

SETTING OUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE –ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FOR LESSONS 5 & 6

When it comes to prosperity and possessions far too many of God's people cling on to the Old Testament and its promises to Israel. In his book *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, Randy Alcorn has it right:

*In the Old Testament, material blessing was given for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:2), yet in the New Testament many of the saints were poor (Matthew 8:20; 2 Corinthians 11:27; James 2:5). Enjoying worldly wealth is emphasized in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:11; Joshua 1:15; Proverbs 15:6), yet the New Testament talks about giving away possessions (Mark 10:17-21; 1 Timothy 6:17-18). By their obedience, the Israelites avoided persecution (Deuteronomy 28:7), but by their obedience Christians incur persecution (Matthew 5:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6). Why the disparity? Because God was determined that New Testament saints would understand that their home is in another world. No book better demonstrates the relationship of the Old and the New Testaments, and the two worlds in which they center, than the book of Hebrews. ... We no longer sacrifice animals, because the Lamb of God has come. We no longer worship in a temple, because we ourselves are the temples of God's Holy Spirit. We no longer need a priest, because Christ is our high priest, and we ourselves are a believing priesthood. **WE NO LONGER LOOK TO MATERIAL RICHES, BECAUSE OF THE SPIRITUAL RICHES THAT ARE OURS IN CHRIST.** God demonstrated to the nations surrounding Israel His superiority to their gods by prospering the people of Israel when they obeyed Him. Now He wishes to display Christ's Lordship and presence to the world around us through a better faith and morality, **NOT A HIGHER STANDARD OF LIVING.** The Israelites were citizens of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:7-9; 11:8-12). Their destination was on this earth. But New Testament saints haven't arrived yet at their destination and won't until our lives here are done. We are told that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11). Scripture spells out our identity and role here on earth:*

- Our citizenship is in heaven, not earth (Philippians 3:20)
- We are aliens, strangers, and pilgrims on this earth (Hebrews 11:13)
- We are ambassadors representing Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20)

These passages argue not only against prosperity theology but against a large portion of evangelical teaching, preaching, and literature that is geared toward making us more at home in this world. James warns us of the dangers of worldliness (James 4:4).

*The Levites had no earthly inheritance, because God Himself was their inheritance (Deuteronomy 18:1-2). Christians have been told that we are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). The priests had no earthly inheritance, and **NEITHER DO WE OF THE NEW COVENANT PRIESTHOOD.** ...The more holdings we have on earth, the more likely we are to forget that we are citizens of another world, not this one, and that our inheritance lies there, not here. **PILGRIMS ARE UNATTACHED.** They are travelers, not settlers, who are acutely aware that excessive things will distract and burden them. Material things are valuable to pilgrims, **BUT ONLY AS THEY FACILITATE THEIR MISSION.** ... **I AM CONVINCED THAT THE GRETAEST DETERRENT TO OUR GIVING IS THIS: THE ILLUSION THAT EARTH IS OUR HOME.***

"Our society seems to be pursuing an increasingly materialistic lifestyle, and we as believers are not immune to it. We act out guidelines we receive from Christian and worldly advertisers alike. We aim to live the "good life," as advertized on television and billboards and in the press. We are brainwashed by the demons that drive the American media, and we have it all—or we are on our way to having it all! We have closets full of suits, ties, shirts, dresses, blouses and shoes for every season. We own several cars, a savings account and insurance policies. We have a house and a mortgage to go with it and, of course, credit card debt. The television is always on, and we subscribe to popular magazines and newspapers. We can't live without ice cream in our freezer, and we drink sodas between meals. We eat cakes and cookies and junk food. We wash with perfumed soaps and have a medicine chest full of cosmetics, medicines and spray cans."

After coming to the States to go to school (and pastored here for a few years) he too fell for the American dream!

