

**THE ABOUNDING JOY OF NEW TESTAMENT HOPE - Part fifteen**

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

**HOW FAITH AND SIN ARE EACH GENERATED BY WHERE OUR HOPE IS PLACED (Part 5) - Materialism (covetousness)**

**1 Timothy 6:6-12** - "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [11] But as for you, O man of God,  *flee* these things.  *Pursue* righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. [12]  *Fight* the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

**Hebrews 13:5-6** - "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' [6] So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

**Proverbs 30:8-9** - "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, [9] lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."

**Colossians 3:5** - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

**Luke 12:15** - "And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'"

People sin when they think they will come out ahead by sinning. People sin when they think they will find some satisfaction or some security that will exceed the future they will have if they trust Jesus' promise and future grace for their lives. So people give in to lust when they think that they will find a greater excitement in illicit sex than in the future God has planned for the sexually pure. People become angry and vengeful when they think they will be more satisfied in achieving their own personal justice rather than leaving God to punish the guilty and bless the peacemakers.

What I'm saying is  *sin doesn't just come out of nowhere* . Every act of sin starts with some specific form of  *unbelief* . People put their trust in a  *false hope*  for their future satisfaction or security. I sin because I cease to believe that my greatest hope will always be found on God's terms rather than my own.  *All sin starts with trust in a false hope. Always* . Remember,  *no one sins out of duty* .

That's what we've been studying in this series. People sin because they place their hope for their future in the promise of satisfaction or security sin offers. And they trust the promise of sin  *more*  than they believe God's loving kindness is  *better*  than life on their own terms.

All of this begs the question:  *Why is it so hard - given all of the beautiful promises and proofs of God's goodness and trustworthiness - why is it so hard to place our hope joyfully in God alone?*  It just makes sense to place one's hope in an eternal, almighty God - One who can make and keep precious promises for the rest of my life and on into eternity. So why doesn't  *everyone*  hope in God?

And there is only one answer to that question. It's because the devil works overtime to destroy our hope in God. That's what we've been probing into in the last few parts of this series. We've been looking in detail at the tactics of the devil - the  *tools*  he uses to birth distrust in the promises of God - the things he does to shift our  *hope* .

So far we've studied the way Satan uses  *pride* ,  *anxiety* , and  *impatience* . Today we're going to study how he uses  *covetousness*  to destroy our hope in God.

1) **MATERIALISM IS SATAN'S MOST SUCCESSFUL TOOL TO DESTROY HOPE IN GOD BECAUSE IT BRINGS IMMEDIATE SATISFACTION AND SECURITY WHILE IT DESTROYS OUR HOPE IN GOD PAINLESSLY**

By painlessly, I mean there is usually less of a fight with  *conscience*  over idolizing wealth than with committing

adultery. Materialism is the sin we commit while **nothing seems wrong in our hearts**. Unlike theft, rage, murder, or adultery, which so often leave a stain of pain and regret, materialism makes everything about life seem **better**. This makes it very hard to bring any kind of **repentance** to the surface when we are covetous. Materialism **dopes** us into losing hope in God alone.

Consider this - in thirty-eight years of ministry here dealing with people and their relationship with God, I've **never** - never **once** - had **anyone** come up to me and say, "You know what, my love of material things is destroying me spiritually." Mind you, **I've** seen it destroy the souls of scores of people. But **they** never saw it for a second.

Materialism takes the hope that I would place in God and fixes it to something else. It shifts my **contentment** from God alone. Materialism takes the passion that should flow from my heart to God and directs it at something else. And this is why Paul calls covetousness (materialism) **idolatry** - **Colossians 3:5** - "**Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.**"

**All** sin is wicked and will be judged. But not all sin is called **idolatry**. Materialism **is** idolatry because it **divides** the heart's hope and delight. It shifts it from God **alone**. There is something else other than God that I am looking to for either satisfaction or security or joy.

