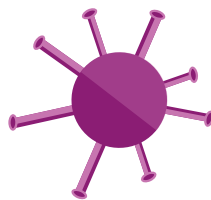
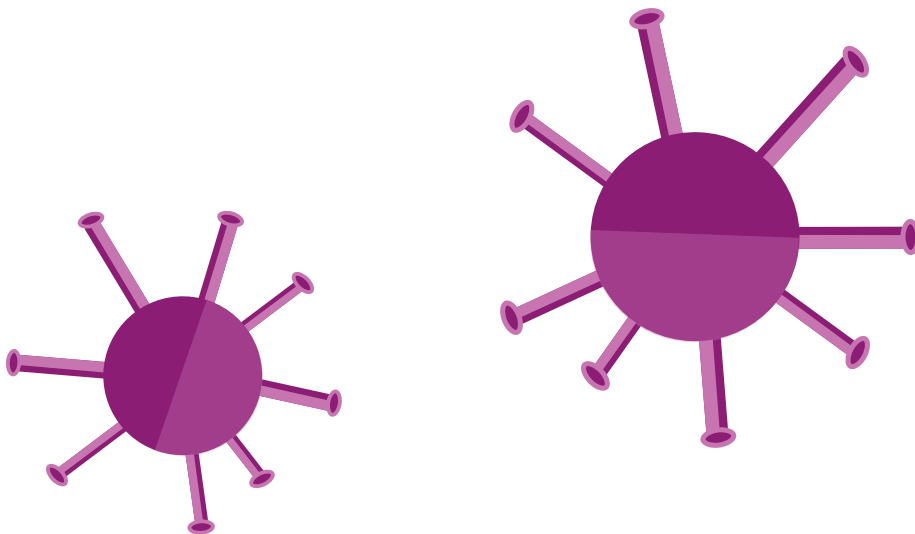


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LOVING GOD FIRST

**YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD
YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR
HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL,
ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH
ALL YOUR STRENGTH**

We know that as Christians we are to love others. But we are also to love God. This, as Jesus made clear, is the most important commandment of all. Jesus spelled what loving God means. The essence of loving is giving:

**“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD
THAT HE GAVE” JOHN 3:16**

Consequently, loving means giving ourselves to Him. Firstly, giving ourselves to Him with all our heart- in other words, with warmth. God intends our relationship with Him to be primarily a warm, close and intimate one. This relationship is not necessarily about rules or correct doctrine. “Dead right”. It is not meant to be a stiff or distant or formal relationship. This is so different to Islam where the very idea of a close relationship with Allah is utterly foreign, even blasphemous. Secondly, we are to give ourselves to God with all our soul. Our soul is basically our entire being, our whole personality.

**THEN MY SOUL WILL
REJOICE IN THE LORD
AND DELIGHT IN HIS
SALVATION. MY WHOLE
BEING WILL EXCLAIM,
WHO IS LIKE YOU, LORD?
PSALM 35: 9-10**

There is to be no holding back of any area of our lives. We are to give ourselves to Him with total sincerity. To be sincere with God means there is nothing covered over or hidden. David Livingstone once said “The Lord has had all of me that it is possible to possess”. That is the language of someone who loved God with all his soul. Thirdly we are to love God-to give ourselves to Him- with our entire mind. We use our mind to acquire knowledge, in this case knowledge of God.

“Christians, who look at God, so to speak, through the wrong end of the telescope, reduce him to pigmy proportions and so, end up as pigmy Christians”.
J.L. Packer “Knowing God”

It is important that we apply ourselves so as to add depth to our faith. (see 2 Tim 2:15)

Fourthly, we are to give ourselves to God with all our strength, in other words with enthusiasm, vigour, passion, and dedication.

“We only have people here who are passionate about what they do”
Steve Jobs CEO Apple

That kind of enthusiastic commitment is vital for commercial success. It is even more important for our relationship with God. This then is how we are to love God; we are to give ourselves to him with sincerity, with depth and with enthusiasm. To think about and turn into prayer:

Even the heart of God thirsts after love
Abraham Kuyper

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF WEALTH

We have been looking at how the chief requirement for fruitfulness in the life of a Christian is Love.

“IF I HAVE NO LOVE I AM NOTHING” 1 COR. 13:2

There is a particular area of our lives which can so easily be exceedingly corrosive of love- both love for God and love for others. I am referring to the dangers of wealth. This is where Christianity differs so diametrically from the world's view. In 1995 the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping said: “To get rich is glorious”. Jesus' teaching was as different as it is possible to get. Jesus in Mark 4:9 warned about

“THE DECEITFULNESS OF WEALTH AND THE DESIRE FOR OTHER THINGS COME IN AND CHOKES THE WORD, MAKING IT UNFRUITFUL”

It is important therefore that we spend some time examining what exactly Jesus meant when He gave this warning and we need to start by asking the question

“WHAT CONSTITUTES WEALTH?”

