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The New Testament Perspective on Material Possessions (Studies in Selected Passages)

Ennis Barrington Edmonds

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THE NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

(STUDIES IN SELECTED PASSAGES)

by

Ennis Barrington Edmonds

A Graduate Research
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Theological Studies
Western Evangelical Seminary

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this introductory Chapter I will present the area under research, the methodology employed, the justification of this research, the limitations involved, and the general organization of this paper.

Area of Study

This study proposes to investigate and present the New Testament perspective on material possessions.¹ To provide adequate background and sharpened focus, a biblical survey (Old and New Testament) of the subject will be made. The heart of this research is the exposition of selected passages from the gospels, the Pauline Epistles, and the General Epistles. There will be a brief summary reflection on the various principles which emerge in the process of the survey and the exposition.

Methodology

The approach to this study is avowedly inductive and exegetical. I hope to approach the Scriptures as objectively and open-minded as possible. My purpose is to discover and enunciate the New Testament point of view on the subject. Since my emphasis falls on exegesis, I purpose to work closely with the Greek New Testament, utilizing such reference materials as

lexicons, concordances, Bible dictionaries, New Testament word studies, and commentaries. Relevant and available journal articles and specialized studies in the area will be consulted and utilized also.

Both the word studies and the exposition of selected passages represent an attempt to analyze and understand the Scriptures in the original context. In our final Chapter we move beyond analysis to synthesis. Here a measure of theological reflection is brought into vogue, as I seek to identify and outline the major and fundamental issues addressed by the New Testament on the subject of material possessions.

Justification

Academic theologians of the past and present have displayed an amazing nonchalance concerning the subject of material possessions though it is such an integral part of the biblical records. While these theologians dwell on inferences and implications to establish other doctrines, they pass over with remarkable silence the explicitly stated teaching regarding material possessions. So one may search through various reputed theological works only to find little or nothing on the subject. And even when they dare to mention it, their treatment is so scanty and perfunctory that it is appalling. For example, Guthrie, in his voluminous New Testament Theology of 1054 pages, devotes no more than two pages to sweep the subject under the rug.²

But in light of the prevailing economic materialism of this century, I believe it is imperative that we investigate and proclaim

the biblical attitude towards material possessions. Already there are some signs of a move towards the Fulfillment of this task (Ronald Sider's Rich Christian in an Age of Hunger, John White's Golden Cow, and Walter E. Pilgrim's Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke - Acts, for example). One of the drawbacks to works in this area is the frequent lack of an avowedly exegetical approach to the subject (Pilgrim is exegetical in his approach but his study is restricted to the Lukan perspective). Though this paper is confined to the New Testament, and is by no means exhaustive, it represents a move towards an exegetical investigation of the biblical perspective on material possessions.

From a personal point of view this paper represents my personal attempt to clarify my own understanding on the subject. The importance of clarifying my own understanding stems from the fact I emerged from and probably will minister in a context (Third World) in which wealth or the lack of it is often a source of conflicts. Thus, I must be able to take a reasonable and responsible stance which is informed by the Bible.

But beyond my personal benefit this should provide the interested reader with the basic New Testament approach to the subject.

Limitations

There are at least two basic limitations to this study. In the first place the restrictions placed on this kind of study, in terms of number of pages and deadline for submission makes it impossible to be exhaustive. Thus, not every possible facet of truth is

explored thoroughly, and not every possible passage relating to the subject is exegeted. In fact, as I have said before, only selected passages are dealt with. In choosing these passages, I have sought first of all to represent the various aspects of the New Testament teaching, and at the same time I have striven to minimize the overlapping of similar material from different passages. Secondly, I have sought to mirror the New Testament perspective through eyes of the different personalities responsible for the New Testament corpus: Jesus and the writers of the Gospels, Paul and James. Thirdly, I have sought to concentrate on passages which are more doctrinal or prescriptive in nature (This is reason for not expositing any of the passages in Acts).

The second limitation of this study is that it does not explore the area of the practical application of the New Testament principles to our contemporary situation (though I will suggest some implications in the concluding Chapter). For suggestions regarding practical models, I would like to point my readers to Rich Christian in an Age of Hunger, authored by Ronald Sider, Golden Cow, authored by John White, and Living More Simply, edited by Ronald Sider (See Bibliography for publication details).

Organization

As will be evident, this study proceeds from the background provided by a biblical survey, to the exposition of several passages, and finally to a reflection of fundamental issues raised by the New Testament in relationship to the subject. Chapter two seeks to

provide an Old Testament background to, and a New Testament survey of the area to be explored. Chapter three seeks to explore the perspective of the Master himself, especially as His perspective relates to the Kingdom and discipleship, two issues which pervade His teaching. Chapter four represents the Pauline perspective on greed and liberality. Chapter five is James' perspective on the judgment of the rich for their hoarding and exploitation. The final chapter seeks to give a systematic presentation of the fundamental issues encountered in the preceding chapters. Three broad areas are identified: the acquisition, accumulation and utilization of material possessions.

CHAPTER TWO

A SURVEY OF THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

In this chapter I seek to survey the biblical teaching on the subject of material possessions in order to provide the wider background against which we shall do the exposition of specific passages in the following chapters.

The Old Testament Perspective

Though this paper is primarily concerned with the New Testament teaching concerning material possessions, to put the New Testament perspective in focus it seems necessary to survey its Old Testament background. We shall survey the Old Testament background under the following headings: the vocabulary for material possessions, the items of material possessions, the means of acquiring material possessions, and the attitudes towards material possessions.

The Vocabulary of Material Possessions

The Old Testament has a wealth of words for material possessions: over twenty-five Hebrew words with varying shades of meaning.¹ For our purposes it is unnecessary to mention each and its meaning. Therefore, we shall only consider several words which will give a representative sampling of the various shades of meaning.

כֶּסֶד, כֶּסֶד and כֶּסֶד have reference to valuable and moveable goods and property. (Isa. 30:6; Gen. 12:5). Sometimes כֶּסֶד may have reference to livestock holdings (Num. 31:9). Wealth in silver and gold is sometimes designated כֶּסֶד. כֶּסֶד which literally means silver is the general term used for money. כֶּסֶד is used for treasures which are hidden away (Job 3:21). Literally, כֶּסֶד means "to advance," but in an economic sense it carries the connotation "to prosper." כֶּסֶד, which is usually rendered "riches" is commonly employed with reference to the wealth of Kings.² The above consideration serves to give an indication of the areas covered by the Old Testament vocabulary for material possessions.

The Items of Material Possessions

As varied as the Old Testament vocabulary of material possessions were items which constituted such possessions. The most significant and common items were foodstuffs such as wheat, olives, honey, wine and figs. These took their importance from the fact that they were the means of subsistence. Closely akin to the agricultural produce were certain livestock such as sheep and goat which were slaughtered for food, and others such as oxen, which were used for ploughing farm lands, and camels and donkeys which were used for travel.³

In addition to foodstuffs and livestock, the more affluent possessed considerable quantity of such precious metals as silver and gold, and such precious stones as emeralds, pearls and agates.

These were mostly used for jewel items. Other luxury items were expensive spices and refined clothing. The Old Testament also indicates that slaves were an important part of the possession of the rich in Ancient Near East.⁴

The Means of Acquiring Material Possessions

The economy of the Ancient Near East was based on the land. So it is not surprising that farming, both agriculturally and pastorally, were the dominant means of acquiring material possessions. Abraham and Isaac are good examples of the dominance of farming the Old Testament economy.

But farming was by no means the only economic activity. Trading was widely practised. Abraham himself seemed to have had established trading links which reached from Haran to Egypt. Because of David's military conquests, Solomon came to monopolize the trading routes between the Mediterranean and Euphrates River. From this monopoly he was able to enrich both himself and his kingdom.⁵

Another frequently used means of acquiring material possessions was military conquest, though such an acquisition was not usually the primary motivating factor for war. However, it was the prevailing practice that the victors would relieve the victims of whatever items they desired. The booty of David's military campaigns amply illustrates this fact.

The manufacture of such items as pottery and clothing served as another means of acquiring material possessions. By the time of

David, Israel increased its manufacturing ability to include the making of iron instruments to be used in agriculture and war. Apparently, there was a rapid expansion of the manufacturing sector in the time of Isaiah. This led to economic prosperity which, in turn, led to moral and spiritual degeneration.⁶

The prohibition against taking interest on loan made to a neighbour, and against taking a neighbour's clothing as a pledge on loan (Deut. 24:10-13) suggests that loans were used as a means of gaining more wealth. Furthermore, in the post-Davidic era the royal administration legalized the charging of interest on loans.⁷

The Attitudes Towards Material Possessions

This section will be treated more fully since it has more relevance to the New Testament teaching and contemporary debates.

One attitude is expressed in the tradition which regards material prosperity as an expression of God's favour. This tradition was in vogue from the patriarchal period and was carried over into the intertestamental period (as is reflected in its wisdom literature). Apparently, the patriarchal narratives regard the prosperity of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a sign of God's blessing (Gen. 13:2; 26:13; 30:43; 41:40).⁸ Furthermore, there seem to be promises of further prosperity enshrined in the covenants that Yahweh made with them. On various occasions God promised the Children of Israel that prosperity would follow their obedience to His commandments (e.g. Deut. 8:7-10; Josh. 1:8; Psalms 37:34). The book of

Sirach accredited the wealth which Solomon amassed to the blessings of God (Sir. 4:18).

But alongside the view that material possessions are Yahweh's gifts, is the call to recognize Yahweh's ownership of everything (Psa. 24). Therefore, one should use his wealth to bring honour to the Giver (Deut. 8:18; Prov. 3:9). Evidently, the law of the tithe was designed as a means of recognizing that ultimately all material possessions come from and belong to Yahweh (Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-31; Deut. 12:5-18; 14:22-29).

The Old Testament, especially the Wisdom literature, also propounds the idea that the wealthy are wealthy because of their industry while the poor are poor because of their sluggishness and extravagance (Prov. 6:6-11; 21:17; 23:21).

To counterbalance the emphasis on material possessions as the marks of God's blessing, there are repeated warnings against succumbing to the temptation of self-sufficiency and against making wealth the object of one's affection or trust (Deut. 8:11ff; Psa. 52:7; 62:10).

Another Old Testament attitude towards material possessions is that which is embodied in God's concern for the equitable distribution of wealth and His concern for the welfare of the poor in particular.

God's concern for the poor was demonstrated in certain crucial acts in revelation history as recorded by the Old Testament.

As Ronald Sider points out in Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger, "...at the crucial moments when God displayed His mighty acts in history to reveal His nature and will, He also intervened to liberate the poor and oppressed."⁹ The Exodus was one of these crucial moments when God delivered the oppressed Children of Israel from the oppressive Egyptian masters (Exo. 3:7-8). The far-reaching implications of the Exodus is borne out in the fact that at their annual harvest festival, "the Israelites repeated a liturgical confession celebrating the way God acted to free a poor, oppressed people" (Deut. 26:5-8).¹⁰ But as Israel was to learn later at another crucial point in revelation history, "Yahweh's passion for justice was a two-edged sword."¹¹ It delivered them from their oppression but on the other hand it sent them into captivity for the oppressive treatment of the poor in their midst (Idolatry and oppression were the twin sins for which Israel and Judah were sent into captivity).