*"My family and I were not unaffected by the materialistic lifestyle around us, and we, too, were caught up in this same spirit. **ON THE SURFACE EVERYTHING WAS FINE.** I was preaching, studying the Word for hours daily and shepherding a flock of 200 souls. Our church was growing. The congregation was being fed the Word of God. People were being saved, but I was miserable inside. My soul was drying up. I was tormented by the knowledge I carried inside my heart and my head. **OTHERS HAD NOT SEEN WHAT I HAD SEEN IN ASIA,** and I could not forget the people I had left behind. I was haunted by the memory of the millions of lost souls in north India ...So for two years my heart had hardened. ... Then, as I prayed and evaluated **MY LIFE IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY, IT ALL CHANGED.** I let go of one materialistic thing after another."*

Martin Luther said that on his calendar there were only two days: "Today" and "That Day." May we live in such a way today and invest our money and possessions today in light of eternity!

*"We can stand anything that God and nature can throw at us save [except] only plenty. If I wanted to destroy a nation, **I WOULD GIVE IT TOO MUCH, AND I WOULD HAVE IT ON ITS KNEES, MISERABLE, GREEDY, SICK.**" - John Steinbeck to Adlai Stevenson in 1960 found in the Washington Post*

During the days of the Iron Curtain, a persecuted Romanian pastor said, "In my experience, 95% of believers who face the test of persecution pass it, while 95% who face the test of prosperity fail it." This is what Thomas Carlyle meant when he penned these words: "Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man, but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity."

"But I knew one thing: God did not shower such great blessing on this nation for the Christians to live in extravagance, self-indulgence, and spiritual weakness."

-K.P. Yohannan, a national missionary from India who came here for awhile and was appalled at American Christianity

After one of our church's missionaries had been home for a month, he said, 'I've been overwhelmed with the materialism here.' When another missionary was returning to the field after a furlough, we asked him, 'What struck you the most in the time you were home with us?' His matter-of-fact reply was sobering, 'What struck me most was how people use their houses to make statements to each other; their houses aren't just places to keep warm and dry, but showcases to display their wealth and impress each other. Both of these men are from other cultures. **The sad thing is that if either had stayed in the United States for another year or two, HE MIGHT NOT HAVE NOTICED.** Like the frog that boiled to death by degrees, we tend to gradually acclimate to our materialism, becoming desensitized to it. **FINALLY, WE REGARD IT AS NORMAL RATHER THAN AN ABERRATION!** The hardest part of dealing with our materialism is that it has become so much a part of us. Like people who lived in darkness for many years, we have been **REMOVED FROM THE LIGHT SO LONG THAT WE DON'T KNOW HOW DARK IT REALLY IS. MANY OF US HAVE NEVER KNOWN WHAT IT IS LIKE NOT TO BE MATERIALISTIC.**"

-Randy Alcorn

The Prince of Preachers' C.H. Spurgeon once said, that in all of his years of ministry and all of the people whom he had heard confess, he had never heard anyone confess to the **sin of covetousness**, which is commonly referred to today as "materialism."

QUOTES FROM THE PAST

"For all luxury is foolish and empty to the servants of God. These, then, are the evil desires that slay the servants of God." -Hermas, 150 A.D.

"These are the ones who have faith indeed, but they also have the riches of the world. As a result, when tribulation comes, they deny the Lord on account of their riches and business. ... So also those who are rich in this world cannot be useful to the Lord unless their riches are cut down." -Hermas, 150 A.D.

*"Foremost of all evil desires is the desire after another man's wife or husband. There is also **the desire after extravagance**, many useless dainties and drinks, and many other foolish **luxuries**. For all **luxury** is foolish and empty to the servants of God. These, then, are the **evil desires** that slay the servants of God." -Hermas, 150 A.D.*

*"**Wealth**, when not properly governed, is a stronghold of evil. Many, because of casting their eyes on it, will never reach the kingdom of heaven. For they are sick for the things of this world, and are living proudly through **luxury**. ... **Love of money is found to be the stronghold of evil** ... But the best riches is the poverty of desires. And the true magnanimity is not to be proud of wealth, but to despise it." -Clement*