Suppose I was to ask you “are you rich?” what answer would you give? Jesus told a parable about a rich man and a poor beggar who lived outside his gate (Luke 16:19-31) Jesus described him as “rich” and there are three factors which put him into this category. Firstly he had nice clothes, he was ‘dressed in purple and fine clothes’. Secondly he ate nice food and had nice

processions, he ‘lived in luxury’. Thirdly he had a nice house (for it had a gate) The reality of our own situation, each of us, is that all these are true of us. We all have nice clothes, we eat nice food, and we have nice processions. We are all rich according to this standard set out by Jesus. Note the experience of a medical student who had come to Uganda for his elective. He had never been in the developing world before or had been exposed to real poverty and was quite shaken by his experiences. When he returned he said

“DON'T TELL ME WE ARE ALL RICH IN THIS COUNTRY, WE'RE STINKING RICH”.

Our incomes may not compare to the very rich, the super-rich (millionaires) or the hyper-rich (billionaires) but we are still rich from a Biblical perspective. All of us therefore are in danger of what Jesus called “the deceitfulness of riches”. Riches can corrode our Love for God and for others and so destroy our fruitfulness as Christians.

To lay up treasure on earth is as plainly forbidden by our Master as adultery and murder.

John Wesley

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 1

Wealth tends to lead us to forget God.

“WHEN YOU HAVE EATEN AND ARE SATISFIED PRAISE THE LORD... FOR THE GOOD LAND HE HAS GIVEN YOU. BE CAREFUL THAT YOU DO NOT FORGET THE LORD YOUR GOD, FAILING TO OBSERVE HIS COMMENDS, HIS LAWS AND HIS DECREES”. DEUT 8:10

God is warning His people about the dangers of wealth. (Remember that their wealth, about 1000 yrs BC, was massively less than our wealth today, so the danger for us surely is corresponding much greater)

He is saying “Do not let your wealth cause you to forget Me!”

When God speaks about people forgetting Him, He is not suggesting there was a danger of them having their memory wiped. Forgetting in this context means neglecting. Forgetting comes from two Anglo-Saxon words meaning “to get away from” it conveys the idea of distance and separation.

To forget God is to allow a separation to develop between Him and us. This can happen deliberately – or more commonly, by neglect. When we experience a situation of material plenty, it is so very easy for a separation to develop between the Lord and ourselves.

“When I fed them, they were satisfied when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me” Hosea 13:6

Our wealth can so easily lead to our love for the Lord cooling off.

Outwardly, all may appear to be the same but inwardly there is a distance between us and Jesus.

And it’s not He who has moved!
We become lukewarm;

“So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing’ Rev 3:16, 17

This is the seducing effect of wealth. “Seduce” comes from two Latin words meaning “to lead aside” it means to deflect from the right course. Wealth so easily can deflect us from the right path – it takes us away from God. Remember Demas?

Paul wrote about his one-time co-worker “Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me” (2Tim 4:10)

“Give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise I may have too much and disown you ... or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God (Prov 30:8,9)

Earthly riches are full of poverty.
St Augustine, 350-430AD

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 2

RICHES TEND TO SHRIVEL UP OUR FAITH IN THE LORD

Hannah More (1745-1873) was a Christian very active in the campaign to end slavery, working alongside William Wilberforce and John Newton and others. She knew a good deal of difficulty in her life and on one occasion she wrote: "It is among the mercies of God that He strengthens servants by hardening them through adverse circumstances, instead of leaving them to languish under the shining but withering sun of unclouded prosperity"

Because we have considerable material resources we can so easily rely on them rather than the Lord and our faith in Him withers. Our material prosperity provides the safety nets we need and we begin to rely on them rather than on the Lord.

Consider the python which is a constricting snake – it has immensely powerful muscles in order to squeeze its victims to death. It kills its prey by coiling itself around its victim (eg a goat, sheep or gazelle) and then gradually squeezing the life out of the animal. It doesn't crush its victim to pulp however. Every time its prey breathes out, the python's coils take up the slack immediately before the prey can breathe in. So the grip progressively tightens until the victim's lungs are completely flattened and empty and the animal suffocates.

Living in our modern materialistic society is rather like living in the grip of a python. Paul warned the Christians at Rome:

***"DON'T LET THE WORLD SQUEEZE YOU INTO ITS MOULD"
(ROMANS 12:2, JB PHILIPS.)***

As the world tries to wrap its coil around us, it is not only moulding and shaping us – it is also strangling and suffocating our spiritual life. The result is that our trust in God begins to shrivel up. Our wealth so easily tempts us into thinking that we are self-sufficient and that we have no need of God. Nothing destroys our trust in God so much as a sense of self-sufficiency.

The world's golden sands are quicksands.
Thomas Watson 1620-1686

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 3

RICHES TEND TO DISTORT OUR VALUE SYSTEM.

