

Introduction

I'd like to begin by having you imagine something. You've inherited a billion dollars and, thus, have access to doing and having whatever you want. Question – Would your lifestyle change and if so, how would it? Would you do and have things you don't do and have now and if so, what would they be? I have another question. Would you be happier and more contented in your new lifestyle, if it changed, than you are now?

Thoughtful and honest answers to those questions assist us in determining something. That something is whether or not we're simple and free and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to the text I read earlier, 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

In verse 6, Paul contends that godliness brings us great gain. He then explains one of the ways it does in verses 7-10. He identifies two ways of life that are open to us in the course of doing so, both of which we need to examine and understand.

The Way of Materialism

The first is found in verses 9 and 10. Notice three phrases in those verses: **"those who want to get rich," "for the love of money,"** and **"longing for it."** The operative words are **"want," "love," and longing."** What Paul is writing about here is materialism. Materialism is the inner condition of craving more than enough. We have enough but crave more. I knew a long established Christian who lived in an upscale neighborhood in Canfield. But she pointed to an even more upscale neighborhood one day and said to my wife and me: **"I won't rest until I live there."** She has far beyond enough but still, craves more.

But materialism isn't just an inner condition. It's an outer lifestyle as well, that flows from the condition. Economics professor Juliet Schor says that the motto of American culture is **"more is always better."** But since more is always better, it logically follows that there's no such thing as enough or even too much. That's the view of most Americans,

which spurs them not only to crave but pursue as well.

Economists talk about what they call the income-consumption cycle. The income side of the cycle is how much we earn. The consumption side is how much we acquire and use on ourselves. For most Americans, economists say, the consumption side is in direct proportion to the income side. The more money they make, the more they acquire and use on themselves - the more their income, the more their consumption. Consumption in fact has become an American way of life. Many Americans consume for the sake of consuming.

Take shopping, for instance. There's a bumper sticker that says, **"I'd rather be shopping."** That really is what many Americans would rather be doing. As author Evy McDonald says it, shopping has become a habit, hobby, and sport. A survey asked several thousand teenage girls what their favorite activity is. 93% said "shopping." Along those same lines, the New Road Map foundation published an article about shopping titled "All Consuming Passion." It said in it that Americans spend an average of six hours a week shopping.

There's no doubt about it. Many Americans consume for the sake of consuming. They habitually buy things they don't need or even enjoy.

Victor Lebow was a United States retailing analyst in the post World War II age of affluence. Listen to what he said to Americans in 1955: **"Our enormously productive economy . . . demands that we make consumption our way of life; that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals; that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever increasing rate."** That is materialism, plain and unabashed.

The Way of Simplicity

But Paul identifies a second way of life in verses 7 and 8.

There's a popular slogan that you've heard I'm sure: **"The one who dies with the most toys wins!"** But Paul, in verse 7, disagrees. He

points out a hardheaded fact that greatly diminishes the objective value of money and things. We can't take them with us. Ask any estate attorney and he'll tell you that's exactly right.

That hardheaded fact has several implications, one of which Paul mentions in verse 8. He mentions "food" and "covering" here. The word "covering" refers to both clothing and shelter. If we have these, Paul argues - food, clothing, and shelter - we should be satisfied.

Those two verses together identify a second way of life open to us, simplicity. Simplicity is the inner condition of craving enough. Materialism craves more than enough. Simplicity craves enough. And when it has that, it quits craving.

But simplicity isn't just an inner condition. It's an outer lifestyle as well, one that flows naturally from the condition. Going back to the income-consumption cycle, the two sides are independent of each other. The income has no bearing whatsoever on the consumption. How much money is made doesn't affect how much is acquired and used. Assuming there's enough, the practical result is - more income, same consumption.

I know of a Christian attorney who won a huge personal injury case and became a millionaire overnight. But his sensible lifestyle hasn't changed one bit. He lives in the same house, drives the same car, takes the same vacation, wears the same suits, and so on. When asked why he doesn't buy more, he quickly replies, "**I don't want more.**"

He craves enough. And when he has that, he quits craving. The result is more income but same consumption. That's simplicity.

The Best Way

Those then are the two ways of life that are open to us, which raise a critical question. Which is the best?

Notice the vivid language that Paul applies to materialism in verses 9 and 10: "**temptation,**" "**snare,**" "**foolish and harmful desires,**" "**ruin,**" "**destruction,**" "**evil,**" and "**pierced with many griefs.**" Inherent in those verses is the glaring truth about materialists. They

don't possess their wealth. It possesses them. The companion text, Ecclesiastes 5:10, makes that perfectly clear. Solomon astutely observes that **"he who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income."** Do you grasp what he's saying? The love of money and things grows by what it feeds on. What it feeds on is money and things. That means that the more the materialist gets, the more he wants, which in turn means that he's never satisfied. That is the tragic fate of the materialist. He's never satisfied.

