

Am I the Lord of Desire, or Slave?: Understanding 'Desire' in the Gospel of Luke

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Abstract

The Gospel of Luke is often called the “Gospel of the Poor.” In this Gospel, we can find many beautiful teachings of Jesus about how to use property well, and furthermore even the so called ‘Abandonment of Property.’ Most of all, it might be difficult to accept the teachings about the Abandonment of Property because it is very peculiar in our society.

The Abandonment of Property which Jesus has taught is not just giving money to help poor or to make them live well in a better financial condition. If so, this teaching becomes another established rule of the Christian Church. The core teaching is about the ‘Desire’ of human beings. Jesus considered it not possible to avoid the instinct of Desire

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with any earthly value.

On one hand the teachings of Jesus about Property pierce the rich, but on the other hand they promise the poor redemption. In other words, Jesus emphasized the Kingdom of God through these teachings. The point is not the teachings themselves, but the values the teachings create. The control of Desire is definitely a hard thing, and as a result, sometimes it is very dangerous. Jesus gave a perfect place for Desire in heaven, where there is no more worry about it.

“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33-34).

Am I the lord of desire, or slave?

- Keywords

Gospel of the Poor, Teachings of Jesus about Property, Kingdom of God, Abandonment of Property, Desire

Freedom is so that we may think differently,
because agreeing does not require freedom. - José Mujica

1. Introduction

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).¹ And Jesus tells the story of the rich man who died in vain that night after building a large warehouse for grain and riches (Luke 12:16-21). This is a representative text from the Gospel of Luke that informs Jesus' position on greed.

The Gospel of Luke is often called the “Gospel of the Poor”. To this end, the teachings of wealth are widely found in the Gospels, and sometimes they are radical. In other words, it even claims to be ‘the waiver of ownership’ (1:53;6:24-25;8:14;12,13-21;14:15, etc.). Thus, while the Gospel of Luke was cruel to the rich (5:11,28;12:33-34;14:33;18:18-30), he promised salvation to the poor (1:53;4: 18-19;6:20-21;7:22). Various attempts have been made to find out the full view of Luke's riches, and in the end, this strict understanding of riches is narrowed down to the question of whether it is only for the disciples, or even the clergy, or even lay people.²

Before we begin to understand 'Desire' in Luke's Gospel, let's first look at how we deal with human desires in Christian history.

1 The *New International Version*(NIV) is used as a translation of the Bible.

2 W. Radl, *Das Lukas-Evangelium*, Erträge der Forschung 261, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 122-123.

2. Christianity and Desire

Traditionally, the Church saw human private desire as a product of sin, and Pope Gregory I (590-604) confirmed seven deadly sins (칠죄종七罪宗).³ So when the Order first emerged, which controlled desires and made ascetic life the highest value, the Church incorporated it into the institutional church and made it an ideal model for the Christian community.⁴ It would mean that although we live in the world, we have to use the monastery as an alternative community to control our own desires. So the church tried to live up to the saying, "Blessed are the poor, and the kingdom of God is theirs" (Luke 6:20). This does not necessarily mean that the past Christian history was negative for desire.

Western society opened the Renaissance era as it passed through the medieval dark tunnels, and the characters that led the era are called Humanists. These Humanists include reformers, including J. Calvin (1509-1564), who claimed the so-called "predestination theory." Predestination is simply that God has set the destiny of all human beings. For example, it means that a rich man's life is designed to live as a rich man, and a poor man with no support and no blessing is originally determined to do so. So, if someone worked hard and became rich,

3 pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth,

4 There are various views on the beginning of the monastery, but the beginning is generally regarded as the hermits who are disappointed with the established church and have entered the desert. They first lived in private, but began to form groups around the 4th century. In forming a group, a rule book was created to establish internal discipline. The important Order which Founded by St. Benedictus (480?-547?) and the Franciscan Order established by St. Francis (1182-1226). The Franciscan Order and Benedict Order were subsequently set as examples of the Order Rules. Monastery Order emphasize abstinence.

this is only a result of God's plan, and there is no reason to be accused of being a sinner according to traditional church teachings. The universe is God's, and human beings living here are of course justified to devote all their abilities to labor. The job itself is God's calling.⁵ As a result, predestination also showed a mighty power, and even the tendency of Christians to work hard to accumulate and invest in production facilities was a blessing.⁶ Predestination, which was originally an instrument of God's providence, gave wings to human desire for wealth.⁷

