

The Deceitfulness of Riches

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. - Matthew 13:22

Chapter 1 - The Essential Nature of Trust

Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! - Mark 10:24b

It is difficult to go through life and trust in no one or nothing. We trust that our employer will pay us. We trust that we will not be murdered in our sleep, We trust the bridge we drive over will not collapse. We can even trust that a friend won't pull a chair out from under us as we sit down as a joke. We come into this life in complete dependence and vulnerability. Sometimes we have parents who nurture, love, and care for us which can make trusting easy. Sometimes we have parents that make trusting difficult. We can grow to be too confident and trusting of the world around us or not trusting enough.

As we grow and come to hear of Jesus and his love for us, we may come to trust in him.

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; - Hebrews 6:19

In contrast, those who do not have this trust (faith) are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of circumstance. People can come to trust in governments, employers, friends, wealth, or even social position only to find that things change and trust has been betrayed.

The most significant change we face is when this life ends. Many people live life as if it would go on forever. Adolescents are often described as living as if they thought they were immortal. Those who see nothing beyond this life and who do not trust in God are left trying to obtain what they can from the world and its systems.

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: - Ephesians 2:12

More than just the assurance of eternal life in heaven, the Christian's present life can benefit from a foundation for trust that is solid and reliable. Having this "solid rock" in which to trust allows the Christian to avoid the many deceptions in the world and especially those associated with riches and their pursuit.

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. - Psalm 18:2

Sadly, many Christians live lives of crippled trust. They are unable to fully let go of the faith they have in what the world can provide, particularly money. This creates a sort of perpetual anxiety.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. - James 1:8

The Christian with crippled faith is unable to put his full trust in God. This is usually because the world seems so able to provide what he desires.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. - 1 John 2:16

It is difficult for someone to try to “straddle the fence” with a foot in the realm of God and a foot in the realm of the world. Either he will exist on the fringe of the world with God at the center, or on the fringe of God with the world at the center.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. - James 4:4

This dichotomy can be seen with money as it so much represents the lifeblood of the world.

No servant is able to serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by and be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches, or anything in which you trust and on which you rely). - Luke 16:13 AMP

One can be anxious or fearful and seek security from the things of the world. One can also be predatory or greedy and seek opportunity from the things of the world. We can see in other worldly dynamics patterns that parallel and are entwined with the influence of money. For example, one’s friends and associates can be seen as a way to achieve security or advantage. A person can seek to build relationships with others with a view towards gain just as readily as they might seek money.

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. - Luke 16:3-4

Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. - Proverbs 19:4

While the manipulation of social networks for advantage has a long historical record, at a more basic level throughout history advantage has often been sought through the use of force. Today this option is mostly employed by governments and criminals.

But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. - Luke 11:22

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. - Psalm 20:7

We can often see in the use of force, the seeking of relationships, and the general use of wealth a reflection of the powerful motives of both fear and greed. These forces of the flesh are what drive most of the activity of the world. Since these forces arise from the flesh and seek to serve self, they often bring one into conflict with others. This creates uncertainty which undermines hope and trust.

He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife, but he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be enriched and blessed. - Proverbs 28:25 AMP

Throughout the ages, the main thing people trusted in was wealth. People are not very reliable and the use of force seldom achieves its objectives without creating other problems or lasts long. Money,

property, or other resources can seem to offer a more certain future. However, even riches may not be as certain as one might hope.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; - 1 Timothy 6:17

We can see here two of the problems with riches. First they corrupt our thinking so that we begin to see ourselves in inflated terms (highminded). Secondly, even riches are ultimately “uncertain”. Regardless of whether we are driven by fear or greed, our trust in wealth leads first to the pursuit of it, and even if successful, the toxic effect of it in our lives.

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: 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. - Proverbs 30:8-9

Paul writes that the purpose of the law given to Israel was not to show how they could keep it, but to show how they could not. It was to be a constant reminder of their need to depend on God. In a similar way, the curse of hard work given to Adam and Eve was to motivate them to recognize how much they needed God. Instead, we use riches to convince ourselves we have no need of anything or anyone. One of the many deceitful aspects of riches is how we come to be so short sighted and we have such confidence in the short term that we become blind to the eternal.

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? - Luke 12:18-20

In the example of the prodigal son we see someone whose view and value of the things of life has been reduced to money. Consider how the father felt when his son asked for the money he felt he deserved so that he could chart his own course in the world. Only a parent who has raised a child can imagine the pain and hurt such selfish ingratitude causes. It is similar to the pain we cause God when we act the same way towards him.

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. - Luke 15:12

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child! - Shakespeare

What can make riches so deceitful is that they can seem so necessary. Consider the example of the widow who lost her son. In a world where, without the support of that son, she would face the rest of her life as a beggar.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: . - Luke 7:12a

We can also come to see our prosperity as so vital to life and that upon which we depend, that we fight hard to prevent any loss. We may find that we will stoop to any act, surrender any values, or even hurt others to insure that the wealth we see as essential is not threatened or diminished. The intensity with which we can come to cling to riches is reflected a little in contrast to what Jesus willingly set aside.

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: - Philippians 2:6

Here the word “robbery” does not capture the fuller meaning from the Greek, “goods obtained through theft and held with an intensity greater than that with which the original owner held them”. Here the picture is that Jesus held greater riches than that of the whole world, but was not so enthralled by them that he was reluctant to set them aside.

The person who clings to his riches shows his greater trust in them or even himself and a proportionally lesser trust in God. In contrast, there are people who come to a point of considering suicide. They have often found attachment to life and the things of this world to be ultimately insufficiently worthy of trust. While suicide is often driven by pain, despondency, and disconnection, it does illustrate some of the superficial and insubstantial qualities of the world and their inability to ultimately provide fulfillment.

And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: - Acts 14:15

The vanities of the world to which the rich cling and the suicidal find inadequate are deceitful in that they are often taken to be the sum of all existence. In contrast we are called to turn from the illusions of the world to the reality of God, the eternal life he offers in Jesus, and the path of wisdom and truth.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. - John 12:25

Old age and failing health are often the only way we have of being motivated to consider that this world may not hold everything we need. Not only is this world passing away, but so are we.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. - Jim Elliot

The deceptiveness of riches is really a reflection of how we come to deceive ourselves. We place more value on the things which can provide ease, comfort, and pleasure, than we do on things of eternal value. Wealth both in prospect and in substance blinds us to the reality of a fallen world lost in sin and in desperate need of a Savior.

Chapter 2 - Who is rich?

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:21

In Western society today the average welfare recipient lives a life of greater prosperity than most emperors and kings in history. Air conditioning and central heating, hot and cold running water, indoor plumbing, 24 hour entertainment, and health care more effective than leeches or blood letting.

It is difficult to talk about riches because most people think it is a subject that only applies to others. There are people with millions of dollars that think the word rich does not apply to them. In a way, the subject of “riches” has two hurdles to overcome. The first is that it applies to all of us and the second is that it is an internal condition rather than an external circumstance. It can be instructive to consider

what happened to an entire nation that was deceived by riches.

Moses gave a warning to the nation of Israel when they were about to move into the land of Canaan. They were to inherit houses that did not need to be built, land that did not need to be cleared, vineyards, that did not need to be planted, and wells that did not need to be dug. Having been through forty years of hardship, they found it difficult to consider that their most difficult challenge lay before them, that of prosperity.

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. - Deuteronomy 6:10-12

Here an entire population would be faced with sudden relative prosperity and ease (especially considering the privations of the previous 40 years in the wilderness). What happened to the nation of Israel can be instructive for us. First they got conned because they trusted in their own understanding even though God had given them several ways to know his will.

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them. - Joshua 9:14-15

Even after this blunder, they did not seek the counsel of the Lord, but wanted to use their own plans to “solve” the problem.

And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them. And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. - Joshua 9:21-23

Slavery can look very attractive to the one who benefits from the labor of others. In a way, the labor of others can be seen as a type of riches. However, it is deceitful because apparent initial ease inclines us to not consider the long term corruptive effects.

And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves. - Judges 3:5-7

One way to measure “riches” can be obesity. In most of history obesity was limited to the wealthy as those who were poor had little time or resources to allocate to gluttony. The obesity epidemic of today is indicative of the relative widespread distribution of “riches”. Like the nation of Israel, we have used prosperity to indulge ourselves, forget to seek of the Lord, lean on our own understanding, and become seduced by false gods.

Further hindering our ability to see ourselves as vulnerable to the deceitfulness of riches is our being

bombarded by political demagogues who incite hatred of “the rich” (meaning some other people). We can come to reflexively think that “rich” only applies to others. In all fairness many rich people acquired their wealth by less than noble means. However, listening to these almost constant exhortations can create in us discontent and even hatred and division besides blinding us to understanding that the dangers to the “rich” also include us.

To get a better idea of how the word “rich” might apply to us we should consider a group of people considered the opposite of “rich” in the bible.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:3

At first glance the “blessedness” of being “poor in spirit” might seem elusive. The word used for “poor” is ptochos which means absolute poverty. The sound the word makes in Greek is the sound of someone spitting (it may have been customary in ancient Greece to spit on beggars). It implied someone who had absolutely nothing and no hope of ever having anything. It came to mean someone whose trust in the Lord was not in any way obstructed by pride, possessions, or possibilities.

The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. - Proverbs 14:20

In contrast, those who might be considered “rich” would be anyone who had anything. If we cannot see ourselves as having “riches” we are unlikely to get any benefit from warnings regarding how these riches can harm us.

To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. - Jeremiah 6:10

For an example of how riches can cause harm when people are deceived, we can consider the post WWII generation. Almost en-mass they populated suburbia and raised their children with every possible indulgence and material prosperity that well meaning parents could provide. This produced a crop of self-indulgence manifest in the drug and sex revolutions as well as almost unprecedented self-righteousness and ingratitude.

The damage caused by prosperity at the societal level is plain to see. What is less clear is at the individual level,

He who has an evil and covetous eye hastens to be rich and knows not that want will come upon him. - Proverbs 28:22

Here we see that just the desire for wealth can result in a loss of discernment or blindness such that a man can become vulnerable to disadvantageous circumstances.

He who is of a greedy spirit stirs up strife, but he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be enriched and blessed. - Proverbs 28:25

Here we have described a consequence of greed, strife (or contention). It might be expected that one who eagerly seeks that which others also grasp after will find that he is entangled in disputes.

He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; But he that hateth bribes shall live. - Proverbs 15:27

Here is an intriguing statement that greed can cause trouble within a household. One might surmise that an elevated interest in gain might be accompanied by a proportional deemphasis on the importance of familial relationships. If people within a family feel that they are valued less than the things the family owns, they might become resentful.

And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose sentence now from of old lingereth not, and their destruction slumbereth not. - 2 Peter 2:3

Greed can lead people to deceive with words and use others as if they were disposable commodities. There are many other negative effects that cause riches to be deceitful. What is important is that we are aware that these influences can damage a life regardless of if the person has one million dollars, or just one.

The righteousness of the upright [their rectitude in every area and relation] shall deliver them, but the treacherous shall be taken in their own iniquity and greedy desire. - Proverbs 11:6 AMP

Chapter 3 - The Roman Emperors, a study of the corruption of wealth.

In the book "An Outline of History" we are implored to be kind in our consideration of the Roman emperors by being asked to think how we would turn out if every desire we had from infancy was instantly fulfilled.

The Roman empire could be considered a centuries lasting Ponzi scheme. At the core a small group of people fed off the wealth brought in by expanding conquest. While marginal democratic ideals were favored early in the empire, the institution of emperors defined most of the rule of Rome. Depending on how they were counted, there were approximately 83 emperors. Of these 26 died of natural causes, 8 died in battle, 6 committed suicide, and 43 were murdered or executed. Being emperor could be considered hazardous to your health.

Rome could expand and prosper as long as there were wealthy neighbors to plunder. When the limits of geography, population, and wealth were reached, Rome faced two destructive forces. The first was similar to the starvation a parasite faces when the host dies. The second was the exposure of the intrinsic weakness of the Roman system, when that to which one has become addicted disappears, there is no "plan B". At a more basic level, when there was no more money to pay or provide for the soldiers, they were open to invasion.

The sale of captured lands, slaves, goods, and positions created an income stream that appeared to many to be unending. This highlights one aspect of the deceitfulness of riches, that of being narcotic (one requires increasing amounts and frequency).

"Just a little bit more." - John d. Rockefeller, in response to the question, "How much money is enough money?"

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. - 1 Timothy 6:9

Here just the desire to be rich results in lusts that entangle and carry one down a path of destruction and ruin. Even if one is successful in obtaining riches. there is a real physical danger in having that which

others also lust after. The ostentatious display of wealth has led to more than one murder in history.

However, the additional dangers of having or even just seeking wealth are often not fully appreciated. The perversion, debauchery, and excesses for which the Roman emperors are so famous are not found among the poor as frequently or to such an extent. This is not necessarily because the poor are more noble, but more because poverty imposes limits and even a sort of discipline.

We have an example from the Tower of Babel where God limited the scope of use to which we could put our collective imagination.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. - Genesis 11:6-7

One can also see in the original curse that God was not so much punishing us with hard work, but setting limits so that our fallen nature would not have much chance to indulge itself.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. - Genesis 3:17-19

Modern life has largely achieved freedom from the limits God instituted for man. We have often used this freedom in the same way Roman emperors used theirs. Philosophers have long pondered the essential nature of man, is he essentially good or bad. One way to measure this is to see what people do when they are freed from restrictions and provided with surplus resources. The “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” of the 1960s seems to parallel the lives of the Roman emperors.

We might consider that the Roman emperors were not a uniquely flawed group of humans, but representative of that which is within all of us.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?- Jeremiah 17:9

To consider the natural orientation of the human heart, we should consider what the bible describes as works of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. - Galatians 5:19-21

The current idea that man is basically good could only be plausibly presented in a Christian society such as Western Civilization. In Asia, the Mid East, or Africa such a foolish idea would not long be

entertained.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: - Romans 3:10

It is easy to see in the Roman emperors a decadence and debauchery unique to themselves. However, we must overcome the tendency to see ourselves in such a favorable light that we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not like them. Paul writes that the law was given to the nation of Israel to help them see that they could never keep it and were in need of a Redeemer.

Sadly many, like the Pharisees, thought they had kept all the law and thus had made themselves righteous, In a similar way, we are inclined to see ourselves as immune to the corruptions and deceit of riches, because we often come to think that we are not rich.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

While most of us do not have armies at our command like Roman emperors, we do have access to even greater comforts than they enjoyed. Consequently we begin to experience the same delusional thinking, descends into perversion, and perpetual dissatisfaction.

The “deception” comes from thinking we are pursuing that which eases, frees, indulges, and satisfies. Only to discover that we have unleashed that within us that devours, enslaves, corrupts, destroys, and is never satisfied.

