

"Missions and Money - Greed"
(1 Timothy 6:6-19)
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⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

For many years now, February has been dedicated as missions month here at City on a Hill. During this month we've focused on all things related to missions. We've looked at global missions, unreached people groups and we've looked at local missions and the needs of our city. This year the theme is still missions but with a specific focus on money. So, for the next month we're going to be looking at the connection between money and missions.

Now, some of you may be a little bit skeptical about this theme. Perhaps there's been planted in you this idea that the church is just after your money. I could see where that would come from, because there have been churches where that's been true. There are churches that do exploit the poor so the church can line its own pockets.

I remember reading an expose' article in the Toronto Star some years ago, where a megachurch in our city was being investigated. They discovered that the pastors were living it up, driving fancy cars and living in mansions north of the city and they owned a mansion down in Florida. And as they continued to look into this, they discovered that the parishioners of this church were primarily from the lower to middle class income bracket. So, they were collected the hard earned offerings of the low and middle class and they themselves were living the luxurious life. But what made this even worse was that very little of their multi-million dollar church budget actually went back into the needy communities in which their members lived. When you hear stories like it can make you very suspicious of the church, but not every church is like that.

There may be other reasons why people have such a strong reaction when the church talks about money. Money is a very sensitive topic and it reveals a lot about us. Many people are willing to talk about their porn addiction before they're willing to share about their money habits. We feel that we'll be accepted for one and condemned for the other. For example, if you anonymously looked at someone's finances, you'd be able to learn a lot about that person. Now listen to this principle that comes straight from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus says, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." You see, that's what our bankbooks reveal. They reveal what's truly in our hearts. They reveal our attitudes about almost everything. Our bankbooks will reveal what we love. It'll reveal our values. It can even reveal the quality and depth of our faith.

Another reason we resist hearing teaching on money is because one of our highest values is our independence. And that's what money provides. Having money allows us to do the things we want to do. It allows us to buy not only the things we need, but the things we want. It gives us the opportunities to take nice vacations, live in nice neighborhoods, eat at yummy restaurants. Not having money restricts those freedoms. For many of us, we've become so accustomed to those freedoms, and the last thing we want is for someone to begin restricting us from enjoying them, but here we are and we're going to be spending the entire month talking about money, especially as it relates to missions. We're doing this because missions and money go hand in hand. As an old friend of mine once said to me, "Money isn't everything, but you can't do much without it." And that applies to missions.

As we learned, worship is the ultimate goal of the church. Missions is the means to see the worship of our one true God happen in places where it is not happening and it takes money to do missions. Yes it takes prayer. Yes it takes the powerful preaching of the word. Yes it requires people who are willing to go, but it also requires money. It takes a lot of money to send missionaries to foreign countries. It costs money to build bible colleges, hospitals, and orphanages, and learning centers. It costs money to get clean water to remote villages. It costs money to build homes for families that live in makeshift houses made of wood pallets and tarps. It costs money to get the bible translated into hundreds of languages that are still without the bible. It costs money to show the Jesus film in one's native tongue. It costs money to transmit gospel content over radio waves into closed countries. It costs money to plant churches in gospel-deficient neighborhoods in our city. It costs money to welcome the refugee family to our country. It costs money to run city missions that reach the homeless. It costs money to provide a plethora of community services in the name of Christ like job placement, literacy, counseling, clothing, food banks and on and on it goes.

That's why we're talking about money, because money is needed for mission work. So here's where we're going this month. Today we'll be looking at the subject of greed, then we'll talk about stewardship, and then generosity.

So, let's dive right in. Let's look at the subject of greed. I remember listening to a sermon by pastor Tim Keller on the subject of greed. He mentioned that he was giving a sermon series on the 7 deadly sins, of which one is greed. And he predicted that when the subject of greed came about that there'd be less in attendance than for the others. And he was right because people tend to think that they are not greedy. Pinpointing greed is really difficult because you can always find someone greedier. As well, it's not like adultery, where it's very clear once a person has committed adultery, but greed is different. I would agree with him. Most of us probably don't think of ourselves as greedy people.

