

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

Lesson 1. The Influences of Materialism

Recently a friend jokingly said to me, “Don’t you know that he who dies with the most toys wins!” That’s about as far as you can get from the compassionate generosity of God. But it’s pretty close to what our culture is all about—a culture saturated with greed and headed for disaster. Millions of Americans seem to share this view of our modern wants, particularly as our economy continues its unparalleled growth.

Still, for the majority of us who have known hard times in our lives, today’s consumer economy brings to mind Jesus’ parable that has become known as the “Parable of the Rich Fool,” the story of a man who had so much that he planned to build new barns in which to store his goods. And we remember well what Jesus said of him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21, *New International Version*).

It has been said that we don’t own our things; our things own us. How easy it is to be consumed by material possessions; hence, Jesus warned about “the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19).

Think through just how easy it is for money, or the pursuit of it, to blind our spiritual priorities. How crucial that we keep this truth in mind as we seek to reach those whose wealth might have already blinded them.

At the same time, we all need a reality check. Some people live as if the one question that they will be asked on Judgment Day is, How much money did you make?

Christ reverses our misplaced priorities. While possessions are not forbidden, they must be placed in perspective. Material goods are God’s instruments designed to benefit humanity. They become blessings when shared rather than when hoarded. When hoarded, they become curses.

Materialistic persons, whether rich or poor, are in danger of sacrificing their eternal well-being for temporal pleasures. Eternal satisfaction is exchanged for passing fancies that deteriorate and become outdated.

Humans serve God or money, never both. Everyone, rich or poor, needs to be reminded: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Here is one simple reality. It is not possible to develop deeply spiritual thoughts if we feed our minds with violence, immorality, greed, and materialism. Our senses are the gateway to our minds. If our minds are bombarded with the stimulating scenes of Hollywood's entertainment, they will be molded by these sensual experiences rather than by the principles of God's Word.

Multiple millions of dollars are spent by media producers to manipulate our emotions, condition our thinking, and shape our values. We can be assured that the basic question that these entertainment gurus ask is not, "How can these productions prepare people for the soon return of Jesus?" The bottom line that motivates them the most is money.

Seventh-day Adventist Christians preparing for the second coming of Christ should reflect carefully before sacrificing their souls on the altar of the world's entertainment.

There are some parents who are so concerned about their children's Internet viewing habits that they have installed filters to block out certain sites. Others have done something similar with television. The purpose of these electronic filters is to let some things in while keeping others out. God has provided a "spiritual filter" for our minds. It has been carefully crafted to allow only those things into our minds that will build our spiritual experience with Jesus.

As long as you have a sinful nature or as long as you are in "the flesh," you are doomed to spiritual defeat. And this is what many professed Christians believe. Their experience constantly reinforces this idea for they find the flesh all-powerful. Appetite, illicit sex, sensuality, pride, jealousy, hatred, drugs or liquor, materialism, constantly beat back the Spirit, and they find themselves defeated time after time. Surely the Saviour's heart goes out to them.

If Jesus Christ is "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42), doesn't that mean He can save any person from "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"? (1 John 2:16). Otherwise, the Bible is a farce. Our question is not, "Can He save" but "Does He"? Unless you answer "yes," you're not much of a witness for Him, are you? And just "preaching" about it seems empty and helpless, and only deepens the guilt that many feel.

Legalism is not the answer, however stern and strict. According to the apostle John, one can't deny the reality of the multitude of our built-in desires. By nature, you're drowning in them and you need a Life-Guard Saviour 100 percent. Don't think your own will power will succeed.

Before you start your new day you have prayed, "Father which art in heaven, ... Lead [me] not into temptation, but deliver [me] from evil" (Matt. 6:9-13). If you log on to Internet pornography, aren't you deliberately canceling that prayer? You're walking directly onto the devil's ground, doing Peter's thing when he denied Christ by mingling with the worldly crowd who enjoyed the fun of watching Christ be crucified. By watching

pornography you are crucifying Christ afresh in the person of the victims—supporting the business of their exploiters.

Jesus told it straightforwardly as only someone can who Himself goes to the cross: “whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

You don’t know what to do until you learn. The grace of God actively *teaches* you to say “No!” exactly as Jesus Himself did (Titus 2:11-14, NIV). Now, thank Him, praise Him! Join Christ on His cross and let self be crucified *with* Him (you’re never alone). The new covenant, not the old, is the answer.

The Adventist reform movement grew out of this concern for cooperation with the heavenly High Priest in His closing work of atonement. In a very special sense, God’s people who follow Christ by faith have their attention focused on Him, not on themselves. Their motivation is not fear but a corporate concern for the final success of Christ’s mission. A clearer understanding of the cross and the Saviour’s sacrifice delivers them from vanity.

The glorious good news of it all is that never in world history have we had a better opportunity to find release from the crippling tyranny of being absorbed with self. God’s people in these last days are to be the happiest, most free from pride, sensuality and materialism, the most selfless humans, the world has ever been refreshed to see.

Their lifestyle reform is not a do-it-yourself works program or a form of self-torture. It is a “sign” of an inner devotion to Christ and a preoccupation with Him (the 1888 focus) that demonstrates they have found something more exciting to be concerned about than adorning themselves or indulging sensual appetites.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/MybKPWR3kkk>

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