



“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

Treasures on Earth

Central Truth: A proper perspective of earthly possessions conquers materialism.

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Topic: Money

The apostle Paul said it well: “*Having food and raiment let us be therewith content*” (I Timothy 6:8). Jesus said it better: “*A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15). Each was speaking of the problem of materialism. It was a problem then as now. It is a problem in every generation.

We must deal with the material things. We must eat and drink, buy and sell, give and receive. God himself has given us the ability to do productive work and make money (Deuteronomy 8:18). There is nothing wrong in that so long as one makes money serve him rather than letting it master him. Material wealth is good when it is used for good purposes; it is evil when it is used for wrong purposes.

Why study the subject of materialism on Christmas Day [Dec. 25, 1988]? Is this not the season to concentrate on the birth of Jesus?

The purpose of Jesus coming in human flesh was that He “*might deliver us from this present evil world*” (Galatians 1:4). He who had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20) and who called His disciples to forsake material wealth to follow Him (Luke 14:33; Matthew 19:27-29) has a lesson for us on material and spiritual values. Read the accounts of the incarnation of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25; Philippians 2:5-11) and let it challenge you to conquer the spirit of materialism.

I. DEFINITION OF MATERIALISM

That which is a form of matter and has physical substance is called material. We speak of “a material object.” It stands in contrast to what is spiritual or ethereal, intangible and not subject to knowledge by the five senses. Materialism is a concern about that which is tangible and physical, usually in neglect of that which is intangible and spiritual.

A. Materialism is a theory. It is the doctrine that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life. A materialist believes that comfort, pleasure, and wealth are the only values or at least the highest goals in life. The result is that he is more concerned with material than with spiritual goals and values.

Because it is a theory, materialism can be taught. It can be taught by overt instruction in which the value of the material is discussed. It can be taught by neglecting to refer to spiritual things, so it appears that the material is the only thing of worth. The teacher who makes no reference to spiritual things is teaching materialistic values.

B. Materialism is an attitude. On the belief that the temporal is more important than the eternal, the world more important than God, the materialist pursues worldly things. He feels that the main thing in life is to accumulate wealth so he can use it for things that satisfy the flesh. Even the Christian must be careful at this point.

III. THE VALUE OF THE MATERIAL

The material universe is of great value. Materialism does not destroy the value of the material any more than gluttony destroys the value of food. Much good can be realized through the right use of material possessions. A Christian is not to forsake the use of material wealth, but rather use it as a good steward of God.

A. Material things were created by God. The Bible says it over and again. “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). The earth is the Lord's, and all that is upon it belongs to Him (Psalm 24:1). Everything that has existence came into being by the creative power and purpose of God (John 1:3). Look upon the earth and the skies as coming directly from God's hand.

Did God create a bad thing? Not at all. Emphasis on material values is bad only because man perverts it. Anything taken from its God-ordained place becomes an instrument of evil.

B. Material things are given as blessings from God. Examine

Deuteronomy 28. Notice the promise of material wealth which comes as direct blessings of God on His people (verses 8, 11, 12). An increase of one's possessions is called a "*blessing*" from God. God would not give a bad thing and call it a blessing on His people. He gives us power to get wealth because it can be used to benefit us and those who need our help. Look on your salary, your income from investments, and the increase in the value of your property as blessings from God. Paul warns us not to trust in the uncertain riches of this world, but to trust "*in the living God,*" recognizing Him as the one who gives us "*all things*" to enjoy and to share with others (I Timothy 6:17-19).

C. Material things are less important than spiritual things. Jesus asked, "*What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" (Matthew 16:26). He has lost far more than he has gained. Our labor must be for that which endures, not that which perishes (John 6:26). We must "*look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (II Corinthians 4:18). While you handle the material treasures of earth, remember how temporary they are.

D. Material things are earthbound. Money is only a medium of exchange. We trade it for temporary and passing things. Whether it is beads, shells, coins, or printed paper, it is just a medium by which we count value. It will all "*perish with the using*" (Colossians 2:22). Money is for this world only. "*We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*" (I Timothy 6:7). Treasures laid up on earth are subject to destruction by moth and rust and loss by theft (Matthew 6:20). It is unwise to be rich in this world's goods and not rich toward God.