It is not so much the amount of damage we do to others. It is not even the amount of riches that we have. What matters more is the internal damage that changes us. The Roman emperors represent an extreme example. What is less discernable is the effect of the lies we come to tell ourselves to justify the harm we do others. It is a tragedy if one becomes deaf or loses his eyesight. However, the loss of the ability to discern truth, be sensitive to others, or trust in a Savior who died for us is so much greater a tragedy we should all weep when we see the effect of the deceitfulness of riches.

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. - James 5:1-5

One does not need to be an emperor, banker, industrialist, or even business owner to be vulnerable to the deception of riches. One does not have to be a farmer who exploits agricultural workers. One can cheat on taxes or food stamps as well. Regardless of how much a person possesses, it is the power of selfishness that fuels the deceitfulness of riches.

The poison of selfishness destroys the world. - Catherine of Siena

Chapter 4 - Can the Rich be Saved? - Industrial Camel Processing

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. - Matthew 19:23-26

Two thousand years after Jesus spoke these words we actually have technology that theoretically could liquefy a camel and push the resultant material through a small opening such as the eye of a needle. It would be very difficult, expensive, and time consuming, however, it is still illustrative of an almost impossible task.

From our perspective it is impossible for someone given over to riches (whether those riches have actually been obtained or not) to become free of the grip with which such lust can hold one.

It has been said that there are more people receptive to hearing about Jesus in prisons and hospitals than in country clubs. Riches and the desire for riches come to be seen as an alternative god. They seem to offer provision, protection, and security even to the point where just the idea of God is seen as laughably anachronistic, a sort of an embarrassing legacy of a heritage considered primitive and superstitious,

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: - 1 Corinthians 1:26-28

Riches are deceitful because they lead us to first consider God less important than what riches could provide. We can then come to forget about God. We can even come to intentionally reject any consideration of God. The illustration of a camel going through the eye of a needle attempts to picture how unlikely it is that any of the people who have come to be so distant from their creator to ever consider their need for a Savior. Yet God is still all powerful and can bring anyone to himself.

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: - Daniel 4:33-34

Here in the dealing God had with Nebuchadnezzar, we see an example of how “with God all things are possible”. It is also an illustration of how intense a divine intervention needs to be to penetrate the delusion of self-sufficiency we can create for ourselves.

Chapter 5 - Is it Possible That We Are Actually Rich?

While we usually think about “those” rich people and how difficult it is for “them” to respond to the life that Jesus calls them to, we need to remember that the biblical admonitions regarding riches apply to anyone who elevates their possessions and even desires over God.

We might not be guilty of active hostility towards God. We might not be so smug and arrogant as to think we have no need of God. However, we may find that we are too busy to spend much time in his word, seeking out and knowing brothers and sisters in Christ to see if they have any needs to which we can minister, or seeking out older and wiser Christians from whom we can learn to grow more fully into the image of Christ.

And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. - Luke 11:7

If we are reluctant to be inconvenienced when asked, how much more unlikely that we would actively seek out those who might need our ministry. The rich young ruler was reluctant to surrender his wealth. Are not we similarly reluctant to surrender our time to minister to others or expend the effort to seek out those from whom we might learn and grow. The riches of Nebuchadnezzar are obvious. However can we equal his sense of self-sufficiency with what we possess.

We can hoard our time and effort as stingily as the worst miser grasps his gold. God can use drastic measures to call back those who have become so woven into the fabric of the world that they have become almost useless for the work the Lord would have for them. Getting laid off, losing a house to foreclosure, being unjustly accused, or having health problems are all ways God can use to turn us away from that to which we cling.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. - Hebrews 12:5

Self-assessment and reflection are good ways to avoid any corrective methods the Lord might employ to gain our attention as well as determine if we have followed riches away from God. If we include how we use our time as well as our attention, we may come to find that we have “riches” of which we had little awareness.

Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. - 2 Corinthians 13:5a AMP

We need to pay attention to our Christian life particularly in regard to where we fall short. Rather than reflexively disregarding consideration that warnings and admonitions about riches can apply to us as well as the “rich”, we should seek of the Lord to bring to our mind that which needs correction.

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. - 1 Corinthians 11:31

Chapter 6 - All that Glitters is not Gold.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. - Luke 12:15

Jesus gave this warning to a man who was concerned for his inheritance. The warning exposes another aspect of the deceitfulness of riches. Contrasting the number of things that one possesses with one's own life. Here one can see that a desire for things can lead a person to lose sight of the value of his own life.

In touching on the subject of value, Jesus describes the ultimate accounting;

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? - Mark 8:36

While possessions have the ability to assuage anxieties and provide comforts, in the end they all pass away. True riches would be that which one can carry with them into eternity.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1 John 2:17

The word "drugs" is generally taken to mean those families of chemicals that can be used to produce a specific effect in people. In medical practice, this is usually some therapeutic effect. However, in the larger world, the sensations of pleasure or just mind numbing tranquility have such a value that almost any price will be paid for even the brief short term effect they produce.

Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. - Proverbs 23:29

The consequences of alcohol are well known. Yet people still pursue it. How much more will people entangle themselves in the pursuit of riches, when the negative consequences are far less discernable. If we consider again Paul's words to Timothy;

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. - 1 Timothy 6:10

The apparent mixed metaphor of falling into a snare and drowning may be better understood as a sequence of events. Beginning with a desire, temptations are encountered which entangle like a snare. This is compounded by lusts which lead to destruction and perdition so complete as to be seen as being covered such as with burial or drowning. This process has two components "temptations" and "lusts" that accelerate one down a path whose end is "destruction". It could be seen as similar to one who falls into quicksand.

It is interesting that it is not just greed or the desire to be rich that drives this destructive process. The "many lusts" that are spawned from this essentially compound the destructive forces that can take someone almost as a captive to his destruction. Frequently the desire for power, fame, and prominence work in parallel with greed.

It is interesting that these corruptive dynamics do not require wealth, just the desire for it. It can be seen in anyone. For example, from someone who might participate in a pyramid scheme, buy a lottery ticket, make a hostile takeover of a corporation, or rob a liquor store.

An example of a destructive "lust" that might seem disconnected from greed could be the destructive

characteristics of a narcissist (the desire to control others, have everyone “respect” him, or acknowledge his “superiority”). The emergence of additional lusts can confuse the identification of the original triggering lust for riches.

The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the willful contrariness and crookedness of the treacherous shall destroy them. - Proverbs 11:3

The Christian has the opportunity to avail himself of resources such as wisdom, discernment, knowledge of truth, and the very Spirit of God to guide his path. Those given over to the desires of the flesh are like a blind man on a precipice.

It is not just riches (things that glitter) that can seduce a Christian on a destructive path. He can be flattered, drawn into pride so that he thinks he is doing “God’s work”, or convinced (like the Pharisees) that he has achieved righteousness through his own accomplishments.

For the Christian, the key to not being seduced by various lusts is the ability to see truth. The key to being able to see truth is humility.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. - Luke 18:13

Humility allows God to fill us with grace.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. - James 4:6

Freedom (including freedom from destructive lusts) comes from truth.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32

When we can look at ourselves and the world through the filter of truth, things that glitter” (even gold) become less attractive as we can understand the real cost of such things. We do not need a bigger car, and fancy house, or the best schools. Rather we need the love of Christ to wash away our sins and to trust in his provision.

Chapter 7 - Who’s the Boss?

People with surplus wealth begin to spend it on things they think they will enjoy. However, it slowly becomes apparent that the time and money they spend protecting, repairing, maintaining, and even using these assets almost makes them servants of that which they ostensibly own.

Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one. --Benjamin Franklin

One particular aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is that while one thinks he is gaining, he is really losing. Sometimes the wealthy hire someone to manage their affairs so that they can be free of the entanglements that riches often bring. However, it is not uncommon for those who have gained

stewardship of others resources to begin to find ways to divert some into their own pockets.

Fretting over the threat of money loss, the demands of asset management, and even the worries about those who have been entrusted with your wealth can create even greater anxiety than one had before he was well off.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. - Philippians 4:6

Riches and possessions are uncertain. Trust in them will ultimately fail. Trust in God who is unchanging, eternal, and merciful relieves us from unnecessary worry and anxiety. The anxieties associated with riches reflect their ultimate source, ourselves. The Hollywood starlet may think her looks will never fail. The rock star may feel that his inspiration will never cease, the executive may feel that his talents will always be recognized, the office sycophant may think his loyalty will always be rewarded, the welfare recipient may think his dole will constantly increase.

No matter what it is in which we trust, if it is other than God, it is ultimately only a reflection of ourselves and ultimately unreliable. At some level we often know this and can come to work like slaves to sustain that which we have acquired. All of this effort and anxiety to serve that which is not worthy of our trust is truly sad.

for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. - Romans 14:23b

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. - John 8:34

An aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is misplaced faith. One might consider that we are ultimately brought to the state of “servant” by having failed to place our trust in God.

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. - John 8:31-32

Chapter 8 - Fair weather friends

Too many people spend money they earned..to buy things they don't want..to impress people that they don't like. --Will Rogers

Drugs are not the only source of pleasurable sensations. Adulation, flattery, and being sought after can be equally enjoyable and even equally addictive. Having things others want attracts all sorts of attention.

A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. - Proverbs 29:5

They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. - Psalm 12:2

Another aspect of the deceitfulness of riches is that one can be fooled by covetousness disguised as friendship. Most of the world systems are constructed of false friendships, insincere alliances, and people making use of other people.

I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD. - Psalm 31:6

The world is run by a network of flatterers all seeking to gain advantage for themselves. Like bullies, they are obsequious to those in power or with money, but brutal to those who are in their way or not of use to them. We are made vulnerable to the effects of flattery in proportion to our distance from truth.

