**MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL?**

1 Timothy 6:6-10

I invite you to open your Bible to 1 Timothy 6:6-10. As we conclude our series, *Is That Really in the Bible*, we’re going to ask that question of the well-worn statement, “Money is the root of all evil.” Is it?

Well, money’s a big deal. Money is an inanimate object, but you’d think it was an animate one. Nobody says, “BMW’s talk.” Nobody says, “Bass boats talk.” But a lot of folks say this: “Money talks.” No one says, “Time is a 5-carat diamond,” or “Time is a conference championship.” But people do say, “Time is money.”

Money’s a big deal. Money drives the plot of well-known movies like Wall Street, Slumdog Millionaire, Fun with Dick and Jane, Casino, and Jerry Maguire. You remember Jerry Maguire? Jerry is a sports agent whose tag line is, “Show me the money.” Money drives a lot of movies.

And money drives a lot of popular songs. The Beatles sang, “Money: that’s what I want.” The Steve Miller Band sang, “Come on, take the money and run.” Shania Twain sang, “Ka-ching!” Willie Nelson sang, “If you’ve got the money honey, I’ve got the time.” Pink Floyd sang, “Money, so they say, is the root of all evil today.” And then there are these lyrics from an O’Jays song:

For the love of money
People will steal from their mother
For the love of money
People will rob their own brother
For the love of money
People can’t even walk the street
Because they never know who in the world they’re gonna beat
For that lean, mean, mean green
Almighty dollar, money

I know money is the root of all evil
Do funny things to some people
Give me a nickel, brother, can you spare a dime
Money can drive some people out of their minds
Pink Floyd said it and the O’Jays said it too: “Money is the root of all evil.” They’re not the first ones to say it. It’s a common phrase in our culture. And many people believe it. But is this phrase in the Bible? Hear the word of the Lord … (read the text).

I

So does the Bible say, “Money is the root of all evil”? No. The Bible says this: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

Money is not the root of all evil. Money is neutral. Money is simply the way society’s barter for goods and services. Money can be used for purposes good and bad. Money can send a missionary to the Czech Republic to share the good news, and money can be used to contract a murder. Money can be used to help a homeless person find shelter, and money can be used to enrich a local gambling institution. Money can be used to feed the hungry, and money can be used to bribe an official. Money can be used to help meet our basic needs, and money can be squandered in a relentless competition to keep up with the Joneses. Money is neutral. It has no moral value in and of itself. Having money is not a sin; being poor does not make one a saint. It’s not about the money. It’s about what we do with the money we have—be it a lot or a little or just enough.

The Bible talks a lot about money because that’s where we live, and everybody’s got to have some just to get along in this world. You can read all about it in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. And nobody says more about money than Jesus. Jesus doesn’t talk about it like so many TV preachers do. Jesus is not a fund-raiser. Just ahead of our text, Paul tells Timothy in v. 5 to beware of those false teachers, those religious hucksters, who think that “godliness is a means of gain.” Too many of God’s so called pastors and preachers are in it for the money. Maybe you’ve caught the furor that’s been in the news lately about 33-year-old Pastor Steven Furtick of the 12,000 member Elevation Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He’s just built a 16,000 square foot house.¹ Some folks, even in his own church, think that might be just a bit much for anybody, especially a pastor. I wonder if it’s stuff like that Paul is

¹http://www.mediaite.com/tv/pastor-defends-controversial-16000-sq-foot-house-everything-we-have-comes-from-god/
talking about when he writes of those who believe “godliness is a means of gain.” That was true in Timothy’s day; it’s true in ours.

But these charlatans didn’t get that idea from Jesus. That’s not the way Jesus talks about money. He doesn’t tell you that if you give Him your ten dollars, He’ll give you a hundred dollars. Jesus mostly talks about our attitude toward money and how we use our money. So while the Bible talks about money a lot, neither Old Testament nor New Testament, neither Jesus nor Paul, ever suggest that “money is the root of all evil.” This is what the Bible says, this is what Paul says right here in v. 10 of our text, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”

Now this general concept that it’s the love of money rather than just money that leads to evil is not completely original with Paul. This idea already had some traction in Greek culture—a culture Timothy’s church in Ephesus knew quite well. About 400 years before Paul wrote that line an eccentric Greek philosopher named Diogenes said this: “The love of money is the mother-city of all evils.”

