

Christ Community Covenant Church
When money establishes authority in our lives
Pastor Dave Scherrer - August 4, 2013

As we wind down our series on authority we have only a couple of things yet to unpack. And maybe one of the most important discussions is coming up now in the last couple of weeks. It is the discussion of an alternative lifestyle. The lifestyle of the materialist.

Throughout we have been talking about the authority of God and His word. All authority on earth derives its authority from God and from His word. God has strong opinions on what represents an authentic and true Godly lifestyle – a Kingdom of God lifestyle. Anything else is alternative.

And there is no patience with God for alternative lifestyles, There is only one lifestyle that Jesus approves of all others are alternatives . . .

There are the gender issues we are so familiar with as alternative lifestyles but there are many more that run contrary to God's preferred Kingdom lifestyle:

There are the lifestyles where the man and the woman live together and do not marry

There is the alternative lifestyle of the pursuit of influence for the sake of power

There is the alternative lifestyle of the pursuit of physical stimulus for the sake of

There is the alternative lifestyle of the pursuit of materialism for the security and sense of significance it can provide.

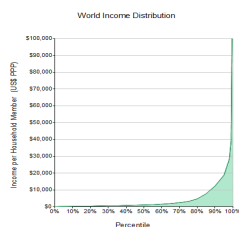
There is the alternative lifestyle of the pursuit of physical beauty and social acceptance through the pursuit of clothes, physical beauty and things.

These are all alternative lifestyles. They all represent lifestyles where the authority of God is usurped by an alternative value system: a 21st century idol.

I believe that the greatest threat to our Kingdom lifestyle in this country isn't regarding our tendencies to live an alternative lifestyle based on our sexuality, though that is a profound threat. I believe that our greatest threat has to do with tendency to live an alternative lifestyle to the Kingdom based on our affluence.

I mentioned a year ago that we live in very rich country. If we make more than \$10,000 as a household we are in the 90th % and if we make \$40,000 or more as a household that puts us in the same percentile as Bill Gates in the top 3% of all on earth.

It looks like this if you chart it:



Remember this verse? The Apostle John summarizes all sin in one of three manners:

1 John 2:16

¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

Greed is the lust of the eyes. Greed happens when the love of money establishes authority in our lives.

Greed: When money establishes authority in our lives

There is a reason that the lust of the eyes and the love of money are so devastating to our Kingdom lifestyle. Money alone gives us opportunity to participate in each of these categories of sin; lust of the flesh – our appetites, the lust of the eyes – the pursuit of things, and the pride of life – the various pursuits of power and influence and fame - money gives too much opportunity for any number of alternative lifestyles. And when that happens we are tempted to participate in an alternative lifestyle – anything other than a Kingdom Lifestyle is an alternative and it is sin.

Ephesians 5:5

"For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a man is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." (NRSV, Mark 10:23-27)

It is not that wealth is intrinsically evil, or that poverty is blessed. Rather, a devotion to gathering wealth is incompatible with devotion to God. The significance and security that seems to come with the accumulation of wealth is a temptation to trust money and God must always be the most important thing in our lives:

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (NLT, Luke 16:13)

The craving for wealth and possessions can lead us into all kinds of temptation. While we spend evenings and weekends earning extra money, we are depriving our families of our love and attention. We may take unfair advantage of our customers, employers, or employees. We may attempt to rationalize our greed by closing our minds and hearts to the needs and rights of others. In the process, we could end up being stingy, bitter and isolated.

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (Proverbs 23:4-5)

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV, Matthew 16:26)

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (TNIV, 1 Timothy 6:9-11)

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NIV, Matthew 6:19-21)

You see when we give into the love of money and a materialistic lifestyle; we rob God of what is rightfully His:

Malachi 3:8-10, 4:1-2

⁸ "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”

Why money exercises power over us

Verse 8 and 9 has a question: “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me!” The word translated “rob” here is rare (one other place) it means to oppress, pillage or plunder. Like a wealthy, powerful country advantaging itself over a weaker party. It seems incongruous that God would use this word.

God says “your lack of generosity with your money...” He’s talking about stinginess which is cosmic and evil and we’re oblivious to it. 1 Chronicles chapters 28 and 29 speak to the truth that everything comes from God. When we give to God in our tithes and offerings we only give what God already owns. Everything we have is a gift from God. Even what we use to make money has also been received from God.

God doesn’t give up ownership of it when he gives it to you. We are to relate to our money the way a money manager relates to his clients. You are a broker, a steward. If you are a money manager and you see your funds grow you get excited but you are not confused about whose money it is, and if you are, you’ll be liable, it’s called “fraud.” And we know what God’s money values are or at least we should know if we are pursuing God’s Kingdom on earth. God created the world to be an inter-related, inter-dependent place of shalom. He wants you to plow your wealth into human community as generous good deeds that honor the Father and glorify His name.

The trouble is because we live in such an affluent culture we become blind to this. Money blinds us to the power it has. Money is different from other things. Materialism and greed is a sin of the eye. It blinds you to its presence. Materialism and greed is an excess concern for, worry about, love of, need for money and possession. This one is very difficult to see in yourself.

