

THE RICHES OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

There are many teachers nowadays who assert that it is God's will that believers be wealthy in the goods of this world, and go on to give us the 'secret' of how to appropriate these promised riches by faith. This teaching is seen in many forms, some more extreme than others. It is an important issue because believers who find themselves struggling financially can also have the increased stress of blaming themselves for their own lack of faith. The purpose of this writing is to examine the concept of riches, and to ascertain what the scriptures say about wealth, and where a believer is to find his treasure.

HEALTH AND WEALTH?

To support their viewpoint of earthly wealth or the need to tithe, ministers will generally use Old Testament scriptures, such as:

**¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,”
Says the LORD of hosts,
“ If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you such blessing
That there will not be room enough to receive it. (Malachi 3:10)**

This focus on the literal blessings of the Old Covenant to the earthly tribe of Israel is telling, because it is claiming the laws and blessings of *a covenant we have no part in*, and furthermore *an earthly foreshadowing of spiritual realities to come*. And yet such teachings garner great followings, with all manner of hucksters and peddlers making merchandize of God's people through the combination of cunning and gullibility. Paul addresses this very thing in his first epistle to Timothy:

³ If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴ he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵ useless wranglings^[a] of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.^[b]

⁶ Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain^[c] we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:3-10)

One only has to turn on a religious TV show to see these “men of corrupt minds”, who equate their financial gain with godliness. Who can deny that these mega-pastors desire to be rich? Or that they harbor an overwhelming love of money that is manifest in everything they preach? Paul goes on to counter this carnal, covetous mindset with the truth that *godliness itself* is gain, rather than being a means of earthly gain. Now is abundance itself wrong? By no means! But we see in Philippians that it is not the abundance or poverty itself that is desirable or undesirable, but the attitude:

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ^[b] who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:10-13)

Understand brethren, I am not espousing a “mindset of poverty”, but a mindset of *contentment*. How can we read these words of the Spirit through Paul – ‘godliness with contentment is great gain’, ‘having food and clothing, with these we shall be content’, ‘I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content’, ‘in all things I have learned to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need’ – and come to any other conclusion than the obvious? If we are trusting in the Lord, and seeking the will of God in all things, we can truly learn this contentment in any circumstance that comes our way, whether it be provision or perceived lack of provision.

Let me state it another way. Should not the gospel be universal? And if universal, should it not be relevant to every person of every nation on earth? Can we go into a poor persecuted church in Vietnam, North Korea, China or some such nation, and proclaim that they are poor because of a lack of faith? That they can just claim their abundance in faith and expect a deluge of earthly wealth to pour forth from the sky? Now we know that there are endless testimonies in all places of God’s mighty provision, whether in rich America or the poorest, most desolate part of Africa. The point is not whether the Lord provides or whether He is capable of giving earthly abundance, but whether it is His will at all times, and whether it is something that He desires us to reach out and claim by faith, or whether He would rather us be *content in Him*.

THE TEMPTATION TO COVET

Before telling the well known parable of the rich fool, the Lord Jesus uttered the following warning:

¹³ Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

¹⁴ But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness,^[b] for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:13-25)

Let us consider this matter carefully – for many who preach the various forms of the health and wealth gospel claim that earthly abundance is a result of our life in Christ, and that we are simply

manifesting His life in all of its bountiful supply. Yet what does the Lord say? “One’s life does NOT consist in the abundance of the things he possesses”. Your earthly possessions are in no way a manifestation of the life of God in you!

Let us also consider the Lord’s rebuke to the church at Laodicea, who had become arrogant and pompous in their earthly wealth and prestige:

¹⁴ **“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans^[f] write,**
‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,^[g] I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Revelation 3:14-19)

Again we see that what the world calls riches is NOT what Jesus Christ calls riches! What the world calls abundance and honor, Christ judges as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked!”. Now again, this is not to say that it is wrong to have abundance in and of itself – I reference again the contentment of Paul in all circumstances – but rather that the Lord considers true riches to be “gold refined in the fire”, which is the divine nature wrought in us by all the afflictions, corrections and scourging of a patient, loving Father!

TRUE SPIRITUAL RICHES

There is a treasure that we should seek, and that is the treasure which is from above:

³² **“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:32-34)**

This being said, just what is heavenly treasure? Just what is meant by spiritual blessing? It is in reading the beginning of Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians that we begin to see just what kind of blessing we have been blessed with:

³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)**

Now THIS is true blessing indeed! To be chosen before the foundation in world to be holy and blameless before Him in love! To be predestined to divine adoption! To be accepted in the beloved! These are indeed just a few examples of the fantastic riches that we inherit in Christ, but they are so much more real than all the riches and wealth of this temporal age. For just as Paul wrote, by the Spirit:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

....so I am also convinced that the wealth, prestige and treasures of this age are not worthy to be compares to the honor that the Father shall confer upon His own corporate Son, even Jesus Christ Head and body!

CONCLUSION

The issue of how to view earthly riches has been obscured and muddied by the extreme teachings at either end of the spectrum, from the many modern espousers of 'health and wealth' mentioned in this writing, to the self flagellating monks who shunned every earthly joy in a spirit of morbid religiosity. As in so many things, the truth is in the correct balance between the two. The issue is not what gives us, but what our attitude is in all circumstances. If we have tasted of the heavenly blessings in Christ, if we have partaken of the sweetness of His Life and the assurance of glories to come, we can say along with Paul "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" and "I can do all things through Christ^(b) who strengthens me". Amen!