

WHY CHRISTIANS MUST DEPART FROM ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH

Habakkuk 2:9-14

Ezekiel, Oghenekaro

9 “What sorrow awaits you who build big houses with money gained dishonestly! You believe your wealth will buy security, putting your family’s nest beyond the reach of danger. 10 But by the murders you committed, you have shamed your name and forfeited your lives. 11 The very stones in the walls cry out against you, and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint.

*12 “What sorrow awaits you who build cities with money gained through murder and corruption! 13 Has not the Lord of Heaven’s Armies promised that the wealth of nations will turn to ashes? They work so hard, but all in vain! 14 For as the waters fill the sea, the earth will be filled with an awareness of the glory of the Lord. **Habakkuk 2:9-14 (NLT)***

It is disheartening to see the disparity between the very rich and the desperately poor in our world. Not that being rich is necessarily wrong or that poverty is somehow godly in itself. Having wealth through hard work and being generous with it is no problem. Rather, the issue is how wealth is accumulated and used.

This is what is attacked in our passage today. Habakkuk is wondering when and how justice will be done on earth as he is surrounded by corruption both amongst his own people and the surrounding nations. God reminds him that things might indeed be bad, but he will have the last say. Ill-gotten gains will not be left unpunished. Justice will finally be done.

And yet we know from elsewhere in the Bible that we can’t expect perfection of justice and fairness here on earth. That awaits the new heavens and the new earth. Of course, God can and does act prior to that time. We do see instances of the corrupt rich being brought back to earth. Other times, they seem to prosper.

Are you envious of the wealth of the wicked? Do you consider obedience to God to be in vain when you see the ungodly prospering? Many believing Christians find themselves querying the justness of God when they compare the results of their work with God with the riches of the ungodly. This is not right before God, for it shows lack of knowledge of God and trust in God. This article gives the consequences of ungodly riches which no child of God will desire.

When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me- until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end – Psalms 73:16-17 (NKJV)

Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase – Proverbs 13:11 (NKJV)

The fear of the Lord prolongs days, the years of the wicked will be shortened – Proverbs 10:27 (NKJV).

Many times, Christians have been harsh against God through their words: we say it is useless to serve God and we call the proud blessed (**Malachi 3:13-15**). However, we are lacking wisdom, we are ignorant and act like ingrate before God when we do so (**Psalm 73:22**). Asaph found himself in such a situation, he queried the justness and faithfulness of God. Thank God he went into God's sanctuary and got the answers (**Psalm 73:1-17**)! I encourage you to go to God's sanctuary in prayers when you don't understand a thing instead of saying and doing the wrong things before God.

In Psalms 37 and Psalms 73, King David and Asaph wrote of the tragedy of the wicked who seem to be prospering. O child of God, read and gain understanding. Be rest assured that the book of remembrance shall be written before God for those who fear Him, and you shall again discern between those who serve God and those who don't serve Him (**Malachi 3:16-18**).

Now, what Do we Consider as ungodly/Ill Gotten riches?

These are riches or wealth gotten out of wicked actions: through cheating, lying, bribery and corruption, killing, yahoo yahoo, yahoo plus, oppression, 419, betting, ponzi schemes and every ungodly act. Our society today celebrate mediocrity and laziness. Consider the just concluded big brother Africa programme and how this nation celebrate mediocrity, laziness and sometimes it makes you feel that hard work and excellence have no reward.

Why Christians Must Depart from Ill-Gotten Wealth

Things deceive: As our Lord says, “. . . he that was sown among thorns, this is he that hears the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (**Matthew 13:22**). The lust and love of things choke, deaden, and, ultimately, deceive. Riches create a false sense of security and power.

In a lengthy warning against the dangers of wealth, Paul exclaims, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil; which some, reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (**1 Timothy 6:10**). Ancient Israel was warned that unless great care was exercised, they would grow fat and forget God, which very thing they did (**Deuteronomy 6:11, 12**). How true the words of wisdom: “There is no peril to which man is exposed, and against which he is so solemnly warned and carefully guarded, as that involved in the accumulation and possession of wealth.” When man begins to make money, either God gets a partner, or Satan wins a soul! It was Solomon who said the sleep of

the laboring man is sweet; but the fullness of the rich will not allow him to sleep (**Ecclesiastes 5:12**).

Ill-Gotten is Wealth Transient: Another warning the Scriptures give about things is their transiency. *Riches make to themselves wings to fly away* (**Proverbs 23:5**). Moth, rust, and thieves take away their value (**Matthew 6:19, 20**). The glory of the rich man will not descend to the grave with him (**Psalms 49:16, 17**). Eight men gathered at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Atlantic City in 1923. They controlled more wealth and possessed more wealth, than was in the U.S. Treasury at the time. But in just a matter of a few years three had committed suicide, two were in prison, one had been murdered and two had gone insane. How true that “*we brought nothing into this world, and we shall take nothing out*” (**1 Timothy 6:6-10**).

Calamity (**Micah 2:1-5, Proverbs 15:6, Proverbs 10:16**): God devises disaster for the wicked from which they cannot come out. Their income yields sin and trouble for them. They are destroyed and their walls come crumbling down all around them, leaving them hopeless and helpless. The sad thing is that the family of the wicked shares in this calamity.

Their years are shortened (**Proverbs 10:27, Psalm 55:23**): They cannot boast of long life for their days are shortened. They will not live up to half of their days. They will amass this wealth only to leave it in the midst of their days. They will not live to enjoy the ill-gotten riches, unlike the righteous who will live to enjoy the fruit of their labour.

