

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

The Influence of Materialism

Lesson #1 for January 6, 2018

Scriptures: 1 John 2:16-17; Luke 14:26-33; 12:15-21; Deuteronomy 8:10-14; 1 Timothy 6:10; John 15:5; Galatians 2:20.

1. This lesson will focus on the challenges of living in a very materialistic society while still trying to maintain true Christianity.
2. Read Romans 12:2. Do you need to be rich in order to experience the love of money? Who are more susceptible to “the love of money”: The rich? Or, the poor? What does it mean to “be conformed to this world”? (Romans 12:2) Does money give us power?
3. Is there anything wrong with being rich? Or, working hard to get ahead? Have you ever been tempted to try to get more money just for the pursuit of money itself? One worldly wise soul once said: “Money isn’t everything, but it’s way ahead of whatever is in second place!” So, why is money so attractive? Money can be used to buy just about anything. It is a form of instant gratification. But, it can never meet or deal with our greatest needs.
4. Would you agree that money has become the god of this world? In reality, materialism is the religion of money. “Materialism is a sophisticated and insidious system that offers temporary security but no ultimate safety.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sunday, December 31.
5. Unfortunately, it is often the case that the more money we have, the more we want. Have we ever been tempted to think that wealth and possessions are more important than spiritual realities? Solomon once wrote in Ecclesiastes 5:10, *NIV*: “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.”
6. Read 1 John 2:16-17.

¹⁶Everything that belongs to the world—what the sinful self desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are so proud of—none of this comes from the Father; it all comes from the world. ¹⁷The world and everything in it that people desire is passing away; but those who do the will of God live for ever.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 John 2:16–17). New York: American Bible Society.
7. Jesus had a number of things to say about money. Read Luke 14:26-33. This passage clearly suggests that we need to take into account and seriously think through projects that we may have and what are our most important goals in life and who we care about the most.
8. **Luke 14:26:** [Jesus said:] “Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.”—*Good News Bible*. [Content in brackets is added.]
9. Is it reasonable for God to ask us to love Him or Jesus more than we love any member of our family? What kind of love is that? Jesus concluded that discussion by saying: “None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.”—Luke 14:33 (*GNB*) What did Jesus really mean? Was Jesus asking us to measure our love for things of this

world in contrast with our desire for a place in the heavenly kingdom? See Mark 8:36.

When Christ came to the earth, humanity seemed to be fast reaching its lowest point. The very foundations of society were undermined. Life had become false and artificial. The Jews, destitute of the power of God's word, gave to the world mind-benumbing, soul-deadening traditions and speculations. The worship of God "in Spirit and in truth" had been supplanted by the glorification of men in an endless round of man-made ceremonies. Throughout the world all systems of religion were losing their hold on mind and soul. Disgusted with fable and falsehood, seeking to drown thought, men turned to infidelity and materialism. Leaving eternity out of their reckoning, they lived for the present.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 74.4-75.0.

10. As you look around in the world where you live, what is the position of religion? Are Christianity and Seventh-day Adventists respected and honored? Or, do you find that religion is being scoffed at, ridiculed, and thrown out by many? Why are people making fun of religion?
11. Do the things that we own and the things that we want own us?
12. Read Luke 12:15-21. How many people today would be considered by Jesus like this man who was trying to build bigger barns? Could we be giving our lives in an effort to attain more and more and losing eternal life in the process? In Old Testament times, people were bowing down to statues of wood, stone, gold, and silver. Few of us today would be tempted to do that. But, are we tempted to worship money which is just another form of gold and silver?

Multitude have a wrong conception of God and His attributes, and are as truly serving a false god as were the worshipers of Baal. Many even of those who claim to be Christians have allied themselves with influences that are unalterably opposed to God and [178] His truth. Thus they are led to turn away from the divine and to exalt the human.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 177.1-178.0. [Bold type is added.]

13. For a moment, think about the methodologies being used by retailers to get us to purchase their products. There are all sorts of strange techniques that have proved to be successful. Retailers want us to think that real happiness is found in buying and using their products.
14. So, how much does God actually want us to have? What did He say about the ancient people of Israel as recorded in Deuteronomy 8:10-14?

¹⁰ "... You will have all you want to eat, and you will give thanks to the LORD your God for the fertile land that he has given you.

¹¹ "Make certain that you do not forget the LORD your God; do not fail to obey any of his laws that I am giving you today. ¹²When you have all you want to eat and have built good houses to live in ¹³and when your cattle and sheep, your silver and gold, and all your other possessions have increased, ¹⁴make sure that you do not become proud and forget the LORD your God who rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves...."—*Good News Bible*,* Deuteronomy 8:10-14.

15. Can you think of an instance at any time in history from ancient Bible times to the present where the accumulation of wealth or material possessions actually improved someone's love for God, his spirituality, or even his desire for heavenly and spiritual things?