Flattery is a counterfeit money which, but for vanity, would have no circulation. --François de la Rochefoucauld

He that loves to be flattered is worthy of the flatterer. --William Shakespeare

Riches can lay before us as an open invitation to get what we want, enlist the labor of others, exert control over circumstances, or shape the future. This aspect of deception strongly competes with faith as trust in God can seem abstract and distant when what seems so obvious and concrete a foundation for trust is right before us. However, it is when we distance ourselves from God that we become even more vulnerable to deception.

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. - Psalm 119:37

Modern life has produced a weakened family structure and replaced much of it with a stronger social structure. However, it is a sort of unhealthy social dependence where we come to make determinations often based on the opinions of those around us. We are raised in an environment that weakens independent thought and evaluation. Thus we are even more vulnerable to the words of flatterers.

Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character. - 1 Corinthians 15:33 Amp

Chapter 9 - Gaining a Competitive Edge

Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. - Mark 12:40

Another deceitful element of riches is the extent to which rationalization and justification can be employed to excuse almost any act including the exploitation of the weak and vulnerable such as widows.

WOE TO those [judges] who issue unrighteous decrees, and to the magistrates who keep causing unjust and oppressive decisions to be recorded, To turn aside the needy from justice and to make plunder of the rightful claims of the poor of My people, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! And what will you do in the day of visitation [of God's wrath], and in the desolation which shall come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you deposit [for safekeeping] your wealth and with whom leave your glory? - Isaiah 10:1-3 Amp

Most people can look at a situation and see if there is a potential for gain. Those who give little consideration as to who might be harmed are similar to those who give little consideration to risk. The persistence and temporary success of “pyramid schemes” testify to the willingness of people to be drawn into risk by their assessment that others could be similarly exploited.

The potential for gain blinds the greedy to both risk to themselves and harm to others. Even Christians can come to see disadvantage to others as their own fault for not being “competitive”. This is more

common among those who have embraced the political philosophy of Libertarianism. The attraction of this view is that it seems to justify the idea that one is entitled to whatever one can get and that those who fall short in this Darwinian arena deserve their fate because they were not clever enough, strong enough, or ruthless enough to contend for what was there for the taking. The main problem with this philosophy is that it is difficult to limit it so that it does not extend to justify the actions of thieves and murderers.

The problem with this sort of deception is that seldom will those held captive by it ever even consider that they do not see clearly.

And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth. - John 9:40-41

While the greedy seek after riches, those who have obtained them, even in small measure, often come to have a distorted view of themselves and drift increasingly further from truth.

The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. - Proverbs 28:11

But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? - 1 John 3:17

Chapter 10 - False gods

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: - Colossians 3:5

The tenth commandment has a list of things we are not to covet (lust after). One could add that the seventh and eighth commandments (adultery and stealing) also include coveting. In Colossians coveting is equated to idolatry (commandments one and two). One can make a case that at least half of the ten commandments relate to wrongful desires of the heart.

While most people think of some stone statue or primitive tribal ritual as idolatry. What is often less appreciated is how often we in the modern world practice idolatry and do not even recognize it as such. For example, many consider getting a good education and securing a favorable position in life to be responsible. However, if one considers the fear of failing in school or losing one's job, one may begin to measure the degree to which we see these activities as that in which we trust over the trust we have in our Savior.

One measure of the deceitfulness of riches can be the more sure offer of security we see in them as opposed to what we perceive God can offer.

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. - Luke 12:29-30

What God offers often seems to be ephemeral and insubstantial especially when contrasted with what appears to be the concrete, immediate, and tangible results that can be achieved with riches.

In a similar way to that of some ancient people who placed their children in a fire to obtain from the god Molech a favorable harvest, we can see in abortion and birth control, public education, and cable TV opportunities to both reduce the burden of children and obtain a more comfortable life for ourselves. We may think ourselves distant and even superior to the primitive people of the nation of Israel, yet we should ask ourselves if we have not also gone after strange gods?

But mingled themselves with the nations, And learned their works, And served their idols, Which became a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto demons, And shed innocent blood, Even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, Whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with blood. - Psalm 106:35-38

We may not think of the everyday activities in which we participate, our way of thinking, or the actions we take as being particularly idolatrous. However, we need to consider all that we say, do, and think that is apart from God.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. - Galatians 5:14

To understand biblical love, the type of love that Jesus showed for us when he died for our sins, we should consider the biblical definition of love;

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Essentially love consists of selflessness. God is love and calls us to show love. This is very alien to the course of the world. To the extent we seek after self, we draw ourselves further away from God. It is self that is at the heart of covetousness and greed. But beyond that, it is reflective of a lack of trust in God and a heightened trust in self.

But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. - Matthew 6:33

Equating covetousness with idolatry gets to the core of why riches are deceitful. Love serves God by setting aside self. Covetousness reflects a hunger to feed self. Love is giving and being full, covetousness is consuming and never being satisfied. All life is from God, especially eternal life. Riches, like idolatry, deceive us that we are independent from God and free from any restriction.

The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the

fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. - Isaiah 44:13-17

Trusting in a carved piece of wood to save us is as foolish as trusting in a savings account, one's social position, government support, or even health. They can all vanish in a moment and none last into eternity. Like the carpenter, we make "gods" of all the various things we think will save us. We are better advised to give up all our deceptions and trust in false "gods".