Their wealth will go to the righteous (**Proverbs 13:22, Job 27:16-17**): These wicked people gather so much of this wealth with the mind of leaving it for their children’s children. However, the scriptures make it clear that unlike a good man who leaves an inheritance for his generations after him, the wealth of the wicked goes to the righteous. The just will wear the clothing they pile up and the innocent will divide the silver.

Diminished wealth (**Proverbs 13:11, Proverbs 21:6**): Wealth gotten by dishonesty will diminish, like a fleeting vapor it will disappear leaving him with nothing. This is the story of many who are rich today and tomorrow they are poor. God allows the devourer to come in, in form of challenges and attacks, to cart away all they have gathered. It will be like a hole in their bags such that as they are gathering the wealth it is disappearing, and when they look in they see nothing left.

Sickness and disease (**James 5: 1-3**): The ill-gotten riches corrode and eat up the flesh of the wicked like fire, resulting in all manner of sicknesses and diseases. God certainly will judge the rich oppressors. They will be looking at the wealth and they won’t be able to enjoy it: they won’t be able to eat the delicate meals, wear the expensive clothes or drive their luxurious cars.

Descendants shall be cut off (**Psalms 37:28**): The descendants of the wicked are cut off. You will look for them and you will not find them, nobody to carry on their names or show that they ever lived. And if there be any surviving child, he or she will change his or her name so

as to dissociate from the wicked person. Ungodly riches affect not only the gatherer but also his household.

Shame (Jeremiah 17:11, Isaiah 47:1-5): At the beginning it will seem as if all is well with the wicked and his riches, but the end will leave him as a fool, full of shame. Nobody will remember his glorious days except to mock him. He will sit like Babylon in darkness and his shame will be seen by all. He will become a story to be told of what happens to those who get wealthy through ungodly means.

Eternal damnation in hell (Luke 16:19-31): The worst of all and final judgment of God upon the wicked and his ill-gotten riches is damnation in hell. The story of the rich man and Lazarus tells us exactly what will happen to any rich man who does not walk right before God while on earth. His life after death will forever be a life of torment in hell.

Now that you know the tragedy that will befall those who gather riches through ungodly means, do you still have any reason to envy them or consider God as an unjust God? I charge you this day to walk in obedience to God and enjoy His blessings, while exempting yourself from the calamities of disobedience.

The Futility of Things: Solomon said long ago, after giving his life to building something big, to gold, to silver, to *“becoming a millionaire before age thirty,” that it all was vanity and striving after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11)*. He is also the one who said that a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches (**Proverbs 22:1**). There are so many things nobler, higher, and sweeter than gold: Wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it (**Proverbs 8:10**).

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver (**Proverbs 16:16**). Things perish with the using (**Colossians 2:22**). Riches are not forever (**Proverbs 27:24**). And listen to this solemn warning by the writer of Hebrews: *Be ye free from the love of money and content with such things as you have; for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee.*

Halford Luccock tells of a family called Danks who were devoted to one another and had a happy home. Mr. Danks was a song writer, which was a very precarious position, and they were poor. But their poverty seemed to draw them closer to each other. Danks was so impressed with this family affection that he wrote a song that everybody now knows: *“Silver Threads Among the Gold.”* The song brought him fame and fortune—but it also brought discord and unhappiness. The home was broken up, and in time, Mr. and Mrs. Danks were separated. Some years later, he was found dead, kneeling beside his bed in a cheap boarding house in Philadelphia. On the bed beside him lay an old copy of *“Silver Threads”* with these words written across it: *“It is hard to grow old alone” (The Halford Luccock Treasury, p. 417).*

Today people have had more and more, but enjoyed it less and less. The standard of living has gone higher and higher while the standard of life has gone lower and lower. We have the finest homes, but the least home life. We have conveniences that save us many hours, but no time to study the Word of God. In a land of abundance, we have never learned how to

abound. We have proved without a doubt that to be better off is not to be better. This generation believes that it can drink its way to happiness, spend its way to wealth, fight its way to peace, and enjoy its way to heaven.

The Effect of Things Upon Life: Another warning of the New Testament is the effect things have on life. Rather than bringing life and fulfillment and happiness, things rob people of the greatest values. Those who have riches find it difficult, if not impossible, to enter the kingdom of God, so said Jesus (***Matthew 19:23***). Those who possess riches are honored in the world; they are socially acceptable and enjoy the best of things. A sense of pride is created that makes it virtually impossible for them to do the humble things of Jesus: serving the poor, communicating to every need, being concerned about others.

You have seen it happen again and again. A young family is faithful to the Lord, attending, serving, giving. Then promotions come, money is more available, time becomes short, and the job has more demands. A cut has to be made somewhere; so out goes attendance, serving, and giving to the Lord. There is not time for the visitation, teaching, and good works. A sense of values has been lost and the effect on the family and children is devastating. The father thinks nothing of giving sixty to seventy hours of work to his occupation, but cannot give a few hours in faithful worship and service to the Lord, or time to his precious children. The father has become too busy building his empire to build children and family. Often, the mother has left the home and its sacred precincts when her little ones and husband needed her most. The tragedy of this path is that it robs the soul of eternal salvation and brings no satisfaction here in this life. Hear Solomon, who through experience and divine inspiration speaks: He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loveth abundance with increase; this also is vanity (***Ecclesiastes 5:10***).

CONCLUSION

The ultimate standard of value of anything is *if it lasts*. All things are to perish. At the last day, the world and all things therein will be burned up, the heavens will be rolled up as a scroll, and the elements will be dissolved (***2 Peter 3:10, 11***).

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