8).

We are currently seeing extremely wealthy people make arrangements to “give something back.” Billionaires such as Microsoft’s Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffet of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. have pledged tens of billions of dollars to charitable purposes. It seems that in the end, people determine their self-worth by what they give in life, not by what they get. Mankind’s way is get. God’s way is give. “Give” is clearly better!

An Answer to Gordon Gekko

In *Wall Street*, Gordon Gekko goes to jail because greed drives him to take excessive risks, and ultimately, to break the law. Although Gekko is a fictional character, he is based on a real-life financier with a similar history—Ivan Boesky. Boesky was convicted in 1986 of insider trading—a blatant crime, buying large blocks of stock in a company only days before its corporate takeover was announced. He was fined \$100 million and sent to federal prison.

Just months before confessing to his greed-fueled misdeeds, Boesky gave a commencement speech to MBA students at the University of


California, Berkeley. He told them, “Greed is alright, by the way. I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself.”

The jails hold many greedy, covetous people, and the mighty have often fallen because of their greed. On a positive note, after his prison term, Boesky was reported to have embraced a more moral life.

Although there are many who have not learned this lesson, successful corporate leaders recognize that greed is not “good” or “healthy.” Rather, greed can ultimately make you incompetent! An excessive desire for gain causes a person to take unreasonable risks for rewards that, in the end, do not measure up. As a result, greedy people are often unbalanced in business, and they tend to make bad decisions motivated by a desire to get rich quickly without exerting the effort required for honest gain. “The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare” (Proverbs 21:25–26).

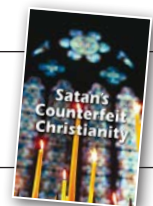
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A World of Greed



By **Douglas S. Winnail**

Many Bible prophecies describe specific events that will arise as we approach the end of the age—the period of time just before Jesus Christ returns to this earth to establish the Kingdom of God. Jesus told His disciples to watch for these events so they would recognize when His return was near (Matthew 24:32–44).

Many of these prophecies, written **dozens of centuries** ago, are coming alive right before our eyes! The Apostle Paul wrote that “**in the last days** perilous times will come: for men will be *lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud... unloving... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*” (2 Timothy 3:1–4). Jesus Christ criticized those who made a false show of righteousness while privately seeking selfish gain. Speaking to one of the religious leaders of His day, Christ pointedly noted, “Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness” (Luke 11:39). How common is this attitude in business, politics, and consumer culture today?

Warnings Against Greed

The Ten Commandments condemn covetousness (Exodus 20:17). Solomon, thousands of years ago, warned that wicked people were “greedy for gain” (Proverbs 1:10–19). Jesus rebuked religious leaders for hypocrisy, extortion, and unbridled greed (Matthew

23:25). The prophets railed against selfish material acquisition: “Woe to those who devise iniquity... they covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them.... Behold, against this family I am *devising disaster*” (Micah 2:1–3). The prophet Amos delivered God’s warning to the Israelites that because of their rampant greed, godless materialism, and exploitation of the less fortunate, “I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end” (Amos 2:6–7; 3:1, 14–15). Amos warned Israelite leaders, who lived in opulent splendor while many others scraped by on much less, “Behold, the days shall come upon you when He [God] will take you away with fishhooks... and Israel shall surely be led away captive” (Amos 4:1–3; 5:27; 6:7; 7:11, 17). The Bible reveals that God has dealt severely with the godless and greedy in the past, and will do so in the future!

An Age-Old Dilemma Today

Americans, like many others in Western nations, are divided by the issue of greed. On one hand, commentators such as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship lament government’s failure to limit human greed: “Instead of acting as a brake on runaway corporate power and greed, government becomes their **enabler**” (“Enabling Greed Makes U.S. Sick,” *BillMoyers.com*, May 20, 2013, emphasis added). On the other hand, as economist Milton Friedman noted in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*, “What is greed? Of course none of us are greedy; it’s only the other

fellow who's greedy. The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests.”