A powerful example of the distorting effect of wealth is found in the church at Laodicea. We have already seen how their material wealth had produced a distance between them and the Lord and made their faith a lukewarm one. Their wealth had also destroyed their value system:

“YOU SAY ‘I AM RICH; I HAVE ACQUIRED WEALTH AND DO NOT NEED A THING’ BUT YOU DO NOT REALISE THAT YOU ARE WRETCHED, PITIFUL, POOR, BLIND AND NAKED” (REV 3:17)

They thought they were in a spiritually healthy position when in reality the opposite was true – but they didn't realise their plight!

In India, the wildlife parks are a huge attraction for tourists, they come to meet the tigers especially. In one of the parks the number of wild tigers has dropped by 50% in the years 2001 to 2007-ironically because so many tourists have come to see them. The reason is that familiarity with tourists dulls the tigers' natural defence mechanisms-mechanisms that would keep them away from any human contact. So they become more vulnerable to poachers seeking their valuable skins.

In a similar way, constant exposure to and immersion in our rich materialistic society dulls our spiritual edge, Consequently, we think we are fine spiritually when in fact the opposite is true.

In the book of Kings, we read how, as King Solomon grew old, his heart

“WAS NOT FULLY DEVOTED TO THE LORD HIS GOD AS THE HEART OF DAVID HIS FATHER HAD BEEN” (1 KINGS 11:4)

His great wealth had insidiously and gradually distorted his value system and he was influenced by his foreign wives to acknowledge their false gods. Not that he ever turned away completely from the one true God- but he began to give them a place which they never should have had. The end of his life was such a sad contrast to an excellent beginning.

In Haggai's day, the people had become wealthy and put a higher value on increasing their own standard of living instead of seeking Gods honour and glory. Their wealth had distorted their spiritual value system.

“HOW IS IT THAT IT'S THE RIGHT TIME FOR YOU TO LIVE IN YOUR FINE NEW HOMES, WHILE THE HOME , GODS TEMPLE, IS ON RUINS?” (HAGGAI 1:4, THE MESSAGE)

Riches are not evil but they are dangerous
John White

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 4

RICHES TEND TO MAKE US NEGLECT THE POOR

Scripture instructs us to

“LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR AS OURSELVES” (LEVITICUS 19:18)

and Jesus taught us in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25, 37) that our neighbour is anyone in need, whoever they may be.

We live today in a global village and we are surrounded by vast numbers of people in the developing world who are struggling in grinding poverty. It is desperately easy to shut our ears and eyes and hearts whenever we are ourselves are not in such need.

In the Old Testament, the city of Sodom was destroyed by the Lord because of its great wickedness (Genesis 18:20). There were at least two aspects of that wickedness: the first (and generally well known) was their sexual depravity. The second aspect is much less well known.

THIS WAS THE SIN OF SODOM... SHE AND HER DAUGHTERS WERE ARROGANT, OVER FED AND UNCONCERNED. THEY DID NOT HELP THE POOR AND NEEDY. THEY WERE HAUGHTY AND DID DETESTABLE THINGS

BEFORE ME. THEREFORE I DID AWAY WITH THEM (EZEKIEL 16:49, 50)

Sodom was wealthy, proud, perverted and unconcerned for the poor. Wealth can make us unconcerned for the poor. Wealth seems not only to attack our love for God but also our love for other people. It is like a corroding acid, eating away at these twin pillars which form the foundation of our Christianity.

Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador in Honduras was a determined campaigner on behalf of the poor. (He was assassinated in 1980 because of his outspoken criticism of the powerful wealthy and corrupt cliques in his country) This is his penetrating comment on the dangers of wealth:

“I used to think that Jesus might have been exaggerating when He warned of the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on people’s eyes: a dangerous way of freezing people’s hands and lips and hearts”

Wealth somehow has the ability to attach our affection to it so that we want to keep as much as possible for ourselves. It has this subtle tendency to make us selfish and self-centred and to be unconcerned about those in need.

If you want to destroy a nation, give it too much; make it greedy miserable and sick
John Steinbeck

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 5

RICHES TEND TO MAKE US GREEDY.

In The U.K., in the 20 years between 1970 and 1990 there was an 80% increase in the average income in real terms ie: allowing for inflation (gov.uk Social trends) This was a huge jump in peoples wealth and wealth tends to make us greedy- this is not always true but it is true often enough to make wealth very dangerous spiritually and thus potentially damaging to our fruitfulness as Christians.

This insight is not exclusively Christian. The Romans had a proverb, which is telling: "Riches" they said "are like seawater. The more you drink, the thirstier you become"

Livy, the Roman writer, said quite specifically, "Wealth makes us greedy"
Titus Livius (59 BC-AD 17)

Quite simply, the more we have, the more we want. It is true, not in every case but in many cases.

"Christians in the US live in the richest country in the history of the world, surrounded by a billion hungry neighbours. Yet we want more and more".

Ronald Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger

This is true not just of Americans but of the whole Western world.