Yahweh's concern for equitable distribution of material possessions also finds expression in several legal provisions of the Old Testament. Firstly, in the legal provision known as The Decalogue, we have an injunction against stealing and an injunction against covetousness (Exo. 20:15, 17). These two prohibitions represent an affirmation of the individual's right to those possessions which constitute his means of subsistence. As Walter E. Pilgrim, Associate Professor of Theology at Pacific Lutheran University,

argues, both injunctions are designed to protect the "basic human and social rights and needs by forbidding others to take them in ways that are detrimental to the neighbour's well being."¹²

Another legal provision expressing Yahweh's concern for economic justice is the Sabbatical Year provision (Exo. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-7; Deut. 15:12-18). As Ronald Sider observes, the sabbatical legislation had both an ecological and humanitarian purpose. From an ecological point of view, allowing the land to lie fallow every seven years would ensure the preservation of its fertility. The freeing of slaves and the cancellation of debts were God's measures to protect the unfortunate from permanent slavery and to prevent "an ever-growing gap between rich and poor."¹³ That Yahweh has a special concern for the dispossessed is revealed in the fact that the masters were commanded not to release the slaves empty handed, but to furnish them with provisions from the abundance of their possessions (Exo. 21:2-6). Another indication of this concern is represented in the injunction against any refusal to grant loans when the seventh year was approaching.

Closely connected to the Sabbatical Year is the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25). It only differs from the Sabbatical Year in two respects. It was to be celebrated every fiftieth year instead of every seventh year, and in addition to the resting of the land, the freeing of slaves, and the remitting of debts, all ancestral lands were to be returned to the family of the original

owner. Two considerations seem to make clear the implication of the Jubilee provision concerning the return of ancestral land. The first is the importance of the land for survival in Israel, which was basically an agricultural society. The second is Yahweh's own direction for a just division of the land among the various tribes and clans to ensure that everyone would have the basic economic means of survival. It was to protect and preserve economic well-being for all that the Jubilee provision was given. It further served to remind the people that their ownership of the land was not absolute because it belonged to Yahweh (Lev. 23:23).¹⁴

Another legal provision aimed at lessening economic disparity is the law concerning gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22). Yahweh was concerned that the poor and the aliens be fed, so He commanded the Israelites not to reap their fields thoroughly, but to leave gleanings for these less fortunate individuals. Frank E. Gachetain strikes the right cords when he says, "that in the 'law of gleaning' God puts into the economy of Israel still another compassionate requirement for helping the needy."¹⁵

The prophetic condemnation of exploitation of the poor and insensitivity towards their needs, further illustrates Yahweh's concern for economic equity. Apparently, the legal provisions given to Israel were disregarded by the time of the great prophetic activity. By then a powerful and wealthy class had emerged in Israel. Through the use of its power this class devised a plethora

of unjust means to exploit the poor and further enrich its members (Amos 2:6; 4:1; 5:11-12; 6:4ff; 8:4-6; Isa. 3:14-15; 10:1-2; Jer. 5:28; Mic. 2:1-3).

To give an indication of the nature of the situation and of God's response to it we will quote three passages from the prophet:

Woe to those who devise wickedness, and work evil upon their bed! When morning dawns they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them; and houses and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance (Mic. 2:1-2, RSV).

But you have eyes and heart only for dishonest gain, for shedding of innocent blood, and for practising oppression and violence (Jer. 22:17, RSV).

When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow (Isa. 1:15-17, RSV).

These passages reveal the gravity of the injustices practised against the poor. But at the same time they express Yahweh's displeasure against exploitation and His determination to have it corrected. As was mentioned earlier, it was for Israel's perpetuation of oppression, along with the practice of idolatry, that God sent her into captivity.

In concluding this survey of the Old Testament perspective on material possession, we wish to use a lengthy quote from

Frank E. Gaebelein:

The Old Testament sets wealth and prosperity in perspective. It hedges them about with restrictions and cautions. Wealth is not to be accumulated just for the sake of getting more and more, it must not be gained by oppression and injustice, it can and does lead to covetousness..... We are stewards, not proprietors, of our wealth. In our use of it, we are sinning if we do not reflect God's special concern for the poor and hungry, the weak and oppressed.¹⁶

The New Testament Perspective

A study of the New Testament vocabulary for material possessions will give us a broad perspective on the New Testament attitude towards material possessions. The various words used may be categorized into three groups: those designating material possessions in general, those designating accumulated material possessions, and those designating the drive towards accumulating material possessions.

Material Possessions in General

According to the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, *χρημα*, *κτηνη* and *διαρχη* and *διαρχοντα* are the "general words for property and possessions."¹⁷ *μαμωνας* also seems to refer to material possessions in general, but we will

consider it more closely in the exposition of Matthew 6:19-34 (Chapter Two).

In Classical Greek *χρῆμα* means wealth, property or money, *κτῆμα* means property or possessions, and *ὕπαρξις* or *ὕπαρχοντα* means that which one possesses. In the LXX these words occur with similar shades of meaning. There is the recurring idea that material possessions are the blessings of God (Prov. 8:21; Eccles. 5:19; 6:2; 2 Chron. 1:12). But to balance this idea, there is also a repeated warning against the predisposition to make possessions one's source of security (Prov. 18:10f.; 11:28; 28:6; Sir. 11:18f.; 27:1f.; 31:3, 5f.).¹⁸

In the New Testament *χρῆμα* occurs only in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. In the gospels it occurs only in reference to the possessions of the rich young ruler which prevented him from becoming Jesus' disciple (Mk. 10:23; Lk. 18:24). In the Acts of the Apostles *χρῆμα* simply means money (Acts 4:37; 8:18; 20; 24:26). *κτῆμα* is also employed in reference to the possessions of the rich young ruler, and probably means estates (Mk. 10:22; Mt. 19:22). In Acts *κτῆμα* has reference to property (Acts 5:1; 2:45). *ὕπαρξις* and *ὕπαρχοντα* are the most widely used words with reference to material possessions. They occur at least sixteen times. They literally mean "the thing that belongs (to someone) and thus possessions in general."¹⁹

βίος and *οὐσία* which have their primary reference otherwise (life and substance) are sometimes used to denote man's means of

subsistence (1 Jn. 3:17; Lk. 15:121.).²⁰

From the foregoing considerations it is clear that *χρημα*, *κεχρημα* and *ὀψιζεις* or *ὀπαρχοντα* have primary reference to material possessions in general and only a secondary reference to accumulated possessions, and frequently a qualifying word is used to indicate the secondary reference (as in the case of the rich young ruler).

Accumulated Material Possessions

Accumulated material possessions "may be denoted by *πλουτος* riches, and *θησαυρος*, treasures."²¹ Since we will treat *θησαυρος* in the exposition of Matthew 6:19-34, we will confine our consideration here to *πλουτος* and its cognates.

Πλουτος and its cognates (*πλουσιως*, *πλουτεω*, *πλουτιζω*) probably shares with *πυμπλημι*, *πληθος* and *πτελος*, a common root in the Indo-European word pel, "to flow," which probably came to mean "to fill or full." Thus the primary meaning of *πλουτος* is "fulness of goods."²² *Πλουτος* is usually translated "wealth" or "riches" in the New Testament.

In primitive Hellenistic thought *πλουτος* (riches including property) was bound inextricably to nobility and both were regarded as the gifts of the gods.²³ During this early period riches were viewed on an individualistic basis. But beginning with the philosophical predecessors of Plato and Aristotle, and culminating in Plato and Aristotle themselves, riches were viewed in the social context of the *πολις*. In the opinion of these thinkers, wealth should be utilized for the development of culture and the dispensing of

justice. Plato and Aristotle, especially, contended that striving after wealth as a means of security was a mistake, because "opposed to external riches" is "the true wealth of virtue."²⁴ The Cynics and the Stoics returned to the individualistic view of wealth, but for most part rejected the pursuit of riches since it would make "man dependent on things and relations" instead of himself.²⁵

In the LXX *Πλοῦτος* occurs about 180 times as the translation of several Hebrew words. Riches (i.e. *Πλοῦτος*) does not assume a prominent part in the early Old Testament documents, but where it is treated the prevailing view is that "wealth is God's gift and an expression of His personal blessing."²⁶

But when we come to the prophetic era, we discover that wealth had become a strong sociological factor in the life of the chosen people. From the prophetic utterances we learn that alongside the deprived masses, a rather small but powerful and wealthy elite had developed (Isa. 3:21.; Jer. 5:4f.; 25-31; Ezek. 22:25-29; Amos 2:6f.; 5:7-12; Mi. 2:1f.). Instead of revering the rich as the blessed of Yahweh, the prophets issued indictments against them in the most caustic terms and called them to repentance. There were at least two reasons for the castigation of the rich. Firstly, they often acquired their wealth by unjust means. And secondly, while they reveled in their luxury, they became oblivious to the need around them (Isa. 5:8-24; Amos 5:7-12; Jer. 34:8-11; Mi. 6:1f.).

In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament as well as the Intertestamental Period, *πλοῦτος* received weighty approval, because it was seen as resulting from the economy and industry of those who possessed it (Prov. 10:4; Sir. 3:3) and because it produced security, respect and the ability to give alms (Prov. 10:15; Sir. 10:30; Job 12:8).

In the New Testament era there were at least two opposing views regarding *πλοῦτος* prevalent in Judaism. One end of the spectrum was represented by the Sadducees and Pharisees who regarded wealth as expression of God's blessings and salvation. The new age in which the Jews will enjoy special privilege meant for them a time of abundant material possessions. The other end of the spectrum was represented by such eschatological movement as the Essenes who contended that the present age was passing and the new age was about to emerge, and that riches were "the most visible sign of captivity to the passing world."²⁷

Πλοῦτος and its cognates are widely used in the New Testament. Though the prevailing idea is always that of abundance, the use of *πλοῦτος* is not limited to material possessions, but has frequent references to the fulness of spiritual qualities and graces, especially in the Pauline Epistles. For example, Paul speaks of the riches of God's grace, wisdom and glory (Rom. 9:23; 2:4; Col. 1:27; 2:2; Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:4, 7; 3:16). Christ who was rich became poor for the enrichment of the Church (2 Cor. 4:9; 8:9). The Church must allow

the Word to dwell richly in it, and must also be rich in good works (Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 6:18). One local church is even commended for the "riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:2, RSV).

In the sense of material possessions *πλοῦτος* occurs mostly within negative contexts (one notable exception is the rich man who buried Jesus, Matt. 27:57). Though wealth itself receives no forth-right condemnation, at least not in a gnostic sense, the dangers it entails and the barriers it constructs against entrance into God's kingdom are sufficient grounds to discourage attachment to it.