But Jehovah is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth trembleth, and the nations are not able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens.- Jeremiah 10:10-11

Chapter 11 - Riches, the Thirst That is Never Satisfied

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. - Ecclesiastes 5:10

An object in possession seldom retains the same charm that it had in pursuit. --Pliny the Younger

You say, 'If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.' You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled. --Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The word "habituation" is used to describe how someone gets used to something. Money can be seen as similar to drugs, getting some usually makes you want more. While riches can deceive us even before we ever get any, actually getting some can start a process of reinforcement that locks our thinking into patterns of acquisition that make consideration of other things increasingly less likely.

Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied. - Proverbs 27:20

We have a continual appetite for food because our body depletes the nutrients we consume and additional quantities are required. If we derive a pleasurable sensation from the consumption of food, it is possible to over-eat because we have combined both a nutritional need and a desire to experience a pleasurable sensation. In a similar way, we work to obtain the money we need to sustain our existence (food, rent, clothing, etc.). However, we can also derive a pleasurable sensation from buying things or having beyond necessity. Like over-eating, we may not be able to determine where we cross over to an unhealthy pursuit of "riches".

It is when appetites for pleasurable sensations are indulged that narcotic effects are first noticed. A person can ride a roller coaster and experience all sorts of sensations. However, if one rides the roller coaster a second time, the experience is diminished and the expectation of sensation is partially unfulfilled contributing to what can be a growing "hunger".

Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. - Proverbs 23:20-21

When a person forms in his mind that he needs what riches can provide, his hunger becomes a funnel excluding temperance or balance. God is forgotten, others are ignored, and all that is left is a

consuming “self”. Even in the unlikely event riches are actually obtained, the consuming hunger is never satiated and only grows ever larger.

But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. - 1 Timothy 5:6

Chapter 12 - “Choking the word”

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. - Matthew 13:22

In the specific example of the deceitfulness of riches Jesus describes one effect as “choking the word”. This point deserves special attention. Life consists of more than avoiding doing wrong. The Christian draws his life from God’s word.

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. - Luke 4:4

Jesus is also called the “word of God”.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. - Revelation 19:11-13

We have the ability to make to the word of God ineffective.

Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. - Mark 7:13

God would have us grow in faith and dependence upon him. Those who seek after riches neglect trust in God and grow in trust of self and the belief that riches will sustain them. It is when we cripple our faith in God, that we lose the effectiveness of his word in our lives.

There is a life to which we as Christians are called, Christ-likeness. This is growing to maturity in truth and love. We can only follow this path by humility and faithful dependence on God guiding us. When we abandon this path to serve the flesh and the world, we cut ourselves off from access to wisdom, truth, discernment, and grace. The path of self grows increasingly darker as we become distant from Jesus.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. - John 14:6

One might think of the world as a minefield. There are all sorts of hazards and dangers we can encounter. Those pursuing riches find they are not able to avoid these dangers and are even drawn to them. Whereas the Christian who has escaped to deceptions of riches is able to draw from the word of God illumination to negotiate past the hazards of the world.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. - Psalm 119:105

Chapter 13 - Two Masters

There are certain activities that dovetail or are synergistic. For example when a person goes to the grocery store, he may pick up eggs as well as milk. These two objectives combine in efficiency. However, there are other activities that not only do not mesh, but are in active opposition to each other.

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. - Matthew 6:24

It is interesting to note that even though many consider the pursuit of “mammon” (wealth) to be liberating, the bible still calls it “serving”. It is not just that these pursuits are in different directions, they shape the traveler in different ways. The person seeking after God is called to surrender self and even his very life.

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. - Matthew 10:37-39

The person seeking after wealth is not on a path to surrender, but to acquire. It is our “taking in” that inflates self and diverts us away from truth and God.

If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above. - Job 31:28

The world has a particular idea of what constitutes “success”. God offers a completely different one.

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. - Luke 6:22-23

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. - 2 Timothy 3:12

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. - John 15:19

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. - 1 John 2:16

Chapter 14 - Resource management

Some come to possess wealth without seeking it such as with inheritance or windfall. For the Christian

a question arises as to how the resources that constitute wealth are to be administered. There will be no end to those who would suggest ways and reasons to distribute wealth. Some going so far as to advocate communism.

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; - Acts 2:44

However, the example of the early church in Jerusalem is not so much an example of the preferred method of church organization as it is an example of surviving persecution. We know from the example of the blind man's parents that there was fear of being expelled from the synagogue. This most likely also entailed social and economic ostracization. As the pooled money was exhausted, the church survived through contributions from other churches.

We understand that there is a principle of being responsible to provide support for one's own family.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. - 1 Timothy 5:8

We also know that wealth administration can involve investment.

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. - Matthew 25:27

There are requirements for charity.

