

Carnal Cash into Kingdom Currency

Paul's Word to the Rich- By John Piper

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These are good days for cashing in on godliness. The godliness market is hot for book sellers and music makers and dispensers of silver crosses and fish buckles and olivewood letter-openers and bumper stickers and lucky water crosses with Jesus on the front and miracle water inside guaranteed to make you win at Bingo or your money back up to 90 days. These are good days for gain in godliness!

And so they are dangerous days. What you do with your money—or desire to do with it—can make or break your happiness forever. Paul makes very clear that what you feel about money can destroy you: "Those who *desire* to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9). So how you how you feel about money can kill you.

Paul is warning Timothy about some slick deceivers who discovered they could cash in on the upsurge of godliness in Ephesus. He says they "imagine that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5). They are so addicted to the love of money that truth is a wax nose in the service of selfishness. Nothing is sacred. If the bottom line is big and black, the advertising strategies are a matter of indifference. If godliness is in, then sell godliness.

Paul's response to this was not: Gain is vain. His response was, "There is *great gain* in godliness with contentment" (1 Tim. 6:9). If your godliness has freed you from the desire to be rich and has helped you be content with what you have, then your godliness is tremendously profitable. "For while physical training is a little profitable, godliness is profitable for all things, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Godliness that overcomes the craving for material wealth produces great spiritual wealth. So it is very profitable not to pursue wealth.

Don't get me wrong. Making a lot of money is not the same as amassing a lot of wealth. Big income does not have to mean "bigger barns". John Wesley said, make as much as you can and give as much as you can.

But wanting more and more money for ourselves is folly. Paul gives three reasons.

1) "We brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world" (1 Tim. 6:7). In other words, there are no U-Hauls behind hearses. You can't take it with you.

2) "If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim. 6:8). Why? Because no matter which way the market is moving, God is always better than gold. "Be content with what you have. For He has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5).

3) "The love of money is the root of all evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:10). The relish to be rich is suicidal.

But what if you do come into a lot of money? Say an inheritance or a life insurance settlement or a well-deserved bonus or raise.

Some would say, "Invest!" Well, Jesus and Paul are not against all investments, only bad ones—the kind that aren't still paying interest in a thousand years. Jesus said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven!" (Matt. 6:20). Paul said, Tell the rich to "lay up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:19).

How do you do that? Jesus said, "Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with . . . treasure in the heavens that does not fail (Luke 12:33). That's how you invest your money in eternity: you use it for others. Paul said the same thing: "Be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous"—that's how the rich lay a foundation for the future. Use your money for mercy and missions.

The reason generosity provides a good foundation for the future is not because it *earns* eternal life, but because it shows where your hope is. "Charge the rich not to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God" (1 Tim. 6:18). We don't earn eternal life. It is a gift of grace (2 Tim. 1:9). We receive it by resting in God's promise. But how we use our money confirms or denies the reality of that rest. Resting in the promises of God releases money for missions and makes the soul more sure of heaven.

There is a wealth and prosperity doctrine afoot today that has been shaped by the half-truth which says, "We glorify God with our money by enjoying thankfully all the things He enables us to buy. Why should a son of the King live like a pauper?" And so on! The true half of this is that we should thank God for every good thing we have (1 Tim. 4:3; 6:17). The false half is the subtle implication that God can be glorified by all kinds of luxurious purchases.

But if this were true, Jesus would not have said, "Sell your possessions and give alms" (Luke 12:33). He would not have said, "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink" (Luke 12:29). John the Baptist would not have said, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none" (Luke 3:11). The Son of Man would not have walked around with no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). And Zacchaeus would not have given half of his goods to the poor (Luke 19:8).

God is not glorified when we keep for ourselves (no matter how thankfully) what we ought to be using to alleviate the misery of unevangelized, uneducated, unmedicated, and unfed millions. The evidence that many professing Christians have been deceived by this doctrine is how little they give and how much they own. God has prospered them. And by an almost irresistible law of consumer culture (baptized by a doctrine of health, wealth and prosperity) they have bought bigger (and more) houses, newer (and more) cars, fancier (and more) clothes, better (and more) meat, and all manner of trinkets and gadgets and containers and devices and equipment to make life more fun.

But what is specifically called for today is a wartime lifestyle. I mean a style of life that is unencumbered with nonessentials. I don't mean primitive "simplicity". I mean wartime effectiveness. (It might include computers!) I mean a kind of Spartan commitment to maximize everything for the mission of the church. A glad-hearted Christ-like austerity that can see his imminent victory, and will make any sacrifice for the joy of being on the cutting edge of God's kingdom.

There is a war going on. All talk of a Christian's right to live luxuriantly "as a child of the King" in this atmosphere is hollow. Especially since the King Himself stripped for battle.

Test yourself. Where do you fall in the following three levels of Ephesians 4:28. "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." Level 1: you can steal to get; level 2: you can work to get; level 3: you can work to get in order to give.

Too many Christians live on level two—working to get and keep. Almost all of the forces of our culture urge them to live on level two. But the Bible pushes us relentlessly to level three. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance. . ." Why? ". . . So that you may always have enough of everything *and may provide in abundance for every good work*" (2 Cor. 9:8). That's level three: enough for us; abundance for others.

Three billion people today are outside Jesus Christ. Two-thirds of those do not have a viable Christian witness in their culture. If they are to hear—and Christ commands that they hear—cross-cultural missionaries will have to be sent and paid for. All the wealth needed to do this is in the church.

In the last issue of *Equipping* John Wimber said, "I am confident the Holy Spirit is on the verge of releasing a missionary zeal and practice in [the Vineyard Movement]."

Part of that practice will be turning carnal cash into kingdom currency. If Vineyard people, like Paul, are content with a glad-hearted wartime lifestyle, millions of dollars will be released to take the Gospel to the unreached peoples.

A \$100,000 salary does not have to be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. God is calling us to be conduits of His grace not cul-de-sacs. Our great danger today is thinking that the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do. May the Lord release unprecedented power in the Vineyard to turn carnal cash become kingdom currency!



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“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.” Luke 12:48