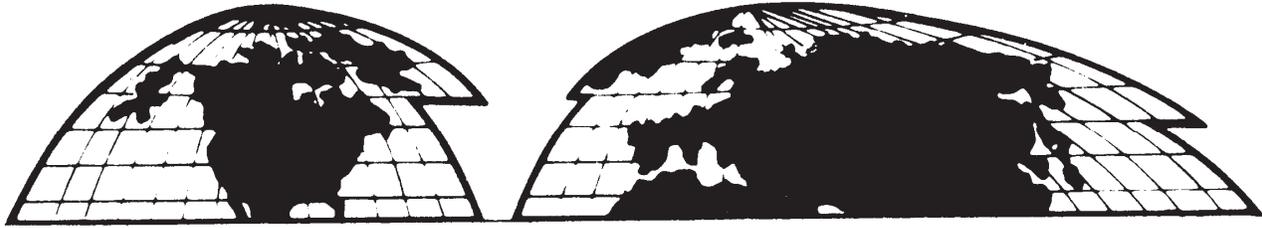
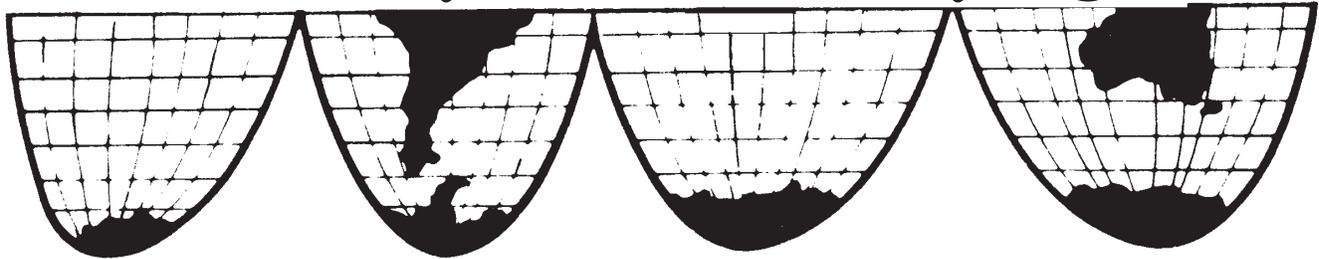


PRAYER IS THE MIGHTIEST FORCE • II CHRON. 7:14



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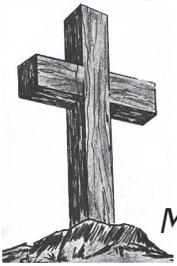
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**Matthew Skariah**

## Covetousness and Casino Capitalism

The abandonment of the “puritan ethics” has ushered in a new era of looking at the acquisition of murky varnish of wealth in a different perspective than what it used to be in America. The new philosophy of the “culture of greed” has crept into the political as well as religious circles masked as “success and fame.” What is covetousness? Covetousness is “insatiable cravings.” It is a voracious appetite for more, for that which is bigger, more extravagant. It is a trap many people are falling into in these troubled times. God’s Word warns us to beware of covetous ministers who would use isolated Scriptures to exploit believers—greedy men would develop a false conundrum of avarice and greed. Some have become blatant and arrogant in their greed. They now preach that our walk with God is based on how prosperous we are in this temporal life. That’s humbug! *Things do not satisfy human hunger*; but a life lived in faith and purity gives comfort to the mind. The people of faith are very much at peace, and secure in their walk with God and do not chase after fickle “fame and popularity.”

Those who have enormous wealth, real estate, private planes, summer and winter homes, still cajole and plead for more money. Will they ever be satisfied? For their own greed they bleed the people financially in the name of the one who had to borrow a coin to illustrate his sermon. What a contradiction! *Deception is deception*, regardless of who practices it. Those who practice expediency give up no advantage, sacrifice nothing, but they take what they want, when they want it. What has happened to us? Don’t we any longer believe in the human conscience? Perhaps one of the great problems we have in our generation is that we try to minimize everything to the point that truth is often distorted. Someone has said that falsehood travels around the world twice before truth ever gets out of bed. The irony is that many souls have succumbed to the oily charms of men whose hearts are filled with crass materialism. Today, in Christianity, we hear so much about manufactured faith, pumped up joy, and self-determination and a cultish view that people can be their own god. Have we crossed the line? *I think so.*

When we pervert and prostitute the gospel for material vantage, we become earthy and carnal. Today’s prosperity gospel is merely a phenomena that grew out of some Christians desire to emulate worldly people in their pursuit for wealth and fame. Prosperity gospel is the brainchild of greed, concocted

by covetous men whose excessive craving for wealth has cast a pall on the blessed gospel of Christ. Let’s look around, read what is said and written. What do we see and hear in Christendom today? Do the goals and ambitions that many Christians strive for bring spiritual wealth, inner peace, satisfaction and happiness, no? Those whom the world has showered with gifts, perks, honor, are restless and confused. Above the jangles of the world’s materialistic cries, there echoes the most probing message, *“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out”* (1 Timothy 6:7).

Through an impressive display of wealth on religious television, supported by superficial reviews, promoted by easy believism and often downright marketability, undermining the potent message of Christianity, thousands of earnest believers needlessly fall into a materialistic diatribe which denies the most basic truth of the Christian gospel. Saints are often without a creed and a permanent dwelling place, always risking their lives in order to bring healing and hope to millions who are hurting. For example, when Father Joseph Damien went to live among the lepers on the island of Molokai, it was not without risk. Soon he began to say, *“We lepers.”* Christians always risk their lives in the service of the Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Tertullian wrote long ago, *“The leg doesn’t feel the chains when the mind is in heaven.”*

A man who through love and compassion brought great joy and happiness to thousands of homeless children was George Muller, founder of the Ashley Down Orphanage, in Bristol, England. As a young man, I was deeply challenged by the compassionate life of George Muller and his devotion to humanity. My tender heart was melted and inspired as I read of his devoted life. He was a remarkable man of faith and prayer, and God enabled him to care for about 10,000 orphans without soliciting funds from the general public.

When Muller died in 1898 at the age of 93, the flag over the great cathedral in Bristol flew half-mast, and during his funeral service all traffic in the city was halted. His departure made worldwide news. His influence had reached far and wide. The whole of humanity sustained a real loss when he died. The funeral attracted attention as is seldom seen. Tens of thousands reverently stood along the line of procession. The tears ran down the cheeks of those precious boys and girls for whom he had cared so much. The grief of the children melted the hearts of the bystanders.

After they laid him to rest, the orphans made a request that they might make a contribution out of their meager possessions to the erection of a monument to their beloved benefactor. In agreement to the known wishes of Muller, only a simple headstone was placed over his remains. Those who promote God’s glory are not covetous of vain glory. We are rich when we have His peace and live triumphantly without fear all the days of our lives in holiness and purity before the Lord! Let the record speak for itself

and may God help us to look back with wisdom and at the same time defend and maintain our integrity as the people of God without fear or trepidation.

Recently, AIG and Lehman Brothers executives were part of what has been recently called “casino capitalism” — using predatory practices and financial gimmicks to promote an illusion of free money, all at the expense of unsuspecting Americans. Why would anyone think a government run like a casino is going to turn out any better? Proceeds from gambling are stolen money, and no one can prosper on stolen money. Will Rogers was so profound when he said, “You know horses are smarter than people. You never heard of a horse going broke betting on people.”

In the Scripture, Achan had a covetous heart, and it was obvious that he kept his eyes on the Babylonian garment and the wedge of gold. The sin of covetousness led Achan to thievery as he stole booty for himself. Finally, God exposed Achan and he along with his family was stoned and all their possessions were burned. At the moment it may seem palpable

to subscribe to the “theology of green and greed,” but sooner or later God will expose it as He did with Achan. (Read Joshua chapter 7)

We live in a culture that winks at sin and greed. We talk about “greed/covetousness” in terms of success and reward. The sin of greed appears as “fudging numbers and cooking the books.” It is what society calls “white collar” crime and it is often swept under the rug. When we do the right thing, God is pleased and His name is being honored. Always remember, nothing escapes God because we’re always under His watchful eye. Alexander Pope expressed his commitment, “Unblemished, let me live or die unknown. Give me an honest fame or give me none.” Plato said “Only those who do not desire power are fit to hold it.” As Christians, we’ve the inbred ability to send a powerful message to America that we are a Christian nation rooted in the premise of puritan ethics, biblical precepts, strong families and communities... not a collection of greedy and selfish hucksters who prey on the weaknesses of our citizens for profit.

### *A prayer of repentance is in order.*

*Lord, I do not want wealth accumulated through shady deals, gambling proceeds, cooking the books, false pretense or using the poor of the world as mission merchandise. Merciful Father, purge me from the insatiable hunger of the unholy elements of greed, covetousness, and an uncontrollable and prurient lust for power and position. In Jesus' name, I thank you for answering my prayers. Amen.*

I have told our congregation more than once that our aim determines how we measure success. *So what is the aim of revival?* Is it getting a bunch of folks to show up for meetings during the week? If so then you measure success by how many people came. Is revival an evangelistic crusade? If so then success is measured by how many people were saved or baptized.

I believe that revival is more than either of these. Revival is less concerned with how many and more concerned with how deep. Revival is a return of our primary focus and affection toward God that leads to fervent prayer and increased desire for holiness. Our hearts long for closeness to the one who loves us deeply and at the same time can protect us. I think our world is looking for meaning and security especially at such a difficult and uncertain time.

But can revival happen in a week? *I think revival happens over time as we daily discipline*

## **What is Revival?**

**Jason Langley, Pastor**  
Lakeside Baptist Church  
Mannford, Oklahoma

*our lives with prayer and holy living.* In a church it begins with the leadership. As they begin to burn brightly with passion for God, then parts of the congregation begin to catch fire as well. Then God begins a broader work in the rest of the congregation. The congregation becomes a light that attracts lost people in the community. After all, if you were God would you not want to send new believers to a place that would make passionate disciples?

We had this aim when we invited Matthew to come to our church. We did no advertising in the community. We did not do any pack-the-pew nights or pizza drives. We just told the people that we were going to seriously seek the Lord. Since that time, there is a great desire to pray together as a staff. People in the congregation are beginning to return to their first love. Do we have revival? Only time will tell, but we are on the path to seeing God do some remarkable things here at Lakeside.

### Man and his Folly

Man is entrenched in many fears and doubts—the economy, his job, family, health, national and international terrorism, financial instability; he holds a mortgage he cannot afford, a job he hates; a life that never satisfies; a belief that is never steady; theories he cannot validate and hopes can never be realized. What's the point of it all, he asks. Man is at war with himself. *"All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled."* (Ecclesiastes 6:7) *"Naked he came and naked he goes."* Most men are destroyed not by their enemies but by themselves. For example, Alexander the Great conquered the known world but he never conquered himself. Consequently, he died as a drunkard maniac. History is full of such examples.

Underneath that veneer of respectability and gaiety, there lays a side of man that no one knows except the Lord. It is astounding how ignorant man is about himself. The greatest blunder in human existence is conceit; man is the epitome of conceit. As Soren Kierkegaard, father of modern existentialism, once said, *"Man is a creature of duplicity and doubt, a dissipated being."* As the prophet Jeremiah said, *"The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked and who can know it."* The heart of man is darker than the darkest night. Only through the grace and mercy of God can man's broken heart be mended.

There are two forces at work in the world. Sooner or later man has to yield himself to God or the devil. Our steely determination and will power will utterly fail us. Man cannot redeem himself and he is in need of a redeemer whose grace and mercy are unsurpassed. As the French Philosopher Pascal once said, *"Believe in God, you have nothing to lose."* Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

*Man is like a leak of gas, escaping into the thin air.*  
(Sartre)

### What's Christian Humanism?

Humanism is anything that's not done in the power of Jehovah God. We don't trust Him enough that His life becomes our life. Everything is meticulously laid out by human ingenuity, and we're expert on micro-managing God's affairs by our constant nagging, scheming and improvising. *"Our helplessness brings God's help. The more helpless we seem to be; the easier it is to receive."* When your life gets tangled, call on God! Doing your best is calling on God for reinforcement.

In many cases, we've allowed the voice of humanism to creep into our lives with all its twisted logics and commonsense approach until we are filled with self and selfishness. When man circumvents God's provision and seeks other means to fulfill his desire by going outside the realm of God, he then opposes God Himself.

Too many people maintain a self-importance streak, or a "don't-tread-on-me mentality," buffered by a rugged individualism, which denies our ultimate dependency on God, and that's Christian humanism pure and simple.

*Individualism is the first cousin of narcissism.*

### Spring Encounter with God

◆  
April 19-22

*Easton Heights Baptist Church*

2901 W. Easton Street • Tulsa, Oklahoma • Perry Cox, Pastor

◆  
April 23-26

*Immanuel Baptist Church*

1915 E. 3rd Street • Tulsa, Oklahoma • Don Queen, Pastor

### VOICE FROM THE PAST

We can be bewitched and beguiled by what we enjoy; we can become too dependent on it. And that is absolutely unchristian; that is idolatry; that is worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. It was not only the ancient Hebrews who constantly relapsed into idolatry; this seems to be an incurable trait in original human nature. Thus the sense of abundance could kill our faith; we may be tempted into feeling that we do not need faith; and then we cease to live by faith. And that is not just, for the just shall live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38).

**Dr. Charles Malik** • Scholar • Professor • Former President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.  
*A humble Lebanese Christian*