But that isn't so of simple people. Paul mentions one of their defining characteristics in verse 8, contentment. About 2300 years ago, someone asked the renowned Greek philosopher, Epicurus, **"What is the secret of being happy and content?"** To which he replied, **"Add not to a man's possessions but take away his desires."** Simple people, by virtue of their inner condition, desire less, which makes them far happier and more contented with what they have. Their capacity for enjoying money and things is far greater than the materialist's.

I have a testimony in that regard. Those to whom simplicity is foreign might think it absurd but it isn't. I live in what our real estate agent called a "starter home." She called it that, I assume, because it's an 1,100 square foot two bedroom home. But it's a mansion to me that I thoroughly enjoy. Bill Gates lives in what may be the most technologically advanced home in the world. It the mansion of all mansions, the value of which, with property, is \$147.5 million. The property tax alone is \$1 million a year. But I say this with total confidence. He doesn't enjoy his home any more than I do mine. I strongly suspect in fact that I get more joy from mine that he does his. How is that possible? It's that those who choose simplicity have a capacity for enjoying money and things that materialists don't have.

That's just one of the many advantages of simplicity over materialism, which makes it the best way. Craving and pursuing enough is clearly superior to craving and pursuing more than enough.

Living Simply

So live simply. That's God's call to us. Live simply. That's His call and there are two things we have to do to answer it.

First, resist the modern propaganda machine. I mean by that, advertising in general and television advertising in particular. Nothing makes materialism easier and simplicity more difficult than advertising. Television advertising in fact is one of the most mind impacting forces in the world today. Its commercials dramatically alter how people think and feel and socialize them to be materialists.

They're able to do that because they're the single most voluminous form of public communication in America today. Did you know that the average 40 year-old has seen well over one million television commercials in his or her lifetime and will see close to a million more by the age of 65. That means most of us will have seen over two million television commercials by the time we die.

But they aren't only voluminous, they're masterfully crafted as well. They're works of genius that touch us profoundly. Their purpose isn't to inform us but to make us think and feel certain ways about money and things. Neil Postman explains it this way in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: **"The television commercial has oriented business away from making products of value and toward making consumers feel valuable, which means that the business of business has now become pseudo-therapy. The consumer is a patient assured by psycho-dramas."** He's right. Television commercials are creative psychodramas that make us strongly desire things we don't need.

Almost everyone is duped by this but we, as followers of Jesus, shouldn't be. We should refuse to be propagandized by doing two things. First, learn what the Bible teaches about how we should think, feel, and act when it comes to money and things. Our *Biblical Economics 101* study will enable you to easily do that. And second, conform to what the Bible not advertising says about how we should think, feel, and act when it comes to money and things. Let the Bible not advertising determine our

posture and behavior in that regard. Should I buy a cell phone? If so, what features should it have? Should it have texting, for instance? Make sure the Bible, not advertising and culture, dictates how we answer those questions. Resist the modern propaganda machine.

There's a second thing we need to do in order to live simply, what Jesus commands in Matthew 6:33. Treasure God and His kingdom first. That is the foundational principle for living simple lives.

To treasure God and His kingdom first means, as a practical matter, that we do whatever is necessary to engage them. We arrange all of our affairs around interacting with and responding to them. If anything in our lives gets in the way of our doing that, we either eliminate or modify it so that it won't. I knew a Christian attorney who was an avid runner, 10 to 15 miles a day. But between his family, career, and running, he wasn't devoting enough time to Bible reading, solitude, and prayer. So, he reduced his running to 4 miles a day and devoted the time he saved to Bible reading, solitude, and prayer.

Treasuring God and His kingdom first does something powerful. It opens us up to the Holy Spirit's work, which produces a certain kind of reality in us. Part of that reality is getting rightly related to money and things. The old hymn, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*, captures the dynamics of this. In one of my favorite of all lines, it says, "**And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.**" That's what inevitably happens when we treasure God and His kingdom first. We get so much satisfaction and joy from doing so that we get rightly related to money and things.

Conclusion

I close this morning with the stirring words of an old Shaker hymn: "**'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, * 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be. * And when we find ourselves in the place just right, * 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.**" Resist the modern propaganda machine and treasure God and His kingdom first. We'll be just that if we do – simple and free.