

ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN IDOLATER?
(Matthew 6:19-24)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. We Christians are repelled at the non-Christian world with all their idols, superstitions and pagan practices. Yet, did it ever occur to you that a Christian can also be an idolater? Idolatry takes various forms, and in America many so called Christians worship at the feet of materialism. With ten thousand arms the mighty goddess of materialism ensnares her devotees and laughs as her captives as they drink of her poisonous propaganda. How is it that materialism is idolatry? The Bible says it is, for in Col. 3:5 we read, “and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Greed after things is idolatry.
- B. Materialism is so subtle that it has crept into the thinking of almost all Christians in America. God’s people have become the victims of a materialistic society. As Christians, we know that nothing should come between God and us. But how often do we, the wealthiest Christians in the world, let our possessions, pursuits and pleasures become our idols?
- C. It is on this problem of materialism that the Lord will speak to us this morning. Perhaps some of you are smugly saying, “Well, I can tune out, for I do not have much in the way of this world’s goods. Pastor is talking to the rich people this morning.” Not so, for even poor people are not free from the idolatry of materialism. Your idols may not be what you have but what you do not have-and want! Covetousness is idolatry and God hates idolatry.

II. BACKGROUND

- A. The general context of Matthew 6 is the contrast between the false, external righteousness of the Jewish Pharisees and the genuine, internal righteousness of true Christians.
- B. The Pharisees were very rich and they taught others that riches were a sign of God’s blessing. Because they were rich, they thought that this was an evidence of God’s blessing on them in particular, for they believed themselves obedient to God. They were very proud of their wealth and their so-called spirituality. Our Lord sets out to correct their false views concerning wealth.
- C. Materialism deals with the problem of worldliness. Worldliness is an attitude about life. It is any attitude that excludes the person of Christ. Wealth, possessions and money are not wrong in themselves, for the Bible tells Christians to use the world but not abuse it. The wrongness of the possessions of material things comes in one’s attitude towards them.
- D. I want to emphasize again that God is not against His people having money. All material blessings come from God (Deut. 8:18). God prospered Abraham, Job and David. We are told that those who do not take care of their families are worse than infidels (I Tim. 5:8), and that it is proper to leave a legacy to our children (II Cor. 12:14). What then does God oppose? It is an attitude that excludes Christ from our material possessions, whereby wealth possesses and obsesses us. (Psa. 62:10)

III. POSSESSIONS ARE TO BE USED FOR GOD -- 6: 19,20

A. *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust (eating) doth corrupt (removes), and where thieves do not break through nor steal:”* -- Our Lord gives a negative command about the selfish hording of material things on this earth. Remember He is speaking to Christians, who have experienced the new birth and who accept the authority of Christ in their lives.

1. The word translated “rust” quite literally means eating, and the word “corrupt” can mean remove. This is significant because in those days they did not have banks and a well-defined financial system. Wealth was determined by possession of expensive clothes, possession of grains and cattle and the amassing of jewels and precious metals that were often buried in the walls of homes.

POINT: All material possessions can perish or be stolen. Moths eat expensive clothes, mice eat grains and jewels can be stolen as thieves dig through walls. Earthly wealth is something one can have today and lose tomorrow.

2. What then is Christ saying? He is saying that all earthly wealth is transitory and passing. He is asserting the fact that financial and material wealth is never secure and certain. Because we now have bank vaults which are far more secure than money hidden in a mattress does not mean it cannot be lost. Other types of thieves are constantly threatening to steal our material possessions - illness, a business loss, depression, war, inflation and finally death itself. One or the other of these thieves will eventually take our money from us (Proverbs 23:5). Therefore we are not to selfishly horde up our money, for we cannot take it with us out of this world.

ILLUSTRATION: Some folk try to make this verse say that Christians should have no earthly financial security at all. This is not the proper interpretation. This does not mean it is wrong to have a bank account, a retirement fund or an insurance program. The point is that money is not to be the driving passion of ones life. We are not to find security in money.

- B. *“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:”* -- This is a positive command. It first of all means that Christians are to be more concerned about spiritual and heavenly things than carnal and earthly things. The great thrust of the Christian’s life is to glorify God. Secondly this means that Christians are to employ their earthly treasures and money for spiritual ends. Our material investments should be accumulating heavenly profits. Money used for God down here on earth is actually put on deposit in heaven. Every investment for Christ is eternally safe in the heavenly bank. (I Timothy 6:17-19).

NOTE: Someone has said, “What I kept for myself; I lost; what I gave God, I kept.”

NOTE: Someone else has wisely said, “It is much more wonderful for men to give

their money while they are alive then to have it contested after they die.”

POINT: In light of this verse, how important it is to put all of our monies in places that are true to the gospel of Christ as it is recorded in the Bible.

IV. POSSESSIONS CAN BE A SPIRITUAL THERMOMETER -- 6:21

- A. *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* -- Now the Lord gives an explanation of what He means by treasure. It deals with what a person desires most in life. Where the aim of his life is, there is his heart. If his aims are earthly, that is where his heart is set; if they are heavenly, that is where his heart is. What a man does tells what a man is.

NOTE: It has been said, “that a man’s interest are where his investments are.”

