

# OpenTheo

## Repudiating Greed - Part 2

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott explains what the apostle Paul meant about slaves and masters in the context of his day. John also shows us how to identify false teachers and begins to set out the basis of how we should handle our money as Christians.

### **Transcript**

[Music] We are all of us born naked and penniless. And the moment after we are dead, we are naked and penniless again. Life on Earth is a piddle-groom-age between two moments of nakedness.

[Music] Welcome to the Bible for Today with John Stot. John Stott's ministry was centered on five priorities, prayer, expository preaching, regular evangelism, careful follow-up, and systematic training of new leaders. But for all his global influence, he had an unassuming demeanor preferring to be known as Uncle John and living in a small apartment above a gallerage of a rectory in London.

Indeed, the rectory of all souls laying in place which was his home church for almost 60 years. We are privileged to be marking John Stott's centenary by bringing you just some of his timeless teaching.

[Music] In last week's message, John Stot introduced the subject of greed.

He showed us the difference between having money and wanting money. Today he's concluding his message by unpacking one Timothy chapter six again. John Stot is setting out affluence against the backdrop of poverty around the world.

We don't regard constant safe clean water as a luxury. We regard it as a necessity, but 50% of the population of the third world do not have it, and 70% have no sanitation. 15 million children under five die in the developing world every year, mainly through waterborne diseases.

Or again, the slums and shanty towns of Africa and Asia, the favelas of Brazil, the

bariades of the other countries of Latin America in which human beings made in the image of God scavenge in rubbish dumps as I have seen them with my own eyes like dogs and to eat out a miserable subhuman existence. The existence of these places is a standing rebuke and an utter disgrace to the rest of the human community. Now all of us know that the ultimate solution to this appalling poverty of so many people in the world requires macroeconomic expertise.

There is no simple solution I know, and we need to pray that God will raise a whole new generation of economists who are wise and bold and resourceful in the proposals they make and that the nations of the world will accept for the solution of the problem. But meanwhile, what should be our attitude to money, to material possessions in the light of this widespread poverty? Well Ephesus was an opulent city at the time that Paul was writing and Timothy was working in one of the churches of Ephesus. And on his second visit there you may remember Paul came into conflict with Demetrius, the silversmith and a guild of silversmiths who were becoming rich through selling little statuettes of the local goddess Diana.

Now it seems that by now there were some wealthy people in the church as well as in the city and some of them were gripped with the spirit of covetousness and materialism. Others seemed to have assimilated some of the teaching of the gnostics and they had gone to the opposite extreme from materialism into asceticism. They forbade marriage, they forbade the eating of certain foods and they denied the good gifts of a good creator.

So it seems that there were some members of the Ephesian church who were materialists and there were some who had gone to the opposite extreme and were ascetics. So what position should the Ephesian Christians take? What position should you and I take? There is both materialism which is a preoccupation with material things and on the other hand asceticism which is a repudiation of material things, both of them are incompatible with Christian faith. So is there a third option? Is there a third option that is neither materialism, nor asceticism? And Paul answers here, yes, there is.

Its name is contentment. Now I want to ask you to notice if you will that there are two paragraphs in this chapter that have to do with money. One of them is what we're looking at tonight.

Verse 9 he says, "Those who desire to be rich," and the other one is beginning in verse 17, "those who are rich in this world." I think it is very important to put those two paragraphs together and I hope you'll reflect on them yourself at some time. There is advice here for those who are rich and there is advice here for those who are not rich but wish they were. That is the covetous.

And Paul's teaching to both categories is very important and they need to be held in balance with one another. I want to glance again at the passage, "Those who are rich

were 17." They are exposed to two dangers. The first is pride.

"Tell those who are rich not to be arrogant." Rich people sometimes are arrogant. They boast of their new house and their new car and their new gadgets and their new computer and their despise or tends to despise people who don't have their wealth. "Tell the rich people not to be arrogant." And tell them not to put their trust in uncertain riches.

It's very foolish to trust in riches, a phrase that Jesus also used in talking to the rich young ruler because riches are uncertain. Not only because of moth and rust to which Jesus referred in the Sermon on the Mount but because of inflation. There are many people who go to bed rich and wake up poor because of the inflationary situation.

So why put our trust in riches? We are called to put our trust not in a thing called money but in a person called God. And the rich may put their trust in uncertain riches instead of in the living God who gives us all things richly to enjoy. That is a very important addition because it tells us that we mustn't replace materialism with their asceticism.

God is a generous God. He gives us all things to enjoy. He doesn't mean us to be negative in our asceticism denying the good gifts of the Creator.

We are to enjoy the good gifts of creation. We are to enjoy our family life, marriage and the family, friendships, music, culture, butterflies, birds and many other good gifts of our Creator. And yes, we are to enjoy food and clothing and possessions as well because they are given to us by good Creator.

And if we decide to simplify our economic lifestyle as I think probably most of us should and should do further, we do it not because there is anything wrong in our possessions in themselves but we do it out of solidarity with the poor and in order in our own little way to help to alleviate their poverty. Now Paul says to the rich not only negatively that there must be warned of the danger of pride and putting that trust in the wrong place but he goes on from the negative to the positive to from the dangers of riches to the duty of the rich and the main one is to be generous. Have you ever noticed verses 17 and 18 in relation to one another? This is the skeleton of those verses.

It's very striking. Charge the rich in this world dot dot dot dot to be rich in good deeds. In other words, tell the rich to be rich or more exactly tell them to add one kind of wealth to another.

Their wealthy in this world tell them to become rich in good deeds and to be generous. So generosity is to be a characteristic of all the people of God and especially of course of the wealthy and we ought to be generous in imitation of God. He gives us richly all things to enjoy.

He's a generous giver and if he is a generous giver, we ought to be generous as well.

There are such tremendous needs among Christian enterprises today. There is hardly a Christian enterprise that is not hindered and hampered and inhibited by shortage of resources and funds.

So here is Paul's instruction to the rich, not to be proud and faithful, not to fix their hopes on uncertain riches but to be generous full of good deeds and to trust God who gives all things richly to us to enjoy and so on. Now we move on to the second part of the instruction which is not now to the rich, those who are rich but to those who want to be rich versus seven and eight. Now in verse seven we brought nothing into the world.

The emphasis is on the word nothing and J.B. Phillips brings out the emphasis very well by adding the adverb absolutely. We brought absolutely nothing into the world and it is certain we shall take absolutely nothing out of it. I think it is an echo of J.B. Chapter 1 verse 21 who said naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return.

We are all of us born naked and penniless and the moment after we are dead we are naked and penniless again. Life on earth is a piddle-groom-age between two moments of nakedness. That's all it is.

Material possessions are only temporary. We neither brought them with us nor shall we be able to take them away with us. You know don't you the story I'm sure it's been told in this pulpit many times that the situation and a very wealthy lady in the community died and everybody was most curious to know how much he left and a lady after the funeral was brash enough to come up to the vicar and whisper how much did she leave to which she was wise enough to say she left everything.

And we do we leave everything behind so then material things are the traveling luggage of time and they are not the stuff of eternity. Food and covering the Greek word translated clothing literally means covering and probably includes shelter as well as clothes so food, clothing and shelter are different. They are the necessities for the pilgrimage itself and as we travel from a naked birth to a naked burial food, clothing and shelter are necessary for our very survival.

So I think in our own culture most of us would want to argue is a certain degree of furniture and probably some books and probably a refrigerator and a cooker maybe in my case a pair of binoculars and there are certain things that we could argue are really necessary for ordinary life on earth. But I am persuaded that this passage of scripture teaches that in repudiating greed we should renounce what might be called unconceded and compulsive dying. So when we go into the supermarket we simply buy things we see without even thinking about it.

We did not be a sensible thing as Christian men and women if we made the quite ordinary rule that before we buy anything we ask ourselves the question do I need it and can I justify it? Not can I afford it but can I justify it? In other words does it belong to the

category of necessity in some way that I can put up a case for buying it. Now Paul goes on then to talk about covetousness. He's been talking in fact about contentment that I don't think I use the word and now covetousness.

The verse is nine and ten. Now please remember he's not addressing the rich. He is addressing those who want to be rich.