Jesus represents riches as a great barrier to entrance into the kingdom of God and as a destructive force which stifles the influence of the Word (Matt. 13:22; 19:23f.; Mk. 4:19; 10:23). Luke, who presents Jesus as the friend of the poor, is particularly prone to portray the rich in a negative light. So pronounced is Luke's negative treatment of the rich that F. Seller suggests that Luke may regard the rich (*πλουσιολοι*) as the enemies of Christ.²⁸

Paul is less outspoken on wealth than Jesus. However, he is concerned that wealthy Christians should not become proud and self-confident because of their wealth, but they should distribute it liberally, thus making their future more secure (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Of all the New Testament writers James issues the most scathing indictment of the rich. While he seems to imply that there were rich persons in the Church (1:10, 11), he goes on to castigate the rich as oppressors of Christians, as blasphemers of Christ's name

(2:6-7), and as being in danger of irreversible judgment for their misdeeds (5:1-6).

When the Apocalypse mentions the materially rich, they are included among those in danger of God's judgment (6:15; 3:17f.; 18:3, 15).

The general message of the New Testament is that riches are transient elements, and therefore must be transformed into eternal value through liberality. Those who cling to and trust in their riches are doomed to condemnation.

The Drive To Accumulate Material Possessions

A further understanding of the New Testament attitude towards wealth is provided in the various condemnations of covetousness (avarice, greed, acquisitiveness, love of money). There are at least two important Greek words which designate this drive towards the accumulation of material possessions: *πλεονεξία* and *φιλαργυρος* (or *φιλαργυρία*).

Πλεονεξία and its cognates are derived from *πλεον*, "more," and *εχω*, "I have." In early classical Greek *πλεονεξία* had various shades of meaning: desire for material possessions, lust for power, ambition (in a positive sense), and surpassing of others justly or unjustly. But by the time of Plato and Aristotle, *πλεονεξία* came to have a purely negative connotation. It was regarded as an immoral desire (including greed and sexual lust) for which there was to be no place in the "just society." The Cynics and the Stoics as well

disavowed any connection with *πλεονεξία*.²⁹

The occasional occurrences of *πλεονεξία* in the LXX are primarily in the prophetic denunciation of the wealthy who, through their proximity to power, manipulated the political and economic processes as a means of fleecing the poor and accumulating wealth for themselves, even by violent means (Jer. 22:17; Ezek. 22:27; Hab. 2:9). The negative character of *πλεονεξία* is so pronounced that the psalmist prays for protection against its deadly grasp (Psa. 119:36).³⁰

In the New Testament *πλεονεξία* and its cognates (*πλεονεκτεω*, *πλεονεκτης*) occur at least nineteen times. In all but one case (2 Cor. 7:11) they have reference to material possessions; and in all these cases they convey the negative connotation of avarice, greed, acquisitiveness or gain by fraud.³¹

The New Testament perspective on *πλεονεξία* may be summarized as caution against being possessed by it and condemnation of those possessed by it. In dealing with the man who desired Jesus to intervene in a dispute over the division of family inheritance, Jesus issued an admonition to guard against acquisitiveness because life is not to be measured by the abundance of material possessions. To amplify the seriousness with which he viewed *πλεονεξία*, Jesus told the story of one who accumulated great stores for the future but who died before his enjoyment of them began (Lk. 12:13-21). According to Paul's admonition to the Ephesians and the Colossians, *πλεονεξία* is one sin

which should not "even be named among you, as is fitting among saints." On the contrary, *πλεονεξία* must be put to death among other worldly attitudes and practices. So grave is the sin of *πλεονεξία* that Paul designates it as idolatry, i.e., it elicits human devotion and rivals God (Eph. 5:3-4; Col. 3:5).

Several New Testament passages condemn *πλεονεξία* among those sins which debase man (Mk. 7:22; Rom. 1:29); which exclude them from the Christian community (1 Cor. 5:10, 11), and which as a result exclude them from any inheritance in the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10; Eph. 5:5). *πλεονεξία* is also one of the sins condemned among false teachers (1 Pet. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:14). Paul, in asserting his genuineness as a dispenser of the Gospel, makes it clear that his behaviour has not been motivated by *πλεονεξία* (1 Thess. 2:5).

φιλαργυρία, literally, the love or lover of money, is a synonym of *πλεονεξία*. Paul's strong statement concerning the love of money as the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10) probably should be viewed as a proverb adapted from Greek philosophy.³² But as the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology advances, "....what is said in this text comes of experience. The dream of wealth can gain a demonic hold over a man or a nation."³³ Paul also indicates that the prospective bishop should not be a lover of money (*αφιλαργυρον*, 1 Tim. 3:3), and that the love of money is one of the signs of the last days (2 Tim. 3:2). Luke observes that the Pharisees who were lovers of money were offended by Jesus' teaching concerning mammon (Lk. 16:14).

From the biblical standpoint, therefore, the very drive towards the accumulation of material possessions constitutes moral and ethical delinquency, and as such, should be repented of, or it will incur divine judgment.

CHAPTER THREE

JESUS, MAMMON AND THE KINGDOM

This chapter focuses on Jesus' teaching concerning material possessions. Our treatment will encompass an outline of His general attitude and an exposition of Matthew 6:19-34 and Luke 18:18-30. These two passages should be regarded as representative because as the outline of His general attitude will show, there are other passages in which He addresses the subject under consideration.

Jesus' General Attitude Towards Material Possessions

The overall attitude of Jesus towards material possessions may be outlined as follows: the paradoxical reversal motif, the renunciation motif, the danger motif, and the benevolence motif.

The Paradoxical Reversal Motif

Embodied in Jesus' teaching as represented by the Gospels is the concept of a paradoxical reversal. The most notable example of this reversal is His teaching concerning the loss of life to him who seeks to save it, and gain of life to him who is willing to lose it (Matt. 8:39; 16:25; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 17:33 Jn. 12:25). But the paradoxical reversal motif is also applied

to the economically deprived and the materially prosperous. Luke in particular portrays this reversal. In the Magnificat, Mary points to God providing abundantly for the poor while dismissing the rich empty handed (Lk. 1:52-53). In the Lukan beatitudes the poor are pronounced blessed and are promised the Kingdom of God, while judgment is pronounced against the rich (Lk. 6:20-26). Luke 16:19-31 dramatizes the reversed status of the rich and the poor in the afterlife. The paradox in these passages must be seen against the prevailing idea that riches were the sign of God's favour, and on the contrary, poverty was the sign of God's curse. But in Jesus' proclamation, especially in Luke, the table is turned; the poor are the objects of God's special concern and the rich are repeatedly castigated.

The Renunciation Motif

Jesus' radical call for the renunciation of wealth is usually associated with His prerequisite for discipleship. Thus we encounter the frequent demand to give up one's possessions and follow Him (Matt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 14:33; 18:22). The first disciples are said to have separated themselves from their former life, including their possessions, to follow Jesus (Lk. 5:11, 28; Matt. 4:18-22; 9:1-8; Mk. 1:16-20; 2:13-17). Luke, more than the others, emphasizes the totality of the renunciation required by pointing out that the call includes leaving 'all' (Gk. *ᾧαυτα*), and that in response the early disciples left 'all.'¹

The Danger Motif

The danger motif is expounded primarily in relation to entrance into the Kingdom. According to the Parable of the Seeds (one of the Parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13), delights in wealth stifle the influence of the word sowed in the individual's life (Mark adds to the delight in riches, the craving after other things -- Mk. 4:19). The most direct words on the dangers of riches come in Jesus' saying concerning the difficulty of the rich entering the Kingdom (Matt. 19:23-24; Mk. 10:23; Lk. 18:24-25).

For Jesus the dangers of riches emanate from the temptation to trust in riches which leads to a failure to recognize one's dependence on God. It is in this context that mammon (money, possessions) rivals God for man's affection (Matt. 6:24) and occupies man's interest and time that he makes no provision for the afterlife (Lk. 12:13-21; 16:19-30).

The Benevolence Motif

Jesus also exposes the need for benevolence in ministering to the economically dispossessed. This motif occurs in conjunction with the demands of discipleship (Lk. 14:33; Matt. 10:42) and also with the admonition to store treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-24; Lk. 12:33-34). Luke makes it clear that treasures are stored in heaven when distributed benevolently to alleviate the needs of the poor. Interestingly, in Jesus' teaching concerning the future judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:31-46) He gives no indication concerning the part faith or the lack of faith will play in the

judgment. But He portrays a judgment in which benevolence or lack of benevolence to the poor will determine a person's final destiny. The inevitable conclusion is, faith will produce loving, caring concern and the lack of such concern is an indication of the lack of faith.

Conflicting Centers of Affection and Trust,

Matthew 6:19-34

This passage falls within what traditionally has been called, "The Sermon on the Mount," or "The Ethics of the Kingdom" (Matt. 5-7). So, according to chapter 5:1-2, this passage was first addressed to Jesus' disciples. Its logical connection with what precedes and what follows is not readily recognizable. Because of this the New Testament exegete, Alfred Plummer, has suggested three possible connections with the context.

Firstly, he suggests that the passage is part of Jesus' injunction against worldly-mindedness. Earlier in the chapter Jesus warns against hypocrisy in almsgiving, prayer and fasting which amounts to worldliness. In this latter section He addresses Himself to the worldliness of wealth accumulation. Secondly, Plummer suggests that the mention of rewards for inconspicuous acts of piety might have led to a discussion of wealth accumulation. Thirdly, he suggests that Jesus is warning His listeners against the vices of the Pharisees. In the earlier part of the chapter He warns against their hypocrisy, and in the latter part He warns against their avarice.²

Whichever of the above possibilities we subscribe to, it is clear that in Matthew 6:19-34 Jesus is talking about two conflicting centers of affection and trust between which man must choose.

The Choice Between Mammon and God

Simply put, Jesus' argument is that there are two centers of supreme affection, mammon and God, and undoubtedly one will focus his attention on the center which he chooses. Storing treasures on earth indicates that one's affection is directed towards mammon. Conversely, storing treasures in heaven indicates that one's affection is towards God.

Jesus, in appealing to His listeners not to lay up treasures on earth, enunciates two reasons for His recommendation. First of all, there is the folly of storing treasures on earth. Since material possessions are subjected to destruction by moth and rust or to loss by theft, it is certainly a folly to accumulate them. As John White suggests in his book The Golden Cow, if Jesus' recommendation is transposed into twentieth century language it would read:

If televisions can go on the blink, cars depreciate, fashionable clothes go out of date, if bonds and jewels can be stolen, insurance companies go bankrupt, banks fail, and war and inflation destroy property and money, it would make sense to devote our energies to celestial fortune.³

So Jesus' recommendation against laying up treasures on earth is not so much a command as it is "an appeal to sanctified common sense."⁴

But laying up treasures on earth also constitutes a fatality. Whether the imagery of the evil eye refers to a lack of true perspective or to a lack of generous spirit, the inevitable consequence is stated clearly.⁵ Tasker's succinct comment on this point is very appropriate: "If their spiritual sense is perverted by false philosophy and debased ethics, then the darkness that exists in them through the inherent perversity of their nature becomes darkness indeed."⁶ In explaining the Parable of the Seeds (or Sower), Jesus further illustrates this point by indicating that in some hearers the Word is choked by "the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things" (Mk. 4:19, RSV). The point is that the accumulation of material possessions on earth indicates a lack of proper perspective or generous spirit which results in a compounding of one's condition of spiritual darkness.

