

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Word to the Wealthy

Scripture: Luke 12:15

Code: A357

Promoting everything from beer to soap, advertisers entice you to buy their product by creating discontentment-if you just buy the fancy car, the elaborate entertainment center, and the designer outfit, you'll be satisfied. Say goodbye to boredom, say farewell to loneliness, say hello to happiness. In any case, they don't want you to be content with what you have. Not surprisingly, most people aren't.

America's incredible affluence highlights a major problem with unredeemed man: he can't handle what he produces because he's ultimately and totally selfish. When man's sinful heart is tempted into a selfish attachment to stuff, greed takes over and self-destruction is the ultimate end. He's not happy without it and he's unsatisfied once he gets it-it's the enigma of materialism.

With that in mind, you can easily see why managing your money and possessions is a struggle, even for Christians. What do you do with it? How should you invest it? How should you spend it? Your answers to those questions will reveal much about your spiritual maturity. Sadly, however, many Christians have bought into the world's philosophy, forgetting what the Lord Jesus said in Luke 12:15: "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

The apostle Paul addressed that issue in First Timothy 6 where he directs his attention to "those who are rich in this present world" (6:17). Perhaps you don't consider yourself rich because you don't have an expensive car, a fancy house, or a large bank account. But "rich" in this context refers to someone who has more than he needs to provide food, clothing, and shelter for himself and his family (v. 8). If you have discretionary funds, you are in fact rich, and Paul speaks to you.

It isn't wrong to have money and possessions; it is wrong to build your life around them. Paul doesn't command the rich to give all their money away and take a vow of poverty, but he does give specific guidelines to follow when dealing with material things.

Inherent Dangers

The first thing Paul says is "not to be conceited" (v. 17)-at the heart of the matter. Rich people are constantly faced with the temptation to take on airs of superiority-with thinking they're better than those who have less. Wealth and pride are twins-the more you have, the more you will tend to battle pride and self-exaltation. It's easy to believe we gained our wealth solely because of our own abilities (Deuteronomy 8:10-19).

In contrast, Philippians 2:3-4 says we're to be humble, not just looking to our own affairs but also to

the affairs of others. Greek and Roman culture mocked humility and exalted pride-just as our society does today. That makes humility a distinctive that marks those who live for Christ.

First Timothy 6:17 goes on to say we must not fix our "hope on the uncertainty of riches." We must continually fight that temptation and fix our hope on the reality of future grace (1 Peter 1:13). Still, our natural tendency is to rely on our riches when we have a lot, and turn to God when we have little.

I believe one reason so many Christians in America are apathetic is they don't really believe they need God. They have replaced Him with their estate planner and retirement fund. I'm not implying we should ignore planning for the future and, in effect, presume on God. But when you cling to your possessions and live in fear of not having them, you ignore the Holy Spirit's leading and put your confidence in your wealth instead of God.

From Whom All Blessings Flow

In contrast Paul says we're to fix our hope "on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). After all, He owns everything (Psalm 50:10). If you really want to be happy, view everything you have as a gift from God. You don't own your money or your possessions-you manage them for God. He uses them as a test to see where the focus of your heart is. God wants us to enjoy what He has given us. When He blesses us with more than we need, it is an opportunity to invest the surplus in whatever will most honor His name.

In Philippians 4:11-12 Paul says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." That contentment, totally unrelated to earthly possessions, is always at a premium in the world. And yet it is that attitude that marks us as sons of our all-sufficient Father in heaven.

Your Dollars at Work

Our trust in God is manifest in how we act. So Paul tells us "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (1 Timothy 6:18). The Greek word translated "to do good" speaks of that which is inherently, intrinsically, and qualitatively good. We are to do noble, excellent, praiseworthy things with our money, not things that are superficial and shallow. Here are some basic responsibilities from 1 Timothy 5 that most honor God.

Provide for you family (5:8)

Provide for widows (5:3, 16)

Provide for church leaders (5:17)

Beyond those responsibilities, we are to be "rich in good works." Riches do not belong in a bank, endlessly compounding interest to provide for your security. That money won't follow you to heaven-your deeds will (Revelation 14:13). Money stays here, but the good you've done for Christ's sake is

an investment in eternity.

The word "generous" identifies the kind of good deeds we should do. Be willing to meet any need and to act toward others in the same generous way God has acted toward you. Share what you have with others, and you will reap the fruit of your unselfishness. The phrase "willing to share" speaks of participating in fellowship with someone else. Implication? Don't give from a distance. Rather than merely writing a check, be involved in people's lives. Share with those in your church or Bible study who have needs. Share with all who have limited resources. And especially share in the advancement of the kingdom.

A Long-Term Investment

Amassing money and possessions can not provide contentment. If you want to be happy, pour your treasure into a heavenly vault, where it will pay eternal dividends. Paul said, store up for yourself "the treasure of a good [fund] for the future, so that [you] may take hold of that which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:19). You must be committed to a heavenly perspective, content with waiting to receive your dividend from the Lord. Go against the grain of the world's preoccupation with instant gratification and seek your eternal reward.

The legitimacy of your spiritual claim is proved by how you handle your money and possessions. Your house, your car, your bank account, they are a test of your spirituality. Don't let the world dictate what you do with your money and possessions. When you pass the test of personal possessions, you can look with joyful anticipation to the day when the Lord will say, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things...enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

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