

The Love of Money

“for the love of money is the root of all evil ...” (1 Timothy 6:10)

If there was ever an age that revolves around covetousness and the desire to have, it is the one in which we live. At every corner, there are advertisements designed to create in us a spirit of lust and want. Materialism is a word that encapsulates the predominant mindset of our day – and along with it, there is the desire to obtain money in order that we might be able to have those things that the advertisers persuade us to want.

The Bible, however, presents a different set of standards by which men should live. Teaching “the love of money is the root of all evil:” the holy writ continues: “which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10). Covetousness is Idolatry (Col. 3:5), as it leads men away from God, to fulfil their desires instead. Men governed by covetousness are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (1 Tim. 3:4), their thoughts rising no higher than their carnal instincts for personal gain, increasing in wealth and possessions.

The words of Paul to Timothy, cited above, are often misunderstood. The saying that “the love of money is the root of all evil” is not intended to convey the idea that all evil things originate from the love of money. Rather it is that the love of money itself can produce nothing else but evil. Whilst money itself is a necessary part of life in a capitalist society, it is not something to be coveted by the disciple of Christ. Being content with whatever circumstances our Father places us in, our primary activities ought not tend towards the pursuit of material things.

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isa. 55:2) asks the prophet. The man of God is not satisfied with the transient nature of the things that money can buy: he seeks rather to direct his energies towards seeking first the kingdom of God and His Righteousness (Mat. 6:33). The correct spirit in relation to the things of this life is expressed in the Proverbs:

“remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me” (Prov. 30:8).

Seeking only those things needful to sustain a mortal existence, rather than to lust after material things, the man of God fixes his attention on Christ’s coming kingdom instead. So the Apostle taught: “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:6-8). Human selfishness and inordinate desire instead seeks after the riches and comforts of this life, with scant regard for the things pertaining to the age to come.

The Scriptures provide us with a number of examples of covetous men, who were lovers of money, rather than lovers of God: we shall consider some of them with the view to learning from their example.

ACHAN

Joshua chapter 6 recounts the besieging of Jericho by Israel, as they began to take up their promised inheritance. Verse 17 tells us that

“the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to Yahweh: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she, and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent” (Josh. 6:17).

Here, according to the alternative marginal rendering, the word translated “accursed” literally means: “devoted”. Another translation renders the verse thus:

“And the city shall be put under the ban, and all that is in it belongs to Yahweh ...” (*The Scriptures*)

The idea here, is that all of the things in Jericho were devoted to Yahweh: it “belonged” to Him. There is a similarity here with the Laws concerning the firstfruits, and the firstborn: God was given His part first, and then the people could partake of what remained later. This was, in a sense, the firstfruits of the land that Israel were going in to possess. It was devoted to Yahweh. So we read in verse 19 of the treasures of Jericho: “But all the silver and gold, and vessels of brass and iron are consecrated unto Yahweh: they shall come into the treasury of Yahweh”

Achan, however, was tempted to take for himself that which was devoted to God:

“but the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed (i.e. devoted) thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed (devoted) thing: and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against the children of Israel” (Josh. 7:1).

Through a process of selection, Achan and his family were taken, and Achan himself made confession of what he had done:

“... indeed I have sinned against Yahweh, Elohim of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it” (Josh. 7:20-21).

Here, we see raw covetousness: “the lust of the eyes,” as it is styled elsewhere. He “saw” the proscribed items, and took them for his own use. This is a pattern often repeated both in Scripture, and our own experience – taking that which belongs to someone else. In our experience, covetousness is not simply about taking that which we desire: all too often it also involves desiring that which belongs to somebody else. It is written that “he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two and three witnesses” (Heb. 10:28), and Achan provides an example of that, being put to death for his sin. But “that man perished not alone in his iniquity” (Josh. 22:20), as wrath came upon the whole congregation for his iniquity.

But what of ourselves? Hebrews chapter 10 continues: “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing ...” (Heb. 10:29).

