

## **The Age of Materialism**

### **Intro:**

1. Ph 2:15 – “*without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.*”
2. No virtue in poverty – Mexico, Trinidad, Russia. Results in despair, violence and despotism. Extreme poverty – siege – produces unimaginable horrors.
3. But the opposite extreme is not unmitigated blessing. America per capita wealth, coupled with political freedoms, brings unparalleled luxury and opportunity. We literally have a world of options at our feet: education, profession, location, etc. But it all *costs money*: medical care, retirement, summer/winter homes, travel, etc.

### **1. Dangers of Materialism**

“Things” are neutral. But what attitudes might they create within us that disturb and challenge our spiritual well-being?

A. Pride – Since accumulation is a worldly measure of success, we come to pride ourselves in our possessions. They signify our intelligence, ingenuity, hard work, shrewdness, business acumen, etc.

1. Dt 8:7-17 – A generation would arise that *only* knew wealth, abundance. Us??

2. 1 Tim 6:17 – Ephesus: commercially wealthy. Paul knows these brethren well and advises them “*not to be haughty.*”

3. Paul further warns them not to place their trust in *things* but *God* (6:17b). What is the guarantee of health? Insurance? Medical expertise?

B. Covetousness – An interesting correlation: The more I get, the more I want.

1. In order to satisfy the urge to have more we may: neglect our families (work overtime), defraud the Lord (of time and finances), envy the blessings of others. Remember: Envy was a prime motivation in the death of Jesus.

2. “*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses*” (Lk 12:15 – parable of rich man).

3. Let us not define ourselves by what we *have* but what we *are*.

C. Anxiety – Never satisfied, secure; restless agitation; others getting ahead; shopping, to satisfy inner longings. Focus on the necessities and trust God to provide (Mt 6):

1. We are more valuable than the animals which God cares for – 6:25-26.
2. Worrying accomplishes nothing; God provides for those that cannot help themselves (lilies) – 6:27-30.
3. God already knows our needs – 6:31-32.
4. The proper object of our intense efforts is the kingdom – 6:33.
5. Worrying about the future distracts from today's concerns – 6:34. The future does not depend upon IRAs, Alan Greenspan, the market, mutual funds, etc.

## **2. The Joy of Giving**

- A. Rather than all-consuming work and worry about accumulating, the NT speaks of the joy of giving.
- B. Paul to the Ephesian elders: Ac 20:33-35.
  1. *"I coveted no one's silver ... these hands have provided for my necessities."*
  2. *"You must support the weak."* Reiterated in Eph 4:28.
  3. *"It is more blessed to give ..."*. Unrecorded words of Jesus.
- C. Parting with things that truly benefit others helps us have a lighter grip on the material aspects of earthly life.

## **3. The Peace of Contentment**

- A. Words for our age: 1 Tim 6:6-10. Do you define contentment by character or a computer? By godliness or garage sales? By virtue or Visa?
- B. But contentment does not come naturally to many. Most of us have to cultivate it: Phil 4:11-13.
- C. Let us differentiate between *need* and *want*; let us recognize the limits of what material possessions can add to our lives. Let us look at ourselves as stewards of all God allows us to possess and our possessions as tools to glorify God.

**Conclusion:** Materialism constantly beats on our door: advertisements, credit card offers, coupons, etc. The message is BUY! BUY! BUY! – it'll make you hipper, happier, smarter, sexier. "You don't have to have a college degree to go to heaven, but you'd better be smarter than the devil!" Let us see materialism for what it is: an empty promise that distracts us from heaven.