So important is this concept in the Scriptures that a warning is given against it in both the **first** and the **last** of the Ten Commandments, though the wording is differently arranged: Commandment number one says, "**You shall have no other gods before me**" (Exodus 20:3). And Commandment number ten says, "**You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's**" (Exodus 20:17).

Please notice what's happening here. Commandment number ten lists some of the other gods commandment number one only hints at. In terms of my heart's hopes for satisfaction or security, covetousness creates other gods that are **material** in nature. "**These**," says my heart, "**will bring me satisfaction and security.**" And the warning is repeated in two commandments because that shift in hope is deadly.

## 2) IRONICALLY, MATERIALISM DRAINS THE LIFE OF THE VERY THINGS IT MOST CRAVES

One of the wisest men who ever lived came to learn this lesson the hard way: **Ecclesiastes 5:10** - "**He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.**"

Now, we need to know what Solomon **was** saying and what he was **not** saying when he penned the idea that "**....he who loves money will not be satisfied with money....**" He **doesn't** mean money can't buy a lot of very nice things. He's not denying the **spending power** of wealth. But what he **does** mean is materialism drains the soul of the capacity to find either **security** or **satisfaction** in those very things.

This is because materialism drains your soul of the capacity to **find contentment hoping in God alone**. In the same way a doughnut can take the edge off your appetite for a fine dinner, materialism spoils the soul for the joy that comes from God alone.

But even this is not the **worst** effect of materialism on the heart. Remember what I said in introducing this subject. Materialism is the sin people commit that makes everything feel fine while it's being committed. In that sense it is the most **blinding** of all sins. It not only turns the heart from hope and joy in God alone, it makes the damage of that sin almost imperceptible. And the next point explains why:

## 3) MATERIALISM NUMBS THE MIND TO THE SPIRITUAL DAMAGE BEING DONE TO THE HEART

Materialism is like the needle the dentist gives you before he fills your tooth. You are left with no idea of what's being **hollowed out** in your mouth.

This is no exaggeration. Pray through these words of Jesus from the parable of the seed and sower: **Mark 4:15-19** - "**....and these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. [16] And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. [17] And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; Then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. [18] And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, [19] but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.**"

Note especially those innocent sounding words in **verse 19** - “....*the desires for other things choke the word....*” This isn’t complicated. The heart's desire for “*other things*” competes with the heart's reception of the word. The more I hunger for the one [*either* one] the less I will hunger for the other. But it is **impossible** to set your hope on **both**. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He said no one could serve **two masters**.

In fact, you can see that Jesus wasn’t even pretending to be delicate in His words. He chooses a horrible verb to make His point. He says the desire for other things - that’s another way of saying **putting my hope in other things** - that act “**chokes**” the Word of God’s grace and promise for my life (19).

I’ve had only one occasion when I was in a restaurant with my brother and his wife and he swallowed something and began to choke. You never get it out of your mind. We were all laughing. Peter and I were embarrassing our wives by acting juvenile. And suddenly it happened. At first he just coughed. Then he reached up to his throat. His face instantly stopped smiling and turned red, then white. Try as he might, he just couldn’t get one whiff of air. Finally he sank down on his chair. People stood all over the restaurant and a doctor finally came over and did whatever it is they do.

We didn’t talk much after that. We just finished our meal - or picked at it - and went home. There was a heavy feeling all evening that we almost came to the end of a life at that dinner.

That’s why Jesus chose that verb - “**choked**.” The desire for things - materialism - “**chokes**” out the promise and grace of the Word. You can only choke for so long. **There’s an urgency in choking**. In terms of what’s important, choking pushes everything else aside. Choke too long and life ends. **That’s** why Jesus chose that word. This love for stuff **matters**. It’s stopping air to your soul.

In that same parable in **Mark 4** Jesus tells us how they’re going to end up if they keep choking: **Mark 4:12** - “....**so that ‘they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.’**”

That’s what materialism does. People are going to remain **unforgiven**. That means they’ll be forever stuck in the same sins. People are going to hear the truth, over and over, but never find power to **respond** to it. That’s spiritual choking. God grows dim as hopes for satisfaction and security are placed in material things.