In all of our dealings in life, we must put Yahweh first. First in terms of time, and how we use it. First in terms of this world’s goods that have been entrusted to us, that we might use them in service to our God. Our maxim, as cited above, ought to be “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” with all that we need to follow. If Achan had waited, he could have partaken of the fatness of the land legitimately – but he could not wait, and stole that which belonged to the Almighty. The example of Achan then, is that we should put Yahweh first in all our ways, and He will ensure that we have those other things we need to sustain a mortal existence.

BALAAM

Jude characterizes certain false brethren as having “ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward ...” (Jude 11). Peter elaborates on this, saying that they have “gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). The spirit of Balaam then, is one of greedily seeking a reward, to the expense of others. But notice the words of Jude: they “ran”. They were eager to obtain their “wages”, just like Balaam was, and ran to collect them. Numbers chapter 22 records how Balaam (evidently a renegade prophet), was hired by Balak, the king of the Moabites to curse the people of Israel. His motivation was not that Israel would be cursed, but that he would receive “wages” for cursing them. It was a foolish enterprise to begin with: why should the Almighty listen to a greedy man, and curse His people? But Balaam was blinded by the prospect of having much gain out of the matter. He continued to try and speak words of cursing against Israel, but on each occasion, he found himself restrained from speaking his own words, and was instead made to speak God’s Words – and so blessed, not cursed God’s people:

“nevertheless, Yahweh thy God would not hearken to Balaam, but Yahweh thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because Yahweh loved thee” (Deut. 23:5).

Being unable to speak words of condemnation towards the People of God, Balaam did not give up. Desperate to obtain the wages of unrighteousness, he instead changed his tactics. He “taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication” (Rev. 2:14). The record in Numbers simply tells us that “Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab” (Num. 25:1). In fact, this was at the instigation of Balaam, eager to cause Israel to fall. Being unable to curse them directly himself, he orchestrated a situation where the Moabite women were brought in, who taught Israel to fornicate with them, and partake of feasts to their gods. Through his actions, Israel brought a curse upon themselves.

There are many examples for us here. We should not seek to advance ourselves at the expense of others. That is the way of the world: to tread others down in the endeavour to elevate ourselves. But Balaam's subtle tactic brings a salutary warning for us. Man cannot curse us any more that Balaam could curse Israel. No man can separate us from the love of Christ. So it is written:

“who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39).

Nothing then, can separate us from the love of Christ. At least nearly nothing: the only thing that can separate us is our own selves: “every man is tempted when he is *drawn away* of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:14). We can, through succumbing to our own carnal desires, be “drawn away” from the love of God. This was Balaam's approach: get Israel to bring a curse upon themselves, by inducing them to commit fornication, and fulfill their desires with the Moabitish women. And this is the only possible way that we can become cursed: of our own doing, and the unwise exercise of our own free will.

NABAL

1 Samuel chapter 25 introduces us to Nabal, who was a rich man: “the man was very great” in terms of his wealth. He was approached by David (who was fleeing from Saul) for help by way of providing sustenance. Nabal refused, saying: “there be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?” (1 Sam. 25:11).

Nabal then, is an example of a man who had plenty of this world's goods, yet refused to use his wealth to help others. This is what we find in the world around us: men and women, for some reason, appear to be very possessive of their money and wealth: they want it for themselves, and don't want to part with it for the benefit of others. A similar example comes out in Messiah's parable of the Rich Man who built bigger barns to contain his goods.

In this parable, a certain rich man increased his possessions and ran out of room to store his fruits. His solution was to pull down his barns, and build bigger ones which he could use to store his surplus goods. In the parable, the rich man trusted in his riches, saying: “I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:16-20). What the rich man ought to have done with his surplus goods was to give them to the poor and needy, but in his selfish delusion, he thought he was settled for many years to come. However, the end of his life came sooner than he anticipated, and as Paul testified elsewhere, we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.

