

The Power of Money



SABBATH—DECEMBER 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 John 2:16, 17; Luke 14:26–33; Luke 12:15–21; Deuteronomy 8:10–14.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not be shaped by this world [a love for the things on this earth]. Instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you. And you will be able to know what is good and pleasing to God and what is perfect” (Romans 12:2, ICB).



Money is a mask Satan hides behind to trick us into becoming loyal to him.

THE BIBLE warns God's people not to “be shaped by this world [a love for the things on this earth]” (Romans 12:2, ICB). But our desire for riches is strong. All too often our desire for money leads us to do wrong. We are tricked by the things we think money will bring us. Then we desire more than we should have. This desire is not sensible. But very few people, rich or poor, say no to their desire for riches. Sadly, this group includes Christians, too.

Nothing is wrong with being rich. Or working hard to provide for yourself and for your loved ones. But what happens when chasing after money becomes the biggest reason for living your life? Then you have become “shaped by this world [a love for the things on this earth]” (Romans 12:2, ICB).

Satan makes us think that the good life can be found only in money. But money is a mask that Satan hides behind to trick us into becoming loyal to him. The love for money and chasing after riches are two of Satan's favorite weapons against Christians. After all, who does not enjoy what money can buy here and now in this life? But in the end, money cannot fill our deepest needs. Only Jesus can.

THE GOD OF THIS EARTH (1 John 2:16, 17)

Money has become the god of this earth. What is the name of the religion that worships the god of money? The answer is materialism. Materialism is the love for riches and owning things. These riches and belongings become more important and valuable to a person than spiritual truths. Belongings have value. But their value should not control us or our decisions. The Bible warns us, “He who loves money will never have enough money to make him happy. It is the same for the one who loves to get many things” (Ecclesiastes 5:10, NLV). That is the problem with wanting the things of this life. Whatever we get never will be enough. We work harder and harder for more and more of what never can make us happy. What a trap!

Read 1 John 2:16, 17. What do these verses tell us about what really matters?

Read what Jesus says in Luke 14:26–33. As we see in these verses, what does it cost us to follow Jesus?

Jesus’ words are a warning to us. Those who love money and owning things more than anything else should count how much their love for things will cost them in this life and in the next. “What does a man have if he gets all the world [riches] and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36, NLV).

“Christ came to this earth at a time when humans seemed to be quickly on their way to becoming the worst they ever could be. The faith and teachings that at one time led people and made families strong had grown weak. Life was fake. . . . Everywhere, all religions on the earth were losing their power over people. People were angry with the false stories and lies these religions taught. So, they ran after riches instead. They did not think about the future life in heaven at all. Instead, they lived only for the here and now.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pages 74, 75, adapted.

People turning away from religion and chasing after riches instead? These words seem to be talking about life on this earth today, right?

Everyone likes to own things. But how can we know for sure that the things we own do not control us? Who alone should own us? How can we be sure that He does?



Money has become the god of this life.

FILLING THE BARN (Luke 12:15–21)

Read Luke 12:15–21. What message is found here for us in these verses? How might the important truth found here be a useful rule for someone who is not rich to follow?

Rich or poor, we need to be careful about our desire to own things. Our desire to own things can take our minds off what is really important. Instead, the desire to own things can cause us to care only about owning stuff that does not last. We must allow nothing to cause us to lose our gift of everlasting life. Nothing!

True, we never would bow down to a statue of gold and silver and worship it. But we could be in danger of worshipping gold and silver in another form.

The picture story of the rich fool in Luke 12:15–21 is very useful for so many people today. They seem to care only about getting as much stuff and owning as many belongings as possible. That is why businesses have made an art form out of selling their things worldwide. Their whole plan for selling their goods is built on making us think that we cannot be happy or satisfied until we own the things they sell. Here is what many businesses do with big success. First, they make something. Then they make us think that we need the thing they make and that we cannot live without it. Then they sell it to us. And the truth is that their plan *works!* Even Christians are not safe from this trick that businesses use to get us to buy their stuff. As Christians, we do not place our hopes on this life. But we can be fooled just as easily as everyone else into thinking or feeling we must buy what these companies sell.



Merchants make us think we cannot be happy or satisfied until we own what they are selling.

Read Deuteronomy 8:10–14. As shown in these verses, how can any church member be in danger from the threat warned about here?

What examples can you find in the Bible or in real life that show how gathering riches makes people more holy? Or what verse or story can you find that explains how riches cause people to love God more and desire spiritual things more? None, right? But if you can find an example, please share it with the class!

THE DANGER OF WANTING TOO MUCH (Matthew 6:22–24)

Advertisements can be very powerful. Businesses pay billions to put pictures of the things they sell in front of our eyes. These companies almost always hire attractive people to help sell their things. We look at their ads and see ourselves owning the things they sell. We also see ourselves living in the same way as the people in the ads.

These ads are very powerful because companies also put into the ads many beautiful pictures that try to control the body's five senses. The body's five senses are: touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing. Now, sometimes ads include beautiful people and pictures in a very smart and sneaky way. These ads make you want to taste or touch the things they sell. But you never notice how hard these businesses work to make you want their things. Other times, ads make no secret about using beautiful things to make you want the things they sell. This plan to control our five senses is the most powerful secret used in ads. But their desire to control our senses acts as a poison to Christians who are fighting against the dangers of wanting too much. Sadly enough, that group of Christians includes most of us.

As shown in Matthew 6:22–24, the “eye” is a word picture. What does the “eye” mean? What should we as Christians do about the sneaky ads all around us that cause us to waste money on things we do not need?

As we said, advertisements often connect the things a business is selling to the five senses of the body. This plan can be a very powerful tool. Businesses sell their things by making buyers excited about what they sell. The experience they sell is all make-believe. But it works. The experience often seems to have a strange spiritual power that takes people to “a special place” outside this life. But that experience is a false religion. Why? Because it is not real. It offers no knowledge and no spiritual truth. It seems so attractive that many people believe it. We want this experience, and we feel we need it. So, why not get it? God alone knows the large amounts of money spent, and the amounts that continue to be spent, on things that businesses made us think we needed.

How are we in danger of doing what our “desires controlled by sin” (Galatians 5:16, NIV) want us to do?



Companies almost always use beautiful and attractive people to help sell their goods.

LOVE FOR SELF (Romans 12:3, NLV)

“I ask each one of you not to think more of himself than he should think. Instead, think in the right way toward yourself by the faith God has given you” (Romans 12:3, NLV).

God said to Lucifer: “ ‘ “You became too proud because of your beauty. You ruined your wisdom because of your greatness. I threw you down to the ground” ’ ” (Ezekiel 28:17, ICB). Lucifer lied to himself about being greater than he really was. He bragged, “ ‘ “I will make myself like [the same as] the Most High [God]” ’ ” (Isaiah 14:14, NLV). His bragging shows how eager he was to take glory that belonged to God alone. Two sins of Lucifer’s heart were his lies and his eager desire to get power and glory.

These verses about Lucifer should tell us that, in many ways, the first sin is named narcissism. Narcissism means “loving and admiring yourself and especially [paying special attention to] your appearance too much.” Believing our own lies shows that we admire ourselves too much.

Sadly, many people are guilty of admiring themselves too much. Nebuchadnezzar is one example. He thought he was greater than he was (Daniel 4:30). Another example was the Pharisees (Luke 18:11, 12). The Pharisees were members of a strict religious group in New Testament times. They followed Jewish laws and teachings very carefully. The Pharisees were fooled into believing that they were better than others. Riches also can fool us into believing this lie. So, we must be careful.



Riches can fool us into thinking we are greater than we are. They fooled Nebuchadnezzar into thinking he was greater than he was.

What danger does Paul warn us about in 1 Timothy 6:10?