NOTE: If a person has a Christ centered attitude about material things, God will bless him and he will be a happy person. But if a man is obsessed and possessed by material things, he will be very unhappy and miss the blessing of God. Martin Luther said, “Whatever your heart clings to and relies on is your God.”

ILLUSTRATION: Materialism can have an awful grip on a person. Have you ever seen the change - at first a subtle change and then more obvious - that comes over some people as they succeed and prosper in this life. If they are professing Christians, often they become hard, cynical and almost always become indifferent to Christ, for they are so busy making money they do not have time for God. They then come to the place where they are so self-sufficient that they think they do not need God. Cf. Martin Luther

V. POSSESSIONS CAN DISTORT ONE’S SPIRITUAL GOALS -- 6:22, 23

- A. *“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness how great is that darkness!”* -- Now Christ uses an illustration of distorted vision to show one’s relationship to God and material things. The single eye is the healthy eye. If our eyes are healthy, we can see clearly and in a very real sense our bodies are full of light. The view of life we have depends on the kind of spiritual eye we have. If it is a diseased eye, distorted by a materialistic outlook, everything we see is out of shape and concerns money and possessions. What you see depends on what kind of an eye you have. Your spiritual vision is distorted if you are trying to keep your eye on earthly treasures. Your vision becomes clear if you lay up heavenly treasures.

NOTE: Materialism dulls the mind and keeps us from thinking clearly about spiritual things. We begin to rationalize to please selfish lusts. We settle down to a life of ease in our materialistic comforts and forget to serve Christ. Materialism is more subtly dangerous than outward rebellion to God.

ILLUSTRATION: We Christians recoil when we hear about atheistic materialism, but the Bible tells us that all materialism is atheistic. If a materialistic outlook is controlling us, we are godless, whatever we may say. There is one thing worse than an atheistic materialist and that is a materialist who thinks he is godly. The man, who

thinks he is godly because he talks about God and goes to a place of worship occasionally, but is really living for earthly things, is really in great darkness.

VI. POSSESSIONS CAN BECOME ONE'S MASTER -- 6:24

- A. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other." Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. -- The second illustration of one's relationship to God and material things is that of slavery. The word serve is literally slave. No man can be a slave to two masters. There must be exclusive service. The two masters in context are God and mammon (riches). The word mammon is Aramaic for riches or gain. These two masters are so different that you cannot love both. Both God and materialism make totalitarian demands upon you. **Either one demands all your service, for you are a slave to either; and each has a different way of controlling your life.** You cannot serve God and riches, for what a man serves is what he really loves.

POINT: A man must make a choice to put God first and trust God for whatever material blessings come his way, or he will put materialism first and God will be left out of the picture. **NOTE:** A person who loves money will do anything to get it, even murder. **All kinds of evil the result of the love of money.**

ILLUSTRATION: It is quite possible to serve God and be wealthy too. One of the richest Christians, spiritually and materialistically, I ever knew was Mrs. Fred McManis of Houston, Texas. She and her husband were multi-millionaires but they put God first in their lives. Mr. McManis gave an hour a day for Bible study and prayer and the king pins of Wall Street could not bother him, for he has with The King. He witnessed faithfully for his Lord and gave most of his money to the Lord's work. He and his wife put over 500 men through Bible school who went to the mission field. Many like myself became recipients of these monies to go to seminary to prepare for the ministry. Christian social organizations and college were given great sums of money. The more they gave the more the Lord blessed. So faithful were they to Christ that, after they had given over one million dollars to a large denominational church, Mrs. McManis, at age 78, walked out, for her church left the true gospel of Christ as recorded in the Bible. These people served God and wealth served them, and God was glorified.

VII. CONCLUSION

- A. To The Saved: Are you as a Christian laying up treasures in heaven or in earth? Several considerations can answer this question quite quickly. First, how did you gain your possessions? Were they gained honestly or dishonestly? Did you deliberately destroy some weaker rival to gain them? Second, how do you use your possessions? If they are used only for yourself and not for God's glory, you are building your treasure on earth and not in heaven. And lastly, what is your attitude towards material things? Is this the goal and aim of your life, then you are possessed and obsessed with money. You are a Christian idolater and God hates idolatry.

To The Unsaved: For you here this morning with out Christ, I want to warn you that it is becoming increasingly difficult to trust Christ in our materialistic society. Americans think they do not need Christ for they have the uncertain security of money. Jesus Christ said, "How hard it is for them who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God," and "It is easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.” It is the trusting in riches that makes it difficult for a materialistic minded person to receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. Remember the rich farmer in Luke 12 put all of his trust in the material things he had hoarded up, for now he thought he could eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” Riches never bring security. Nor do riches bring happiness. Often men struggle all their lives for material things and then discover too late that with money they can buy a beautiful house but not a home. They can buy a Beautyrest mattress but not sleep, food but not an appetite, medicine but not necessarily health. And if they turn to religion, they can buy a church but not heaven and a crucifix but not a Saviour. If you are here without Christ this morning, I want you to know that salvation is not in things, spiritual peace is not in earthly comforts, happiness is not in money and heaven is not in materialism. Salvation, which results in peace, happiness and heaven, is found only in Christ. You will never be satisfied with life until you find Him!