

The Christian and Materialism

The story is told of Rose Greenhow, a Confederate spy during the Civil War, who tried to evade capture and the loss of her fortune by sewing the gold she had gained into the seams of her dress. But the ship she boarded sank, and the weight of the gold made it impossible for the life preserver to support her. She sank to the bottom with all her wealth. Dr. Pierce Harris, who told the story, pointed out that death did to her what it does to all of us, because we “cannot take it with us” when we die. But sometimes, we might add, it takes us with it!

Luke 12: 13 – 34

1) The pursuit of materialism

- Man is obsessed with materialism – the accumulation and possessiveness of material things. If there is an issue that confronts us today as Christians it is materialism.
 - Other issues that confront us such as homosexuality or abortion needed to be dealt but they are quite blatantly obvious (unfortunately not by all therefore the need to deal with them) that they are sinful and what the Christian’s stand should be.
 - But materialism is far more subtle enslaving those who are consumed by it.
 - 1 Timothy 6: 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.
- The capitalist system of governance – the American dream – is based on man’s nature to want more possessions
 - Incentives to work harder are always materialistic in nature
 - Communism doesn’t work, not because it is necessarily an inferior system of governance but because it goes contrary to man’s nature of accumulation of personal wealth
 - Sharing wealth so that poverty is eradicated is not within sinful human capacity.
 - Loving your neighbour as yourself and doing to others as you would have them do to you is taken all but in the material sense for a materialistic person.
- On the other hand many people are poor or in financial difficulties because of materialism
 - There maybe was a time when people wanted material things to keep up with the neighbours
 - Now people just want more material things.

2) The consequences of materialism

- It diverts our attention from God that we become rich in this world but not rich towards God
 - For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (v.34)
 - Our hearts cannot be in two places at the same time.
 - Matthew 6: 24 "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.
 - One of artist Andy Warhol’s great pictures is his “Last Supper” in which he superimposes the General Electric logo and the wrapper from a bar of Dove soap over a dim drawing of Leonardo da Vinci’s famous work. Warhol meant no irreverence. He was rather making a statement that few will deny. Spiritual values are often overshadowed or hidden by materialism.
- It causes strife between people
 - Families are divided over property
 - People fight over their possessions
- It causes internal strife and anxiety which causes us not to mature in Christ
 - Luke 8: 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature
- It gives a false sense of security
 - Luke 12: 20 "But God said to him, `You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?
 - In 1923 at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, eight of the most powerful money-magnates in the world gathered for a meeting. These eight, if they combined their resources and their assets, controlled more money than the U.S. Treasury. In that group were such men as:

- Charles Schwab. He was the president of a steel company. Later in life he died penniless
- Richard Whitney was the president of the New York Stock Exchange. He spent the rest of his life serving a sentence in Sing Sing Prison.
- Arthur Cutton was a wheat speculator. He became insolvent
- Albert Fall was a presidential cabinet member, personally a very wealthy man. He was pardoned from a federal prison so he might die at home
- Jesse Livermore was the greatest bear on Wall Street in his generation. He committed suicide
- Leon Fraser was the president of the International Bank of Settlements. He committed suicide
- Ivan Krueger headed the largest monopoly. Quite an impressive group of people! He committed suicide.
- Seven of those eight great big money magnates had lives that were disasters before they left planet Earth.
What mistake did they make? Thinking that what they had and what they controlled belonged to them.
- It wrongly gives the idea that the more a person's possessions the more superior he is
 - Luke 12: 15 Then he (Jesus) said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."
 - The materialistic person normally gets a domineering and controlling attitude
 - James 2: 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

3) Being rich towards God

- Set your heart on God and His kingdom and not on material things
 - Luke 12: 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.
 - Colossian 3: 1 – 3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God
- Put material possessions in the place where they belong
 - They are needed in this life but can be taken from us at any time.
 - Proverbs 23: 5 Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.
- Have a balanced attitude towards poverty and wealth
 - Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.
 - Don't glorify poverty either
- Develop an attitude of generosity towards others without expecting anything in return
 - Matthew 6: 2 – 4 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
 - Luke 6: 29 – 31 If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.
 - Luke 14: 12 – 14 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."
 - The attitude of giving without expecting to get something back breaks the power of materialism over us