Paul warns Timothy to watch out for a group of bad people (2 Timothy 3:1–5). This group includes those who “love money” (2 Timothy 3:2, NIV). A love for money can cause people to feel too sure of themselves. It can lead to a feeling of self-love. Most people want to be rich, but few people ever do become rich. So, it is easy for the few people who are rich to feel proud.

Read Philippians 2:3. How does this verse help us understand why the love for money and belongings does not fit with how a Christian should behave?

WHY THE LOVE FOR MONEY FAILS US IN THE END (James 5:3)

There are many people who love God. What they say, feel, and do show who God is. No amount of riches or belongings ever could take God's place in their lives.

Read Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9; John 15:5; and Galatians 2:20. As we see in these verses, what does it mean to belong to God or to be His special treasure? Where do we find the true meaning of who we really are?

God says, “‘I am the Vine and you are the branches. Get your life from Me. . . . You can do nothing without Me’” (John 15:5, NLV). Our connection to God joins us to Him. We can trust Him to give us life. “All true obedience comes from the heart. Christ obeyed from the heart. We must give Him permission to closely connect Himself with our thoughts and plans. In this way, He will bring our hearts and minds into agreement with His plan for our lives. He will help us to obey it. So then, obeying Him will be the same as carrying out our own desires.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 668, adapted.

Obedience is the true riches Jesus offers us. But what does the love of money offer us? Money tells us that our worth comes from the things we own. So then, our feelings of worth are connected to the things we own and the things we can buy. James warns us about the dangers of thinking this way: “Your gold and silver will rust, and rust will be a proof that you were wrong. It will eat your bodies like [in the same way that] fire [will]. You saved your treasure for the last days” (James 5:3, ICB). In this verse, “saved your treasure” means to collect and gather many things. Many people feel good about themselves because of how much treasure they have. What they believe about themselves and their worth comes from the things they own (Luke 12:19–21).

A love for money causes us to be confused about who we are. For many of us, who we are becomes mixed together with what we own. Our belongings become our god (Matthew 6:19–21). As one person said, “I am nothing without my things.” How sad to feel that we can know who we are only by what we own. What a foolish way to live life! Do we belong to God or to our things? We cannot belong to both. We must choose.

How much is your understanding of who you are connected to the things you own?



The true riches Jesus offers us is obedience.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The enemy [Satan] is buying souls today very cheap. ‘You have sold yourselves for nothing’ [Isaiah 52:3, NKJV] is the wording used in the Bible. Indeed, one person is selling his soul for applause. Another person sells his soul for money. One person sells his soul to satisfy his evil desires. Another person sells his soul for the fun things in this life. These sales are made daily. Satan is making bids for the souls Jesus already purchased with His blood. God paid a very great price to set them free from the slavery of sin. But Satan is buying them up cheap.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 5, page 133, adapted.

“Buying souls” is Satan’s number one plan. Satan tricks humans into selling their souls to him. He promises them riches, goods, and the power that owning them brings. Satan promises these treasures in exchange for their souls. Riches and our desire for them cannot talk. But they know every language. The desire to have riches gives pleasure to both rich and poor. It satisfies them and causes them to say, “I have all I need now in this life. Why worry about the next life?” In this way, the desire for riches spoils the mind. It causes people to trust in what they own instead of trusting in God. Zechariah 4:6 tells us how to heal from the sickness of wanting too much: “ ‘ “Your help will not come from your own strength and power. No, your help will come from my Spirit.” This is what the LORD All-Powerful says’ ” (ERV). The power of the Holy Spirit is stronger than the love for riches. So, we must give ourselves to God. We must take hold of His power to help us not let the love for riches rule our lives.



“Satan is buying souls today at a very cheap price.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How can we, rich or poor, get trapped by some of the dangers of wanting riches?
- ② Money and belongings are important. They do have an important place in our lives. Those who say differently are not being completely honest. So, how can we make sure we understand and follow the correct view about money taught in the Bible?
- ③ Read carefully what Jesus says to us about riches in Matthew 6:19–21. How are His words a powerful way to protect ourselves from the dangers of a love for money and wanting too much of it?