As the alternative to storing treasures on earth, Jesus recommends storing treasures in heaven. From our text we may adduce two reasons also for this recommendation. Over against the folly of storing treasures on earth is the security of storing treasures in heaven. The destruction and theft to which the former is subjected is precluded from the latter. Furthermore, while accumulated earthly treasures are accompanied by fatality, the storing of treasures in heaven is accompanied by spiritual soundness. This soundness (the single eye - generous spirit or true perspective) frees one from the hardening and blinding influence of wealth, so that he can be "full of light."

But how does one store treasures in heaven? *θησαυρος* (verb, *θησαυρολογω*) can refer to a place of storage, a container for stores, or the thing which is stored. Obviously, Jesus is talking about what is stored.⁷ While there is a corresponding Old Testament word (*קצוץ*) for treasures, there is no specific mention of man storing treasures in heaven (at least not in a positive sense) in the Old Testament. However, in the intertestamental wisdom literature and in rabbinic writings rewards for acts of piety are regarded as being stored away for the coming age.⁸ In the New Testament Jesus takes up this Jewish idea and specifically relates it to the use of wealth. According to the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Jesus' concept involves "the paradoxical transformation of earthly values."⁹

That Jesus is talking about the utilization of material resources in such a way as to transform them into heavenly treasures, is clearly brought out in one of the Lukan parallels of our text.¹⁰ For Luke, storing treasures in heaven means a liberal distribution of one's wealth to improve the condition of the poor (Lk. 12:33; cf. Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 16:9). So to answer the question of how one can store treasures in heaven, it is by a generous use of one's possessions for the welfare of others.

In verse 24 Jesus comes to the crux of the matter. He has already indicated that the location of one's possessions determines

his center of affection. Now He states bluntly that there are but two centers of affection. God and mammon, and allegiance cannot be given to both. This statement (you cannot serve two masters) reflects the cultural realities of that time in which it was inconceivable for a slave to have two masters;¹¹ and it underlines the fact that one cannot be totally committed to two masters.

Writing in The Evangelical Quarterly, R.T. France points out that *μαμωνα* is used in Aramaic Targums, the Hebrew of the Qumran literature, and Mishnah in a neutral sense of material possessions (i.e., it is neither good nor bad). Whenever a negative connotation is attached to it, this is usually indicated by a qualifier.¹² France also observes that Jesus virtually personifies mammon as a competitor with God for human devotion. In the words of France, "It is the principle of materialism (economic not necessarily philosophical materialism), and it is diametrically opposed to the service of God, because where your treasure is there will your heart be also."¹³

By connecting mammon to wealth accumulation, Jesus' disturbing implication is that wealth accumulation in this life is indicative of devotion and service to mammon. But by His recommendation to store treasures in heaven (Heaven is often a Matthaean metonymy for God) He indicates that God should be the center of man's supreme affection.

The Choice Between Anxiety and Trust

The introduction of this section (24-34) with "therefore" (RSV, NIV, the Greek is literally "on account of this") indicates its connection with the previous section. In one sense this is a conclusion or an application of what has been taught in the previous section. But because of its length and its shift from the idea of affection to the idea of trust, we believe that these verses warrant a separate section for its treatment.

Again Jesus presents His listeners with a choice between anxiety and trust (this choice is virtually the same as between God and mammon, only the emphasis changes from affection to trust).

The prohibition against anxiety occurs three times in verses 24-34. Implicit in these verses is the idea that anxiety is one of the causes which leads man to accumulate wealth as a source of security.¹⁴ But anxiety further indicates that one does not have to possess wealth to trust in it. The mere fact that one becomes anxious about acquiring certain items of material possessions seems to betray his trust in them. On the contrary, trust in God will be indicated by a 'cool' confidence that He will supply our needs.

In the course of His highly rhetorical presentation, Jesus advances the argument that anxiety is rooted in faithlessness.¹⁵ By asking a series of rhetorical questions and by pointing to God's

providential care of the birds, the flowers, and the grass, Jesus carefully drives home His point until He bluntly exclaims, "O you of little faith" (v. 30, RSV). Jesus' real contention is that anxiety about food and clothing among the children of the Kingdom (remember He is addressing His disciples on the ethics of the Kingdom) reveals an amazing lack of trust in God's ability to supply their needs. In fact, Jesus maintains that such anxiety is heathenistic (v. 32). But the children of the Kingdom can rest confidently in the fact that the Heavenly Father knows their needs and will supply them in due season.

Jesus also advances the argument that anxiety is useless.¹⁶ Either the translation "span (or hour) of life" or "cubit of height" may be admissible in verse 27.¹⁷ But in either case the point is the same. The answer to the rhetorical question is evidently negative, hence the uselessness of anxiety. In fact, what we know today from medical science is that anxiety is more destructive than creative.

In His admonition to make God's kingdom and His righteousness first on our list of priorities (v. 33), Jesus points to the primacy of trust in God. Instead of preoccupation with wealth accumulation or unbelieving anxiety, entering into the Kingdom and inculcating its principles of righteousness should be the first object of human pursuit. The Greek word for first, *πρωτον*, contains both the idea of "before all else" and the idea of "above all else." The latter seems to be more dominant here.

The admonition does not mean that one can seek the Kingdom in the first place and then seek riches in the second place. It means that one's relationship to God should always occupy the place of primacy, and all other concerns should grow out of that primary relationship. The primacy of seeking the Kingdom of God first should be seen against the fact that mammon rivals God for the lordship or reign over the individual's life. So here is a call to come under the rule of God, inaugurated by the first advent of Christ and which will be consummated in His second advent.¹⁸

When the Kingdom, and by implication God, is given primacy, God will then provide the necessities of life. "All things will be added" (v. 33b, RSV). So trust in the unfailing God is the antidote to anxiety. The believer can rest assured that He will supply every need "according to His riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, RSV).

In this concluding verse of this chapter Jesus urges His hearers to live one day at a time. There is no value in being anxious about tomorrow: "each day has enough trouble of its own" (NIV). In the light of the preceding verses this verse implies that the believer's faith in God should lead to a steadfast trust that God will provide for the needs of every day, thus anxiety is precluded.

Matthew 6:19-34 represents in graphic terms, the radically exclusive claim of God on human devotion, and at the same time calls for a commitment which excludes fretfulness and faithlessness.

Riches and Discipleship

Luke 18:18-30

All three Synoptic Gospels record the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16f; Mk. 10:17f; Luke 18:18f). Though each gospel differs from the other in certain details, they all raise the question of how riches should be regarded in relation to discipleship and entrance into the Kingdom of God. It is this question which we are exploring here from the Lukan perspective. Where necessary, appropriate references will be made to Matthaean and Markan records.

The Challenge of Discipleship, v. 18-23

Luke, like Matthew and Mark places the incident surrounding the rich young ruler following Jesus' call for childlike faith as a prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom of God. It would seem that Luke intends the story of the rich ruler to be part of a series outlining what is involved in becoming a disciple and in participating in the Kingdom of God.¹⁹ Humility (18:9-14), childlike faith (18:15-17) and detachment from material possessions (18:18-30) are all included in this series.

The challenge of discipleship presented to this rich ruler emerges from his query concerning what he should do to partake (*καληρονόμω*) of eternal life. The Lukan tradition alone specifies that this man was a ruler (Mark states that he was young). Commentators have speculated regarding the particular position of leadership that this man occupied,²⁰ but the only thing that can be said with surety is that *αρχων* "denotes Roman and Jewish

official of all kinds."²¹ According to Walter E. Pilgrim, "The mention of his position as a ruler is ... meant to enhance his social and economic status in the eyes of the reader."²²

The postulation that the rich man's attribution of good to Jesus is mere flattery²³ has no support from the text. In fact, the Markan parallel, in stating that Jesus was on His way out of town when the rich young man came running up to Him and knelt before Him, suggests that he possessed a modest sincerity.

Though goodness was sometime ascribed to man, it was an attribute particularly reserved for God and the Torah, especially in rabbinic circles. So it was somewhat out of character in a Jewish context to address Jesus as "Good Teacher."²⁴ It is against this background that we should understand Jesus' response. He is by no means repudiating His moral purity to which the Gospels themselves bear witness, but He is questioning the basis on which He is being designated good against the fact that God alone is good (especially according to the prevailing teachings of the Rabbis). According to Goldenhuys and Summers, the rich young man apparently had no idea of the deity of Christ. He only regarded Him as an extremely versed rabbi who could provide Him with an expert opinion.²⁵ In pointing to the fact that God alone is good Jesus, is therefore, urging the rich man to consider the implications of his own words.²⁶

Turning to the question of how to inherit eternal life Jesus points His enquirer to the commandment. In all three synoptic

accounts the commandments which are quoted have to do with social relationship. The implication is that Jesus is seeking to challenge the rich man at the level of his love for his neighbour and at the point where his obedience to the commandments could be measured by his overt behaviour.²⁷ This view finds support in the fact that in verse 22 Jesus commands him to sell his possessions and distribute the income to the poor, i.e. his destitute neighbours. Also in support of this view is the fact that Matthew adds to the commandments quoted from the Decalogue, the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself which is found in Leviticus 19:18.

The citing of these commandments elicits from the rich man a sincere affirmation of having kept them from his youth, that is to say, he had obeyed them all his life (v.21). This affirmation is typical of the claims of a devoted Pharisee.²⁸ While in Matthew the rich man outrightly acknowledges that he still lacks something, Luke and Mark place the statement of his lack on the lips of Jesus. However, in Luke and Mark the manner of his affirmation suggests that in his acknowledged obedience to the commandments he did not experience the quality of life about which he is now questioning the Good Teacher.

Apparently, the rich man thought he was in total obedience to the commandments, and probably as far as the popular interpretations were concerned, he was (and Jesus seems to accept this). But in challenging him to sell all and come follow him, Jesus presses beyond the legalistic adherence to the letter of the law to the spirit of the law which is characterized by loving

obedience to God and loving, caring concern towards the neighbour.

The command to sell "all" follows the characteristic Lukan's formula for discipleship (9:11, 28; 14:33; 18:23). The Lukan characteristic "all," *παντα*, modifying "whatever," *οτι*, is intended to emphasize the totality of the renunciation, since the idea of "all" is already inherent in "whatever."²⁹

The mandate for total renunciation of riches (here as well as in the passages listed above) raises the question of whether all believers are expected to abandon their material possessions in order to be bona fide disciples. Some (including Clement of Alexandria), unwilling to accept the radical nature of Jesus' demand, seek to soften it by positing that Jesus is advocating a radical change of attitude towards wealth and not the giving up of wealth per se.³⁰ But this view is untenable not only for the mere fact that there can be no genuine inward attitude which does not find commensurate outward expression,³¹ but also for the fact that it is based on a refusal to accept the unmistakably clear understanding of the text.

A second interpretation is that the complete abandonment of material possessions was limited to those who were full-time followers of Jesus (like the twelve and the seventy during His earthly ministry, Lk. 2:35-38).³² This interpretation finds support in the fact that there were apparently some disciples of Jesus who did not follow Him everywhere and who did not discard all their possessions (Lk. 8:3; 19:1-10; Matt. 27:57). Peter's words in 8:22 and Jesus' words in 22:35-38, may also be construed to favour this view.

