

Lesson 3 16 November 2014

The Christian and His Possessions

Lesson Scope: Proverbs 3, 10, 11, 13-15, 18, 19, 22, 23, 28, 30

Lesson Focus

God possesses all things by absolute right. He created all things, and He sustains all things.

Man possesses things of this world by privilege. This privilege was granted at Creation when man was given dominion over the works of God's hands.

God has placed us in a material world; we deal with material goods every day. We must beware of our natural tendency toward materialism, toward the inordinate pursuit of these things. Rather, God calls us to hold these possessions lightly, realizing they are actually His and not ours.

A proper view of possessions begins with a proper view of God and of His ownership. Recognizing God as the Giver and Sustainer of all gives us a proper sense of our smallness before Him. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4).

As we keep a proper view of our possessions, we are willing to use them to serve God by ministering to the needs of our fellow men.

In emphasizing the importance of Christian giving, be careful to avoid the health-and-wealth gospel emphasis. While we do believe that God blesses those who give, that blessing will not always be financial or material. The reward will be in heaven.

"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof." Earthly possessions are a gift from God, and He holds us accountable for how we use them.

Lesson Aim: To see how we should relate to material possessions.

Theme Verse" Proverbs 3:9. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase.

Lesson Text

Acknowledge the Lord

Proverbs 3:9-10⁹ Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: ¹⁰ So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

Proverbs 10:2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Proverbs 10:22 The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

Proverbs 11:4 Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Share With the Poor

Proverbs 11:24-26²⁴ There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and *there is* that withholdeth more than is meet, but *it tendeth* to poverty.²⁵ The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.²⁶ He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing *shall be* upon the head of him that selleth *it*.

Proverbs 14:31 He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

Proverbs 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Proverbs 22:2 The rich and poor meet together: the LORD *is* the maker of them all.

Proverbs 28:8 He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

Labor Not to Be Rich

Proverbs 11:27-28²⁷ He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.²⁸ He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.

Proverbs 13:7-8⁷ There is that maketh himself rich, yet *hath* nothing: *there is* that maketh himself poor, yet *hath* great riches.⁸ The ransom of a man's life *are* his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.

Proverbs 13:11 Wealth *gotten* by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

Proverbs 13:22 A good *man* leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner *is* laid up for the just.

Proverbs 15:6 In the house of the righteous *is* much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.

Proverbs 15:16-17 ¹⁶ Better *is* little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. ¹⁷ Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Proverbs 16:27 An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips *there is* as a burning fire.

Proverbs 18:9 He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

Proverbs 22:1 A *good* name *is* rather to be chosen than great riches, *and* loving favour rather than silver and gold.

Proverbs 23:4-5 ⁴ Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. ⁵ Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for *riches* certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

Proverbs 28:6 Better *is* the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than *he that is* perverse *in his* ways, though he *be* rich.

Proverbs 28:20 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.

Proverbs 30:8-9 ⁸ Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: ⁹ Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*.

Questions for Study

Acknowledge the Lord

1. What is the Biblical view of material possessions?
2. List practical ways to honor God with our possessions.
3. Judging by God's standard, what makes a successful life?

Share With the Poor

4. Explain the paradox of giving as portrayed in Proverbs 11:24-25.
5. Why does a materialistic person tend to neglect the needs of others and even oppress them?

Labor Not to Be Rich

6. What things does the proverb writer count more valuable than money?
7. Why should the Christian be employed in productive labor rather than falling for get-rich-quick schemes?

8. How can we cultivate contentment?

Analyzing the Passage

The word possessions used in the lesson title includes three categories: (1) consumable goods, such as food and clothing; (2) producer goods (tools of production that generate income); (3) liquid assets, such as money.

Firstfruits (Proverbs 3:9) are the first and best, which the Lord deserves. This includes not only possessions and income but also time, talents, and thoughts. God blesses those who keep Him first in everything.

Common wrong attitudes toward possessions include stinginess (Proverbs 11:24), trust in possessions (Proverbs 11:28), covetousness (Proverbs 15:27), slothfulness, wastefulness (Proverbs 18:9), and discontentment (Proverbs 23:4-5).

In contrast, the Christian sees his possessions as gifts from God to be used for God.

Principles and Applications

Acknowledge the Lord

1. Material possessions are the gracious gifts of God to men (Proverbs 3:9-10). God sends the rain and the sunshine, causing the earth to bring forth abundantly. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." We are privileged to be recipients of the beauties of the earth. We really do not deserve them.

2. Ill-gotten gain incurs sorrow and loss (Proverbs 10:2, 22). Dishonest gain makes enemies of those who are cheated. A person who is ruthless and selfish usually receives the same treatment from his fellow men. They reap what they have sowed. Wealth gotten dishonestly will testify against its owner; it brings anything but happiness.

3. Character, rather than material success, determines one's destiny (Proverbs 11:4). When we stand before the judgment seat, God will not judge us according to the quantity of our possessions. What will matter at that day is whether we have surrendered to Christ and lived by His commandments. Have we related to material possessions by the principles of honesty, generosity, diligence, and stewardship? Then we will hear the welcome words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).\

Share With the Poor

4. God diminishes the wealth of a selfish person but amply rewards the generous giver (Proverbs 11:24-26; 13:7; 19:17). This is the paradox of giving. Those who give have more for themselves—sometimes materially but always in the form of happiness. Those who hoard and neglect to share with others distance themselves from God's blessing. Sooner or later, they experience divine judgment. Remember, we are the hands and feet that God uses to minister to the needs of others.

5. The needs of others call us to sacrifice (Proverbs 11:26). This verse portrays a profit-oriented farmer with a crop of grain. His plan was to hold the crop in storage to get the best market price later on. But someone in need wants to buy grain now.

It is right for us to make a profit, but we may not neglect the needs at our door. We should sacrifice what could rightfully be ours for the sake of others.

6. Oppression in all its forms marks one for judgment (Proverbs 14:31). The way we treat our fellow men is a clear index to our relationship with God. Those who fear and honor God will have pity on their fellow men. Those who forget the great debt that God forgave them and who mistreat their fellow men invoke God's wrath.

Labor Not to Be Rich

7. Faithful stewardship includes saving rather than consuming all of one's living (Proverbs 13:22; 15:6). It has been observed that a man's financial worth is not determined by how much he earns but by how much he saves. We must instill the principles of saving into our children early. They should not freely spend money at the store; rather, we teach them to save and to give.

With the help of credit cards and easy credit, many in our society spend their money even before they receive it. "They spend money they do not have to buy things they do not need to impress people they do not like." How foolish and vain! In contrast, the frugal person who learns the discipline of saving his income is better prepared to face hard times when they come.

8. True wealth increases only by productive labor (Proverbs 13:11; 28:6, 8, 20). This principle was established in Genesis 3:19: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." As a rule, those who give themselves diligently to their labors and persevere in hard, honest toil

experience more financial gain than those who try first one adventure and then another. Schemes for getting rich quick usually disregard honesty and integrity. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is not true.

9. Possessions do not guarantee happiness (Proverbs 15:16-17, 27). Materialism is the obsession of acquiring money and things. It is fueled by greed and discontentment. It leaves men empty and unhappy. True happiness is found in being content in whatever state God has placed us. This happiness is expressed by a life of thankfulness and praise.

10. Possessions are transitory and not a store of true wealth (Proverbs 23:4-5).

Job, one of the wealthiest of men, lost his riches in one day. We handle possessions as long as we are in the world. But we remember that they are really God's, not ours. The only possessions we can keep are those we give away. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

11. Cultivating contentment helps to avoid the snares of covetousness and self-sufficiency (Proverbs 30:8-9). The human tendency is for those who have little to feel that they would be happier if they had more. The rich usually wish for even more. Contentment in Christ produces gratitude for what we have, rather than a desire for what we do not have. It also produces a trust in God to supply all our needs, whether we possess little or much.

Answers to Questions

1. What is the Biblical view of material possessions?

Material possessions are gracious gifts from God. He is the Creator and ultimate owner of all things. They are entrusted to us as stewards for the purpose of meeting our needs and the needs of those around us.

2. List practical ways to honor God with our possessions.

We honor God by giving of our increase to Him. We use our things to better serve God, not ourselves. We share our goods with others in need. When we experience loss, we respond with Job, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

3. Judging by God's standard, what makes a successful life?

A successful life is not measured by our accumulation of assets or the

appearance of our dwelling. Rather, a successful life is one lived in submission and obedience to God. It is evident as we relate to others in honesty, love, and generosity.

4. Explain the paradox of giving as portrayed in Proverbs 11.24-25.

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." To the human mind, this seems absurd. How could I receive more by giving away? And yet God's ways do work. God often does bless generosity in a financial way, although we do not give so that we receive more. Always, the cheerful giver lays up treasure in heaven.

5. Why does a materialistic person tend to neglect the needs of others and even oppress them?

He is living for self and possessions first of all. He who fails to honor his Maker with his substance will also fail to respect and help his fellow men as he should.

6. What things does the proverb writer count more valuable than money?

Sacrifice (13:7), the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 15:16), a good name (Proverbs 22:1), uprightness (Proverbs 28:6), and faithfulness (Proverbs 28:20) are worth more than money.

7. Why should the Christian be employed in productive labor rather than falling for get-rich-quick schemes?

The Bible teaches that wealth is increased by hard, honest toil. Productive labor meets man's need for exercise. It gives a sense of satisfaction in providing for his family, and it meets the physical needs of his fellow men. Those who run after get-rich-quick schemes are usually disappointed; often they end with a net loss.

8. How can we cultivate contentment?

We must understand that all we have is God's; we are only stewards. We should remember that we are undeserving of the many good things we enjoy. We can experience greater contentment by sharing our blessings with our fellow men.

Important Teachings

1. Material possessions are the gracious gifts of God to men (Proverbs 3:9-10).

2. Ill-gotten gain incurs sorrow and loss (Proverbs 10:2, 22).

3. Character, rather than material success, determines one's destiny

(Proverbs 11:4).

4. God diminishes the wealth of a selfish person but amply rewards the generous giver (Proverbs 11:24-26; 13:7; 19:17).

5. The needs of others call us to sacrifice (Proverbs 11:26).

6. Oppression in all its forms marks one for judgment (Proverbs 14:31).

7. Faithful stewardship includes saving rather than consuming all of one's living (Proverbs 13:22; 15:6).

8. True wealth increases only by productive labor (Proverbs 13:11; 28:6, 8, 20).

9. Possessions do not guarantee happiness (Proverbs 15:16-17, 27).

10. Possessions are transitory and not a store of true wealth (Proverbs 23:4-5).

11. Cultivating contentment helps to avoid the snares of covetousness and self-sufficiency (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Summarizing the Lesson

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Research Guide

1. Read the Scriptures listed under "Riches" in Nave's Topical Bible.

2. A Faithful Steward, by Eastern Mennonite Publications, offers abundant background resources for teaching this lesson.