16. Very frequently, advertisers use beautiful and attractive people to promote what they are selling. Often, those people have nothing whatsoever to do with the product they are trying to sell. But, they want us to think subconsciously that if we buy their products, we will be like those beautiful and attractive people. One of the most powerful motivators that advertisers use is sensuality. Why is that like poison for Christians who are struggling against the dangers of materialism?
17. Most temptations in our modern world come to us through our eyes. What did Jesus say about the use of our eyes? Read Matthew 5:29; 6:22-24; 18:9. Does God really want us to do that? Can you think of any Bible character who lost his/her eyesight permanently from being poked out? Samson (Judges 16:21) and Zedekiah. (2 Kings 25:7)
18. Why are people influenced by advertising? Advertising is a way of appealing to a world of pure fantasy. People are—perhaps even subconsciously—led to believe that their wildest imaginations could be gratified by the use of the product which is being sold. Can you imagine the amount of wealth and time that has been spent and will continue to be spent on truly unnecessary things which advertisers have convinced people they need?
19. Read **Galatians 5:16**: What I say is this: let the Spirit direct your lives, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants. These two are enemies, and this means that you cannot do what you want to do.—*Good News Bible*,* Galatians 5:16.
20. Do we have to struggle with this battle every day of our lives? Does it have to be that way?
- All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 668.3; *LHU** 178.5; *BLJ** 31.4; *RH*,* July 14, 1910, par. 6.
21. Clearly, these two passages represent very different worlds or very different states of being. How do we get from Galatians 5:16 to *Desire of Ages* 668?
22. Wouldn't you think that virtually every young woman who came in contact with Jesus wished that they could marry Him? Although Ellen White commenting on Isaiah 53:2-3 suggested that He was not physically attractive, His intellect, wit, and insight must have been very appealing. (*4aSG* 116.3) What else did they have with whom to compare Him? Was that ever a temptation to Him?
23. What led to Satan's fall from heaven? Satan, who at that time was known as Lucifer, the Light-bearer, allowed his thoughts to go into self-deception and selfish ambition. (Ezekiel 28:17; Isaiah 14:14) The ultimate sin is selfishness or even narcissism which one dictionary defines as "inordinate fascination with oneself; self-love, vanity."
24. Can you think of other characters explicitly mentioned in the Bible who could be described as narcissistic? What about Nebuchadnezzar? (Daniel 4:30) Or, the Pharisee who prayed in the marketplace? (Luke 18:11-12) Could any of us today be like a Nebuchadnezzar? Or, like that Pharisee? Do we know of any people like that today? Isn't Hollywood full of them?

25. Probably the most comprehensive and succinct comment about money in the Bible is found in 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows."—*Good News Bible*.*
26. Why does the love of money lead to many sorrows and broken hearts? Do rich people think more highly of themselves than they should? Are they more inclined to be self-absorbed, proud, even boastful? Read Philippians 2:3. Why does God tell us to always think of others as better than ourselves? Is it because selfishness and love of self are such an awful pervasive evil?
27. Back in Exodus, God chose the people of Israel as His special possession close to the time when they left Egypt as well as back in the time of Abraham. Think of the great nations of the world at that time. Why would God pick a group of ex-slaves, uneducated, accustomed to obeying only the whip, as His special possession? Why not pick the Egyptians? Or, the Assyrians? See Exodus 19:5-6. Peter picked up that same idea in the New Testament and said that it no longer applied to the Jewish people as a nation but to all Christians.
28. See **1 Peter 2:9**: But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light.—*Good News Bible*.*
29. Can we have the kind of relationship with God that would really make a difference in our lives? Jesus told us that without Him we could do nothing. (John 15:5) If we are connected to Jesus as the branch is connected to the vine, incredible things can happen.
- He came to the world to display the glory of God, that man might be uplifted by its restoring power. God was manifested in Him that He might be manifested in them. **Jesus revealed no qualities, and exercised no powers, that men may not have through faith in Him. His perfect humanity is that which all His followers may possess, if they will be in subjection to God as He was.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 664.4. [Bold type is added.]
30. Doesn't that seem completely impossible? Could we strive for that?
31. Why are possessions and materialism such an attraction to us? Can they become almost synonymous with our identity? The Bible study guide suggests that materialism is almost a form of identity confusion. Almost as if our identity depends on how much we own. So, do we identify with God? Or, with our possessions? We cannot serve God and Mammon. At the end of this world, we will have to choose one or the other.
- The enemy is buying souls today very cheap. "Ye have sold yourselves for nought," [Isaiah 52:3, *KJV*] is the language of Scripture. One is selling his soul for the world's applause, another for money; one to gratify base passions, another for worldly amusement. Such bargains are made daily. Satan is bidding for the purchase of Christ's blood and buying them cheap, notwithstanding the infinite price which has been paid to ransom them.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 5, 133.4. [Content in brackets is added.]
32. So, how about that? Do we put most of our confidence in our 401(k)s? Or, treasure that we have stored up somewhere in the bank? Or, projects or buildings or businesses? Or, could we come to the place where we trust solely on God Himself?
33. It is virtually impossible to exist in a modern society without having some money. It is our

means of exchange. So, how do we keep a proper biblical balance? Won't the day come soon when we will not be able to buy or sell without the mark of the beast? (Revelation 13:17)