#### 4) **MATERIALISM IS THE ROOT OF SINS THAT DON’T APPEAR EVEN REMOTELY RELATED TO MONEY**

There's a verse of Scripture that many people find confusing: **1 Timothy 6:10** - “**For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.**”

The part of the verse we all know is that first phrase - “**The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.**” Simple enough. But there seem to be all sorts of sins that have nothing to do with money at all. People commit all kinds of sins without even thinking about money. What can Paul mean?

I think this gets right to the core truth of this entire series on hope and holiness. Paul is saying there is a kind of heart that sets its hope on **material, earthly things**. And once that contentment - that **hope** - is set on anything other than God, there is no sin from which that heart will be safe. There is a kind of heart that **roots** a life in sin. In fact, the heart that sets its hope for satisfaction or security on anything **other** than God will **breed** sin the way a swamp breeds mosquitos.

#### 5) **MATERIALISM WILL LEAVE YOUR LIFE EMPTY AT DEATH**

**1 Timothy 6:7** - “....**for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”**

There is a wonderful, stark, simplicity here. Paul is reminding us that, in terms of our **one earthly life**, we are a life between bookends. And what’s more, we’re reminded that, in terms of this present earthly existence, there is **nothing** outside the bookend on either end. We weren’t here **before** the bookends and we won’t be here **after** the bookends. So we are to live life remembering the **bookends**.

Let me illustrate it with a **fictitious story**: Last week, Chris and I went down to the Royal Ontario Museum. He said he was hungry to see some great art. So off we went. We separated in the art gallery, and after a while he came up to me with four paintings under his arm.

"These paintings are worth a fortune", he said, "let's get out of here!"

I was shocked. I said, "Chris, you can't take those paintings. They're not yours!"

"What do you mean?" he said. "They're just hanging all over the place on the walls. This is a public place. No body else was taking them. There are no signs saying you can't take them. Finder's keepers. Looser's weepers!"

I said, "Chris you can't take them home. They're not really *yours*. They don't *belong* to you. You can look at them. You can enjoy them. But even though you *enjoy* them, they're not really *yours*. And the way you *know* they're not yours is you can't *leave* here with them!"

**"You brought nothing into this world and you can take nothing out!"** That's what Paul says about everything you call your own. You can't leave here with any of it. You will die some day soon - *very* soon. It's appointed already. Will you have a payload of joyful investment in God's kingdom as you stand before the Lord? **Or** will there simply be an enormous cavity where your life used to be?

## 6) KEEP YOUR HEART FREE AND GLAD BY PLACING YOUR HOPE IN GOD ALONE

This is not easily done. Remember the way Paul, in **1 Timothy 6:12**, said you and I would have to **"fight this good fight of faith"** against covetousness. That's because the very essence of the **"counsel of the ungodly"**(Psalm 1:1) is the lie that we are only safe as we secure and satisfy our lives on our own terms. And without incredible diligence, it's almost impossible to remain pure. The spirit of self-indulgence is like lead in your drinking water.

So the Bible offers this counsel: **Hebrews 13:5-6** - **"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' {6} So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"**

These are such useful words. That first word, **"keep,"** is in the constant present tense. You and I can never rest from the fight against materialistic greed. And notice the way the writer ties the branch of materialism to the root from which it grows. "Don't fall prey to the love of money! Remember, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you! You don't *need* to be covetous. Your faith in me will pay more dividends than all the wealth you will ever accumulate! Don, do you really believe this?"

Here's the deal. **You can't create desire for the Lord at will.** Most of us want more passion for God than we can muster. Many people think they can create the desire for God through worship alone. But that will never be a long term solution. Desire for God comes from placing your *hope* in Him alone. Here's the eternally binding principle - **You and I must make room for delight in God by eliminating competing affections.** That's what the good fight of faith is all about. Hope in God is the capturing of your soul's greatest delight.