They are not content with the necessities of life. They are filled with what in verse ten he calls the love of money and the love of money is another word for covetousness. And Paul writes those who want to be rich full.

Verse nine. "That downfall is disastrous indeed." Look at it. They fall into temptation.

Of course they pray every day that God won't lead them into temptation so they lead themselves into it instead. They fall into temptation. They fall into a snare.

They become trapped in materialism from which they cannot escape. They fall into many senseless and hurtful desires because money is a drug and covetousness is a drug addiction. The more you have the more you want until it becomes an insatiable craving.

They fall into ruin and destruction which is a tragic irony. They set their hearts on gain and instead of gain they experience loss, destruction and ruin, loss of integrity, loss of peace, maybe loss of their own humanity. Then they fall into error and of verse ten because of this love of money.

Many have wandered away from the faith and they've wandered after riches instead. Let me tell you something friends. It is impossible to pursue Christ and riches at the same time.

Impossible. You wander after riches. You'll wander away from the faith.

You can't keep on the same straight line at the same time. And then they fall into many pangs with which they pierce their hearts. There is many sorrows.

The grief of worry, the grief of remorse, the grief of the disregarded conscience, the grief of the disorientated life because the love of money brings no satisfaction. Thus, ten, it is not the source of all evil but again in the Greek and the new international version has it correctly. The love of money is a source of all kinds.

So friends, let us be warned. Jesus and his apostles have left us a number of solemn warnings against covetousness. The chief sin of the 20th century.

It is addictive. It is destructive of authentic humanness and its unworthy of rational beings. Let alone of the children of God.

The English literature knows no more covetous character and no more eloquent

description of a covetous character than Charles Dickens's portrait of Scrooge in a Christmas tale. Ebenezer Scrooge. Do you remember how Dickens describes him? They are the beginning of the book, a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching covetous old sinner.

Whom moreover was hard and sharp a flint from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire. Secret, self-contained and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features.

Whipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheeks, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red and his thin lips blue and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. God deliver us from covetousness. Now let me conclude.

I want to say in defense of what some of you may be thinking that this is not to make religion the opium of the people. As Mark said in his famous phrase, what Paul is saying here is not to acquiesce in social injustice. It is not to say, well let the poor be poor, it's good for them anyway.

This is not acquiescence in poverty and destitution, not at all. This is not to romanticize poverty because the Bible says poverty is an evil and so is social injustice. So what is this teaching and a few words? It's an advocacy of simplicity of lifestyle.

A simplicity that is not incompatible with our human dignity. It's advocating a happy contentment with the good things that the good creator has given us. I hope it is clear to us that the apostles' emphasis throughout this chapter is not that he's for poverty against wealth.

It's rather that he is for contentment against covetousness and for simplicity against materialism. So I think as I come to an end the question that I want to ask myself and I hope each of you will ask yourself, is this? Could my Christian life, could my Christian lifestyle be honestly and accurately be described by the three words simplicity as opposed to materialism, contentment as opposed to covetousness and generosity as opposed to niggardliness? And my prayer tonight for myself and for you and I hope we'll pray for one another is that God will make us simple, contented and generous Christian people. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the relevant challenge of your word as it comes down to us across the centuries.

We desire to open our hearts and our minds and our whole being to you that we may receive this word and not reject it and that we may not only acquiesce in it intellectually but enable it to shape our life and our lifestyle. Grant us simplicity, we pray. Grant us contentment, we pray.

Grant us generosity, we pray that we may be authentic children of yours for the glory of your great and worthy name. Ah, no. Simplicity not materialism, contentment not

covetousness and generosity not niggidliness.

You'll be listening to the conclusion of a message by John Stott on our need to repent of greed and to foster generosity. Today's message is from the New Testament Letter of One Timothy chapter six and you can discover what John Stott has to say on all of First Timothy by reading his commentary, The Message of One Timothy. It's part of the Bible speaks today, commentary series and it's also our book recommendation for this week on our website.

There you'll find tributes to John Stott from other great preachers and teachers who were influenced by Uncle John. You can find all this and so much more at [premierchristinradio.com](http://premierchristinradio.com) forward slash John Stott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing touching every level of society across the world.

Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book world is to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this another ministry is John Stott founded go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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