This parable appears to echo some of the principles seen in the case of Nabal. Just as the rich man said “take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry”, so we find that Nabal “held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king, and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken ...”. Indulging in his own wealth, Nabal's life was cut short: “it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, ... that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that Yahweh smote Nabal, that he died” (1 Sam. 25:37-38). So it was, that just like the rich man in Messiah's parable, his life was cut short, and the abundance of his riches could not save him from the grave. As it is written: “wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Eccl. 7:12). Nabal was not wise: his name literally means “fool”, and the record indeed demonstrates his selfish greed and folly – what a contrast between him and the wonderful spirit exhibited by his wife Abigail!

JUDAS

Judas Iscariot's name is notorious for his betrayal of his Master. He was the keeper of the bag, but he was also a thief. On the occasion where a woman of faith anointed the feet of Messiah with “very costly ointment”, Judas was most displeased. He said: “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor ...” (Jno. 12:5). But the reason for his objection was not because he cared for the poor at all – the record continues: “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (Jno. 12:6). It would appear that in the bag was the collected money, to be used to help the poor. A modern example would be of a brother receiving money to pass onto the needy, but who took it for himself instead: this

is the spirit of Judas: a self-seeking thief, who despised the poor. His greatest crime was denying the Lord Jesus himself, selling him for the cost of a Hebrew slave. Notice his words to the chief priests: “what will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you”. He exhibited self interest, not caring about his Master at all.

“What will ye give me” is a spirit all too often seen in the world around us. Men and women will do nothing unless there is a clear personal gain from it. This was the attitude of Israel of old. Consider the following testimonies:

“who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Yahweh of Hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Mal. 1:10).

“the heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money” (Mic. 3:11).

This is the spirit of our age; “what will ye give me?” by way of money or material advantage. But the better position is the reverse of this: “what can I give you?” In Judas we see a man motivated by the love of money, stealing from the poor fund, even to the extent of denying his Master for material gain.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

The early believers, in order to meet a particular need, sold their houses and property to provide money for the poor. There was a logic behind this: in Matthew chapter 24, Messiah had warned them of the coming judgments upon Jerusalem, and so it made sense to leave in advance, and to sell their property, rather than to suffer the loss of it when the Roman Eagles came to take their prey. In Acts chapter 5, we find that Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession, and brought some of the proceeds of that sale to lay it before the Apostles. However, they claimed to be giving all of the proceeds, not some of it. There would have been nothing wrong in them only giving some of the money, if they had said that was what they intended to do. But they lied and claimed to be giving everything. So the Apostle rebuked them: “... why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). Men might have an appearance of giving their all to the Lord, sometimes an apparent lifetime of service: but if they are not in reality, their sins shall find them out: they are lying to the Holy Spirit.

In these few examples, we have principles for our learning, that we might not be like them. The predominant features of each case are as follows:

- **Achan:-** did not seek after Yahweh first, and stole from that which was devoted to divine service.
- **Balaam:-** sought riches to the expense of others, who he sought to condemn in order to elevate himself.
- **Nabal:-** a selfish fool, who indulged himself in his opulence rather than to help the poor and needy.
- **Judas:-** sought self-interest, a thief who stole from the poor, and betrayed his Master for money.
- **Ananias & Saphira:-** Gave an appearance of devoting everything to the Lord, whilst holding back things for themselves

The Lord taught: “take heed, and beware of coveteousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Men run to and fro, being busied with the affairs of this life, seeking to increase their worldly goods. Labouring for meat that perisheth, both men and women leave little time for Yahweh, in meditating upon His Word, and developing the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). The love of money can produce only evil, and this is what we see in those who seek it to the expense of spiritual things. Instead of accruing money which rightfully belongs to somebody else, we need to divert our energies into seeking after the hidden treasures of Wisdom, that we might recognize our position before the Almighty, and at the last, receive blessings at His Hand.

Christopher Maddocks