People generally do not come to church to confess their sins of greed. I don’t. I forget. If I were to do a series on the seven deadly sins nobody would come to the “greed” study - not because they don’t think it’s a problem, but because they don’t see it as THEIR problem. God on the other hand sees it as rampant, and everyone doing it is unaware of their participation in it, then it’s a marauding evil. If you take the Bible seriously, you should make it your working hypothesis that it is also true of you. Don’t trust yourself with it.

The Bible gives you one guideline to test yourself, the tithe. Is it in the New Testament? Yes and no:

Luke 11:42

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

Jesus condemns them for refusing to go beyond the tithe. In the rest of the NT tithing is never mentioned. We shouldn’t see it as a legalist limit to our giving but a baseline, a guideline, a rule of thumb. The tithe gets us started in a disciplined lifestyle of Kingdom living when it comes to our affluence.

How money exercises power over us

Verse 12 of our Malachi passage says, “Bring the whole tithe into the temple.” How does that translate for us when we hear this word “Temple”?

A lot of ministers just swap “temple” for your local church. I don’t subscribe to this. The temple was not the local church. The temple was the institutional seat for the service of God for the entire society. There is no one church, organization or charity in our life parallel to that. The problem is not that they don’t give to their local church; it’s that they don’t give in Biblical proportions.

I once had a person from our congregation ask why she should give to the building stewardship campaign rather than to AIDS in Africa. I wouldn't tell her to do this. I can't decide for her which is more important or better described, what God wanted her to do with His money. She has to weigh that herself regarding what she thinks God wants to do. (Remember it is not our money and it is not about our wants).

The storehouse in the temple: the treasury of the temple. Every temple had a treasury and out of the treasury was supported the worship and salvation system of that particular deity. When Jesus reminded the people of the law "put your treasure in my temple, my treasury, into the worship of my salvation, into me," the implication is that your tithe is in some other temple and some other treasury. Your 'treasury' is where you find it easiest to place (spend or save) your money. It's effortless to put your money towards that which is your real god no matter what you say you believe. It is possible to look at our checkbooks as an initial self-test to discover where our 'gods' stand in priority. If you find it very easy to spend money on clothes, your wardrobe might be your real treasury. You're looking to your personal appearance to get that sense of desirability and acceptability rather than looking to the love of God. If you find it difficult to give your money away but easy to put it into a new house, that is evidence of what your real temple is. We look to invest in that to make you feel important.

Others of us look at others spending money in these ways and we sneer. We save everything and live very frugally amassing our wealth. Then our bank is our treasury and our security. You looking to your money to give you control in a very chaotic world. One way or another, money will always show you what you do worship. For some money serves a security idol, for others money serves an approval idol, for some money serves a control idol. The fact is money can't give you what your heart is hoping it will.

Dr. Leech, of Concordia Theological Seminary tells the story of two women in seminary who decide they want to be missionaries and their parents get upset. One of the parents calls Dr. Leech, hoping he will speak some wisdom into the girl's ears. "We wanted our daughter to get a master's degree to get something in the bank to get some security!" He responded "We're all on a little ball of rock called earth and we're spinning along through space at zillions of miles an hour. Even if we don't run into anything eventually we're all going to die, every single one of us. A trap door's going to open up beneath us and we'll fall either into the everlasting arms of God or absolutely nothing. *And maybe we can get a master's degree to get some security.*"

The biggest savings account in the world cannot stop death.

Luke 12:13-31

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

How we can break that power

On Palm Sunday the first thing Jesus does when he goes to the temple is to start throwing things around, tearing it down symbolically. Jesus says "kill me, and in three days, not only this temple, but all other temples of the world will be out of business." Every other religious leader had sacrifices and money brought to temples because they all know there is an infinite chasm between that deity and humanity that has to be bridged. Every single religious founder brings codes of conduct and says if you do all these things you can bridge that gap. Then along comes Jesus and Jesus says, "No. I lived the life you should have lived and died the death you should have died. My destroyed and resurrected body is the bridge over the infinite chasm between deity and humanity because I fell into that chasm. I paid the penalty. I'm the ultimate priest that ends all priests; I'm the ultimate sacrifice that ends all sacrifices. I've come to

replace the temple; I've come to tear it to pieces."

What does that have to do with your money? Jesus said "where your treasure is there is your heart." You have set your heart on something and you've said "if I have that I have significance and security." It could be your children, status, career, a certain amount of money in the bank, physical beauty, etc. You will do anything for it. You will die for it. You will pay any cost for it. Anything to maintain it, sustain it, reclaim it. It is time to acknowledge our sin and to repent. Jesus Christ came and died for you. Why would he go to hell for you? Because you and I are his heart's treasure.

You and I are his heart's treasure

There are two ways to break the bondage of materialism that infects each and every one of us. First is to give your life to Jesus and the Kingdom of God and all that goes with it. To do so is a pledge to die to the things of this world and to live for the Kingdom. Every other treasure in the world will insist that you die for it but Jesus died to purchase you.

The second thing you can do is to begin to simplify your life and to become increasingly generous with your money and time. If you do not have the freedom to give your money away it's because something besides Jesus Christ is your functional Lord and Savior. Think about the radical generosity of Jesus Christ and you'll get freedom. When you see him dying because you were the treasure of his heart then he'll be the treasure of yours.

Don't sit down with a calculator to give your money away; sit down with a cross.

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9)