However, this interpretation does not accord with Jesus' teaching concerning the dangers of wealth and with the fact that He presents the same formula for discipleship to everyone so interested ((Lk. 14:33; 12:33; 18:29; 9:57)). Furthermore, the rest of the New Testament calls for a similar detachment from possessions and for its use in ministry to the underprivileged (I Tim. 6:5-10, 17-18; James 1:9-11; 5:1-6; I Cor. 8-9).

In light of Jesus' contention that mammon (material possession) vies with God for the lordship of human life, that it is exceedingly difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God, and that treasures are to be stored in heaven, we should view the call to give up all, as a call for the dethronement of mammon, for the renunciation of earthly security rooted in material possession, and for the placement of all material possessions at the disposal of the Master to be used in His ministry to the poor. Therefore, then and now, discipleship demands "a radical change in one's relationship to money and possession of wealth."³³

The rich man's negative response bespeaks his slavery to his possessions and betrays his unwillingness to exchange same for the reign of God in his life. The demand was too radical and his riches were too abundant (exceedingly, *σφοδρά*), so he became sad and went away (according to Mark and Matthew), thus showing himself an unfit candidate for discipleship and for entrance into The Kingdom of God.

The Difficulty of the Rich, vv. 24-27

The rich man's failure to meet the challenge of discipleship occasioned Jesus' words concerning the difficulty faced by the rich with regards to entrance into the Kingdom of God. The hyperbolic camel-going-through-the-eyes-of-a-needle imagery serves to heighten the difficulty almost to the point of impossibility.³⁴ These verses (vv. 24-27) indicate that like the rich young ruler, all the rich face a particular difficulty in disentangling themselves from the tentacles of their possessions.

Before attempting to ascertain what Jesus intended to convey in His teaching about the difficulty faced by the rich, we must say a word about the meaning of the Kingdom in the teaching of Jesus. According to the Synoptic Gospels, the Kingdom of God bespeaks the establishment of God's eschatological reign of justice and peace and the dismantling of the kingdoms of the world which operate under the influence of Satan (Matt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20). This eschatological rule of God was inaugurated in the first advent of Christ (Lk. 17:20-21; Matt. 11:14; Mk. 1:4), but its culmination still lies in the future (Matt. 7:21f; 13:42-43; 16:27-28; 24-25; Mk. 9:1; 13; Lk. 21). At present the reign of God is operative in the lives of those who submit to the lordship of Christ, and in the gospel which challenges the existing worldly systems.³⁵ The particular difficulty of the rich arises from their avowed or tacit attachment to the present order, hence their unwillingness to let go of their possessions in the present age to participate in the new age being established by God.

The harsh implication of Jesus' words concerning the camel and the needle's eye has proven too rigorous for some, so attempts have been made to soften their import. One attempt changes *καμελος*, "camel," to *καμινος*, "rope" or "cable," so that we have a comparison between difficulty of threading a needle with a rope and the difficulty of the rich entering the Kingdom.³⁶ Another attempt finds here a reference to a small gate in the Jerusalem wall which was allegedly called the "needle's eye gate." It is said that only by stripping a camel of its pack and allowing it to kneel down, that one could have a chance of getting it to squeeze through this gate.³⁷ These attempts, however, cannot be supported. *καμινος*, appearing in some Byzantine texts, seem to have been a scribal modification of the text, probably under the influence of Cyril of Alexandria. The "needle's-eye-gate" hypothesis is void of any historical and archaeological support.³⁸ Furthermore, Luke's use of *βελονη*, a surgical needle, instead of *ραφίς*, the usual word for needle (Matthew and Mark), suggests that he intends his readers to think of a literal needle.³⁹

Jesus' imagery should be seen against its rabbinic parallel. Apparently, it was "an hyperbolic expression of what was impossible."⁴⁰ It is in this context that Jesus uses it to underscore the problem of the rich in entering the Kingdom. The exclamatory, "Then who can be saved?" (v.26, RSV) of Jesus' audience clearly indicates that they understood the import of Jesus' statement.

Interpretations of Jesus' words in verse 27 have tended to focus on God's ability to save the rich in spite of the difficulty

outlined by Jesus.⁴¹ But the idea behind the question to which Jesus responds in this verse, may suggest that the primary focus should be on the salvation of persons other than the rich. The question, "Then who can be saved?" grows out of a "commonly accepted premise associating God's blessing with riches."⁴² So in the minds of the inquirers, if those who have the blessings of God on their lives can hardly enter the Kingdom, then surely there is no hope for others. It is against this background that Jesus assures them of the ability of God to do what they consider impossible. Of course, God's ability to save the rich is not excluded but the primary focus seems to be on those whom His audience would consider unsalvable.

The Reward of the Committed, v. 28-30

Verses 28-30 record Peter's remarks concerning the fact that the disciples (probably the twelve) left their homes (Mark and Matthew say, everything) to follow Jesus and Jesus' promise of full reward to those who accept the discipleship challenge. Howard L. Marshall suggests that behind Peter's verbal expression is the question, "Do we qualify for entrance in the Kingdom?"⁴³

In response to Peter's remark Jesus indicates that those who will forego all other loyalties for the sake of God's Kingdom will indeed be rewarded in this life and in the next (Luke omits Mark's reference to persecution in this context). "Manifold more in this time" is most likely a hyperbolic way of stating that

self-denial certainly will be met with the appropriate reward.

As Walter Pilgrim suggests,

Behind the promise is not a guarantee of wealth and abundance in the tradition of Job, who received double of what he lost. What the Gospels have in mind is life in a new community where the needs of one person are met by the gifts of another, where there is a common sharing of possessions according to need, where a supportive community suffers and rejoices with one another, and where one can trust God without fear or anxiety over earthly need.⁴⁴

The promise of eternal life in the age to come recalls to mind the desire of the rich ruler. He would not break with his present ties so he forfeited that which his soul desired, but whoever will sever present ties are assured life eternal in the new age.

In conclusion, Luke 18:18-30, like Matthew 6:19-34, bears witness to the fact that discipleship and participation in the Kingdom of God calls for revolutionary transformation of our relationship to material possession. Loyalty to mammon must be renounced and replaced by total commitment to God.

CHAPTER FOUR

A WORD TO THE GREEDY AND THE WEALTHY

In the Pauline Epistles there are at least three themes in connection with the subject of material possessions. One theme underscores the responsibility of providing for one's own material needs as well as the material needs of one's family (II Thess. 3: 6-10, I Tim. 5:8). The second theme grapples with the matter of greed or acquisitiveness. This theme is developed in the various references to *πλεονεξία* (greed, avarice, acquisitiveness, see Chapter 2) and in I Timothy 6:5b-10 which outlines the peril of greed (*φιλαργία*). The third theme espouses the need for liberality and hospitality. Here the apostle's concern is that the Christian community shows liberality and hospitality to all, but, more so to those within the community itself who are in need and to those who are ministers of the Word (Gal. 6:6-10; Rom. 12; 13; I Cor. 9; II Cor. 8-9; I Tim. 6:17-19).

Owing to the fact that we cannot be exhaustive in this paper, we wish to confine ourselves in this chapter to an exposition, I Timothy 6:5b-10 and 17-19. As will be evident, these passages represent Paul's treatment of the second and third theme mentioned above.

False Teachers and Greed

I Timothy 6:5b-10

The wider context of I Timothy 6:5b-10 goes back to Chapter 4 where Paul begins to issue a series of guidelines to Timothy concerning the manner in which he should discharge his duties as a minister of the gospel. This series continues to the end of the epistle. The immediate context deals with the sins of false teachers who do not concur with the charges given to the young pastor. The mention of their presupposition that godliness is a means of gain, leads to a discussion of greed which lies at the root of their presupposition. Paul's discussion at this point may be treated under two headings: True gain and traumatic greed.

True Gain, vv. 5b-8

As is stated above, the theology of the false teachers with whom Timothy had to deal was tainted with the sacriligious presupposition that godliness (or the Christian religion) could be prostituted as a means to financial success. Whether this assumption found expression in the charging of exorbitant fees for their teaching (and other services) or in using Christianity as a kind of facade in order to enhance their material advancement is not stated in the text.¹ What is clear is that they were "plagued by this sordid, materialistic view that their profession of Christianity was to be a source of personal gain."²

Paul admits that there is gain in godliness which is accompanied by contentment. But Paul replaces the false teachers' materialistic idea of gain with the concept of freedom from the sway of circumstances. Genuine godliness with such

freedom will provide one with the resources necessary to be profitable in every way (I Tim. 4:8).

The word rendered "contentment" in verse 6 is the compound Greek word *αὐταρκεια* which literally means "self-sufficiency." "It denotes independence of any lot, and the ability of finding resources in oneself, and in being indifferent to everything else besides."³ This word was commonly found on the lips of the Stoic philosophers. By it "they meant a frame of mind which was completely independent of outward and external things, and which carried the secret of happiness within itself."⁴ In a similar vein Paul uses *αὐταρκεια* to denote a state of satisfaction and repose which should characterize those who are indeed godly regardless of their economic status. It is such a state of mind which constitutes true gain and which guarantees freedom from greed which has driven the false teachers to commercialize religion.

To buttress his argument for contentment, independent of one's economic status, Paul introduces the fact that both our entrance and departure from this world are unaccompanied by material possessions. The "and" connecting the two clauses of verses 7 in the Authorized Version and the Revised Standard Version is not supported by the Greek. The Greek is *ὅτι*, "because or since," which would indicate that the reason for not taking anything into the world is the fact that we can take nothing out. This is difficult but not impossible logics.⁵ William Hendriksen regards the sentence as elliptical, thus he

renders the second clause, "just as it is evident that neither are we able to carry anything out."⁶ Without cataloguing the other attempts⁷ to explain the use of *ὅτι* in this verse, I may point out that it is clear that the apostle is unveiling the temporary significance of material possessions.⁸ This fact is supported by the obvious allusion of Job's "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither" (Job 1:21, AV). The point is that godliness is the only thing which will be of value when we make our departure from this life, thus it represents true gain.⁹

In verse 8 Paul names two items of material possessions with which the godly should be contented. These two, food and clothing, represent the basic necessities for tolerable human existence. The New English Bible by translating *ὁκενυγία* "covering" captures the literal meaning of the word. So we may have here not only a reference to clothing but to shelter as well. With these basic needs met the godly have no need for further anxiety, since these are all the material possessions that are really needed to pass their time on earth.

Traumatic Greed

Verses 9 and 10 set forth the traumatic results of being possessed by greed. The basic proposition is, "the love of money is the root of all evils" (10a, RSV). This aphorism finds many parallels in the writings of the classical thinkers. In the word of Democritus, "the love of money is the metropolis of all evils." For Phocylides "the love of money is the mother of all evil."

Seneca wrote about "the desire for that which does not belong to us from which every evil of the mind springs." Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, contended that it is "the love of money which is the starting-place of the greatest transgression of the law."¹⁰ From these sources Paul borrowed this well-known maxim to underscore the multiplicity of evils which are rooted in the passion to acquire and accumulate more and more material possessions.

