Introduction

Materialism is an excessive devotion to worldly concerns rather than spiritual, especially to the acquisition of material possessions. Perhaps one of the most prevalent forms of worldliness is the devotion to material things over spiritual development. In short, it is the worship of temporal things rather than God. It is easy for one to perceive idol worship as the bowing down to some golden calf or some other image; but it is substantially more difficult for us to realize that anything we put before God is considered by God to be idolatry. The crux of the matter is anything that stands between God and us is an idol. Our Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Today, we live in a capitalist world, where success is often defined by the accumulation of wealth. A successful person is often considered as one who has accomplished or accumulated much in life. The world is after material gains, and people are caught in the clutches of their desire for more. Our lives are constantly bombarded with messages about products that will make life better and we are encouraged to spend our lives pursuing worldly possessions. Even the church is not spared. There are some among the Charismatic movement who say that it is God’s will that a person ought to be healthy and wealthy; and this teaching is known as the “Health-Wealth” Gospel. Well, if this is the case, then our Lord Jesus Christ would have considered the rich man in the “Parable of the Rich Fool” (Luke 12:16-21) the wise man instead of the fool.

There are many examples of materialism in the Old Testament, too, that can teach us the dangers of this sin. One of the earliest examples comes from the story of Abraham and Lot (Genesis...
13:6-12). It was blatant materialism that caused Lot to choose the better part of the land for his herd, leaving Abraham to the lesser watered land of Canaan. Well, God blessed Abraham for his unselfish spirit and his obedience, while Lot was severely chastised for his devotion to material things.

**Materialism**

**Blurs A Person's Spiritual Vision**

One of the ill-effects of materialism is that the mindset of the person will be so drawn into material concerns that he will be distracted from faithfully doing the will of God. Time and again, we read in scriptures the warnings against the quest for material things that can stand in our way of service to God. Jobs and careers can be so consuming that we have no time for God and the things that matter most. The desire to have newer, bigger things causes many Christians to neglect family and spiritual matters. Quite frequently, those desires supersede their spiritual desires. This reminds us of the great truth that Jesus taught in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

In the parable of the rich fool, the rich man is someone who is only concerned with accumulating and accomplishing more in life. If a person puts most of his or her energy into seeking the material comforts of life, there will be little time or energy left for spiritual devotion to God. It is not just a matter of priorities; it is losing one’s entire focus and perspective in life. How often we see Christians who were once faithful in their service for the Lord, being drawn into materialism.

Focus and Preoccupation are two vital things that many Christians lack in their service to God. They fail to serve God as they devote all their time to the pursuit of temporal and earthly material things. They neglect God as they become more and more preoccupied with materialism. Their desire for more material things often cloud their hearts and minds so much so that they lose their vision for spiritual things. When we put our desires, efforts and priorities towards physical possessions over our obligation to God, we sin and displease God.

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21).
Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us by His personal example. He was always about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49), and He was relentless in carrying out His Father’s will. He taught us that if we take care of the things of God in our lives, God will take care of our material needs. He will provide for us (Matthew 6:25-34).

Materialism Causes A Person To Be Greedy

We note that the rich man of Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:16-21 made two fatal errors. On the one hand, in planning for himself, he forgot about God. And, on the other hand, in providing for his body, he forgot his soul. His life is centred around his possessions and his insatiable desire for more. And that is greed.

Greed is taking all one can get without any regard for the needs of others. Greed is avaricious, covetous, and a great, consuming evil that will enslave those who meddle with it. Is it not true that in our time, materialism has become an obsessive way of life? Much evil is generated in the lust for money, houses, and material possessions.

There was once a financial advisor named Ron Blue who visited a rural village in Africa. He asked one of the villagers, “What is the biggest problem in your village?” He fully expected to hear about a food shortage or lack of medical supplies. He was not prepared for the response he received. One man blurted out, “Materialism.” He explained, “If a man has a mud hut, he wants one made of stone. If he has a thatch roof, he wants a tin roof. If he has one acre, he wants two.” And then he added, “Materialism is a disease of the heart.” Indeed, materialism is one of the most grievous sin of our age.

No doubt it is wholly human to be concerned about issues of survival because we need money, shelter, clothing and food for life to go on normally. It is certainly not wrong to work for the necessities of life, but it is wrong to covet after them at the expense of spiritual things. Many crave after beautiful homes, fancy furniture, membership in exclusive clubs, glamorous vacations, etc. In order to achieve all these things, they have to pursue the way of life that results in too many monthly payments, long hours of stressful work, and a disorganized family life. But the biggest tragedy of it all is, that the acquiring of these material things does not really satisfy a person’s needs. In fact, it fuels the greed for more, taking us further away from God.

Materialism Causes A Person To Forfeit His Own Soul

This rich man seemed to think that all there was to life for him was to enjoy all the goods that had been stored away. That is why he said in verse 19, “And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” By most standards, this rich man is someone whom most people would endeavour to be – he was rich, hard working, ambitious and successful. He is the type of person parents would want their sons to become and their daughters to marry. The world calls him wise, but God calls him a fool. He was rich in every way except towards God. What he thought he could hold onto would soon make a quick departure. He was living the life of the fool.

The Scripture tells us in Psalm 14:1 that, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” When a person lives only for the present and puts all his confidence in his surroundings, he is acting like a fool. It appears to this rich
man that life goes on and on, and there is no such thing as death and giving an account before God. Well, this attitude is foolish, for our life on earth is but a few years compared to endless eternity.

This man is so blinded by materialism that he had no concern for spiritual things. His physical house was in order, but his spiritual house was in shambles. His life’s energy had gone into taking care of material business at the expense of spiritual development. And just when he thought he could relax and enjoy what he had accumulated in life, God was about to take his amply-prepared-for life away from him. “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20).

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with material things. Nice cars or comfortable homes are not bad things unless these possessions preoccupy us, unless the pursuit of these things keeps us from seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord. That’s the real danger. Materialism is dangerous because it replaces eternal values in the heart with earthly valuables and it considers the temporal and the earthly more important than the eternal. That is precisely why Jesus ends the parable of the rich fool by saying, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

The warning that Jesus gives in this parable is that we should not become so confident in material possessions that we neglect our need for God. Which kind of wealth is more important: material or spiritual? Is it better to be a rich man who is spiritually empty, or to be a poor man and yet spiritually rich? Well, Jesus warns us in Luke 12:15, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

Conclusion

Heed the scriptures’ warnings on the blinding effects of materialism.

Every one of us should be convinced to put far more energy and zeal into building our spiritual storehouses than our material ones. As Jesus said on another occasion, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). You should not put your emphasis on material possessions because they do not last. The vanity of materialism is well illustrated in the following conversation between two men who were walking back from a funeral. One of them asked the other, “How much did the guy leave behind?” And the other man replied, “Everything.”