The Bible has much to teach us about money and the subject of greed. Paul tells us that greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). So, there you have it, to be greedy is to be an idolater, an idol worshiper. To be greedy means that money and your possessions are your god. To be greedy means you love things more than the giver of those things, more than God himself.

Let's take a closer look at this passage in 1 Timothy 6; verses 6-10 provides us with some rich instructions and warnings about greed.

In verse 10 Paul warns against greed, which he calls "the love of money." That's a pretty simple and good definition of greed—the love of money. That's exactly what greed is. The opposite of greed is godliness and in particular godliness with contentment. Let's explore both of those.

Paul tells us in v10 that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. We need to heed this teaching because he's telling us that there are a lot of sins that stem from or result from this one sin. Just to be clear, it's not that money is the root of all kinds of evil, but rather the LOVE of money that is the root of all kinds of evil. The love of money is a sin that breeds more sin. It's a sin that sprouts other kinds of sins. And if you let this one sin go unchecked, it'll grow and spread into dozens of other sins. And the opposite is true as well. If you keep this sin in check, then you'll save yourself the hassle of having to deal with a whole bunch of related sins.

How exactly is the love of money a root sin, rather than a stem sin, or a branch sin? Or perhaps we can think of it this way. How is the love of money a primary sin, rather than a secondary sin? Or how is the love of money a cause sin, rather than an effect sin?

Well, first, it has to do with love and love comes from the heart, the very center of a person's being. When we love something or someone, our actions follow, and fall in line with the thing we love. God created us to love him first and foremost. That's why you and I were created. And when we do love him, the rest of our lives begin to adjust to that love. We begin to act and think in relation to that love.

It is not incidental that the first of the ten commandments is that we are not to have any other gods in place of the one true God and it's not accidental that Jesus clearly teaches us that our greatest command is a command to love, to love God because these are primary commands. These are the most basic and fundamental of all the commands. First and foremost, we are to love God, but since greed is an alternative love, our lives will begin to adjust to be aligned with our love for money. We will adjust the way we utilize our time for the love of money. We will adjust the way we view our relationships because of our love for money. We will reorganize our life priorities because of our love for money.

Paul tells us in verse 9, "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." That's what the love of money does.

More specifically, here are some of the secondary sins that spring from the sin of loving money:

- dishonesty, lying, cheating -- a classic example is lying on our tax returns;
- making a shady or false tax exemption claim or false deduction;
- not reporting income -- a salesman, who'll lie and cheat to close the deal; think about scandals in the car industry.
- We use people, exploit people. We take advantage of them.

Second, Paul tells us that because of the love of money some people have wandered from the faith. Jesus tells us, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both and money." Both Jesus and Paul are telling us that it is virtually impossible, in fact it is impossible to love God and at the same time love money. One will replace the other. And it'll cause us to wander from our faith in God and we pierce ourselves with many griefs. We self-inflict many wounds and pains and heartaches because of our love for money. Consider the unnecessary stress that we put ourselves through because of the love of money.

I remember some years ago, after my mother had died, my dad was getting remarried. After he got remarried, I began to ask, "I wonder who will get his inheritance when he dies. Will he give it to my brother and me or will he give it to his new wife." I couldn't stop thinking about it. All the time it was in my head. Now my dad wasn't super rich or anything, but he had a nice home, and a fairly successful dry-cleaning business. When I look back at that time, I can see that so many ungodly things were happening to me. I was getting greedy. I was feeling entitled. I was getting jealous. I was putting my trust in this potential wealth. It was affecting my worship and my prayer. It was filling up all of my headspace. And it wasn't until my wife knocked some gentle sense into me that I finally got out of it. She said something like, "Look, we are where we are because of God, because of his provision, not really because of your parents, so let's continue to trust in God." And that broke the cycle. And I vowed never to think about it again. And I didn't. Now fast forward to the time of my father's death. He died without a penny to his name. He made some bad business decisions. There were some external circumstances he had no control over as well, and when he died he didn't even leave behind a penny to even pay for his own funeral. I had wasted so much mental and spiritual energy, over nothing. Those are the dangers of greed.