B. Spinoza (1632-1677) is another important figure related to desire in Christian history. He is famous for challenging the traditional God statute through the claim that 'God is nature'.⁸ According to Spinoza's view, every object and mind has its own inertia to resist attempts to

5 'Berufung' of M. Luther. Luther and Calvin are in agreement with the idea that human achievement is not the way to salvation. Nevertheless, for Calvin, great achievements were indispensable as essential evidence of the final salvation (G. Bataille, *Part maudite*, tr. by Han Kyung Jo, Literary Community, 2000, p.166). In fact, salvation is entirely God's, and human achievement cannot influence God's decision in any way. So Calvin taught that humans should reject their own glory in order to bring glory to God, and insisted that Christians must be extremely frugal and spare, and do their best in what they do. This was, in fact, a persistent assertion of the apostle Paul rather than the original view of the Reformers.

6 Based on these changes, Max Weber (1864-1920) properly linked the birth of a modern spirit about the economy and the fall of the existing religion (Catholic) following the Reformation in his book, *The Ethics of Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

7 The economy of the Middle Ages, when the Catholic Church prevailed, was subject to strict moral precepts. So the workers were subject to the clergy and the nobility, and the producers provided the necessities they used. As a result, the economy was forced to stagnate, and even if overproduction was achieved, it disappeared as unproductive consumption. Therefore, there was no autonomy of production in which goods accumulated due to overproduction were reinvested.

8 God has long been defined in the category of personality, and Spinoza has been excommunicated in Judaism by breaking down this category and has become a rejection in Christianity.

destroy and weaken it. With this ability to enable self-inertia, Spinoza was defined by the word “conatus”.⁹ For example, it is possible to explain why it is difficult to break a stone, why an external force is needed to move a stationary object and erect a moving object, why the human body fights disease, and why humans desire many things. Conatus can be seen as the principle of existence of individual human beings, and human desire is also included here. As such, desire was the “proper perception” of Spinoza.¹⁰

Spinoza's successors had a great influence on the psychoanalysis of the later S. Freud (1856-1939). Freud defines dreams as 'symbolic fulfillment of desire', and the reason why desire is bound to be fulfilled symbolically is that the 'pleasure principle', which determines unconsciousness, yields to the 'reality principle' represented by social and moral norms (If desire doesn't find a breakthrough like this, it will break psychological equilibrium). As such, humans have a 'pleasure principle' that avoids unpleasantness at an unconscious level. However, this is a reference to the inevitability of desire.

The 'Pleasure Principle' goes a step further and draws a trajectory to J. Lacan's (1901-1981) 'theory of desire'. Lacan presented the important coordinates in the existing psychoanalytical world, integrating into the ego centered through the famous word “Return to Freud”. According to Lacan, sexual desire is excluded from symbolic repre-

9 The concept in Spinoza's book *Etica*, chapter 3, is also called 'potentia agendi', or 'vis existendi'.

10 For Spinoza, lies are a lack of awareness implied by inappropriate, fragmented and confusing ideas. This is an important premise to explain the difference between proper and inappropriate perceptions. Therefore, the notion of “true” in us, as long as God is explained through the nature of the human mind, is appropriate in God. (See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, tr. by Lee Hyukjoo, Greenbee, 276-277)

sentations, and we cannot see or know. Sexual desire, which has been excluded in such a way, always breaks the symbolic order and bursts.¹¹ Psychoanalysis aims to subject the existence of this unknown thing. In other words, it identifies human beings as the subject of desire (represented by sexual desire).

The reason for this list of thinkers is to acknowledge that there was a positive view of desire within Christianity, and that desire is no longer judged as a negative gaze of Christianity in the past. In other words, the era of the medieval T. Aquinas (1225?-1274), who saw all desires for pleasure as a product of sin, is over.¹²

3. Luke 12:33-34: for the Kingdom of God

Evangelist Luke collected some of Jesus' words related to human desires in 12:13-34. First, the word that guards against greed comes (vv. 13-15), followed by the parable of the foolish rich (vv. 16-21), and above all, the supreme order to find the kingdom of God (vv. 22-32) and the overall conclusion, the advice to give charity comes with it (vv. 33-34). Here, Jesus' intention to face desire is clearly revealed.

Luke 12:33-34: 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

11 Lacan divided the world of human experience into imaginary, symbolic, and real worlds. The imaginary world is an image, the symbol world is a mental world revealed through language, and the real world reflects reality. Lacan said, "The unconscious is structured like a language," because this segmentation method is the same as grammar.

12 Aquinas said that pleasure itself is neutral, but rather, the ethics of pleasure is determined by the object of pleasure. This is why he focused intensively on physical satisfaction, especially unrestrained sexual pleasure.