The fact that other sources of evil are commonly recognized has posed a minor problem in interpreting Paul's statement. But, the clue to a correct understanding of this statement may lie in the fact that the word for "root" (*rhizō*) is unarthrous and comes in the emphatic position of the sentence. Thus the sense of the statement is "a source of all (kind of) evils is the love of money."¹¹

It goes without saying that Paul is not athematizing money per se. Some amount of it is necessary for survival, and even an overabundance of it can be used redemptively (vv. 17-19). What Paul is stating is that cupidity is by nature infectious, producing multifarious evils. That is to say, the craving after gain leads to a proliferation of evil in the process of acquiring same.

Greed is the starting point on a course which leads to traumatic consequences. The progression on this course finds parallel expressions in verses 9 and 10:

Verse 9

1. desire to be rich

2. fall into temptation ...

3. plunge men into ruin

Verse 10

craving

wandered away from the faith

pierced their hearts ...

The desiring (*βουλομενοι*, "those desiring") of verse 9 is not a result of an emotional stimulus, but a result of a process or reasoning. Thus it is not a passing fancy but fixed attitude of mind.¹² The craving (*ορεγομενοι*) of verse 10 is even more telling. It indicates a reaching after or a stretching of one's self in order to touch or grasp that which is desired.¹³ The implication of both words is that greed is a devotion to the pursuit of gain with all the powers of the human faculty.

But the desire for or craving after riches will lead inevitably to certain complications. In due course those possessed by cupidity will fall into temptations, become entangled in many snares, and become enslaved to many base and baneful desires (v. 9). Christians so possessed are made to wander from the faith they professed (v. 10). The expression "fall into temptation" suggests a constant yielding (*παύωμαι*, present tense in the Greek) to the particular temptations succored by greed.¹⁴ The imagery of falling into many traps indicates that the desire for riches is a kind of bait which lures its victims into danger. Such danger is indicated by the mention of "many senseless and hurtful desires," in the next phrase. Paul's contention is that greed is always accompanied by a host of other unhealthy desires. As Homer A. Kent suggests, those desires are

senseless because "they cannot be logically defended," and hurtful because "they dissipate one's energies and call away one's interest from spiritual activity."¹⁵

Finally, the insatiable drive towards material success brings those it possesses into ruin. It is interesting to observe that the greedy are no longer in control of their desires, but are being controlled by their desires which carry them along until they are plunged into destruction. In the New Testament, "plunge" (*βουβω*) occurs only here and in Luke 5:7. In Luke it is employed in connection with the sinking of an overloaded boat. Here it is used figuratively portraying the unavoidable downward course of destruction to which greed leads.¹⁶ Verse 10 describes the traumatic outcome of greed as "self-inflicted pangs of disillusionment."¹⁷ The imagery is that of the torture inflicted by a sword thrust through the body.¹⁸ The obvious meaning is that the love of money will eventually breed disillusionment and remorse. If one succeeds in gaining what he desires, he will be disillusioned because he will discover that it does not bring the happiness he desires. If he fails to acquire what he desires he will be remorseful over his futile efforts, to say nothing of the sins to which he has succumbed in the process.

In I Timothy 6:5b-10 Paul paints, in bold colours, a picture of the peril associated with the passionate and insatiable desire to be wealthy. His treatment occurs in his enumeration of the sins of false teachers, but such broad statements as "those who desire to be rich," and "the love of money is the root of all

evils," indicate that the peril is the same for everyone who is greedy. Therefore, this passage presents a poignant warning against avarice in general.

The Rich and Liberality

I Timothy 6:17-19

Whereas in I Timothy 6:5-10 Paul speaks to Timothy about those who are avaricious, in 6:17-19 he gives him directions concerning those who are already wealthy. The markedly "Christian atmosphere" of I Timothy has led to the supposition that the rich in this context are Christians.¹⁹ But the phrase, "the rich in this world" (*οἱ πολλοὶ ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι*) seems to be inclusive of the rich in general. Furthermore, in the proclamation of the gospel, it seems reasonable to suppose that Timothy would have to present the unbelieving (as well as the believing) rich with the charges outlined in these verses. So it would seem to me that the interpretation of "the rich" in this context should not be restricted to rich Christians.

"In the present age" (*ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι*) is to be seen in contrast to the coming age (*ὁ μέλλων*, v.19).²⁰ The apostle is referring to those who have acquired great possessions under the systems of the present age. He wishes to intimate that the present world systems will be replaced eventually by the "New Age" (i.e., the Kingdom of God in all its perfection). The wealth of the present age bears the same impermanence as this age itself. It is against this background that Paul wants the rich to know how

they should relate to and utilize their wealth. Thus he admonishes Timothy to command them not to do certain things and to do certain things.

First of all, concerning the negatives, they are "not to be haughty" (RSV). The word rendered "haughty" (*ὕψις γλαυφροειδής*) is literally "highminded" or "exalted in mind."²¹ Paul knows very well the pride and elitism to which the materially prosperous, in particular, are predisposed. He wants them to know that such "pride of purse is not merely vulgar, it is sinful."²²

Secondly, the wealthy ought not to make their wealth their source of security. This charge is reminiscent of Psalm 62:10: "If riches increase, set not your heart on them" (RSV). Not only are the wealthy prone to become proud but also to fix their hope (the perfect infinitive *ἐλπιεῖν*, suggests a fixed state of mind) on their riches, i.e., their confidence in the future is bound to their possessions. But wealth is bordered by uncertainties. One source of uncertainty is the fact that no one knows the duration of his life; and as 6:7 reminds us, we cannot take the possessions of this life into the next. Another source of uncertainty is the volatility of economic and commercial institutions. They are subjected to all kinds of political and social forces which may deplete wealth overnight. The recent world inflation and recession serve to illustrate such volatility. The uncertain nature of wealth should preclude any idea of making it one's source of hope.

On the positive side, the rich ought to hope in God who is the ultimate source of all good gifts. This charge represents a call to be devoted to and have confidence in the Creator rather than the creation. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically evil about possessions; God has given them for human enjoyment. But possessions should be kept in their proper place; they should not rival God as the objects of human confidence.

Furthermore, the rich are not to imagine that their wealth is only for their own self-indulgent enjoyment. On the contrary they have a responsibility to become "rich in good works" through a liberal distribution of their material resources. The three charges of verse 18, (1) to do good works (2) to be rich in good works, and (3) to be liberal and generous, are essentially the same. The three serve to compound the gravity of the charge to make generosity a way of life. As Homer A. Kent suggests, if the rich finds the idea sharing abhorrent, this fact is an indication of his trust in riches instead of God.²³

By the unstingy distribution of their wealth to meet the needs of others, the rich are said to lay up a good foundation for the future (v.19). The elliptical nature of the Greek makes for some difficulty in translation. However, the thought is abundantly clear. A paraphrase of 19a may read, "laying up as treasure for themselves that which shall prove a good foundation for the time to come." This good foundation presents a vivid contrast to the "uncertainty of riches" (v.17). The concept of laying up a good foundation for the afterlife re-echoes Jesus' teaching concerning

the transformation of earthly possessions into heavenly treasures by using them benevolently (Matt. 6:20; Lk. 18:22). By storing treasures in heaven the rich "will grasp the life which is life indeed" (19b, NEB). The idea is that, in correct use of wealth there is an appropriation of real life.²⁴

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have endeavoured to present a Pauline perspective on material possessions as represented by I Timothy 6:5b-10 and 17-19. Verses 5b-10 disclose the cancerous nature of greed and its traumatic outcome. Verses 17-19 direct the rich towards a proper attitude concerning wealth and towards the correct utilization of wealth. The understanding gained from this Chapter should heighten our awareness concerning the danger of acquisitiveness, and at the same time motivate us towards generosity with what we possess.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PREDICAMENT OF THE WEALTHY

Of all the General Epistles, the Epistle of James has the most to say about material possessions. There is no direct treatment in the Petrine Epistles, only an allusion with reference to the greed of false teachers (II Pet. 2:3). John's only significant reference outlines the incompatibility of love and lack of compassionate sharing (I Jn. 3:17-18). Jude also contains an allusion to the subject of material possessions in its reference to the false teachers' desire for gain (Jude 11). Though James' treatment is not exhaustive it is far more substantial than the others.

A Survey

In the book of James there are three direct references to the rich or riches (1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6). In all these instances the treatment is substantially negative. In chapter 1:10-11 the rich man is exhorted to humility, because like the flowers he will "fade away in the midst of his pursuits" (RSV). In Chapter 2:1-7 James admonishes the believers not to show partiality to the rich over against the poor. He reminds his readers of God's choice of the materially destitute to make them rich in faith and to make them inheritors of His Kingdom. On the contrary, he reminds them of the oppressive and blasphemous practices of the

rich. In chapter 5:1-6, (which shall be our focus of attention) James issues a scorching indictment against the rich.

An indirect treatment of material possessions may be inferred from several other passages in James. The apostle clearly implies in 1:27 and 2:14-17 that Christians should use their material possessions in ministry to the destitute. Failure to do so indicates a lack of genuine faith. In chapter 4:1f James seems to denounce the craving for possessions which results in fierce competition, and even combating. From verse 13 of the same chapter he upbraids those who have confidence in their own ability to make life economically feasible without reference to the Sovereign Lord.

What we have seen therefore, is that the subject of material possessions occupies a prominent place in the Epistle of James. But it is to chapter 5:1-6 that we must turn for the boldest and most extensive treatment on the subject.

An Exposition, James 5:1-6

James 5:1-6 continues the indictment against worldliness began in chapter 4. James has already spoken out against wars and fightings rooted in the passionate desires for things (4:1-10), against censoriousness (4:11-12), against arrogance and presumptuousness (4:13-17), and now against the amassing of wealth as a source of security.

This passage breathes the tones of the Old Testament prophets in their denunciation of the wealthy of their day. At some points

the stylistic akinness and almost verbal similarity are very evident. For example His "Listen now (the idiomatic equivalence of ἀγὴν ὑμῶν), 'you rich' takes us back to Amos' "Hear this, you who trample upon the needy" (8:4, RSV), and the imagery of the rich fattening themselves in the day of slaughter is reminiscent of Amos' metaphor of the "cows of Bashan". (4:1, RSV).

In portraying the predicament of the wealthy, Amos demolishes their sense of security and heightens their sense of guilt.

Demolishing Their Sense of Security

In the first three verses James demolishes any sense of security which the wealthy might have had by pointing to their coming miseries and perishing riches.

Their coming miseries. As if to jerk the rich out of the posture of complacency and false security, James exclaims, "Listen now, you rich." Since this epistle is evidently written to Christians (1:2, 16; 2:1f.; 4:11; 5:7), we are immediately faced with the question of whether those addressed in this section are Christians.

According to Robert Johnstone, James is addressing the wealthy Jews who oppressed Jewish Christians and blasphemed the name of Jesus.¹ John Calvin defends an opposing view, arguing that there is every evidence that the preceding chapter speaks of professing Christians whose sins are no less than those condemned in this passage.²

The position advanced by Sophie Laws and James Hardy Ropes seems to be a better interpretation. In the words of Sophie Laws, it is "the rich qua rich" who are addressed.³ James Hardy Ropes argues that "in the passage before us the rich as a class is apostrophised without reference to their religious profession, in order to make clear to the Christian reader the folly of admiring and striving after riches."⁴

In contradistinction to the notion that the rich should be lighthearted, James calls them to weep with howling (literally "weep, wailing"). In the LXX ὀλοαυόντης carries the idea of a grief-laden mourning in face of the impending judgment of Yahweh (Isa., 13:6; 14:31; 15:2f.; 16:7; Zech. 11:2; Amos 8:3).⁵ Within a prophet mold and with prophetic pungency James enjoins the rich to a grievous lamentation over their approaching miseries. What constitutes their miseries is not spelled out, but the eschatological mood of the context indicates that the final judgment is in the mind of the writer (5:3, 5, 7f.).

