

God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between
the material and the spiritual

Chapter 10



with
Mitch
Anthony

IN THIS ISSUE

Maintaining a Spiritual Defense

If Jesus calls us to re-assess our relationship with money, what tools do we have to help us along? Contentment goes a long way toward helping us fight the pull of greed.



MAINTAINING A SPIRITUAL DEFENSE

The next step toward becoming rich in God's sight is to maintain *a spiritual defense against the spirit of acquisitiveness.*

This concept begins with acknowledging that all “stuff” is ultimately on a one-way march toward worthlessness. You can achieve this attitude even while owning nice things—a beautiful home and a lovely car—simply by keeping yourself in a state where you are willing to part with it because you know your life is not wrapped up in material ownership.

The stuff we own or hope to buy is all depreciable. All of our stuff lives under the law of decay. Beautiful clothes unravel, get stained and lose their appeal as the “fashion moths” devour them. Cars, boats, and other goods made of metals are in a constant state of decay as rust, water, and salt sustain their assault. Other goods, because they have value, attract the eyes and interest of thieves who invent new ways of taking what does not belong to them. Today even our identities are susceptible to being stolen.

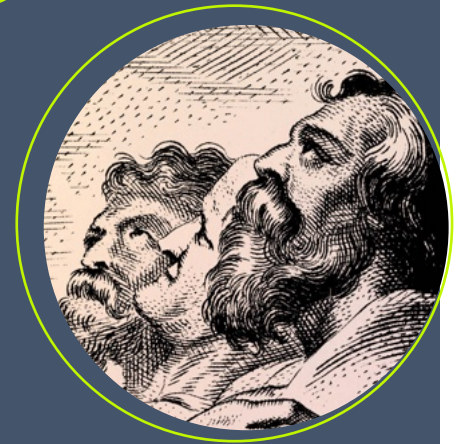
A valuable object lesson for anyone struggling with the merit of things is to take a tour of a junkyard. Look around at the rust and rot and remember this: Everything you see in that yard of decay was once shiny and new. At one time, everything lying in a graceless junkyard state once graced the pages of a color catalogue. It has been said that “stuff is the junk that we keep, and junk is the stuff we throw away.”

“Owning things is an obsession in our culture. If we own it, we feel we can control it; if we can control it, we feel it will give us more pleasure. The idea is an illusion.”

— Richard Foster

Jesus challenges this posture of accumulation in our lives. If your life is about “bigger, better, more,” you are pointed away from God's transcendent purpose for your life. “Collecting” can also be a euphemism for pointless gathering. Do the things we collect fall under Jesus' description of “where moth and rust corrupt”?

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Those decayed junkyard residents were once items so mesmerizing that they convinced someone to go into debt—because they just had to have it now. At one time that skeleton of a car was someone’s dream come true. The dilapidated piece of furniture once held the promise of impressing the neighbors. Everything that is today shiny and new—the stuff that may be calling your name right now—will one day find its place in that yard of decay. It is the destiny of “stuff” to end up there. We are right to maintain a skeptical view of the “value” of things.

In the text we examined to in the previous chapter Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

His instruction to “watch out,” is an exhortation toward a state of vigilance against greed entering our souls. We are all vulnerable. He mentioned “all kinds of greed” indicating that greed can take on many forms. Monetary greed is obvious. I want more than I have. I become focused on getting it. I pay whatever price is necessary to obtain more. I slowly and unwittingly begin neglecting my spiritual, intellectual, and relational development in favor of obtaining what I want. I make small decisions establishing the importance of “acquiring” in my life. These small decisions work like the sculptor’s chisel— eventually forming my character and shaping what people see when they look at me.

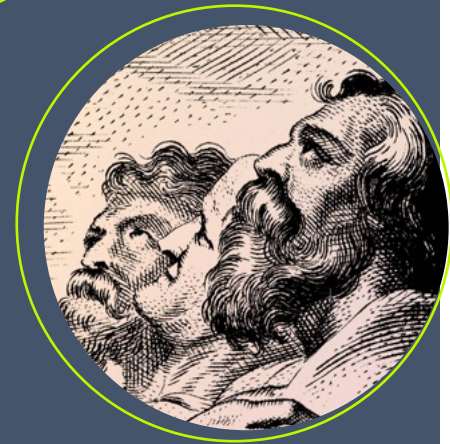
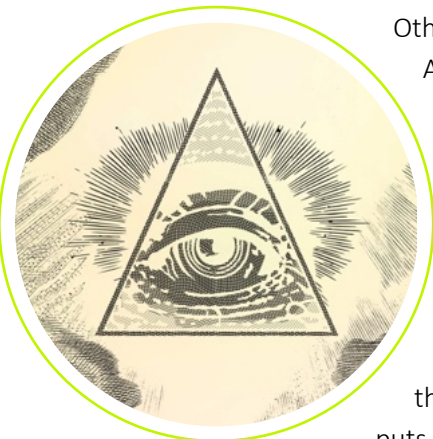
Other forms of greed may not be as obvious.

