

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Earthly Riches

Many hold the distorted view that life revolves around money. Earthly possessions are seen as the "treasure" mankind is in pursuit of, and success is measured by how much or how little is acquired.

The Bible presents a different picture. Consider seven truths about earthly riches, each of which is taught by the Holy Spirit in **1 Timothy 6**.

1) "Gain" Does Not Equal Godliness: A characteristic of the sinner mentioned in **1 Timothy 6:3-5** is that he supposes "*that gain is godliness.*"

Some in the world of "Christendom" teach that living godly leads to earthly riches. This false teaching is not merely that God takes care of His children (cf. **Ps. 37:25**), that He helps the benevolent continue to give (cf. **2 Cor. 9:6-15**), or that being a Christian discourages carelessness with money (cf. **Rom. 13:8a**). Rather, the view is that Christianity is a blueprint for being wealthier than those around us. This is sometimes referred to as the "prosperity gospel."

Such false teaching causes many to under-value the true riches available in Christ. Others are led to think that if they have more riches than someone else, it is a result of being more godly.

What is ironic about this misconception is that the One CHRISTianity is founded upon was relatively poor as He walked on earth (cf. **Luke 9:58**). Many of His obedient followers were likewise poor (cf. **2 Cor. 11:27**).

Some of Christ's disciples are materially rich, but not nearly all are. Nor is the Bible a pattern for gaining earthly riches.

2) Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain: After stating the error of those who suppose "*that gain is godliness,*" the inspired apostle "turned the tables" to show how "godliness" and "gain" are connected. **1 Timothy 6:6**: *But godliness with*

contentment is great gain.

Those who are godly and content with however much or however little they have (cf. **Phil. 4:11-12**) gain the true riches (spiritual riches) available through Christ. These riches far exceed any earthly prosperity.

This point is brought out to two churches Jesus addressed in Revelation. Speaking to the church at Smyrna, Jesus said He knew their "*poverty,*" yet He said they were "*rich*" (**Rev. 2:9**). By contrast, the church at Laodicea said they were "*rich, and increased with goods,*" yet Jesus said they were "*poor*" (**Rev. 3:17**).

While those in Smyrna had little materially, they were strong spiritually. The opposite could be said of the lukewarm Laodiceans.

If we live godly lives and learn to be content, we will receive spiritual blessings that cannot be measured with dollar signs.

3) Beware of Covetousness: Following the description of "*great gain,*" the Holy Spirit stressed the need for contentment (**1 Tim. 6:7-8**) and the dangers associated with covetousness (**verses 9-10**).

Generally, when covetousness is addressed in Scripture, it involves an unrighteous desire for something. Covetousness is not limited to money or possessions, but often includes it. Covetous individuals include "*they that will be rich*" (**1 Tim. 6:9**). Coveting riches is in many ways the opposite of contentment.

God's warnings about covetousness bring to mind the common attitude of "I want my stuff and I want it now" (cf. **Luke 12:13**). Many see a possession they just "have to have" to be "satisfied," though soon after it is acquired, the dissatisfaction sets back in (**Ecc. 5:10**).

Such coveting demonstrates a distorted view of life. In **Luke 12**, Jesus said "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*" (**verse 15**).

Covetousness is a form of idolatry (**Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5**). Coveting earthly riches leads to *“many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition,”* (**1 Tim. 6:9**). It leads many to err *“from the faith”* (**verse 10**).

This is the context for God’s statement that *“the love of money is the root of all evil”* (**verse 10**). Money itself is not evil, but lusting after it is.

4) Do Not Be Highminded: After speaking about those who *“will be rich”* in **1 Timothy 6:9-10**, the Holy Spirit gave a charge for those who *“are rich in this world”* in **verses 17-19**. The first instruction given is to avoid being highminded.

The tendency for many who gain earthly riches is to view themselves as better than those who are poor. The thought is “I must be smarter or more diligent than those who have less than I do.”

Notice how harmful this mindset was for King Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was referred to as God’s servant (**Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10**) because God used him to carry out a purpose. In carrying out that purpose, God allowed the king to be among the richest men of his time.

Yet, Nebuchadnezzar credited *himself* for these riches. As he walked in the palace of Babylon in **Daniel 4:30**, *“the king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?”*

Nebuchadnezzar’s high-mindedness led him to be punished severely by God (**Dan. 4:31-33**).

5) Trust in God (Not Things): Another charge given to those rich in this world is to not *“trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy,”*

Riches can be *here* one day and *gone* the next. In the **Luke 12** account, Jesus spoke about a rich fool whose trust in uncertain riches proved to be foolish (**verses 16-21**). Riches are fleeting, and will not come with us when we leave this earth (**1 Tim. 6:7**). God is the One in whom we must put our trust.

6) Be “Rich in Good Works”: Those who are rich in this world are not condemned for being such. In **1 Timothy 6:18**, though, they are

commanded to be something more important: rich in good works. God exhorts *“that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate,”*

Good works includes a number of things, but the emphasis in **1 Timothy 6:18** is on using what possessions we have to help those who are in need. While being rich materially does not necessarily please God, being rich in good works does.

7) Lay Up Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Spirit finished his charge for the rich with the statement, *“Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”* (**1 Tim. 6:19**).

This brings to mind Jesus’ command in **Matthew 6:19-20**: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:”*

Material blessings can be enjoyed, and we should be thankful for them.

Such should not be what our hope is built on though. Earthly riches should not be what we treasure. Possessions should not be our primary pursuit in life. Hope for the Christian should not lie in soon having more wealth while on earth, but in the eternal reward God promises to the faithful.

The Holy Spirit’s message through all of this is not that we cannot smile when buying a new house, or that one should not seek a promotion to better his family’s financial position.

Rather, the message centers on priorities. Where our affection is, what attitude we have toward possessions, and whether or not we allow desire for riches to lead us to sin are keys. Material possessions in themselves are morally neutral, but man’s uses of them often are not (cf. **Matt. 13:22**).

Regardless of whether we have a lot or a little, may we heed God’s message in **1 Timothy 6**. May we have the right attitudes toward earthly riches.

-Michael Hickox