Their perishing riches. Again James reflects his akinness to the Old Testament prophets in the certainty with which he points to the decomposition of that which constitutes riches. This certainty is revealed in the use of the Greek perfect tense. There is much debate about how to understand this perfect tense, but several considerations seem to favor the interpretation which regard it as a "prophetic perfect."

First of all, the interpretation which claims that James is describing present realities does not adequately explain the fact that silver is not likely to rust and gold does not rust at all.⁶ But in light of judgment and eternity even these will ultimately disintegrate. Secondly, even if the idea of the worthlessness of material possessions is foremost in the apostle's mind, such an idea comes from the ultimate perishability of the various items. Thirdly, the eschatological nature of the text and its context lends support to a futuristic interpretation (5:1, 3, 5, 7-9).

So the conclusion of Ward Anderson is very appropriate:

By picturing these things as already having happened, James emphasizes God's present determination to ultimately judge misused and unused wealth. It is as good as done, and the writer bids the rich man to view his goods in this light, for that indeed is how God sees them.⁷

Without debate over whether or not *πλοῦτος* *ἀγαθὰ* *θεοῦ* *ἀλλυ* has reference to accumulated goodstuffs, the message is clear: all the things which man seeks after to satisfy this acquisitive temper are doomed to corruption.

Even more frightening than the decomposition of wealth is the fact that the decomposition elements will stand in the judgment as evidence of the worthlessness of all that has been treasured;⁸ these elements will also in some way play a part in inflicting punishment on those castigated in this section.⁹

For James the coming judgment is so near (5:7f.) that the rich can be said to be storing up treasures in the day of judgment.

The point is that even in the twilight of judgment the rich are busying themselves with the accumulation of wealth which will eventually perish.

Heightening Their Sense of Guilt

James seeks to heighten the sense of guilt in the rich by describing their ruthless exploitation and their gratifying self-indulgence.

Their ruthless exploitation. In verse 4 James castigates the rich for their acquisition of wealth by unjust economic practices. Breathing the spirit of the Old Testament once again (Gen. 4:10; 18:20; 19:13; Deut. 24:15), James represents the withheld wages as crying out against these exploiters, and the outcry of the workers as having reached the ears of the Lord Sabaoth. "The Lord Sabaoth" is an Old Testament designation for Yahweh as the Almighty Judge who dispenses justice and who defends the cause of the dispossessed (2 Sam. 17:45; Psa. 103:21; Isa. 1:9; Rom. 9:29; Isa. 5).

According to verse 6, the atrocities of the oppressors extend to murder. The most natural understanding of "the righteous" is that it relates to the oppressed already mentioned in verse 4 (and 2:6-7).

Whether the condemnation and murder of the righteous was a necessary outcome of the withheld wages, or came through the courts is not certain. What is certain, however, is that the rich used their positions of power to defeat the cause of the

poor, to such an extent, as to cause their death.

The last sentence of verse 6 may either be indicative or interrogative.¹⁰ Since there is no textual pressure requiring the interrogative, the indicative would be the most natural understanding. In fact as Laws argues, the previous statements of the oppressors' abuse of power would suggest that this is but a simple statement of the powerlessness of their victims, thus heightening the magnitude of the guilt.¹¹

Their gratifying self-indulgence. The rich, indicted by James, were living in luxury and extravagant self-indulgence (ἐπιπορευσαθε, ἐσπταλισατε). This kind of living (especially at the expense of, and without regard for the poor) is expressly condemned by both Old and New Testament (Amos 6:1-6; Lk. 16:19ff.; 1 Tim. 5:6).

From an eschatological viewpoint such sumptuous living is a preliminary to the day of punishment. It is like preparation for the day of slaughter. The point of the metaphor is clear, "these people became so interested in satisfying their immediate desires that they were unaware of their impending doom."¹¹

Conclusion

Throughout the Epistle of James, we find a very strong sentiment against the rich. The fullest expression of this sentiment comes in 5:1-6. In this strongly worded passage, James, in a prophetic manner, pronounces inevitable judgment on those who accumulate and hoard wealth, and who, in the process,

employ unjust economic and political means to perpetrate oppression and to strengthen their own elitist position. This is a clear message to our materialistic world; and a message which must be proclaimed by the faithful stewards of the gospel.

CHAPTER SIX

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

In this concluding chapter we will endeavor to lay out in a more systematic fashion the most important points which we have already encountered in the preceding chapters. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive. In fact, what we hope to present is a brief outline of our findings concerning the acquisition, the accumulation and the utilization of material possessions.

The Acquisition of Wealth

The New Testament issues no forthright condemnation of the acquisition of material possessions per se. The truth is, there is a strong admonition to Christians to earn their livelihood (I Thess. 4:11-12; II Thess. 3:6-15). But the New Testament does issue an explicit and unmitigated condemnation of acquisitiveness and exploitation.

Acquisitiveness Condemned

The New Testament attitude towards acquisitiveness is unmistakably clear. This attitude is best enunciated in the story of the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21). After warning against acquisitiveness ($\pi\lambda\epsilon\omicron\nu\epsilon\lambda\iota\lambda\iota\alpha$, covetousness or the drive to acquire and accumulate wealth), Jesus told this story illustrating the unfortunate end of those who are obsessed with the drive towards

wealth accumulation. In the words of Ronald Sider:

The rich fool is the epitome of covetousness. He has a greedy compulsion to acquire more and more possessions even though he does not need them. And his phenomenal success of piling up more and more property and wealth leads to the blasphemous conclusion that material possessions can satisfy all his needs. From the divine perspective, however, this attitude is sheer madness. He is a raving fool.¹

The primitive church viewed acquisitiveness with such seriousness that the covetous person was excluded from their fellowship (I Cor. 5:10-11). Acquisitiveness itself is condemned as idolatry and as a result those implicated in it have no inheritance in God's kingdom (I Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

Exploitation Condemned

The whole scope of biblical literature manifests a grave concern for justice in the sphere of economic relations. The New Testament joins with the Old in representing God (and Jesus) as the Defender of the economically oppressed and the socially mistreated (the whole book of Luke clearly illustrates this point). Paul commands masters to deal justly and fairly with their slaves (Col. 4:1). But by far the most stern statement denouncing exploitation is issued by James who represents the rich as the oppressors of the poor and the exploiters of their labourers. In biting prophetic tones he pronounces inevitable judgment on such behavior.

The Accumulation of Wealth

A frequently asked (and almost as frequently a very compromisingly or at least defectively answered) question is, "Does the Bible (esp. NT) condemn wealth?" From a New Testament standpoint we must point out that wealth is not condemned in the gnostic sense. That is, those material elements or constituents of wealth are not considered intrinsically evil (the gnostic view that matter is evil). But we must also point out that for the New Testament to condemn the drive behind wealth accumulation and not to condemn wealth accumulation itself would be tantamount to a contradiction. Confessedly, there is no verse which declares, "Thou shalt not accumulate wealth." But the manifest negative attitude with which the New Testament treats wealth (as has been observed in the treatment of *ΜΑΛΟΥΣ*) can be interpreted to mean nothing less than a denunciation of wealth accumulation.

The rationale behind the New Testament attitude towards wealth is that those who possess it usually view it as their source of security. Thus it becomes a competitor with God for men's devotion, and thereby jeopardizes their eternal security (this is exactly the point of Matt. 6:19-34; Luke 12:13-21; Mark 10:17-31; I Tim. 6:5-10; and Jas. 5:1-3). Wealth accumulation (and even anxiety about the necessities of life) is the surest sign that the accumulator is trusting in mammon. Paul, Jesus and James were fully cognizant of the demonic and dominating sway which economic materialism exercises over mankind. That is why they characterize it as idolatrous (Matt. --mammon) and as one of the most potent

forces preventing men from entering the kingdom of God.

Does the New Testament denunciation of wealth accumulation mean that there were no wealthy believers in the early Church? Though the bulk of the New Testament Christians seems to have been composed of those of lowly means, there are indications that there were some Christians who were well-to-do (Matt. 27:57; Acts 4:34-5:6; I Tim. 6:17-19; Jas. 1:10-11). But we must observe that these believers are characterized as utilizing or commanded to utilize their material possessions in a redemptive manner.

A further question which comes to the fore in light of the New Testament denunciation of wealth accumulation concerns how much one may legitimately acquire and keep. Or to state the question in another way, "Is the New Testament against savings?" Admittedly, the New Testament gives no forthright answer to this question. But considering the fact that there are certain God-given responsibilities which require money in order to fulfill them, it would seem to me that savings to meet these responsibilities is a legitimate endeavor. But when saving becomes only a means of wealth accumulation, or the savings become the object of one's trust, then the whole exercise is questionable.

The Utilization of Wealth

The New Testament perspective on wealth utilization can be summarized under at least three motifs: the stewardship motif, the treasure-in-heaven motif, and the love motif.

The Stewardship Motif

The stewardship motif in relation to material possessions is not frequently treated in the New Testament, though much is said about liberal giving. In fact there is no record that tithing one-tenth was recommended to or practiced by the early believers. But in relationship to the parable of Jesus concerning the dishonest but astute steward, we find a clear reference to the principle of stewardship (Lk. 16:1-13). After telling His disciples to use their material possessions to make friends and to make provision for the eternal habitation, Jesus goes on to speak of their responsibilities as stewards. He queried rhetorically, "If you have not been faithful in unrighteous mammon, who will entrust you with true riches?" (v.11). The implication is that they should manage wisely their material possessions as a faithful steward would manage that which is committed to him by his master. The stewards of God's possessions, therefore, should not lavish them on themselves, but should use same as the Master has directed.

The Treasure-in-Heaven Motif

With vividness the New Testament repeatedly points to the impermanence of wealth (Matt. 6:19; Lk. 12:33; Jas. 5:2-3; I Tim. 6:17-18). The way to compensate for the short-lived value of wealth is to store treasures in heaven. Jesus and Paul make it absolutely clear that the means by which wealth is stored in heaven is liberal distribution of earthly goods to meet the needs of the less fortunate (Lk. 12:33-34; Matt. 19:21-22; Mk. 10:21-23; I Tim. 6:19). What Jesus and Paul advocate is a transformation of

corruptible possessions into eternal treasures by investing them in human development.

The Love Motif

The final motif, one which embraces the others, is the love motif. This motif grows out of the first commandment and is embedded in the second (Mk. 12:29-33). R. Batey strikes the right cords when he says, "The task of the church is to incarnate the reality of love and compassion in the hearts of men so that possessions will be freely used for the common good."² Both Jesus and the early Church were serious about such incarnation, and thus proclaimed it in words and deeds.