Jesus was acutely aware of the dangers of greed and warned specifically against it

***"WATCH OUT! BE ON YOUR
GUARD AGAINST ALL KINDS
OF GREED" (LUKE 12:15)***

and greed is included in the traditional of

the seven deadly sins (Lust, sloth, gluttony, pride, wrath, envy, avarice) because Paul included it in lists of particularly serious sins which we are to reject totally;

***"YOU MUST NOT ASSOCIATE
WITH ANYONE WHO CALLS
HIMSELF A BROTHER BUT
IS SEXUALLY IMMORAL OR
GREEDY, AN IDOLATER OR A
SLANDER, A DRUNKARD OR
A SWINDLER" (1 COR. 5:11)***

Paul called greed idolatry in Colossians 3:5. It is idolatry because it puts money and possessions first in our lives, displacing God from His rightful place – the first place – in our lives. This idolatry is not the sort of gross idolatry of actual physical idols made out of metal or stone or wood which is so condemned by the Old Testament prophets. It is the more subtle idolatry of the heart

***"THESE PEOPLE HAVE
SET UP IDOLS IN THEIR
HEARTS" (EZEKIEL 14:3)***

Wealth can so easily cause us to set up idols in our hearts and consequently destroy our relationship with the Lord and our fruitfulness for Him.

Build your nest in no tree here for the Lord of the forest has condemned the whole woods to be demolished.

Samuel Rutherford 1600-1661

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 6

“HAS NOT GOD CHOSEN THOSE WHO ARE POOR IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD TO BE RICH IN FAITH?” (JAMES 2:5)

The opposite of this statement so very easily can be true: those who are rich in the eyes of the world are poor in faith. Such is the deceitfulness of riches.

Dr David Nystrom is a Professor of Biblical literature. In one of his books he tells how recently he was at an international theological conference and happened to be speaking to a Christian from Slovakia, part of the formerly Communist Czechoslovakia. He was a man who had suffered under Communist rule because of his faith. However, it was his opinion that while it was difficult to be a Christian under Communism, it had become more difficult in the post – Communist era! “At least under communism” he said “we had a clear perception of the enemy. Today the enemy is not so clear..... with increasing affluence”. That man’s insight is a powerful indicator of the deceitfulness of riches and it made an indelible impression on Dr Nystrom.

Satan is always seeking to attack Christians in an attempt to weaken their faith in the Lord.

He has two main categories of tool in order to achieve his aim.

One is the blunt instrument of physical persecution (first unleashed under the rule of some of the Roman Emperors and still employed in some areas of our modern world). It generally has proved to be self defeating in that it has the opposite effect to the one intended by Satan – it causes the Church to grow!

Tertullian, one of the early Church Fathers recognised this in his early saying: “The blood of the Christians is seed”.

The second category of tool is much more subtle. It is the use of a more camouflaged attack from something, which seems not to be dangerous or harmful – a kind of “Trojan horse” which we unwittingly accept and embrace without realising the danger it poses. Wealth is one manifestation of that more subtle approach.

“Many Christians in the Northern Hemisphere simply do not believe Jesus’ teaching about the deadly danger of possessions”

ARE THERE ANY WAYS IN WHICH MY WEALTH HAS ADVERSELY AFFECTED MY SPIRITUAL LIFE AND FRUITFULNESS?

ANTIDOTES TO THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 1

***“THAT YOU MAY LIVE A
LIFE WORTHY OF THE LORD
AND MAY PLEASE HIM IN
EVERY WAY: BEARING FRUIT
IN EVERY GOOD WORK...
AND JOYFULLY GIVING
THANKS TO THE FATHER
(COLOSSIANS 1: 10-12)***

When an enemy uses a powerful weapon against us, we need to find effective counter-measures. The alternative is to find ourselves defeated.

During World War 2, the Battle of the Atlantic was a long drawn out struggle against the Nazi U-boat arm who were attempting to starve the UK into submission by sinking cargo ships which brought essential foodstuffs and supplies across the North Atlantic. It was the one campaign which, by his own admission, really worried Winston Churchill for he saw the real possibility of defeat.

The Royal Navy had to develop effective counter measures; not just one but several (under water radar or sonar, new depth charges and new methods of delivery, new ways of escorting the Merchant Shipping and the use of aircraft and above all the use of intelligence derived from the breaking of the German radio codes).

It was a long and costly struggle but eventually the U-boats were decisively defeated.

There are at least five spiritual counter-measures, which we need to employ if we are to have any chance of defeating the deceitfulness of richness. If we want to be fruitful in our spiritual lives then we

need to deploy these counter-measures.

The first of these is thankfulness/ gratitude. Joseph Stalin considered gratitude a sickness suffered by dogs – this may go some way to explaining his vicious nature and the horrifying crimes he committed.

However, joyful gratitude should be a key aspect of genuine Christianity. How else can we respond appropriately to God's gifts? God has done so very much for us. It is so easy for us to forget or fail to recognise and cherish all that God has given us – spiritually but also materially. Thanksgiving is more than a feeling; it is something we can decide to do and we need, with God's help, to make that choice.

***“BE GRATEFUL FOR THE
GOOD THINGS THAT THE
LORD YOUR GOD HAS
GIVEN YOU AND YOUR
FAMILY” (DEUT 26:11 GNB)***

*Count your blessing, name them
one by one, and it will surprise
you what the Lord has done.*

Johnson Oatman JR 1897

ANTIDOTES TO THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 2

“GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN. FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD, AND WE CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT. BUT IF WE HAVE FOOD AND CLOTHING, WE WILL BE CONTENT WITH THAT. ..FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL. SOME PEOPLE, EAGER FOR MONEY, HAVE WANDERED FROM THE FAITH (I TIM 6:6, 7, 8, AND 10)

The second antidote to the deceitfulness of riches is contentment.

Contentment is the opposite of covetousness (which is a greedy grasping spirit). The 10th commandment specifically tells us to keep away from any kind of covetousness.

Lee Iacocca a leading American industrialist was responsible for turning around the fortunes of the Chrysler Corporation in the 1980s. He once commented “I have never in my lifetime seen so many people who are so affluent but they are all anxious. Is anybody happy anymore?”

Contentment is something we can learn. Paul wrote:

“I HAVE LEARNT TO BE CONTENT WHATEVER

THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHETHER LIVING IN PLENTY OR IN WANT” (PHIL 4:11,12)

The powerful advertising world is geared to making us discontent with what we have so that we will strive to acquire the latest, newest, “coolest” things.

“I want!

“I want!

“I want!”

sums up much of the modern attitude to material possessions.

The Greek philosopher Socrates once said: “Contentment is natural wealth; luxury is artificial poverty”.

It doesn't come naturally to us to be content, generally speaking. We need God's help if we are to learn to be content. This was Paul's experience. After affirming that he had learned to be content he gave the reason behind his ability to do that:

“I CAN DO EVERYTHING THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH” (PHIL 4:13)

“The wealthiest man is he who is contented with least”

Socrates BC470-399

ANTIDOTES TO THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 3

Tithing is giving back to God one tenth of what He has given us. To the selfish materialistic spirit of the age, this seems ridiculously high; yet God commanded it in the Old Testament.

“BE SURE TO SET ASIDE A TENTH OF ALL THAT YOUR FIELDS PRODUCE EACH YEAR” DEUTERONOMY 14:22

Jesus endorsed the principal of tithing in Matthew 23:23

If God's people under the old covenant were asked to give one tenth of their income, in money or in kind (and indeed to give other offerings over and above the tithe) how can we, His people under the New Covenant give any less?

Yet many Christians today find tithing hard to put into practice- because we have been so moulded by the materialistic selfish spirit of the age. We fear we will be impoverished if we tithe and Satan likes to whip up those fears in our minds.

The truth is that giving is good for us. Like all of God's instructions, it is designed for our good. Tithing is not a cold restrictive law laid down by God: it is a privilege and a pathway to blessing.

Tithing in fact liberates a person spiritually from a greedy selfish spirit which infects all of us to a greater or lesser extent and which is one of the results of the deceitfulness of riches.

Something which holds us back spiritually is broken when we begin to tithe. Tithing sets us free in that particular area of our lives- and brings a joy with it. Jesus said it would:

“THERE IS MORE HAPPINESS IN GIVING THAN IN RECEIVING” (ACTS 20:35)

Michael Baughen, the former Bishop of Chester, led two churches before becoming a Bishop. Both these churches undertook very major building projects under his leadership. One was in Manchester and the other in London (All Souls, Langham Place) He later wrote about his experiences of God's people in relation to giving:

“I can tell you that in both places, as the projects developed, the givers became more joyful and the non-givers or reluctant givers became more miserable”

A tight fist means a shrivelled soul
Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661)

ANTIDOTES TO THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES 4

“DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURE ON EARTH...BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURE IN HEAVEN... FOR WHERE YOUR HEART IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO” (MATTHEW 6:19,20,21)

Jesus is teaching here in this part of the Sermon on the Mount that we will either be committed to things on earth, material things, or to spiritual things. We cannot, He said serve two masters:

“YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH GOD AND MONEY” (MATT 6:24)

by laying up treasures in heaven we are effectively serving God rather than money. We are putting God first in our lives.

Just what does it mean to store up treasure in heaven? Jesus didn't explain that in the Sermon on the Mount – but He did when speaking with the rich young ruler:

“SELL EVERYTHING YOU HAVE AND GIVE TO THE POOR AND YOU WILL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN”. (LUKE 18:22)

Paul made the same point in 1 Tim 6:18,19:

“Command (those who are rich) to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be

generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the age to come”.

When we share our wealth, when we are open-handed with those in need, we are storing up treasure in heaven. Not only is this a powerful antidote to the deceitfulness of wealth but it is also an expression of the fruitfulness that springs from love.

Someone has said: “You can't take your wealth with you when you die but you can send it on ahead!” What we give away we are actually transferring to Jesus for safe-keeping.