At what point does a hobby of “collecting” somehow become an obsession? If guests in our home are on edge because of our overprotective, anxious state over our belongings, have we gone too far? Loving things seems to have a way of eventually getting in the way of loving people. If we take a job that removes balance from our life and puts precious relationships in peril, does

greed have a part? It does, if our decision is based on the need for more status or simply for the sake of getting the position so that we can have the opportunity to tell others we have it. Greed comes in both explicit and implicit forms. We are to vigilantly reject any and all forms in our life.

Do we underestimate greed as an enemy of our soul? In America, a place that caused the French author Alexis de Tocqueville to comment, “I know of no country, indeed, where the love of money has taken stronger hold on the affections of men.” (This he observed in the 1820’s.)

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One could argue that the United States became the economic superpower it is because of the love of money, and that we have this affection to thank for our quality of life. No doubt greed is woven into the very fabric of our culture. We have a constant bombardment of advertisements feeding the greed impulse. Listen to any conversation about a person and their circumstance and observe how quickly it turns toward money:

“They’re making it hand over fist.”

“You won’t get rich doing that.”

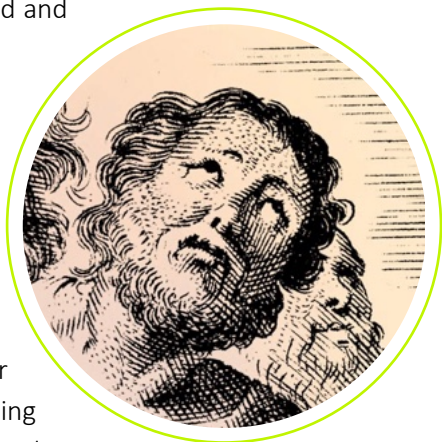
“What do you suppose he’s worth?”

“What do you suppose *that* cost?”

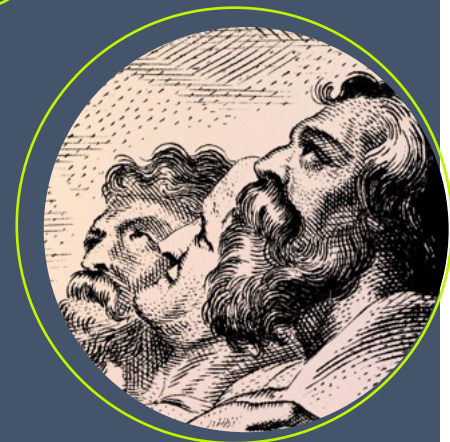
Gathering for the sake of gathering is ingrained in the lexicon of life of our society, so much so that we hardly notice our obsession with it. It is the pulse of secular life—the aim, the means, and the end. Mammon and greed, however, are not uniquely North American afflictions; they are universal. Around the world, as you strip back people’s motives for doing and being, you will find yourself confronting greed in every race and culture.

We can distance ourselves from greed by practicing a daily reflection of our loyalties. Did I serve Him today or serve my need to gather? Did I serve His interests or my own? We are rich when we accept Jesus’ definition of rich, by following Jesus’ compass in the search for riches. Those who ignore his directions, who are consumed with the desire to be rich, typically end up with fool’s gold, a greed that is never satisfied and a life that is void of contentment.

Greed will take any opening we allow it into our lives. We need to have a waterproof defense structure in our souls against greed entering in. According to Jesus our lives are the issue—and nothing throws His purpose for our lives off course like the all-consuming pursuit of more. If we cherish our lives and want God’s best for our lives, this is reason enough to keep watch over our souls for any form of greed that seeks to enter. Stay on guard.



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The ultimate step toward becoming rich in God's sight is *to be perpetually grateful for whatever you have.*

I live in a lovely home. I never dreamed that I would ever own such a lovely property. To be truthful, I never dreamed I would be able to live in a house as nice as the home we had before this one. When I retrospect back to three houses ago and think about it, moving into that house was like a dream come true. It was on a golf course and had 1,000 more square feet than the home I had lived in before, which, by the way, was an absolute miracle to get at the time—and I loved living there as well. This has been my house journey over the last 25 years. I've been equally thrilled at every address.

Being rich toward God has a lot to do with experiencing gratitude at every stage and juncture, sans the "need" for something "better" eating away at our psyche. Your needs and interests can and might change over time,

but they must never be allowed to interfere with your spiritual contentment. Gratitude leads to contentment. If you're looking for joy and contentment, ask yourself if you can you find it where you presently sitting? If you cannot find it there, you may not find it anywhere. A content heart is a heart that God can work with

and through. If tomorrow I had to move

backward three houses, my heart would still have joy, I would still have the love of my family, and God would still be at work in my life. My focus would be to be sincerely grateful for what I have, not on what I do not have. If you cannot thoroughly enjoy where you are today, you will not find contentment at some distant point on the map. You cannot purchase your way to contentment. To stay in a state of perpetual gratitude is no small undertaking, nor is it a one-time decision. We must resist each temptation to compare our lifestyle with others, wear purposeful blinders and continually remind ourselves regarding what really matters.

Let us remain skeptical toward the world's promises regarding things, vigilant toward greed entering our soul and grateful every day for every good thing in our life. This is rich, not just toward God but also toward those who love and need us, because, by our conduct with money, they will know they can trust us and where our heart lies.



A CONTENT

HEART IS A

HEART THAT GOD

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