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς ὑμῶν, ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ καρδία ὑμῶν ἔσται).

Parallel statement Matthew 6:19-21: 19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδία σου).

This statement is considered to be taken from Jesu Logion (Q), as the parallel can be found at Matthew 6:19-20. However, the expressions between the two texts are slightly different, which can be regarded as a case where the order and the order of gold were encountered in the transmission process. In other words, the Gospel of Matthew (v. 19) and the command (v. 20) are mixed in the Gospel of Matthew, and the repetition of the word was prevented in case the wealth was piled on the ground and the case in the sky. The crucial difference lies in Jesus' command to open this paragraph: “Sell your possessions and give to the poor” / “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” Therefore, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Luke 12:33a) is an expression specific to Luke (SL: Special material of Luke).

Verse 33a, “Abandonment of Ownership” is a view found in Luke's

theory and in his other works, Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37.¹³ This is likely to be Luke's edit.¹⁴ There was one controversy in the academic world that the extreme choice of "abandonment of ownership" was not to the general Christians who constituted the church community, but only to the wandering missionaries who preached the gospel at that time.¹⁵ But here the question of whether there was a distinction between disciples and ordinary Christians in the Gospel of Luke should be decided. In other words, by discriminating between "the disciples of Jesus," who allude to the wandering missionaries, and "the people of God," which refers to ordinary Christians, it is necessary to determine whether "abandonment of ownership" was required only by church leaders such as the wandering missionaries. Most scholars agree that there is no discrimination.¹⁶ It is because of the premise that all human beings are fundamentally the same before God. Therefore, according to Luke's Gospel, "sell your property and give mercy" is an economic

13 Acts 2:44-45: All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32-35: All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

14 J.A. Fitzmyer, op. cit. 981.

15 H.J. Degenhardt, *Lukas-Evangelist der Armen. Besitz und Besitzverzicht in den lukanischen Schriften*, Stuttgart, 1965, 33-34.

16 H.J. Klauck, W. Schmithals etc. However, there is also a disagreement that the abandonment of property strictly presented to the disciples is an example for lay people. In other words, seeing Jesus and his disciples who gave up their private property, Zacchaeus gave up his fortune (Lk 19:8-10) to mean understanding of wealth in Luke (H.W. Horn, *Glaube und Handeln in der Theologie des Lukas*, GTA 26, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983, 37-38).

ethic for all Christians.

Verse 33b, which mentions charity and the heavenly reward for it, is a position found in Colossians 3:2 (“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”). And verse 34, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” is a frequent expression in the Greek proverb.¹⁷ Here, a more accurate translation of the Greek noun ‘thesaurus’ (θησαυρός), which means ‘treasure’, is a ‘treasure box’ that holds treasure. It is not a treasure scattered all over the place, but a treasure in a box. If you put a treasure chest in the sky, of course, our heart of coveting the treasure will also be there.

In verse 34, the end of the individual is emphasized rather than the eschatological perspective, specifically referring to the fate of the individual after death.¹⁸ It means that you should not mind your earthly possessions. Verse 34 ends with a collection of Jesus' words about desire (Luke 12:13-34). In particular, Luke placed 12:33-34 after the words that warned against greed (12:13-15) and the parable of the foolish rich (12:16-21) and the word to abandon greed (12:22-32). The message has become structurally more powerful.¹⁹

One of the languages used by Jesus comes in V.34 close to the concept of desire, It is ‘heart’ (καρδία), and the corresponding Hebrew word for this is ‘lebab’ (לֵבָב). The Hebrew ‘lebab’ is actually a difficult concept to pinpoint. This is because this concept is so implicit and often the meaning is ambiguous.²⁰ In general, it is said that Hebrew is an excellent language for expressing emotions as can be seen in the

17 Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.22.19; Empiricus, *Hypotyp.* 1.136.

