

Greedy of Gain – 1:7-19

INTRODUCTION

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (1:7) – Why did God say that “the fear of the LORD” is the beginning of knowledge. Is this the only starting point in man’s journey to find knowledge? Isn’t there another way? Why can’t love be the beginning of knowledge? Why must it be the fear of the LORD? The answer lies in the state of man in relation to his God.

The Bible says that man is in a state of enmity with God. Man has a carnal mind. This is a mind of the flesh where man thinks only in terms of material things and things of this world. This is the state of man. He has no ability to extricate himself out of this state of enslavement. He is completely helpless. As long as he is in this state of carnality, he cannot please God, “Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8). God can have no fellowship with sinful man while this state of enmity remains. Man’s prayers will not be heard! Man’s attempts to reach Him through his fabricated religions cannot penetrate the realms of heaven. All of them fall short of God’s standard and glory. Heaven is a place of perfection and holiness, without sin. All sinners and their sins are barred from heaven. When Lucifer sinned against God, God cast him out of His holy presence immediately. Although Lucifer and his fallen angels had to report to God about what they did on this earth, they were never allowed to stay in heaven! On the last day of judgement, Satan will be cast out of heaven permanently and into the Lake of Fire forever, never to return.

Until that day comes, the spiritual struggles man faces daily are real. Not only is man at enmity with God, there are spiritual forces that blind the heart and eyes of man so that he is not able to see his own state of sin and depravity. Man does not know and refuse to admit that this state of enmity exists. He would rather deny the existence of his own Creator than to admit that he has sinned against Him. He has made himself an atheist. He will believe in a being more powerful than man, and call him god or gods. He ends up making his Creator into his own image, thus worshipping the creatures rather God!

While man is in this perpetual state of enmity with his Creator, he cannot see God and therefore, cannot enter heaven. He must first deal with this state of sin and enmity against his Creator. To do that, God says man must acknowledge that he is a sinner. This means that he will have to answer to God and be judged by Him based upon God’s standard. God’s standard is summarized in His Ten Commandments (or the Decalogue). Man must learn to fear God. This is the first step toward knowing Him. He must humble himself before God and admit from his heart that he is an enemy of God because he has sinned against Him. To this end, man must begin his journey to true wisdom with the fear of God. The LORD reveals to man that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” It is not just fear of any god, but the LORD alone. This LORD is the God of the Bible who has revealed Himself to humanity in His perfect Book. To fear Him means that to believe in Him. The greatest insult to God is not to believe in what He says. It is as good as calling Him a liar. This knowledge is not the knowledge of this world. The knowledge of God is the emphasis here, and it is in the Bible alone. The LORD calls those who reject this truth, which is the Bible, fools. They would despise God’s wisdom that can help them deal with their sins and restore the broken relationship with their Creator. This is no ordinary knowledge; it is also instruction, which refers to correction and chastisement. It redirects our pathway in life to the way that is pleasing in the sight of the LORD. It brings sinners away from sin and back to God. This knowledge will deliver man from Hell and usher him into heaven, if he obeys God’s Word.

The Book of Proverbs is not a book for unbelievers, so that they can enter heaven by good works. No man on earth can, because he is born a very depraved sinner. The Book of Proverbs is for believers who claim to know the LORD. They have already believed Jesus Christ and accepted Him as their LORD and Saviour. Proverbs, when obeyed, bears the evidence of one who is born again of water and of the Spirit. The transformation has already begun in the heart but his life does not reflect it. Proverbs is the mirror that reflects this inward transformation.

I. THE PROTECTION AGAINST GREED – 1:8-9

Prevention is always better than cure. To cure someone who has been sick or hurt means that the harm has already been done. Rectification of a sad state or sinful condition is never better than not having committed that sin at all. It is true that with repentance from sin, there is forgiveness from God. However, repentance does not mean the removal of the consequences of sin. There are two distinct features in the process of forgiveness. For example, God forgave King David for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba but David had to face the consequences of his sin. Our own experiences with sin affirm this understanding of the consequences of sin.