"But do not let it trouble your understanding when you see the unrighteous having riches and the servants of God in need." -Clement 195

"Wealth, when not properly governed, is a stronghold of evil. Many, because of casting their eyes on it, will never reach the kingdom of heaven. For they are sick for the things of the world, and are living proudly through luxury. ... Love of money is found to be the stronghold of evil, which the apostle says, 'is the root of all evils.' But the best riches is poverty of desires. And the true magnanimity [generosity of spirit] is not to be proud of wealth, but to despise it." -Clement, 195 A.D.

"It was difficult for the soul not to be seduced and ruined by the luxuries and flowery enchantments that beset remarkable wealth." -Clement,

"That many of us are called poor, this is not our disgrace, but our glory. For, as our mind is relaxed by luxury, so is it strengthened by frugality. Yet, who can be poor if he does not want—if he does not crave for—the possessions of others? Who can be poor if he is rich towards God? He, rather, is poor, who although he has much, desires more." -Mark Felix, 200 A.D.

"A blind love of one's own property has deceived many." -Cyprian, 250 A.D.

"So it is when a man walks along a road, the lighter he travels the happier he is. equally on the journey of life a man is more blessed if he does not pant beneath a burden of riches." -Tertullian

*"You are the captive and **slave of your money!** You are bound with the chains and bonds of **covetousness**. You, whom Christ had once loosed, are once more in chains. The **lust of possessing and of money** not to be sought for ... We brought nothing into this world, and neither can we take anything away. Therefore, having maintenance and clothing, let us be content with these. But those who **want to become rich** fall into temptation and a snare." -Cyprian, 250 A.D.*

"In this very matter you are sinning against God if you think that riches were given you for the purpose of thoroughly enjoying ..." -Cyprian,

"How can they follow Christ, who are held back by the chains of their wealth? ... They think they possess, but they are possessed instead. They are the bond-slaves of their money, not the lords of their money. They are slaves of their profit." -Cyprian, 250 A.D.

"There property held them in chains; chains that had shackled their courage and choked their faith and hampered their judgment and throttled their soul. If they stored up their treasure in heaven they would not now have an enemy and a thief within their household. They think of themselves as owners, whereas it is they rather who are owned. Enslaved as they are to their own property they are not the master of their own money, but its slave." -Cyprian

NOTE: The affluent of Cyprian's day would not be nearly as affluent as the middle class of today!

"Do not you know that God entrusted you with that money to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to help the stranger, the widow, the fatherless; and indeed, as far as it will go, to relieve the wants of all mankind? HOW CAN YOU, HOW DARE YOU, DEFRAUD YOUR LORD, BY APPLYING IT TO ANY OTHER PURPOSE?"
- John Wesley

"Money never stays with me; it would burn me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible lest it should find its way into my heart."

- John Wesley,

"I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."

- John Wesley

*"Wherever **true Christianity** spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality, which, in the natural course of things, must beget riches! **And riches naturally begets pride, love of the world, and every that is destructive of Christianity.** Now, if there is no way to prevent this, Christianity is inconsistent with itself and, of consequence, cannot stand, cannot continue long among any people; since, wherever it generally prevails, it saps its own foundation.*

-John Wesley

"American Christians live in the richest nation on earth and enjoy an average household income of \$42,409. The World Bank reports that 1.2 billion of the world's poorest people try to survive on just on dollar a day (\$365.00 a year). At least one billion people have never heard the Gospel. ... If American Christians just tithed, they would have another \$143 billion dollars to empower the poor and spread the Gospel."

--Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience:*

"Our American level of living is the highest of any people in the world, because our standard of living is highest, the wants are the highest."

-Pierre Martineau, *Chicago Tribune*

"I place no value on anything that I possess, except in relation to the kingdom of God."

-David Livingstone

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

-Jim Elliot

"Any temporal possession can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality." -A.W. Tozer