Legend recalls St Martin of Tours: A Christian officer in the Roman army stationed in Gaul (France) in the 2nd century. One cold winter's day he was riding into the city of Tours when he spotted a poorly-clad beggar, blue with cold. Martin took off his somewhat worn heavy cloak, cut it in half and gave one half to the beggar, keeping the remaining half for himself.

That night he had a dream in which he saw Jesus in heaven wearing the half of his cloak, which he had given to the beggar. An angel approached Jesus and asked Him when He had got the old cloak. “My servant Martin gave it to Me” was the reply.

So we get by giving!

This is one of those paradoxical spiritual truths which seem nonsensical in the world's eyes – for instance, victory comes through surrender, the way up is down, to gain your life you must lose it

The less I have, the more I depend on Him.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

PASSAGE:

1 Timothy 6:2b-10, 17-19

TITLE and SUBJECT:

The love of money- its ill effects and healthy cure

PURPOSE

To warn people about the danger of loving money in place of Jesus;

To have people assess the reality of their Christianity by how they deal with money and repent of greed;

To encourage people to use their money more for the good of others because they trust God.

Paul was one of the first generation leaders in the early church. He instructed Timothy, like a son to him in the faith. "Teach and urge these things." -things to know that come by teaching; things to do urgently, pressed home by preaching. And as we approach the Bible it is to learn and to be urged to do. The things taught and urged within Paul's training programme for a healthy Christian community have been:-

Ch 1: The truth of how God rescues rebel sinners by Jesus Christ and not by silly ideas or the ethical law.

Ch 2 to 5: How the Gospel of grace shapes the church at prayer and worship, in leadership, in relations between men and women, older and younger, bosses and workers. The picture is of the household of God with distinctive character and good reputation with the outside world. Paul is saying 'this is the nature of the family of God- the truth we believe and the way we behave'. Teach and urge these things.

So we come to chapter 6 from verse 3 on, and to a text that is topical and urgent. V9-10a

"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils."

Had we been looking at this a week ago I would be referring to the debt crisis, international and personal, the stock market crash, greedy bankers, the recession, unemployment, rising fuel costs. But since then, what a week, illustrating the truth of this warning about the power of covetousness!

Four nights of riotous looting in English cities with four murders, businesses and homes burnt out, all kinds of evils.

IN CROYDON, A BURNT DOWN FURNITURE STORE HAD SURVIVED TWO WORLD WARS AND FIVE GENERATION OF OWNERSHIP IN THE ONE FAMILY.

The gaunt owner said, 'There must be something completely wrong with the system in this country to allow it to happen.' Doubtless true but also what Jesus taught is that the cause is a broken and spoiled human nature.

"IT WAS GOOD, THOUGH," one teenage girl said to the BBC, still tiddly from the wine she had looted. "It was fun, bit of a celebration. Gotta coupla free fings" (what used to be called stolen goods)

William Golding's novel, 'Lord of the Flies' has been referenced by several commentators. It is the story of children

marooned on an island without adult authority. They descend into cruelty and greed, to the point of killing one of their number. It is the story of all of us, of human sinful nature without the rescue and transformation that God brings in Jesus.

A startling feature of the parade of arrested looters was the number of educated, employed, and well-off young people involved, alongside those from street gangs and social deprivation. The same suspension of right and wrong happened in their minds also. Such is the power of the lust for money or its goods and it can overtake all sorts of people.

If we go back to our passage, verse 10, we see it says, "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith.."

The love of money and the outgrowth of evils that spring from its root affect Christian people. Paul has got into this theme by way of a warning about bad religion. Let's read from verse 3 down to 5. "If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain."

1 LOVE OF MONEY SUPPORTS SICK RELIGION

Bad teachings are often motivated by financial reward for the teacher. They promote the idea of 'what is in it for me?' in the listeners.

The Indulgence Huckster (1500s)

Johann Tetzel was a monk with a mission. He was to oversee the sale of indulgences--promises of divine forgiveness for the living and deceased loved ones--in the German regions of Madgeburg and Halberstadt. The revenue from the sales would finance a new holy war against the Turks in Germany, solve the personal financial problems of young Albert of Brandenburg, and provide Pope Leo X with cash to build the new basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. Leo also wanted money to fight the Urbino war, transform the Vatican into a work of art, and meet the incidental expenses of a court four times as big as the emperor's.

Tetzel met these needs using the marvellous new printing press, whereby indulgence slips could be mass-produced and delivered door to door. This efficiency eliminated the need for long and costly journeys to sacred shrines. Success was further assured by Tetzel's skill at reducing the highly complex doctrine on indulgences to a simple formula:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
the soul from purgatory springst.

The money poured in, but a few believers gave their little slips of paper to the 34-year-old doctor of theology at Wittenberg University, Martin Luther, seeking his comment on the validity of this way of salvation. His response: The 95 Theses which launched the Reformation.. Certainly not an attack on the practice of the Roman Catholic Church because it can happen in all kinds of places and situations Modern hucksters? Not Billy Graham or Rick Warren... see how they use their money? Rick Warren paid back every penny of salary he was paid by his own church when royalties from his publications started to appear. Billy Graham, well known for a modest lifestyle, separating personal income from ministry.... but others?

