

Lesson 2: Asceticism

Two extremes in lifestyle:

1. Materialism = money is god, therefore live for riches (“riches is righteousness”)
2. Asceticism = money is evil, therefore “poverty is piety”

Both are dangerous! Both are off the road – both leave the faith

Goal: God-centered balance (Proverbs 30:7-9)

Riches ----- Poverty
“Give us this day our daily bread.”
(Matthew 6:11)

Why not riches or poverty?

Worship! Lest I deny You or defame You!

Next Week: Materialism

This Week: Asceticism

Illustration:

Anthony of Egypt (early monk around 300 A.D.) – Christian parents died when he was nineteen

He heard about the rich young ruler (“sell all”); leads to: he gave away the family farm and sold everything else, keeping money for his baby sister.

Also, he heard about not worrying about tomorrow; leads to: gave everything away and sent his sister to the convent

What do the Scriptures say?

1. Gospels

- (1) Jesus commended Zacchaeus for selling half – but not an absolute command
- (2) Jesus commands us to sell our possessions, but not necessarily to sell *all* of them (Lk. 12:33).
- (3) The disciples left all, but they still had homes (Mark 1:29; John 19:27)
- (4) Jesus tells us to use money for eternal friends (Luke 16:9) – Jesus Himself used money (John 13:29)
- (5) Ananias and Sapphira died not for withholding property, but for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:4). Their right to property was actually affirmed by the apostle Peter.
- (6) The Gospels and Acts show unusual circumstances – you cannot literally follow Jesus today (the Epistles tell us of normal life – 2 Corinthians 2:12-15); the Gospels were an argument for ascetics. Jerusalem had many believing visitors with needs, especially widows; so if needs require extreme giving, we should give freely. Otherwise, we are not normally to impoverish ourselves in order to meet the needs of others, unless led through the joyful exuberance of the Spirit (see 2 Cor. 8:1ff).
(By the way, beware of talking someone out of a resolved joy in giving away all!)

Rem: Jesus was homeless, not penniless—had one poor tunic, and one piece of clothing—normal.

2. General teaching of the Bible:

- (1) The Bible upholds the rights of private property – “You shall not steal” (Robin Hood was wrong) – if no private property, how can you give or be hospitable?
- (2) Riches are a blessing (Proverbs 10:22) – the Bible encourages worship through enjoyment with thanksgiving (1 Timothy 4:3-5; 6:17)

Asceticism is self-righteous religion, contrary to the Cross (Colossians 2:20-22) – Luther: we are not made righteous by law-keeping. It denies the glory of God, and it promotes the glory of man.