It is easy to point fingers at others, but harder to recognize greed in oneself. American culture has spread across the globe, exporting the culture of greed. American music, films, and television incessantly promote consumer products and the philosophy that endless consumption brings happiness—and have spawned “a money-minded youth culture that demands instant gratification and thrives on audio-visual bombardment” (Ziauddin Sardar and Merryly Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?*, p. 125). According to some, this “global projection of American influence... The McDonaldization of society... seems like a virus, a particularly pathological one... replicating itself in the rest of the world... infecting the cultural body of other nations” (pp. 117–118). The *globalization of greedy, self-centered consumption* emanating from America and other affluent countries is generating international animosity as it undermines and destroys traditional values and cultures.


Cultural historian Morris Berman describes another worrisome trend: *increasing inequality* through which the rich continue to grow richer while the poor become poorer. Berman notes that in recent decades we have seen “an unprecedented redistribution of income toward the rich. In terms of wealth disparity, the United States leads all other major industrial nations” (*The Twilight of American Culture*, p. 21). Some executives’ salaries are now more than 400 times the wage of their companies’ workers. Once-respectable financial institutions now aggressively pursue leveraged buyouts and hostile takeovers of companies, pocketing substantial fees as executives walk away with millions of dollars—while thousands of workers lose their jobs and their incomes (Ron Chernow, *House of Morgan*, pp. 690–709).

Historian Jim Nelson Black points out that these same social and economic trends manifested **centuries ago**, during the decline of the Roman Empire and the waning years of other powerful states. Ancient writers recorded that “greed and self-indulgence... preoccupation with luxury” hastened moral decay that sped the demise of the once-

mighty Roman Empire (*When Nations Die*, p. 160). Historians Will and Ariel Durant saw a *repeating pattern* in the accumulation and redistribution of wealth over the centuries. According to this pattern, wealth gradually becomes concentrated in the hands of a few, until finally, when the impoverished masses can no longer abide the inequity, wealth is redistributed—either by peaceful legislation or violent revolution. Writing several decades ago, the Durants saw that “the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is now greater than at any time since Imperial plutocratic Rome” and sensed that a correction would soon come (*The Lessons of History*, p. 55). More recently, French economist Jacques Attali warned that the future would see a growing, bitter, and volatile divide between an increasingly rich core and an increasingly impoverished periphery, with the latter eventually rising up against the former “in a war unlike any seen in modern times” (Attali, *Millennium*, pp. 14–15).

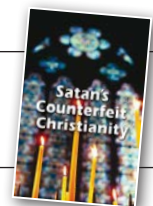
For centuries, economists have **assumed** that human reason can regulate world markets. Optimistic historians have **feared** the worst, yet **hoped** for a peaceful redistribution of wealth to occur when social forces bring about change. The Bible, however, reveals that current trends will build toward a **very different** outcome, the culmination of mankind’s **centuries of greed**. Scripture reveals that God will allow our selfish, consumption-obsessed, materialistic societies to reap the regrettable **consequences** of what we have sown (Jeremiah 2:17–19).

Scripture tells of an end-time religio-political power that will bring short-lived prosperity to the world. At first, greedy corporate leaders will “become rich through the abundance of her luxury” (Revelation 18:3). But that prosperity will end, and the same greedy consumers who became rich through that power will “stand at a distance for fear of her torment” (v. 15).

Finally, Jesus Christ will **return and intervene** with a “strong hand” (Psalm 136:12; Revelation 11:17) to restore economic justice, end selfishness, and destroy greed. Centuries of human greed are building to a dramatic climax, revealing that Bible prophecy is *coming alive!* 

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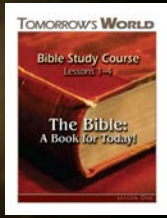
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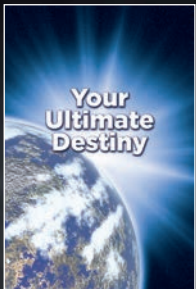


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