Perhaps Paul, no doubt familiar with Greek philosophy, was familiar with this quote. But even then, Paul doesn’t parrot Diogenes. Paul’s Greek here is precise. It’s clear that Paul, unlike Diogenes, doesn’t consider the love of money the root of all evil. There’s no definite article in the Greek text. Love of money is not the root of all evil, it’s a root. And it’s not a root of all evil either. Paul writes that it’s a root of all kinds of evil. Evil takes many forms and has many roots. The love of money is just one of those roots. But it is a root.

As someone once put it, the love of money is not a stone but a root. Roots are living things. If left unchecked, roots grow and spread and deepen. I like to keep a good yard. And when I get weeds in it, I’ve got two choices. I can mow them down—which looks okay for about three days. Or I can spray them with stuff that kills not just what I see but also kills the underground root I can’t see. Cut the weed; it grows back. Kill the root; bye-bye weed. If we want to get rid of this love-of-money weed, we’ve got to get rid of the root.

II

http://www.hermitary.com/articles/diogenes.html
This is serious stuff. “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” It’s a root that bears some pretty foul-smelling and nasty-tasting fruit. We’re not talking apples and pears and oranges and bananas here. We’re talking fruit with names like these: stealing and lying and cheating and murder and stinginess and greed and coveting and envy and materialism and betrayal and even family strife when the lawyer reads the will. Some fruit, huh? Nobody’s buying that fruit at Kroger, nobody’s going to order it in a smoothie, and nobody’s going to put a bowl of that fruit on their dining room table. The love of money is not the root of all evil, but it most surely is a root of all kinds of evil.

Oh, and I failed to mention the bitterest fruit of all that grows off this love-of-money weed: the love of money can destroy your life. Look at v. 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.” And as if that’s not bad enough, Paul writes at the end of v. 10, “It is through this craving that some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Ouch! And self-inflicted wounds at that. Money isn’t the culprit here, but our love of money is—“Money, money, money: want it, gotta have it, gonna get it, gonna keep it, gonna get more and more and more. I love it. I worship it. The pursuit and acquisition of it is the core of my life. I love money!” And it’s not just rich people who are rooted with a love of money. And this love-of-money root can put us in a place of grave spiritual peril. It could keep you out of the kingdom of God. And what Paul states in proposition, the gospels illustrate in a story.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide the composite picture of a man who approaches Jesus with a question: he is young (Mt. 19:20) and rich (all three) and a ruler (Lk. 18:18). He is somebody. He isn’t Peter Peasant. He isn’t Joe Rank-and-File. He is no Oscar Outcast. Nor is he some Needy Ned who was desperate for the healing touch of Jesus. He is somebody. He’s successful. He’s powerful. He has influence. He is young and rich and a ruler. He is probably a pretty good judge of character, and likely a risk-taker.

This man has a lot going for him. He is the kind of man parents want their sons to become and their daughters to marry. He seems to have it all. But since he comes to check out Jesus, you have to wonder if maybe something is missing in his life. Does he wrestle with a nagging emptiness he cannot fill with fancy accessories on his brand new car, a big screen TV, or by surfing the internet on his state of the art computer? Does he have an
emptiness that does not go away in spite of a healthy stock portfolio and a couple of exotic vacations a year? Maybe even going to church and writing a big check to the United Way doesn't relieve the nagging, gnawing emptiness that rumbles in his soul. "There's got to be more to life than this." Maybe he stews over this when his dividend check doesn't give him the buzz it once did, and when once exciting Mediterranean cruises become a bore.

And being a man who knows how to get what he wants, this rich man sets out to take care of the emptiness in his soul. There was a lot of talk about the kind of work Jesus of Nazareth was doing in the lives of people. He heard that Jesus was offering eternal life. "Maybe, that's what I'm missing," the rich man thought to himself. "Maybe what I need is eternal life." He decided to go talk to Jesus about these things.

When the rich young ruler got to Jesus, there was quite a crowd gathered, including a bunch of children hanging all over Jesus as if He was Santa at the mall. After the crowd started to thin and Jesus was heading away, the rich man ran up to Jesus. In a spontaneous show of humility, he fell on his knees before Jesus. And he spoke up, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "Are you calling me God, because only God is good? But you know the commandments: don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't be a fraud, honor your parents. You know the commandments."

"Know them?" said the man. "I've been keeping those commandments since I was a boy in Sunday School. Is that all there is to it?"

Then Jesus looked at him and loved him. And when Jesus looks at a man, he looks at a man. He doesn't just see what he's wearing or how he combs his hair. Jesus sees deep down into the soul, and Jesus saw both the emptiness of the man's soul and the sincerity of his heart. So Jesus decided to test the man's sincerity in a dramatic way, to see whether the man had a heart for heaven or a heart for earth. "You lack one thing," said Jesus. And although lack is a term he hardly understood, with that comment the man lifted his eyebrows and opened his eyes wide in anticipation of what it might be. "Go," said Jesus, "sell everything that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
And a man on tiptoe drops back on his heels. A man with wide eyes of anticipation furrowed his brow. As the gospels put it, the man's face fell. I guess the man thought Jesus was good but not God. When Jesus told the man what he lacked, that comment sucked the life and the joy and the anticipation right out of him. The love of money had rooted down deep in his soul, and the man wouldn't let Jesus kill that root and set him free. So the rich man went away. He went away "disheartened" and "sorrowful." But he went away. Without a word, he turned, moped back to his Lexus with his head hanging down, and drove away. He popped a CD in the stereo and cranked it up to drown out his thoughts. I think he was playing the blues. His emptiness grew a little deeper that day. His soul died a little more. He walked away from Jesus.

Writes Paul: “It is through love of money that some have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Love-of-money is a bitter root that bears rotten fruit.

## III

**And if it’s going to be rooted it out of our lives, we better find some Weed-B-Gone to spray on that nasty thing.** Thank God the Bible mixes up a batch of it.

Look at the label. Check the ingredients. And here is what you see. The main ingredient is **grace**—God’s grace. Grace reminds us that ridding ourselves of the love-of-money root is not a self-service project. This love-of-money root is fertilized by the soil of our sin nature. You can try to reform yourself here, but reformation only gets you so far. **Reformation** deals with the fruit more than the root. A lawn mower will cut down a dandelion, but when you mow next Friday, the dandelion is back and sometimes even brings a couple of other dandelion friends along. **Reformation** is a surface thing. As long as the root is in place, your life will become a vicious cycle of cut it down, watch it grow back, cut it down, watch it grow back. You’ve got to deal with the root.

**Grace destroys the root.** The grace of Jesus secured for us through His death and resurrection, applied to us through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives, destroys the root. Grace is not about sucking it up and doing better on our own strength or by our own willpower. Grace is not about
reformation. Grace is about transformation. I was dead in my sins; now I am alive in Christ. The old is passed away; the new has come. I loved money and the things it buys; now I love Jesus and His kingdom most of all. Grace is what makes those changes happen. Grace reminds us of our helplessness and Christ’s help. Grace reminds us of our neediness and Christ’s provision. Grace reminds us that we are weak, but Christ in us is strong. A root of grace bears different fruit, far better fruit, than the love-of-money root. Grace can take up the space that the love-of-money root once owned. Grace is not something we achieve or earn or create or purchase. Grace is God’s gift to us because God loves us and wants us to live real life rather than be destroyed by this love-of-money root. Invite God to spray some grace on that love-of-money weed and watch that weed recoil. So the first ingredient in our love-of-money Weed-B-Gone is grace.

The next ingredient is contentment. Look at v. 6: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Since we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out of it, why spend a lifetime pursuing things that don’t last? Do you know the difference between a person who has six kids and a person who has six million dollars? The person with six million dollars wants more. You’d think people with a lot of money would be content. As often as not, such persons are not content. They’ve got this cheap and momentary euphoria when they buy something new. But it doesn’t last, and it doesn’t bring contentment. Instead, they live with the fear of losing what they have. They live with the self-imposed pressure of trying to make more. And that spirit doesn’t kill the love-of-money root; it fertilizes it. Learning to be content with what we have is a better path.

On the mission field I see people who have so little appear to be quite content with their situation. Contentment doesn’t come easily in our culture though because Madison Avenue works overtime to stir discontentment in our souls: “You need this new phone! Life isn’t complete without this car! If you want to be happy you need bigger, better, and the newest model or the latest upgrade.” This happens with both an in-your-face assault, and it can happen in the subtlest of ways. John Ortberg wrote about this some years ago in regard to his children.

When we take our children to the shrine of the Golden Arches, they always lust for the meal that comes with a cheap little prize, a combination christened in a moment of marketing genius, the Happy Meal. You’re not just buying fries, McNuggets, and an action figure from the latest kid’s movie;
you’re buying happiness. Their advertisements convince children they have a little McDonald-shaped vacuum in their souls: “Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in a happy meal.”

We try to buy off the kids sometimes. We may tell them to order only the food and we’ll give them a dollar to buy a little toy on their own. But the cry goes up, “I want a happy meal.” All over the restaurant, people crane their necks to look at the tightfisted, penny-pinching cheapskate of a parent who would deny a child the meal of great joy.

The problem with the happy meal is that the happy wears off, and they need a new fix. No child discovers lasting happiness in just one: “Remember that Happy Meal? What great joy I found there!”

Happy meals bring happiness only to McDonalds. You ever wonder why Ronald McDonald wears that grin? Twenty billion Happy Meals, that’s why. When you get older, you don’t get any smarter; your happy meals just get more expensive.³

Our culture fertilizes this love-of-money root in treating us as if our main purpose in life is to consume. How can we learn contentment in this kind of culture? In Philippians 4 Paul writes a bit more about contentment. And he sums up the “secret of being content” with whatever situation you’re in as this: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (4:13), and “My God will provide all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:19). Do you hear the trust that’s in contentment? God knows what I need, and God will take care of me. Do you hear the gratitude in it? Instead of focusing on what I don’t have or on what my neighbor has, I’ll be thankful for what God has given me. And do you hear the peace in it? There’s no straining in contentment; there is rest and peace and shalom. It is well with my soul. When our primary satisfaction and contentment is in Christ, the love-of-money root withers and dies. God can help you be content if you’ll ask Him and trust Him. And if you want to destroy the love-of-money root, learn to be content with what you have. Contentment is the second ingredient in our love-of-money Weed-B-Gone.

³Adapted from John Ortberg, Dangers, Toils, and Snares (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1994), 99-100.
And then this ingredient is in there too: **generosity**. Those who love money want to keep it to themselves. They live by the philosophy that says, “Get what you can, can what get, and sit on the can.” This stingy, miserly spirit is soul-numbing and soul-killing. It too fertilizes the love-of-money root. But generosity helps kill it. Generosity lives by a philosophy that says, “What’s mine is God’s, I’ll share it.” Generosity declares loud and clear that we worship God not money, and that money is not an idol but a tool.

Generosity allows us to turn money into **things that last**. Generosity helps us love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. Generosity, first through tithes to the church and then in offerings wherever God leads, means lost people get saved, hungry people get fed, people in need get helped, churches get planted where there was no church, and all the nations are made glad in God. Generous people are way more than consumers; they are investors. In writing about generosity, Mark Buchanan said:

Generous people *generate* things. And consequently, their worlds are more varied, surprising, colorful, fruitful. They’re richer. More abounds with them, and yet they have greater and deeper capacity to take it all in. The world delights the generous but seldom overwhelsms them. (Prov. 11:24).

Not so the stingy. Stinginess is parasitic, it chews life up and spits out bones. The stingy end up losing what they try so desperately to hold.  

Lovers of money are stingy people whose lives end in ruin. Generous people are givers who find great joy in blessing others. Think about it like this: since God is a giver, rarely are we more like God than when we are generous. Don’t hoard money and things; share it, give it, release it to do real good in the kingdom of God and in the lives of people. Spray some generosity on the love-of-money weed, and the root will shrivel right up.

The love-of-money root is a **serious thing**. Eternities are at stake here. If you are rooted in a love of money, don’t try to fix it yourself. Run to Jesus. Experience His grace. Learn His contentment. Practice His generosity. That’s the only way to kill love-money-root that grows all kinds of evil.

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God’s grace, contentment, and generosity are the perfect mixture to whip up a batch of love-of-money Weed-B-Gone. You need to get you some of that and keep it handy.

IV

So I am asking you today to make a choice. It’s the very choice Jesus asks you to make when He said, “No man can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Mt. 6:24). In reflecting on this Scott Wesley Brown wrote these words:

Things upon the mantle, things on every shelf,
Things that others gave me, things I gave myself.
Things I’ve stored in boxes that don’t mean much anymore:
Old magazines and memories behind the attic door, things.

Things on hooks and hangers, things on ropes and rings
Things I guard that blind me to the pettiness of things.
Am I like the rich young ruler, ruled by all I own?
If Jesus came and asked me, could I leave them all alone?

Oh Lord, I look to heaven, beyond the veil of time,
To gain eternal insight that nothing’s really mine,
And to only ask for daily bread, and all contentment brings,
To find freedom as your servant in the midst of all these things.

For discarded in the junkyards, rusting in the rain,
Lie things it took the finest years of lifetimes to obtain.
And whistling through these tombstones, the hollow breezes sing
A song of dreams surrendered to the tyranny of things.

Hear the word of the Lord: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wondered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:10). If that verse has your picture beside it, repent of your sins and find your satisfaction in Christ Jesus rather than in money. For the love of Jesus is the root of all good. It is
through this craving that people find contentment and generosity and satisfaction that last forever.

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