

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What is the Corrupt Root?

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:8–10, KJV 1900)

As with so many concepts that require knowledge and reflection, the Christian faith is often challenged by people who have little or no knowledge of it. Sometimes these would-be critics, and sadly sometimes ill-informed—on uninformed—Christians routinely misquote key passages of Scripture, or else they wholly misrepresent passages so as to contradict the text's context and intent. Any number of examples could be used to make the point, but I'll offer one before we examine our lesson from First Timothy.

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14–15, KJV 1900)

In this case, folks who hold to a man-centric view of eternal salvation will extract—with surgical precision and with equal care to avoid context—one brief clause from this passage, "...choose you this day whom ye will serve...." Then these folks will make their empty case that every sinner must choose God or face eternity apart from God. In framing Joshua's command in this fashion, these folks wholly misrepresent the passage. Joshua does not in any way direct every person to make an eternal choice. Quite the contrary, he directs all of Israel to put away their idol gods and serve God alone. There is no other rational or right choice for them to make. However, some of these people were stubborn in their sinful rebellion against God. For them, serving God seemed to be the worst option possible. To these people, Joshua qualifies his follow-up, "...if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord...." Only the people who had already refused to serve God, who thought serving God was "evil," had any kind of choice to make. And the choice was not between God and the devil, between heaven and hell. The choice was between two or more idol, pagan gods, the "...gods of your

fathers...or the gods of the Amorites...." A more inexcusable example of false interpretation could hardly be found. Yet folks who embrace errant doctrine continue to misrepresent one clause in this lesson, while ignoring the context and the Holy Spirit's clear intent.

In the case of our study passage from First Timothy, the common miscue errs in that it fails to correctly quote the actual words of the passage. In a manner similar to the errant misrepresentation of the Joshua passage, folks will repeatedly misquote one brief phrase from this lesson, "...money is the root of all evil...." If money itself is the root of all evil, all faithful Christians need to turn to the hermit's life and become wholly self-sufficient so that they never, under any circumstances, touch or use any form of money. If money is the root of all evil, a little or a lot makes no difference except in degree; it is evil.

However, Paul's actual lesson associates the problem with the true cause of all kinds of evil. The problem lies, not in the money, but in the corrupt, and often idolatrous attitude that people adopt toward it. According to Paul, the culprit is not the money, but the possessor's—or seeker's—inordinate love of it. "...the love of money...." First century common Greek language provided several different words that are loosely translated into the English language as "love." Scripture uses three of those words. The word that Paul uses here refers to intimate friendship. The name of one of our country's major cities, Philadelphia, comes from this word, so in keeping with the word's meaning, Philadelphia boasts of being "The city of brotherly love."

We learn much by quietly observing people. They teach us more about themselves by simple routine behavior than they might ever confess specifically. It may be that more people who do not have money struggle with this problem than the folks who have it. How many sins does Scripture name that grow out of the ugly human emotion of envy or lust? The desire to have what one does not possess drives many people to sinful actions. Far more intimate and destructive, the spite that people who do not have a lot show toward those who do have wealth has destroyed many a life.

... *the root of all evil*. With time and creative thought, we might name various sins that do not sink their taproots in money. "All" in Scripture, as in ordinary conversation, can refer to every item under consideration without exception, or it can refer to all kinds of things, but not necessarily the universally inclusive idea. Without doubt, this inordinate friendship with money causes all kinds of sin and generally evil, or undesirable, problems in people's lives.

...*which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*. The problem with money is not limited to people who have it. Quite often it appears vividly in the insatiable pursuit of wealth by people who do not possess it. They "...*covet after...*" it. Coveting, prohibited in the Ten Commandments, God's most direct and condensed moral baseline, itself is sin, but it leads those who catch its infection into far deeper sins, as well as greater misery.

Notice the first problem that Paul names, "...*erred from the faith*." If Satan can convince the coveting lovers of money to forsake their faith, he can convince them to do just about anything he wishes. We often draw the analogy of the "Slippery slope" when discussing moral issues. An excessive desire for something convinces you to rationalize an attitude or action that you know is wrong, but you go out of your way to justify it, to try to redefine sin as righteousness. If your love for money is too strong, you'll eventually find your rationalization, but you have set the course for your future. With each step, the moral ground on which you stand becomes more slippery, and the angle of the incline becomes steeper. In the analogy, the angle always leads to decline. It takes you down! Never up! Jesus taught this same lesson in the parable of the unjust steward. (Luke 16:1-13) When Jesus extracted the moral lesson from this parable, He directed us specifically to the point that Paul teaches in our lesson, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon was the pagan god of money. Jesus didn't say it is difficult to serve God and money; He said it is impossible. **You cannot do it.** Take substantial time to study that parable. A driving element in the parable's plot is the steward's rationalizing of sin for his personal benefit.

...*pierced themselves through with many sorrows*. Who causes this pain? Beginning in the third chapter of Genesis, and continuing consistently to this day, Satan's favorite deceitful strategy with sinners whom he has convinced to walk away from God is to blame someone or something else for the sin. When God confronted Adam for his sin, he responded, "This woman whom you gave me did it." When God confronted Eve for her sin, she answered, "This serpent whom you made did it." Interestingly, Adam and Eve tried to blame God for their sin, and fallen, corrupted minds ever since that time prefer to blame God for their sin over any other cause. If they can't make

their self-deluded case that God caused their sin, they'll look eagerly for the next convenient person to blame. In recent years, I have had more reason than I would desire to observe the attitude and behavior of an addict. His most consistent attitude about all the problems that he has brought upon himself is to blame those around him for his problem. Neither Paul, nor God who directed these words, has the least tolerance for this phony blame game. Imbed Paul's words in your mind. Those who pursue their inordinate love for money are personally responsible for the endless problems of their life. They "...*pierce themselves...*"

Years ago, a wise deacon told a fascinating experience he had as a young man. In the waning years of the Great Depression, he served in the CCC. He was assigned to a camp in a rather remote area where the program administrator of the project provided the participants with housing and food. One evening during the group's collective evening meal, the administrator announced that the group would have the exceptional opportunity to hear one of the Rockefellers speak to them. The leading member of one of the nation's richest families stood to speak to these poor men. He talked about a number of interesting ideas, but one thing stuck with this young man who later became a wise deacon. Mr. Rockefeller told the men about all the uncertainty he lived with daily in trying to manage and to grow his family fortunes. At the very time of this speech, he was worried about a whole train loaded with his grain, but it was stuck on a side rail somewhere in the mid-west with no cover over the grain, and the grain was quickly being ruined by pouring rain. Needed rainfall was eroding his personal fortune. He mentioned a number of other similar worries that consumed his thinking. Then he pointed out something to the men that this young man never forgot. The wealthiest man in the room—perhaps in the country at the time—could not eat the cafeteria meal that those men ate that night. He was so consumed with worry, and his stomach was so burned with excessive acid that he could only tolerate a bland liquid diet. The men were all amazed when Rockefeller told them, "I'd gladly give my fortune to be able to sit at a table and eat this food just as you are eating it tonight." Despite Mr. Rockefeller's fortunes, he lived with the "pierced through" pain and sorrow that came from his insatiable obsession with wealth. He had it, but it didn't do a thing for his stomach! **Or did it have him?**

In the context of our lesson, Paul repeatedly contrasted contented godliness with the empty promises that any other lifestyle floods its objects with. No rocket science necessary for the wise and godly believer, the choice between these two lifestyles is about as stark as Joshua's "If it seem evil to you..." options to ancient Israel. Like that lesson, God doesn't ask you to decide between two bad options. He commands us to serve Him; we need make no other choice.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor