

TIGER'S TRAGEDY

Contributed by Jim Jordal
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But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows…. Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed.

I Timothy 6:9-10, 17-19 (ASV)

By now you've all heard ad nauseum of the alleged "indiscretions" of the world's highest paid athlete, Tiger Woods. You've seen the women claiming relationships with him multiply almost daily. And you've perhaps wondered how and why such a situation could develop. Don't these world-renowned figures of wealth and power know that their indiscretions will be uncovered? Or don't they care?

But my point is not to write about Tiger Woods—it's to attempt a comparison between what Tiger has allegedly done and what the notorious Wall Street captains of finance—aided by their skills in Congress-- have most certainly done. I'm trying to put both sets of behavior into some sort of ethical/moral balance.

I'm concerned about the relative seriousness of each set of actions. It seems to me that many Christians act as if there are only two sets of sin in existence—idolatry, or substitutes for God; and personal impurity, characterized mainly by illicit sexual behavior. I'm certainly not denying their existence or their seriousness. What I am saying is that there is another category of sin mentioned thousands of times in Scripture but at the same time almost ignored by conservative Christians. Yes, I'm speaking of the sin category characterized by injustice, oppression, financial tyranny, and economic slavery.

It's clear in Scripture that all sin separates us from God and each other and therefore deserves punishment unless forgiven through sincere contrition, confession, and absolution. But if we look not only at how these various sins offend God, but also at how they damage and destroy human lives, we may come to the conclusion that some sins are definitely worse than others.

Regarding numbers of persons negatively affected we could say that Tiger's alleged sins will seriously affect himself and his family, but also at least indirectly the millions of sycophants who view him almost as a deity. In fact some are speaking openly of the Church of Tiger Woods and the rising crisis of faith in its "god."

But how many people have not only been psychologically damaged but also financially and even physically destroyed by the actions of Wall Street and its friends in Congress? Some 30,000 children daily die of malnutrition and its attendant plagues, and many more suffer lasting mental and physical damage. Billions more subsist on a few dollars a day or less, suffering debilitating sickness and the loss of both dignity and hope. So how does this suffering—caused in most part by the arrogance and heartlessness of the world's power elite—compare against the angst of golf addicts suffering the possible downfall of their idol? Are they even comparable?

The Scripture quoted above gives God's answer to the issue of economic sin and its consequences. Tiger Woods will undoubtedly pay a high price for his indiscretions in the loss of public respect, damage to his marriage and family, demeaning of his iconic status, and possibly some of his multiple millions in sponsorship money. A high price indeed.

And what will be the punishment for the icons of Wall Street who have wiped out the jobs of millions, destroyed the financial future of many more, and threatened world economic stability? So far, very little. Obscene bonuses continue as before. Bernie Madoff is the only one as far as I know to have been convicted of crime and punished. The others continue more or less as before, demanding bonuses to prevent them from moving to greener pastures, vociferously defending their actions, and traveling in their private jets. Only one, Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, has publicly apologized for their egregious behavior.

So where is justice? Tiger Woods suffers public opprobrium and has become the butt of scores of jokes. And what of the Wall Street tycoons? Nothing but government bailouts, \$40 billion in 2008 bonuses, and the grateful thanks of public figures now that they are making enough money to pay back a portion of the bailout.

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