

On covetousness

In John 10:10 Jesus said:

“..I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Many take this verse, isolate it, and translate it as a promise to a life without problems and full of “blessings” of all kinds they imagine for them and their family, especially in the areas of finances and health. Though such a view appeals to the flesh, making attractive to it, it is nonetheless a distortion of the gospel, a false gospel. Particularly on the matter of riches, the true Christian life is not a life that seeks them. As we will see, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that riches cannot be a valid goal for a true Christian. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:7-10:

1 Timothy 6:7-10

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. **And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare**, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For **the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil**, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

“Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”: the only things that we need, my dear brother and sister, are food and clothing. The Greek word translated as “clothing” here should have been better translated as “coverings” (and it is translated so by some Bible translations). Having food and coverings - a roof above our heads and clothes to get dressed - we should be content. This is all that we need! And this what our

Lord has promised us to provide, telling us to not worry at all (Matthew 6:28-34)! But some not only worry about these things, but also they want to be rich! However, this passage - and many others that we will see – leaves no doubt: desiring to be rich will be fatal for our faith. As we read: “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition”. See that the passage does not say those who are rich, but those who desire to be rich! If you are poor but you desire to be rich, you belong to those this warning is addressed to. On the other hand, you may be rich – without actually seeking it - but use your wealth for the purposes of the gospel, such as feeding the poor, helping orphans, expanding the gospel. This passage then is not referred to you. But it does refer to whoever desires to be rich. And as the apostle tells us in no unclear terms: the root of all evil is exactly this: the desire to be rich, the love of money, greediness; to not be content with food and shelter but to always want more and more. As John Chrysostom, a great theologian of the 4th century, said:

“Rich is not the one that has a lot of possessions but the one that does not need much. Similarly, poor is not the one who has nothing, but the one who desires to have much. If one desires to have much then we should consider him as the poorest of all, even if he has more money than everybody else together”

It is not so much the income you have that defines whether you are rich or poor but the desires you have. If you are content with food and clothing then you are rich as you have no desire for more. But if you are not content with food and clothing but you have other lustful desires – luxurious home, luxurious vacations, luxurious fancy cars, name it – then you are, because of your lustful desires, poor. And to satisfy these desires you desire to be richer, falling then into temptation and a snare.

As the Lord told us:

Matthew 16:24-27

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. **“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”** “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Imagine we have managed to gain the whole world. Imagine we have all that we desire and double of it and triple of it. What would be the profit if in the process we lose our own soul? And for sure: if we follow this path, the path of covetousness, the price will be our own soul! For as we read: the love of money is the root of all evil whose end is destruction and perdition.

Let’s remember here the parable of the foolish rich man:

Luke 12:15-21

“And He said to them, “Take heed and **beware of covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. “And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ **“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”**

There is a desire to be rich which is blessed and justified: it is the desire to be rich to God and to things associated with his Kingdom! It is the only desire to be rich which is

justified. But desiring to be rich in this world not only is not blessed but it is equal to a disaster, as it leads those that have this desire astray from the faith and the true gospel. As the Lord said as reason for giving this parable:

Luke 12:15

“And He said to them, “Take heed and **beware of covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

“Beware of covetousness”! Turn away, beware, then from whoever pretends to be a Christian and promises you riches or promotes in you a desire to be rich. A desire to be rich has nothing to do with true Christianity.

In fact greediness is a sin of the same category as adultery, fornication and theft and the greedy person will not get into the Kingdom of God. Paul made it clear:

1 Corinthians 6:9:11

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor **covetous**, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

We were some of those things. But these all were washed away with our baptism, which obviously is not just a ceremony but something very important, marking the start of our new life in Christ. Will we return again to those things? If we do, if we consciously desire to live a life of covetousness, a life of running after things and riches, then let us not be deceived: we will not inherit the Kingdom of God! And see also that covetousness,

greediness, wanting more possessions, is in the same category as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, idolatry etc.

In fact, in order not to leave any doubt Paul repeats the same warning in Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:1-8

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or **covetousness**, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. **For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”

And again Colossians 3:1-7

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.”

As we see the matter of covetousness, the love of money, is so serious that the apostle warned about it in several of his epistles. All the local churches had to know! Nobody should be deceived! That's why he repeats the warning epistle after epistle. And the warning is the same: practicing covetousness – or the other things mentioned in the above passages - will keep the ones that do it outside the Kingdom of God, unless they repent. In these passages, Paul does not speak for people outside the church. If he did, it would mean that a non Christian who did not practice these things would enter the Kingdom of God, even if he denied Christ. But this would be impossible. So it is insiders, people in the church, WE, to whom this warning refers to. If we – having been washed from our sins, having known the light - fall into these things and do not repent for them, then we will not enter the Kingdom of God. Because true faith, my brother and sister, is not just a confession but a walk. A walk where if we fall, we get up – through repentance - and continue. But if we deny getting up, if we do not repent, then will happen what these passages said and we should not have any doubt about it.

As the Lord said:

Luke 16:13

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon.**”

By mammon is meant money. We cannot serve God and money at the same time. It is either the one or the other. We deceive ourselves if we think we know better! And I'm sure that some of us indeed deceive ourselves on this. Because the love of money is promoted by the whole world and the society and sometimes by even some, pretending to be, Christian movements, it is considered somewhat acceptable. That's why many of the passages we have read up to now start with the words: “Do not be deceived”, or

“beware”. The Word of God does not have a soft opposing view on the matter but a hard opposing view, expressed as we saw in a multitude of passages.

To summarize what we have seen up to now:

- i. We cannot serve God and money.
- ii. The greedy will not inherit the Kingdom of God.
- iii. The love of money is the root of all evil.

In closing, let us leave aside any such evil desire, and let us heed the words of our Master, who told us not to care about anything but seek God and His Kingdom first and everything that we need will be added to us. Isn't that wonderful and more than enough? This promise He gave to us immediately after the parable of the foolish rich we read above:

Luke 12:22-31

“Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. “Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? “And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? “If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. “If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? **“And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.** “For all these things the nations of the world

seek after, and **your Father knows that you need these things. “But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.”**

Our Father knows our needs and cares for us! That’s why the epistle to the Hebrews instructs us:

Hebrews 13:5-6

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

We should give no way to covetousness but be content with what we have. Why? Because He said, **He will never leave us nor forsake us.** The Lord then is our helper! We will not fear! We will not worry! Instead, as Paul said:

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

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