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HOW DO WE DISCERN BAD TEACHING AND BAD TEACHERS?

Bad teachings do not agree with Jesus sound words. They are 'different', deviating, or diverting. Novelty can be a feature or a problem. Sound words mean healthy teaching. It is a medical word. Contrast the false teaching which is said to be unhealthy, v4. The NLT memorably translates it as 'sick interest in controversy' gk noseo. From which flow words like nauseous.

BAD TEACHINGS ARE UNHEALTHY BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY PRODUCE.

When Jesus criticized the religious teachings of his day, he said that 'by their fruits you will know them', in a parable about fruit trees that were healthy and diseased. He said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes?"

Some characteristics: not leading to 'Godliness' that is, God-centeredness and Christian Character.

Producing controversy about minor things especially quibbling about terminology

Breaking Christian community by envy, dissension, slander, suspicion and friction.

Befuddling clear and true thinking. 'Depraved mind and deprived of the truth' and feeding the ego of the teacher. The Greek word for puffed up with conceit is TYPHOOS. (a term Paul uses several times- as in 1Tim 3:6 warning of appointing recent converts to positions of leadership and 2 Tim 3:4 as one of the characteristics of the future world- pride the big sin of our age?) The word was used of a storm wind. As we say of someone, 'full of hot air' or

'a big noise' or 'full of puff and bluster'

The place of the teacher, in pre-literate societies, was one of influence and power. He could read, he was learned when many were not. He got money for services rendered. That is why Paul was careful to tell the Corinthians that he took no pay even though entitled, scrupulously avoiding any appearance of exploitation and bearing witness to the freely given grace of God even in the manner of his ministry.

1 Thes. 2:5 ..."never came with words of flattery as a pretext for greed"
Money love is a root that supports sick religion V9-10a

2. SECOND, MONEY LOVE FEEDS MANY OTHER DESTRUCTIVE CRAVINGS.

The love of money is a snare or death trap like an animal pit with bait over it, and sharpened stakes in it. The love of money breaks the 10th commandment 'You shall not covet' but opens up breaches of all the rest. So one will murder for money, lie for money, commit adultery for money,... one thing leads to another. In many evils, money is involved somewhere. Money is like a drug and the love of money is like a drug addiction.

One of the obvious effects is indebtedness. Quote from the 1987 film "Wall Street" from the character Gordon Gecko, the amoral trader and raider.

"GREED, FOR LACK OF A BETTER WORD, IS GOOD. GREED IS RIGHT. GREED WORKS. GREED CLARIFIES, CUTS THROUGH, AND

CAPTURES, THE ESSENCE OF THE EVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT.

Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A."

I don't think so... Greed for money is a root of many evil branches of human pain and ruin, very persistent and deep rooted in the human heart:-

ILLUSTRATION: Anna's weeds coming up in her back yard through the new turf, (the weeds not having been dealt with)

Money love supports sick religion; Money love feeds many other destructive cravings; V10b

3. MONEY LOVE DIVERTS FAITH ASTRAY

"It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs"

Mark 4:18-19

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful There is a particular warning that the love of money can arise in people in and around the Christian Church, whether real believers in the first place or not. The danger is that the desire to get rich can lead to a falling in love with money, and gradually some wander away from the faith. The wandering is by its nature gradual, but suddenly there is a pang, a sharp and life-threatening injury stabbing the vital organs - the pang of isolation from brothers

and sisters, the pang of losing the wealth on which you have come to depend, the pang of not making the gains you strove for, the pang of envy as you compare yourself with others richer than you, the pang of fear that you might lose it all and how then would you live?, the pang of cynicism that people see you as rich and only want something from you, the pang of how wealth affects all your relationships, the pangs of addiction through over-indulgence and the ever greater need to get more satisfaction than the time before.

Some have pierced themselves with many pangs..

The pang of losing your wealth- your pension your 'Future' Worrying about the security of your money

The pang of ruined relationships and of broken communities.

The pang of addiction and self-destructive excess.

The pang of dissatisfaction.

The pang of debt.

THE PANGS REVEAL HOW MUCH WE LOVE MONEY AND HOW VULNERABLE WE ARE TO WANDER FROM THE FAITH.

Take a look at the next part of our passage in v 11, 'But as for you, man of God, flee these things..' Run a mile from greed in spirituality and in finances. Run fast. Run away from those all kinds and varieties of evils that spring from greedy gain. See the warning signs and escape. Instead

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there is something to pursue. As John Stott put it, "Run from evil as you would run from danger and run to righteousness as you would run after success"

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, but the love of God is a source of all kinds of good.

A LOVE OF GOD BRINGS TRUE RICHES.

Paul teaches us how to handle money rightly in four ways.