A. From Parents to Children – v 8

- a. It is presumed that parents know the Word of God and possess the fear of God in their hearts. On this basis they are to impart to their children the Word of God which is called “instruction and law” in this verse. The parents’ knowledge of the Word of God is paramount to instructing their children. They cannot teach if they do not know! They must, therefore, be students of God’s Word all their lives;
- b. “Hear” and “Forsake not” are verbs synonymous in their understanding. To hear is always to hear and to obey. This is the meaning of the usage of this word in relation to God’s Word. **Stating it negatively is the meaning of verb “forsake not.”** Both carry the strength of the imperative;
- c. “Instruction” and “law” are nouns that refer to the Word of God from two different perspectives. “Instruction” is the same word used in verse 7 to mean “correction and chastisement.” The father has a duty to correct and if need be to chastise as well. As the head of the house overseeing the spiritual wellbeing of the household, it is his duty to ensure that his children are led in the way of God, i.e. the way of righteousness according to Holy Scriptures;
- d. “Law” refers to the expressly stated commandments that are non-negotiable, which definitely includes the Ten Commandments but not limited to them. They must be obeyed without question. The mother takes over the role of the father in nurturing the children at home, especially when the father is out of town or in the fields working throughout the day;
- e. Bringing up children is always the responsibility of both parents. The head is the father and the LORD will hold him accountable for the spiritual wellbeing of his household. However, the mother is also responsible as the “second in command” to teach the children the Word of God.

B. True Beauty Perpetually – v 9

- a. There is no ornament on a person’s head more beautiful than an ornament of grace. It never rusts. It can never be stolen. It is not affected by inflation. It lasts forever. Money cannot buy this ornament, for it is priceless. However, Christian parents can

give this to their children if they so desire. It is a crown of beauty, for it is a crown of grace;

- b. Inheritance from parents has been materialism. These ornaments perish! They can be stolen. They lose value with time. Their value is false, for it is based upon the wishes of man. Even priceless diamonds are worthless if no one wants them. Gold is valuable when in demand and are rare. Materialism has no innate value;
- c. The ornament of grace is a crown characterised by God's grace. The blessings of God upon His children are the ornament of grace. It is forever. It includes the privilege of entering heaven and bowing in the holy presence of the LORD, praising Him for eternity;
- d. The chains about the neck are more than decorations. To put chains of great value around one's neck was a way of honouring someone in those days (see Genesis 41:42; Daniel 5:29). In this case, these symbols of priceless treasure reflect a godly and holy life. All men see them. Their words and deeds are marked by grace and perspicuity. This is what the Word of God can do to the life of one who is born again. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

II. THE WAY OF GREED – 1:10-14

It is worthy to note that the first sin, which the Book of Proverbs warns the believer of, is the sin of greed. All the sins that the believer commits begin with this sin. That is why the tenth Commandment is one of the most difficult to obey as it is always without fail, the first commandment to be broken before the others. The tenth Commandment states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's" (**Exodus 20:17**).

A. Enticement – v 10

- a. Seduction is more deadly than persecution. It is definitely more effective in destroying the Christian's witness. To entice is to seduce. It also has the idea of flattery, persuasion, and deception. How the strong have fallen when persecution failed but enticement has succeeded;
- b. The issue is "if" rather than "when." In other words, the believer can avoid these sinners if he so chooses so that he might not even be in this state of temptation. Sinners are people who are characterised by acts of sin. [NOTE the use of the plural, as there are many of them.] Their way of life is to sin and lead others to sin. Do not make friends with these sinners who are bent on destroying believers. Avoid them, for they will cause ruin. It is one thing to have a social interaction with them because they may be in the work places. However, the believer does not need to go out and have social interaction with them in sinful places or in doing sinful deeds;
- c. Do not yield to their ploy, not even in the slightest. They might flatter or coerce the believer into following him to sin. However, the believer must resist at all costs! The price is too high. His life and the name of Christ that he bears are at stake!

B. Entrapment – v 11-12

- a. One of the more successful ways of enticement is entrapment. These sinners are usually men of renown, which makes many want to join them and to be seen with

- them. They belong to the popular or “cool” group. They tempt with phrases like, “Come with us. We want you to be part of us.” This inflates the ego of the foolish.
- b. The believer must have the moral fibre to think and act independently, and not to go with these sinners. He is a child of God and to sin with these sinners is a sin against God. The child of God can never hide from God, even if he can hide from men. The fear of God is the antidote to keep a believer from sin. It will provide him with the moral courage to stand alone and resist the strong desire to become part of this “cool” group. Please note the use of “US” in verses 11 and 12;
 - c. The victims are just victims to these sinners who will snare them. It is without any just cause that these sinners will hurt their victims. It is to fulfil their lusts to sin.
 - d. Their method is to ambush them. Shedding the blood of their victims describes the extent these sinners are prepared to go to hurt their unsuspecting victims. “To lay in wait” and “to lurk privily” mean the same thing;
 - e. To ambush someone is always a premeditated sin. They study their victims and know their way of life. Then they lay their traps so that their victims will fall into them. They are no fools. They know the characteristics of a sinner well. The lusts of the eyes and the flesh and the pride of life are the three main sins committed by all sinners. Employ snares along the lines of these three sins and it will work;
 - f. Who in this world does not like to be popular and to be rich? This is the nature of all sinners, to be liked by others. Sweet words and dangling colourful carrots have caused many to fall into sin. The environment in casinos from the outside to the inside has only one motive! It is to entrap the foolish to think that they can win a quick buck without hard work. The message is loud and clear: that this is the life of luxury they can have, if they have lots of money. “Gamble and you will have it all!” is the invisible message written on all the walls of every casino on earth.
 - g. There is no compassion or care in their dastard deeds. Their aim is total destruction for maximum gain. “To swallow them up alive as the grave” is a most apt description of their evil motive. When one buried a body, one would put the entire body into the mouth of the cave and then seal it. The imagery is: cover up their crimes and sins. In other words, they promise the foolish not to worry because they will not get caught;
 - h. They cover their tracks completely as “those that go down into the pit.” They will do their sinful deeds quickly and fast, and leave behind little or no trace.
- C. Enrichment – v 13-14
- a. The promise of reward is wealth. They will not mention the consequences of sin but highlight the glitter of success.
 - b. They will find all kinds of precious substance. Whatever the believer’s mind and heart can imagine or desire, he can own, if only he would join them. Synthetic parallelism is used in verse 13 to describe the enrichment that can be gained if the believer is foolish enough to join them. The first line emphasizes the quality and the second line emphasizes the quantity. Note the use of “we” in verse 13.
 - c. There will be enough for all to share. However, the believer must cast his lot with them. It will be a common purse for all if only the believer would join in!
 - d. This is the first and most important step to take in the journey of greed. He must “cast in his lot” and stand with them.
 - e. From enticement, to entrapment and then to enrichment.

III. THE END OF GREED – 1:16-19

Why is it that whenever temptations arise, it is always the rewards that are emphasized and not the consequences? Furthermore, the ones who are foolish enough to succumb to these temptations do not think of the gravity of the consequences of their sins! It is as if their greed has blinded them. There is always a heavy price to pay for foolishness and sin!

A. Quick to Kill – v 16

- a. These sinners are very quick to kill. They will run toward evil. The word for “run” has the idea of one who rushes toward something;
- b. Using synthetic parallelism, the Bible warns the believer that the aim of these sinners is to shed blood. They will do it quickly without hesitation;
- c. The Bible warns the believer that he must not follow these sinners; he must not be enticed or deceived by their lies of reward. They will murder and do whatever it takes to satisfy their greed.

B. In Vain They Trap – v 17

- a. Their entrapment will not work.
- b. Their traps are for all to see.
- c. The bird will see the snare and not fall into it. That is why snares are always concealed.
- d. However, these sinners will fall into their own traps.
- e. What these sinners offer is vanity. It is not real treasure.

C. In Death They End – v 18-19

- a. Their ambushes are actually to trap their own lives;
- b. The deliberate use of the same two verbs as in verse 11 is God’s way of demonstrating His just retribution against these sinners. They plan to entrap others, but instead, they fall into their own traps;
- c. Their own blood will be shed. Their own lives will be lost!
- d. Jesus put it this way when He was on earth, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)
- e. The poetic justice in this matter is that these sinners will die by their own sinful ways. Their way is the way of death;
- f. The LORD describes them as sinners who are greedy of gain.

CONCLUSION (verse 15) – The counsel from the LORD is “My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path.” (Synonymous parallelism for emphasis) Know their way of sin and beware of them. Avoid their way at all costs! Therefore, if you have acquaintances or friends who are like these sinners, have the moral courage and strength not to follow in their footsteps. Stand alone on the side of righteousness if you have to. The cost of following their way of sin is death. Being greedy of gain is the main sin committed by all. Whether it is the sin of fornication, adultery, murder, theft, or idolatry, it all begins with the sin of covetousness, which is to be greedy of gain! Remember **1 Timothy 6:6**, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What motivates you when you go to school or work every day? What is the biblical and correct motivation to have? Do you have this godly motivation? If you have it, how do you ensure that you do not lose it?
2. Is it wrong to want a bigger house or car, or a better way of life? Is it OK for a Christian to change jobs because of better pay and promotion prospects?
3. Is it true that poverty equals spirituality and wealth equals carnality? If you are a multi-millionaire Christian, would it be sinful to buy an expensive car like a Rolls Royce?