18 W. Pesch, “Zur Exegese von Mt 6,19-21 und Lk 12,33-34.”, *Bib* 41, 1960, 356-378(374).

19 L.T. Johnson, op. cit. 202.

20 lebab's basic meaning is ‘heart’ which can be translated as ‘courage’ (Ez 22:14), ‘understanding’ (Deut 29:3), ‘plan’ (Jer 23:20), and is often ‘moral action’ (1Sam 12:24) serves to inspire.

psalms, but it is not an analytical and scientific language like Greek. Therefore, even in understanding humans, insight precedes the way of distinguishing the various components of humans. In fact, the 'heart' used by Jesus is not fixed as a single meaning: "the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8), "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28), "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (Matthew 9:4) "for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29) and so on. These quotes show that the 'heart' used by Jesus has a variety of meanings and must be interpreted according to the context. The reason why the 'heart' of verse 34 can be interpreted as 'desire' is because of the treasure in the conditional statement "For where your treasure is". It means desire for wealth.²¹

As Jesus discovered, every human being has a desire. Also, when someone tries to accept his desires and maintain them, it implies appropriate circumstances. Where the treasure is, our heart (desire) is also there. However, humans often don't know where their desires should go, which makes them fall and get sick. On the other hand, the desire to accumulate treasure in the kingdom of God never makes us sick. This is because there are no money bags that get lost, no treasures that accumulate, and no thieves who aim for treasures. So, any Christian should give up possessions, sell what he has, give charity, and keep treasure in heaven. It is Jesus' clear interpretation of desire.

21 "In the heart dwell feelings and emotions, desires and passions. 'joy' (Jn 16:22; Ac 2:26), 'pain and sorrow' (Jn 14:1,27; 16:6), 'desire' (Lk 24:31; Ro 10:1), 'lust' (Mt 5:28; 6:21)..." (TDNT IV, p.612)

4. Exchange-Bestowal

Jesus says: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back” (Luke 6:27-30). Everything is from God, so it is right to give it back to your neighbors as if you received it from God, or more generously.

‘If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.’ This principle of Jesus’ practice does not fit somewhere with desire, and even the most sublime meaning is difficult to be accepted by modern people. How can I give the results of my hard work to others? However, an interesting fact is found in the history of humanity. Before the emergence of currency, the conclusion of contracts, the formation of markets, and the accumulation of wealth, mankind had a completely unfamiliar concept of economic principles, a so-called “bestowal” exchange economy. For example, the Pygmy, the African primitive tribe, always emphasize that it is more than just a “exchange,” a friendly feeling between two people when exchanging. Therefore, the gift presented cannot be refused, and even in return, the generosity tries to surpass the other. In this way, it is assumed that the duty of exchange, which binds each other’s relationships forever, occurs, and that personality and things are mixed with each other through exchange. Let’s take two more concrete examples.

Melanesians in the South Pacific regard the bestowal itself as a strict

consciousness (Kula) and do their best to show generosity, freedom, autonomy, and great guts.²² There are symbols of wealth (bundles of shells), and these symbols should not be kept by a person for a long time, and are circulated in one direction. In other words, order is given, and should not be passed on to anyone other than a specific person. In this way, it is impossible to take possession of wealth alone or to trade in the family. As such, it has ownership, but only when it is transferred. Kula is not only legal, economic, and moral, but also has a religious and witchcraft dimension. When the contract is established, the Melanesians invoke the spirit of the object with a beautiful spell, perform magic, and then perform a ritual symbols to pass over.²³

Indians in Northwest America also have an exchange-bestowal system called "Potlatch"²⁴ which has three obligations: offer, receive and return. The basis of the obligation to provide is to establish a "face" within the tribe, and people are eager to give to each other generously. Receipt of duty is as compelling as that of providing, but no one has the right to refuse bestowal or reject Potlatch. The condition imposed on the return obligation is that you must return in a larger Potlatch than you have received. If you don't, you may not be able to establish a "face" forever in the community. The Indians regarded every object as having the effect of making it impossible to be exchanged for itself, which is, giving it as a gift and making it in return. Therefore, posses-

22 In Melanesia, there is a strict distinction between "Gimwali," a simple economic exchange, and "Kula" a generous gift system. So, if you say 'process it like Gimwali', it is a kind of idiom, meaning to practice Kula without care.

23 Kula also applies when crossing tribal boundaries, visiting, trading, and intermarriage with other tribes. In other words, the Melanesians were forming a huge "Kula community".

24 Potlatch means originally "to give (something, such as a gift) especially with the expectation of a gift in return" (Wikipedia).

sions were regarded as objects of rental rather than objects of assignment, and were received as holy objects. Because everything is related and entangled in this way, 'they are wearing grace', so the circulation of goods is followed by respect and courtesy.²⁵

As we have seen, the primitive exchange economy shows that some of humanity, who have produced surplus through sincere economic activity and diligent life, have exchanged and bestowed something completely different from our familiar economic form. The material and mental life exemplified by the exchange is non-existent and at the same time compulsory. The person exchanging can never be separated from the object being exchanged, and there is a strong spiritual exchange and partnership. The exchange-bestowal system is the circulation of rights and is identified with the circulation of personality. It has long been the institution of the majority of humanity in history and still persists in some areas. The exchange-bestowal system was an important economic principle in a society where capitalist economic logic was not established, such as a currency-oriented economy, private contracts, sober market logic, huge finance, and indiscriminate accumulation of wealth.