III. THE DANGER OF MATERIALISM

A. Materialism can enslave. Jesus warned, "*No man can serve two masters. . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). "*Mammon*" means "money, riches, material wealth." Jesus said you cannot have as your goal in life obedience to God and pursuit of wealth at the same time. But notice the term "*masters.*" God will be your Master because of your devotion to Jesus Christ, or material wealth will be your master because of your devotion to its accumulation. Money will master you if Jesus is not your Lord.

The Bible warns that those who are determined to be rich will expose themselves to the devil's trap and end up in ruin and misery. "*The love of money is the root of all evil*" (I Timothy 6:10).

B. Materialism challenges commitment to Christ. Jesus said you “cannot” serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). What is the reason? “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). A married man cannot fall in love with another woman without it destroying his love for his wife. Neither can the Christian fall in love with material wealth without it destroying his love for God. Jesus made it very clear: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

C. Materialism fills one with anxiety. Jesus points out the worry about length of life, food, drink, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:25~33). He warns us against being filled with worry and saying, “What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (Matthew 6:31). Such a person is beset with frustration and worry.

Why would one have such anxiety? It is because he does not look to the heavenly Father who knows he has need of such things (Matthew 6:32). Therefore, he has no more hope of providential provision than the heathen does.

An ancient fable tells of a poor man who was given two wishes. He wished first for great wealth, and it was granted. He was unable to sleep because of fear that someone would steal his wealth. So his second wish was to be a poor man again. Wealth is not the cure all that many people think it to be.

D. Materialism brings judgment. The Bible warns, “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Timothy 6:9, 10). The apostle James describes the wailing and moaning of the rich men who will lose all their wealth when they stand before God to be judged for their fraud and indulgences on earth (James 5:1-6). Be warned lest you fall into that condemnation.

E. Materialism deceives. Jesus told of a farmer who became very rich because of the blessings of God on his crops. The man forgot God in his prosperity. He told himself, “Thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19). God called the man a fool because he was content to be rich in this world and poor toward God. There is no real security in material wealth, either in this world or the world to come.

IV. OVERCOMING MATERIALISM

A. Cultivate the grace of contentment. Discipline your desires, refusing to want more and more expensive things. *“Having food and raiment let us be therewith content”* (I Timothy 6:8). *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). You will never get enough to satisfy unless you cultivate the grace of contentment. Offer your desires to God as a spiritual sacrifice and learn to be content.

B. Distinguish between the material and materialism. God said He gives us the power to make money and accumulate material things (Deuteronomy 8:17,18). There is nothing wrong with that. But the desire to accumulate material things, or pride in what we have accumulated, is sin (I Timothy 6:7-10). Remember that the spirit of materialism turns from God in its compulsion to have more and more. The acquisition of material things is an indication of the blessings of God. Materialism is a rejection of God. Make that distinction clear in your life.

C. Follow the example of the victorious saints of God. Moses gave up all the riches and luxuries of Pharaoh's palace to follow the will of God for his life (Hebrews 11:23-26). Those who walked with Him never lacked food or water (Exodus 16, 17), clothing or shoes (Deuteronomy 29:5). God cares for His own.

A traveler in the desert must distinguish between an oasis and a mirage. The one sustains life; the other brings death.

A wise person will recognize that the materialistic spirit of this world offers far more than it can give. He will use this world, but not abuse it, knowing that the fashion of this world passes away (I Corinthians 7:31).

Be more concerned with the spiritual values found by devotion to God than with the physical promises of this world, and you will be free from the spirit of materialism.

Questions

1. What is materialism?
2. How does Luke 12:15 warn against it?
3. How can you distinguish between the material and materialism?
4. How does II Corinthians 4:18 relate to this study?
5. How does materialism enslave a person?

6. What is the warning in I Timothy 6:10?
7. How does a materialistic spirit lead one away from Christ?
8. What other dangers do you see in materialism?
9. How does Hebrews 13:5 show victory over materialism?
10. How can you apply this study to your life this week?