

# Materialism

by Joe Helm

God doesn't say that we aren't to have material goods, but He makes it clear that we are stewards of what He gives us. Pastors often preach against materialism and about stewardship, but even pastors can get caught in the riptide that can carry them out to the sea of worldly concerns.

Christians have been entrusted with time, talents, treasure, temples (our bodies), the testimony of our salvation, and much, much more. God has promised eternal blessings to those who wisely, faithfully, and profitably invest what He entrusts to them. Unfortunately, there is an enemy of our faithful stewardship. It is the enemy within—the flesh, our old fallen nature.

Paul refers to the desire for material goods as “the will to be rich” (I Timothy 6:9). Money itself is not the problem. Money is neutral. Instead, the love of money and the trust in uncertain riches are the problems.

These problems are not unique to our materialistic generation. In Genesis chapter 3, we read that Eve eyed the forbidden fruit, which was pleasant to the eyes, good for food, and desirable to make one wise. That desire for material things deceives us into thinking that the material world is all that there is.

The desire for material goods isn't always the desire for great wealth. It may be the yearning simply to gain control over our lives and to minimize uncertainty. While God doesn't promise that we will have all our needs stored up in advance, He does offer us a life free from uncertainty, if we will trust Him. Still, the temptation is to wrest control back from Him. That's what Eve wanted to do.

Our old nature seeks material things in order to obtain provision, power, and purpose. We think that these will give us control. You don't have to be a Main Street businessman to be tempted toward materialism. When your ministry malfunctions, it is easy to look initially for material solutions.

There are three reasons we pursue material goods. First, we seek material things to provide our needs, our wants, and our ease. Second, we seek material things for power over circumstances, power in social circles, power in conducting business, and power in organizations. Third, we seek material things in order to find purpose in life.

We tend to focus our energies on fulfilling our material needs. You ask: “Isn't that natural? After all, we need food, clothing, and shelter.” Yes, these needs are natural, and that's just the point. Jesus calls us not to a natural, but to a supernatural life. He promises to meet the material needs of the Kingdom-seeking believer.

From the day that Paul met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he pursued the purposes of the Kingdom, and his needs were met. He said that he learned how to be content. He told Timothy to be content with food and clothing (I Timothy 6:8).

Yet, we almost never are satisfied with merely our needs. We also have wants—desires for things we don't really need. In my law practice, I've counseled many young couples with problems that started with coveting things they couldn't afford. I Timothy

6:6 says that godliness with contentment is great gain. God wants His stewards not only to live by faith but to live in contentment.

Unfortunately, that old nature isn't satisfied even when its needs and wants are met. It craves ease. Remember Luke 12:16-19: "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Our flesh wants to eat, drink, and be merry.

God wants his stewards to have an eternal perspective, not a temporal perspective. We don't live on this earth to have ease but to serve God until He removes the stewardship from us. We don't require physical ease. We need spiritual ease.

I see wealthy people every week. Many are miserable, empty, listless. They have no focus, no purpose, no joy. Even though they may have acquired physical ease through their riches, they have no ease of soul.

In the last thirty days I have had the opportunity to lead three of my senior clients to Christ—two of them on their deathbeds. It is a blessed privilege to be able to give them the Truth that will bring them ease of soul for the first time.

It may be that you have accepted the idea that you will not make a lot of money in the ministry or at your current location. But that doesn't mean that you are immune to the temptation to pursue more income than God intends for you. You might consider taking on another job or seeking a larger church. But if money becomes your motivation, you will never be satisfied no matter how much money you earn. You will be anxious and dissatisfied because your heart will be adrift on the sea of materialism.

Jesus told us that we should see our material goods, not as ends in themselves, but as tools to use for Christ. In Luke 16:9 He says: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that when ye fail," that is, when you die, when the stewardship is removed from you, "they may receive you into everlasting habitations." That's the supernatural perspective. We should take the mammon of unrighteousness to invest in souls for eternity. That's good stewardship.

Be aware that the old nature is also seeking material possessions in order to acquire power. We think that money will purchase control over our circumstances. Well, doesn't it? With money we can buy cars and homes. We can travel or move to a different part of the country. We can control our circumstances, right? It may seem so for a while, but it is God Who meets our needs and, in reality, controls our circumstances. He tells us to trust Him.

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., said: "Success is finding the will of God and doing it." That's true success—finding the circumstances that God ordains for you, not trying to purchase advantageous circumstances with power or money. Trying to buy social power, status, visibility, approval, popularity, or recognition implies a lack of confidence in His sovereignty. Besides, we are not going to be popular if we are living for Christ. We are

the offscouring of this world (I Corinthians 4:13). All those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

But suffering persecution doesn't mean that we are laid low. James 1:9 tells us: "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted." God will do the exalting. In II Corinthians 10:18 Paul says: "For not he that commendeth himself is approved but whom the Lord commended." It's God's commendation that we must pursue.

Money will buy social visibility and popularity for a time, but it's not lasting. Money also buys power in business and in organizations. Money can buy authority over others. One can buy stock in a company. One can buy a seat in Congress if he has enough money. And sadly, someone may even be able to buy a deacon's chair on a church board.

However, we must not look to money for power. It is false power. God is the One Who lifts up, and God is the One Who brings low. I Samuel 2:7: "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich. He bringeth low, he lifteth up." Ezekiel 17:24 says: "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I the Lord have spoken and have done it." When Joseph was lifted up to second-in-command in the kingdom and when Daniel was lifted up, they did not scrap for their positions, or politic for them, or purchase them. They recognized the sovereign will of God for their lives, and they were faithful in it. We cannot, must not, look to money to buy provision or to buy power.

Some folks are looking to money to find purpose in their lives. They've been taught that animal life climbed out of the primordial swamp, that man evolved from monkeys, and that there is no creator. If there is no creator, man is not responsible to a higher authority, and man's lot depends entirely on whatever he does for himself. Consequently, there is no reason he can't pursue all the things he wants. His purpose in life becomes the accumulation of material goods and the exaltation of self. That is man's perspective.

In contrast, God's intent for man is that he glorify God and enjoy Him forever. In order for him to enjoy God forever, he must trust Him for salvation. In order for him to glorify God, He must trust Him daily for everything else and be His obedient servant.

The love of money and the pursuit of material things lead us away from God and to spiritual impoverishment. Seeking the Kingdom, promoting the Kingdom, and expanding the Kingdom bring spiritual reward. If we fear anything, we should fear standing before our Lord empty-handed, with no jewels for His crown. That's the result of being sidetracked by materialism.

Richard Owen Roberts said: "We are not here to entertain ourselves, to accumulate a fortune and die." We are here to do the will of God, to find our place of service in His kingdom and to persevere faithfully in God's ministry until the end. Don't be distracted by materialism. Do you want real provision, true riches, real power, and real purpose? Lay up for yourself treasures in Heaven.