5. Conclusion

Today, the traditional Christian teachings that have linked desire to sin seem to be ineffective. St. Francis's excursions are beautiful, but that doesn't mean that people considered him completely free from

25 M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, L'Année Sociologique, 1925.

desire. Also, no Christian would blame someone who said something like this. The purpose of this saying is to highlight the human side of St. Francis and to make his greatness shine, but it is because it is impossible for humans to “complete liberation from desire”. If complete elimination of desire is not possible, then it is best to admit it as a natural aspect of human beings. Desire itself is not a sin. Even though I wonder why I spent so long in realizing such an ordinary fact.

Jesus grasped the nature of the desires of all human beings and gave important teachings about them. In fact, human desire has a different shape, but the nature will be the same in any era. Everyone, of all ages, in history would have had a desire for wealth, honor, and sex. As we saw in the previous verse, the place where Jesus' position on desire is relatively detailed is the Gospel of Luke. Here Jesus demands that Christians should give up possessions. However, this does not mean simply to give out the entire wealth you have collected to help the poor. If this happens, the logic of 'Give out all wealth' will be the principle of faith, and accordingly, just the logic of 'Give out all wealth' can be established at the convenience of human beings.

The value that arises is important to the principle of giving up possession. Jesus found the value in the kingdom of God, and at its core is the question of 'How should we deal with human desire?' Because desire is a very dangerous human nature. Therefore, the kingdom of God is nothing but vain unless it finds an appropriate place for human desire.²⁶

26 Ancient Plato condemned the desire in *Republic*. This is because, while placing importance on the mental aspect of humans, they viewed desire as mainly related to the human body: “And should we not rightly pronounce unnecessary the appetite that exceeds these (necessary desire) and seeks other varieties of food, and that by correction and training from youth up can be got rid of in most cases and is harmful to the body and a hindrance to the soul’s attainment of in-

Where your treasure is, there is also your heart, so keep the treasure in heaven! The words of Jesus feel as if they are using Lacan's theory, that is, the process of sealing the gap between the divided subject and the desire to wander through unknown identity (object a) is brought into the subject through the calling of the other.²⁷

Jesus' principle of giving up possession and doubling payback (Luke 6:27-30) is in many ways consistent with the primitive exchange economy. So I have to pass the richness of the inheritance which I was trying to pass on to my child to my afflicted neighbor, and sell the stock that I have reserved for my old age to fill the pockets of the poor neighbor. And we must share our overflowing wealth with the North Korean brothers who are starving and dying.

It is often said that human desire is endless. And Christians also cannot escape the shadow of desire, which is also acknowledged by God. For example, clergymen who want to show off to the world by creating a large church, who take any means to get to the top leadership position, or who cling to the honors of faith are also slaves to desire. It is at that time that Jesus tells us to store treasures in heaven. The spirit of Christianity shines here, so that it will be a beautiful world.

Now I introduce some of the speeches from Uruguay's Jose Mujica, famous for being the "world's poorest president," in Brazil. It is a

telligence and sobriety?"(559b-c) On the other hand, Aristotle connects temperance and desire in *Nicomachean Ethics*: "And the appetitive part of us should be ruled by principle, just as a boy should live in obedience to his tutor. Hence in the temperate man the appetitive element must be in harmony with principle?"(1119b).

- 27 Lacan calls the part where the symbolic world and the real world overlap 'object a'. There are unidentified objects in this area, and this is where desire is located. These unidentified objects constantly seek their fixed positions. The calling of other is, in fact, a human being's obsession with the desires of others.

speech that is already widely known through SNS, but it needs to be reconsidered, so I put it in.

Today, man does not govern the forces he has unleashed, but rather, it is these forces that govern man, and life. Because we do not come into this planet simply to develop, just like that, indiscriminately. We come into this planet to be happy. Because life is short and it slips away from us. And no material belonging is worth as much as life, and this is fundamental. But if life is going to slip through my fingers, working and over-working in order to be able to consume more, and the consumer society is the engine-because ultimately, if consumption is paralyzed, the economy stops, and if you stop the economy, the ghost of stagnation appears for each one of us, but it is this hyper-consumption that is harming the planet. And this hyper-consumption needs to be generated, making things that have a short useful life, in order to sell a lot.

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