V 6-8 The high value of Contentment -in place of covetousness. It is 'great gain' as one aspect of Godliness. (Godliness is a very important term, It means God-worship, God-centeredness, God-fear, God-love and God-likeness in a good way, combined)

CONTENTMENT KEEPS OUR HEARTS FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY BY TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR LIVES.
Heb 13:5-6

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

CONTENTMENT SEES THINGS AS TEMPORARY

V7 We brought NOTHING into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world.
Job 1:21

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;

blessed be the name of the LORD." Life is temporal- all our stuff is for this life only, passing away and not available for eternal life (unlike the pyramid's vain attempts to provide riches for the after-life for Egypt's kings) therefore relax! Don't cling to stuff; rather put money in its place.

CONTENTMENT DELIGHTS IN NECESSITIES NOT LUXURIES

The parallel in the 'sound words of Jesus' is in Matthew 6:31-32. 31Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the Gentiles seek after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

The virtue of simplicity:

Let us question our purchase decisions. Can I use this fully? Can I make do? Do I really need this? What would happen if I did not buy? Is this good for others as well as me?

Necessities vary across cultures. The Greek word clothing probably includes shelter. Even in poverty, basics include a variety of components. In our culture, more is proportionate- car, fridge, books, something for recreation. But let us not avoid the challenges of Scripture by cunning rationalizations.

Paul is not advocating poverty against possessions, but emphasizing contentment over and against extravagance. Quote: Consultations on an evangelical commitment to simple lifestyle 1980- "we distinguish between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, service of God and slavery to fashion."

In V 17, Paul moves on to address those who are rich as well as those who desire

to be so. Ephesus was a merchant city and among the converts were some well-off people, alongside slaves and many in-between. He does not tell them to sell up and give it all away. He does tell Timothy to charge them! – Not a fee or an attack but a solemn command of charge

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, but the love of God brings true riches. Timothy is to command the rich in the church, three things, which will be part of their love for God and protect them from the all kinds of evil rooted in the love of money.
17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

A LOVE FOR GOD BRINGS TRUE RICHES: THE TREASURE OF HUMILITY -IN PLACE OF HAUGHTINESS

Not looking down on those with less. Advertising trades on this tendency of course...Not flaunting status by labels and allusions to your rich lifestyle or class.

No sense of entitlement, that you have a right because of who you are or your background or social status. No- humility saves us from all that. And many may need it these days as the financial crisis continues.

A love for God brings true riches:

THE WEALTH OF ENJOYMENT OF GOD'S PROVISION INSTEAD OF DEPENDENCE ON FRAGILE ASSETS. "THE

UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES"

To be a man and a woman of God: (v12) calls us to an eternal life which we may lay hold of; (v13) connects us to God as the source of life.

This is about seeing and worshipping the God of verses 15-16.

"...he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."

Christianity is not an ascetic philosophy . It is a physical way of life. .We are not thankful enough... See 4:4-5 "For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."

The verse speaks about the uncertainty of riches. For some, avoiding the love of money and its evils and adopting a trust in God's rich provision is tested by loss. – of job, home, income, savings, pension.

V18 A love for God brings true riches: The treasure of Generosity - instead of greed. The rich are to get richer! They are to invest in a bank of good works to others. This is a treasury in the lives of others who will be in heaven with them. This teaching parallels the 'sound words of Jesus'. For example we have it in...

Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for

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Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The story of the dishonest manager ends with this lesson: (Luke 16)
9 "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."

Then Jesus continued to draw out key teaching about money:-

10 "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? 13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Those are the 'sound words' of Jesus which Paul may have known (the gospel of Luke was not necessarily written and available to Paul)

There are a great many great works to be done for Christ in the world which languish for lack of funds. Eg. The support of Moldovan pastors, a church building in Japan, Wycliffe Translators in the Philippines who can hardly afford to do the long careful work of making Bibles in neglected languages, And what of our own mission here?

Tithing: Many of us know the blessing that comes through obedience in this area:
Acts 5:32-6:5 Barnabas and Ananias

32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. 1 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

Imaging bringing this passage into a sermon about giving!!

WE GUARD OUR MONEY FROM THIEVES AND FROM WASTE. BUT DO WE GUARD IT FROM GOD?

Do we want to hear his hints about spending it on God things?.

CONCLUSION

Test of materialism – Josh Stowell “The real point of materialism is not how much we have, but what has us. It’s not what we hold, but how tightly we hold it. Not what we have, but how we got it. The test of materialism is whether our goods have made us proud or grateful, self-sufficient or God-sufficient.”

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

“Love money: Use God /or
Love God: use money.”

THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL

The root of Money love supports sick religion

Second, Money love feeds many other destructive cravings.

Third, Money love diverts faith astray

THE LOVE OF GOD BRINGS TRUE RICHES.

The high value of Contentment -in place of covetousness. It is ‘great gain’ as one aspect of Godliness.

The treasure of Humility -in place of haughtiness

The wealth of JOY in God’s provision instead of dependence on “the uncertainty of riches”

The treasure of Generosity - instead of greed.

Iain Stewart 14th August 2011 preached in Kings Fellowship Bangor