34. Read Matthew 6:19-21. How do we lay up treasure in heaven?
35. Read Romans 12:1-2. In this passage Paul challenged us to serve God in the best possible way. He told us to turn away from the standards of this world and let our lives be transformed by our relationship with God.
36. So, do we have any real appreciation for what we could do for God by the use of the means that we have available to us even now? If we really study the life and death of Jesus Christ and begin to comprehend all that He has done for us, does any return we might make to Him seem excessive?
37. How can we make sure that not only our money but also our time and our talents are used for the promotion of God's cause? What are some ways to do that? If even a small percentage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church membership did that, would the gospel be finished more quickly? Why would that be?
38. Read Matthew 13:24-30, the parable of the wheat and the tares. Does this parable teach us anything about materialism and consumerism? If we were more generous in sharing with others our time or money and our talents, would God give us more to share?
39. In this lesson we are told that materialism is our "primary stumbling block to faithful service." Do you think that is really true? It is very interesting to note that some of the most respected saints of the Old Testament were also very wealthy. Think of Abraham, Job, David, and Solomon. By contrast, there were people like Achan. (See Joshua 7.) For a paltry Babylonian garment, some silver, and a gold bar, he sold himself and his entire family into perdition.
40. Think back to the time when you were a child. What was it that was most important to you? Was it a raggedy stuffed doll or toy? Of what value are those things to you now? What has brought you to a different set of values? Is changing your set of values a part of growing up? Proverbs 23:7 tells us that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Can we be transformed to truly become like Jesus Christ? What would we need to do to accomplish that?
41. Someone has suggested that all of this focus on the future is just "pie in the sky by and by." Is that true?
42. See Romans 12:1. What is it that God is asking for in this verse? What is "reasonable service"? The two words *reasonable* and *service* are unusual ones found in only a few places in Scripture. Many more recent translations have used the words *spiritual worship* that more correctly represent the original. In any case,

These translations use wording that emphasizes the role of the intellect. "Reasonable" should not be interpreted in the sense of "acceptable" (for example, "He offered a reasonable price"), but in the sense of "rational" (for example, "He did what any reasonable [thinking] person would do"). The Greek word for "reasonable" is *logikēn*, from which we derive the modern English word logical. Thus, the sacrifice of the material is logical, reasonable, a worshiping function of the mind.— *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 15. [Content in brackets, parentheses, and italic type are present in that format in the source.]

43. The word *latreia* is not the usual word for service either of a slave or of a paid servant. The word is *latreia* which means the service offered by a Levite or priest. It is talking about

spiritual service. The word *logikēn* is found only in two places in the New Testament: Here and in Peter's discussion of the "pure milk" of the Word in 1 Peter 2:2. What was Peter talking about? This is worship that applies to the mind: Logical, sensible, reasonable worship of a supreme loving Father God.

44. The apostle John told us not to love the world, (1 John 2:15-17) but he also told us in John 3:16 that God so loved the world. Is this a contradiction?

We must be careful to understand what John meant by the world, the *kosmos*. The Christian did not hate *the world* as such. It was God's creation.... But *kosmos* acquired a moral sense. It began to mean *the world* apart from God. C. H. Dodd defines this meaning of *kosmos*: "Our author [John] means human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, and egoism."—William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters of John and Jude* (Edinburg: St. Andrews Press, 1976), p. 56. [Content in brackets is added.]

45. In 1 John 2:15-17, we need to understand the expressions that John used. The *lust of the flesh* means simply "inordinate physical desires, including lust, gluttony, and other sinful desires." It is much broader than just sexual desires.
46. The *lust of the eyes* refers to anything that is desirable to the human sight or covetousness.
47. The term *pride of life* is interesting.

"Here John uses a most vivid Greek word, *alazoneia*. To the ancient moralists the *alazon* was the man who laid claims to possessions and achievements which did not belong to him in order to exalt himself. The *alazon* is the braggart; and C. H. Dodd calls *alazoneia*, *pretentious egoism*."—Barclay, p. 58. It is this boastful self-exaltation and lavish ostentation, coupled with a deficient appreciation of the spiritual realm, that John condemns.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 16.

48. So, how can we weed out the evils of materialism in our modern commercial world? Do we really know what it means to exercise self-denial? Do we really know what it means to love others, especially others in the church? What role do prayer and Bible study have in protecting the Christian against extremes?
49. On Sabbath morning in church, we may convince ourselves that we are true Christians. But, if we look at our bank accounts and see those things for which we spend our money, does that reflect the same idea? Could we find ways in which we as individuals or even as groups—even as a Sabbath school class—could use some of our money to spread the gospel and help those in spiritual need?

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