Now let's look at the flipside. Paul instructs us in verse 6 that godliness with contentment is great gain. This is the opposite attitude we are to have instead of greed. We are to remain content. Paul mentions something very similar in Philippians 4:12-13

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Many folks have taken this verse out of context applying to any and every trial and situation in life, but the context tells us it has to do with money and possessions. Paul's experienced both sides of the coin. He knows what it's like to have a lot and he knows what it's like to be lacking. So in either situation, Paul says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

In 1 Timothy 6 Paul is addressing some people who wrongly thought that the way to get rich is through God. In verse 5 he addresses those who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. This is the danger of the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel is a false gospel that promises riches to people. It teaches that God's will is that all of his children are healthy and wealthy. And that's just not true. Here it is right here. Paul is directly criticizing and attacking this kind of teaching.

He then teaches us the right way. Godliness with contentment (in regards to money) is great gain. You see the play on words. Loving and wanting and getting more money isn't great gain. Rather, godliness with contentment is great gain. He's saying that if you want a really great return on your investment, if you want an investment that's fail proof, then try godliness with contentment. His definition of contentment is having the basic necessities of life – food and clothing.

What's the key to obtaining this contentment? It's having the right perspective, an eternal perspective. In verse 7 it says, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of the it." Never was there written a more true statement. Look at the bookends of your life. Look at the moment of your birth and now look at the fleeting moments at our death. Every person comes in the same way, with nothing. And every person leaves the same way, with nothing. As they say, there are no trailers behind hearses. This very sobering truth about the bookends of our lives is there to help us live in a radically different way.

It'd be utter foolishness to live one's life trying to amass wealth and possessions when we know that when all is said and done, we will take none of it with us. If that's the foolish way to live one's life, what then is the right way? Well, Jesus tells us.

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **(Matthew 6:19–21)**

This is the alternative life God calls Christians to live. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Invest in heavenly treasures. What does that mean practically, specifically? Look with me to 1 Timothy 6:17.

V17 – Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

So, the first bit of advice is a warning to be arrogant or prideful about their status, about their wealth. Because wealth has a way of making us prideful. And when we take pride in our money we are putting our hope in our money. So, we shouldn't do that because it's temporary, rather we should place our hope in God who is eternal, and he gets rid of pride, because we acknowledge that what I have is because God gave it to me. He's the one who richly provides.

The second piece of advice is this. There is a command directed specifically to the rich. You are to do good. You are to be rich in good deeds. Be generous. Be willing to share. It means that the wealth that God has graciously given to you is to be used for God's purposes. It's meant as an opportunity for you to be generous to those that are in need. I remember having a conversion with a young man in the workforce. As we were having lunch, I said to him, If God has given you the ability to make a lot of money, then you should make a lot of money. But also give away a lot of money. Be incredibly generous too.

Pastor John Piper said it like this. It's not a sin to make a lot of money, but it is a sin to keep a lot of it.

Church, each of us has this one life to live. This life is our only opportunity to choose for whom we will live and whom we will serve. And one of the ways we express that is through our attitudes and actions with money.

So, what's the ultimate motivation for us living this kind of radically counter-cultural life?

First it's God. He gives life to everything. He's the great loving creator. He is our gracious provider. Shouldn't that be motivation enough to live without greed and with great contentment?

Second it's the life and death and return of Christ. He made the confession before Pilate, that he was indeed the king of the Jews which led to his execution. He remained faithful to death. He died for us and he will return again to judge and to rule. We will all be held to account. God as our creator and Christ as our Saviour and King are the real motivators for contentment. Only God, only Christ can set us free from greed. Only when we allow the one true God to be God, will we be free from the idolatry of money and possessions.

Let's pray.