

## **The World Is Crooked**

Dr. Rodney W. Kennedy

Corporate scandals rock our world often enough to tempt me to believe the world is crooked instead of flat. My interest increased when I discovered that a number of the biggest crooks are born again Christians. There's disconnect between the faith of some corporate executives and their propensity to steal money. Dare we forget that stealing puts us at odds with the Commandment: "THOU SHALT NOT STEAL" and in cahoots with one of the seven cardinal sins: GREED.

Another surprise: The country's obsession with sex – heterosexual and homosexual – has escalated to such a fever pitch, it appears that stealing and greed are minor and insignificant vices. Ann Coulter recently defended Enron's former CEO by saying that he is no different from George Soros. She claimed, somewhat incredulously, that both are either saints or both are criminals. What a strange defense that Enron's CEO is no worse than any other rich man on the planet.

Why the silence in the churches about stealing and greed? Perhaps it is difficult for preachers to tell their congregations the truth. After all, Jesus constantly warned of the dangers of money, and preachers tend to equate fortune with faith. Greed seems to possess the soul of mainline Christians. Chaucer's preacher in Canterbury Tales says, "Greed is the desire to acquire earthly goods and give nothing to those that need."

But how do we know when we are being greedy? What would happen if the church confessed its greed-possession and repented? What would happen to the economy? After all, we recognize that the economy depends upon a certain amount of greed and the government on some system of "spoils to the victor."

Perhaps there's a trickle-down effect with greed. The media inundates us with images of white-collar crime. People lower on the food chain get the impression that a little stealing is not bad. For example, last week my telephone bill had a \$38.40 billing from a third party company. I called SBC and the excellent customer service representative told me that this company was an internet services provider. I called the internet company. The nice customer service rep explained that her company was only the billing agency and that I needed to contact the heretofore nameless internet company. She gave me the number.

I called the internet services provider. The equally nice customer service rep explained to me that someone in my company had ordered their internet services and she had a telephone tape to prove that the transaction had actually occurred. I asked her to play the tape for me. She put me on hold for twelve minutes and thirty seconds (I'm obsessive compulsive and I timed her response). Once she returned to the conversation, she informed me that they were having technical difficulties with the telephone tape logs.

How did I get this billing on my SBC account? Sure, it could be a computer glitch. The sound you hear is my skepticism filling the room. Here's what happened. A sales representative called my 800 number, made out an order form and billed me for the service.

Since I pay my SBC bill online, I rarely look at the itemized charges. That, of course, is my mistake, but no one has ever actually confused me with a business person. When I checked previous bills, I discovered that I had been paying for nonexistent internet services for four months. After chalking up part of that bill to my stupidity (there's not a better word), you are left with stealing predicated on human greed. That's the trickle down from a corporate mentality and a government that winks at stealing and abhors sexual misdemeanors. You can't say you believe in God and steal money.

After all, how hard it is for preachers to tell congregants they are greedy, on the one hand, and with the other hand, demand that those same congregants give more money. The world, as in ages past, is a crooked place. That is why the prophetic message of the Jewish prophet remains so crucial to our national health: make straight a path in the wilderness.