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is a portrayal of genuine incarnation of love (Lk. 10:25-36). The parable concerning the judgment of the nations illustrates both the practice and neglect of such loving concern (Matt. 25:31-46). Failure to inculcate this loving concern was precisely the problem of the rich young ruler (and probably the rich man in Luke 16:19-31). Through his refusal to use his possessions to meet the needs of the poor he demonstrated that he would not exchange his love for his possessions with love for God and his neighbors (Matt. 19:16ff.; Mk. 10:17ff.).

Love and lack of caring concern are incompatible. John, in exclamatory language, questions how one can profess love, and yet not "flesh it out" in compassionate treatment of the needy. What John is actually saying is this: If one who claims to have

love sees a brother in need, and he has the world's means of subsistence (τοὺς βίον τοῦ κοσμοῦ), but his innermost being, self or feeling (ὁ νόμος τοῦ νοῦ) is not moved to help the brother, then his profession is empty (1 Jn. 3:17). In James a similar nonconcern is an indication of a lack of saving faith (Jas. 2:14-17).

This love motif was very much operative in the life of the early Church. It was manifested in the voluntary response of sharing to meet the needs of those in the local fellowship at Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37), and by the liberal contributions of other local churches to aid the less fortunate brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30; I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8-9). In the II Corinthians passage we learn that some were making unbelievable contributions out of their poverty. Christ's making Himself poor for our enrichment is presented as a powerful motif for the continuation of such labor of love.

But loving, caring concern is not to be restricted to the boundaries of the Church fellowship. As Jesus' own life, His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Lk. 6), His parable of the Good Samaritan, and His teaching concerning the judgment of the nations all indicate, such an incarnation of love should reach to every "nook and cranny" where human needs issue the clarion call for economic salvation.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have concentrated on letting the New Testament speak for itself on the matter of material possessions;

I have explored various facets of the subject, and in this final chapter I have sought to summarize the areas in which I believe the New Testament speaks most forcibly and urgently. But I have made no attempt to outline specific applications of the truths I have uncovered. For the most part, this has been deliberate. What I have endeavored to do is to bring the New Testament perspective to the fore, so that everyone can judge his economic relations in light of it. What I hope is that a process of conscientization will be initiated in the readers. I hope this process will culminate in a critical examination of the contemporary values placed on wealth and in a serious attempt to be "genuinely Christian" in face of the prevailing economic materialism of our century.

But in spite of the fact that I have made no specific applications, I would like to suggest that the New Testament teaching on material possessions has certain implications for the proclamation and praxis of the church. The naive assumption that the mission of the church is limited to the spiritual sphere (i.e., the proclamation of salvation by grace) cannot be maintained on biblical grounds. A holistic view of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) shows that it contains a call for obedience to the teachings of Christ. At the heart of these teachings is the call for loving concern for others.³ The proclamation of the gospel is intended to touch all areas of human life and activities, and the area of material possessions is no exception. So it is incumbent on the church to proclaim the biblical perspective concerning

material possessions. Therefore, any claim of the church to be following Christ and to be biblical must be validated by a fervent proclamation of the New Testament (and Old Testament) condemnation of avarice, exploitation and mammon worship. In addition, the church must outline to its members and the world the biblical agenda for the utilization of wealth.

Proclamation, however, must be complemented by praxis. I would suggest that the road towards responsible use of material possessions by the church must begin with a rediscovery or revitalization of a genuine community spirit in the local church and in the church community at large. The modern church must come to experience something of the dynamic fellowship which existed in the early church and which led to a voluntary sharing relationship. In such a closely knitted community, the needs of one become the needs of the other, and the fulness of one becomes the fulness of the other.

But the church must not only see itself as closely knitted community, it must incarnate the loving Christ reaching out to a needy world. Klaus Backmuhl, professor of Theology and Ethics at Regent College, equates the battle which must be waged against hunger in our time to the struggle against slavery. He goes on to suggest that "to continue Christ's ministry on earth, the church must provide those in need with the material means for life."⁴

At the individual level there are at least four implications for biblical lifestyle which can be derived from the New Testament. First of all the biblical lifestyle is opposition to the value

systems of the present age. This fact is even more significant in light of the materialistic spirit which pervades most modern cultures. The Christian lifestyle therefore, must be counter-culture. Secondly, the Christian lifestyle needs to imitate the self-giving example of Christ. Paul sights this example as a powerful motif for contributing to the needs of others (II Cor. 8:8). Thirdly, the Christian lifestyle should be characterized by compassionate sharing. This should be done with the realization that we meet Christ in the needy. Finally, the Christian lifestyle ought to be one of moderation. I am keenly aware of the aim of the advertising industry to create a false sense of need in the consumers. But the Christian needs to guard against being sucked in by every mandate of our materialistic world, and thus preclude excess.⁵

To live according to the biblical mandates regarding material possessions is a mammoth task in our twentieth culture which dictates otherwise. But the Christians' commitment to Christ and the principles of the Scriptures demands that they say no to the world and yes to the Word.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

¹ The expressions "material possessions" and "wealth" occur frequently in this paper. The former refers to all material possessions in general, while the latter refers to accumulated material possessions.

² Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Leicester, England and Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 943-945.

Chapter Two

¹ Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barnabas, eds., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 5 Vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), V. p. 909b.

² Ibid., pp. 909b-910a.

³ Ibid., p. 910a.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 910a-b.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Walter E. Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p. 19.

⁹ Ronald Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 60.

¹⁰ Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 61

12 Pilgrim, p. 21

13 Sider, pp. 90-91.

14 Ibid., p. 88.

15 Frank E. Gaebelin, "Old Testament Foundations for Living More Simply," Living More Simply, edited by Ronald Sider (Downers Grove) Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 35.

16 Ibid., p. 38.

17 Colin Brown, ed., The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), II, p. 829; περιουσις cannot be included since it is used in the New Testament in regards to material possessions.

18 Ibid., p. 845.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 846.

21 Ibid., p. 829.

22 Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964-1976), VI, p. 319.

23 Ibid., p. 320.

24 Ibid., pp. 320-322.

25 Ibid., p. 322

26 Ibid., p. 324

27 Ibid., p. 325

28 NIDNTT., II, p. 843

²⁹ NIDNTT., I, p. 137

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 138.

³² Ibid., p. 139.

³³ Ibid.

Chapter Three

¹ Walter E. Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p. 87.

² Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, n.d.), pp. 105-106.

³ John White, The Golden Cow: Materialism in the Twentieth Century (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), p. 45.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cf. Plummer, p. 106; R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to Matthew, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 75-76.

⁶ Tasker, p. 76.

⁷ NIDNTT., II, pp. 829-830.

⁸ Ibid., p. 830.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The material in this section is recorded in three different passages in Luke 11:34-36; 12:22-34; 16:13.

¹¹ White, p. 48.

¹² R. T. Prance, "God and Mammon," The Evangelical Quarterly, 51:1:3-12, Jan.-March, 1979, pp. 9-10.

¹³ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁴ Tasker, p. 76.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ John R. W. Scott, Christian Counter-Culture (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), p. 170.

¹⁹ Howard I. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. by I. H. Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 681.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 684; Pilgrim, p. 89.

²¹ Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 266.

²² Pilgrim, p. 89.

²³ Archibald T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, II (New York and London: Harpers and Brothers Publishers, 1930), p. 235.

²⁴ Marshall, p. 684; Morris, p. 266.

²⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Book of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), p. 458; Ray Summers, Commentary on Luke (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), p. 213.

²⁶ Morris, p. 267.

27 Marshall, p. 685

28 Ibid.

29 George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Riches, the Rich, and God's Judgment in I Enoch 92-105 and the Gospel According to Luke," New Testament Studies, 25:3:324-344, April, 1979.

30 Peter H. Davids, "New Testament Foundations for Living More Simply," Living More Simply, ed. by Ronald Sider (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 43.

31 Ibid.

32 Pilgrim, p. 98.

33 Jim Wallis, Agenda for Biblical People (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 93.

34 Pilgrim, p. 119.

35 For further discussion on the Kingdom of God see Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Leicester, England and Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), pp. 408-430; and Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology, I (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 96-108.

36 Summers, p. 215; Marshall, p. 687.

37 Summers, p. 216; Pilgrim, p. 120

38 Ibid.

39 Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980 reprint), p. 407.

40 Marshall, p. 687.

41 Marshall, p. 688; Pilgrim, pp. 120-121; Summers, p. 216; Geldenhuys, p. 460.

42 Daniel Malone, "Riches and Discipleship." Biblical Theological Bulletin, 9:2:78-88, April, 1979, p. 80.

⁴³ Marshall, p. 686.

⁴⁴ Pilgrim, p. 122.

Chapter Four

¹ Donald Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 112.

² Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 193. The King James' reading "from such withdraw thyself" is not attested to in the best manuscripts.

³ Charles R. Erdman, The Pastoral Epistles of Paul: An Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1925), p. 73.

⁴ William Barclay, The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon (second ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 148-149.

⁵ Kent, p. 194.

⁶ William Hendriksen, Commentary on I & II Timothy and Titus (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1957/1959), p. 199.

⁷ See Hendriksen, pp. 198-199.

⁸ Kent, p. 194.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Barclay, pp. 151-152.

¹¹ Hendriksen, p. 200

¹² Kenneth S. Wuest, The Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament Greek (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952), p. 95.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kent, p. 195..

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Guthrie, p. 114.

¹⁸ Kent, p. 198.

¹⁹ Eerdmans, p. 78; Kent, pp. 206-208; Barclay, p. 158.

²⁰ J. H. Bernard, ed., The Pastoral Epistles, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: The University Press, 1906), p. 101.

²¹ Kent, p. 206.

²² Eerdmans, p. 79.

²³ Kent, p. 207.

²⁴ Bernard, p. 102

²⁵ Kent, p. 208.

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¹ Robert Johnstone, Lectures on the Epistle of James (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), pp. 348-349.

² John Calvin, A Commentary on the Catholic Epistles, trans. and ed. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), p. 342.

³ Sophie Laws, A Commentary on the Epistle of James (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 195.

⁴ James Hardy Ropes, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James. The International Critical Commentary, ed. by Francis Brown and Alfred Plummer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 282.

⁵ Joseph B. Mayor, The Epistle of St. James (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock Christian Publishers, 1977), p. 279.

⁶ Ropes, p. 285.

⁷ Ward Andersen, "The Miser's Miseries," Biblical Viewpoint, 14:1:46-51, April 1980, p. 48.

⁸ George Arthur Buttrick and others, The Interpreter's Bible, XII (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 63.

⁹ Johnstone, p. 355.

¹⁰ Andersen, p. 49.

¹¹ Laws, pp. 206f.

¹² Ibid., p. 207.

¹³ Andersen, p. 50.

Chapter Six

¹ Ronald Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 123.

² David Murchie, "The New Testament View of Wealth Accumulation," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 21:4:335-344, December 1978, p. 340.

³ Frank E. Gaebelin, "Evangelicals and Social Concern," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 25:1:17-22, March 1982, p. 19.

⁴ Klaus Bockmuhl, "Lean Years - Abundant Opportunity," Christianity Today, 26:19:68, November 26, 1982.

⁵ Peter H. Davids, "New Testament Foundations for Living More Simply," Living More Simply, ed. by Ronald Sider. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), pp. 51-53.

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