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. - Romans 12:13

There is also a principle to invest in the world after this one.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. - 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Sometimes adversity for some Christians is an opportunity for others to minister to them and in so doing obtain heavenly reward. God's grace provides the sufficiency for our ministry.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: - 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Chapter 15 - Ambition Beyond Money

"Riches" can refer to things other than money. Those who seek fame, power, position, or influence also are subject to the deceitful influences of their ambitions. Similar to how romance might metastasize into stalking, self-seeking ambition can wreck a life even if greed per se is not a major component.

But for those who are self-seeking and self-willed and disobedient to the Truth but responsive to wickedness, there will be indignation and wrath. - Romans 2:8 AMP

Those who turn away from God make themselves into a sort of mini gods and seek to honor each other rather than God.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? - John 5:44

One of the reasons we have the Old Testament recorded for us is that we can be presented with a rather lengthy history illustrating what happens when people turn away from God.

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. - 1 Corinthians 10:4-14

The bible equates covetousness (including greed) with idolatry. It can be difficult for a Christian to recognize to what extent his ambitions have carried him from his Savior.

Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. - John 12:42-43

The Christian is well advised to follow the advice given to Timothy and renounce those inclinations we have that elevate self and carry us far from God.

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. - 2 Timothy 2:22

Chapter 16 — Bad company

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. - 1 Corinthians 5:11

With families so diminished and fractured at this point in history, the influence of neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances is greatly enhanced over times past. The Christian needs to be aware of just how different the unsaved are and how infectious their patterns of behavior and thinking can be.

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.

Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: - 2 Peter 2:10-14

There is a modern mask of civility that is a cultural legacy of when Western Civilization was more Christian. As more and more people in Western countries repudiate Christ, this mask fades away. What is exposed is a more accurate reflection of the nature of man without Christ.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: - 1 Peter 4:3

When there was more simulation of Christian virtue as cultural conduct, it was easier to be taken in by those who were not really Christian. Now that pretense and even accommodation is ending, Christians have a more clear choice to make.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. - Romans 12:2

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. - Galatians 1:10

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. - Proverbs 1:10

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. - Proverbs 29:25

Chapter 17 True Riches

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? - Luke 16:11

While we are on earth we can accumulate all sorts of things even amounting to “riches”. However, none of these things will be of any value once we leave this earth.

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 6:7

If we are going to get serious about our Christian life, we should understand that there are rewards for faithful service much greater than the rewards for worldly pursuits.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:14

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 nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. - Matthew 6:19-21

Consider what we can know about the life after this one.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. - 1 Corinthians 3:11-14

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. - 2 Timothy 4:8

Worldly riches are acquired by ambition, cleverness, and even ruthlessness. Heavenly riches are acquired by just the opposite, giving of oneself, dependence on God, and faithfulness. It is God who equips and provides for us. He has works for us to do and for which he gives us rewards.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. - Ephesians 2:10

We have no need of worldly recognition as we serve him who knows everything.

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. - Matthew 6:4

Chapter 18 Summary

When considering how riches are deceitful, we can observe the following;

1. We become short sighted.
2. We can think that only riches are necessary for survival.
3. We can think that riches define all of existence.
4. Our faith in God is ultimately transferred to ourselves.
5. We become vulnerable to various temptations.
6. We bring forth various additional lusts.
7. We are brought to ruin by debased character.
8. We become targets of thieves.
9. We become targets of false friends.
10. We become entangled with the world.
11. We become slaves of what we own.
12. We become disconnected from wisdom, discernment, and truth.
13. We see ourselves more highly than we ought.
14. Desire is let loose like drug addiction.
15. The elevation of self increases isolation.
16. Comforts drive out thoughts of God.
17. Stirring up contention and strife.

18. Poor family relations.
19. Acclimation to wealth reduces the ability to survive adversity.
20. Just wanting to be rich causes other destructive lusts to arise as well.
21. We can come to think that we should control others.
22. We can come to a perspective of entitlement to justify any action.

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. - Matthew 13:15

In the parable of the sower (where the deceitfulness of riches is mentioned) Jesus describes why he taught the lesson first as a parable before explaining it to his disciples. He explains that it is because the people had allowed their heart, ears, and eyes (essentially their entire being) to become disconnected from any interest in God.

The idea is of an incremental process over time of a willful disinterest in God that is recognized by God and as a consequence, any explanation that might produce understanding is withheld. In a way, people are kept in a prison of ignorance until such time as they turn their hearts and minds back towards God.

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. - Isaiah 59:20

The idea of “turning” from transgression is captured again later when John the Baptist calls those in the nation of Israel to “repent” (change their minds and turn again to the legacy they have of the knowledge of God and the covenant of promise so that it would be manifest in their actions).

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. - Luke 3:7-8

As Christians we can take from this example an understanding that complacency that leads us to drift into a sort of sleep-walking worldliness results not only in our distance from our Savior, but in the accumulation (“waxed gross”) of layers of insensitivity to any illumination of the deceptions that can entangle us.

We might say that we have been baptized or are members of a church only to discover that it sounds very much like those Jews who claimed favored status by being “children of Abraham”.

Riches are deceitful, but so are pride, fame, prominence, greed, fear, envy, or anything that rises in our life to divert us from humble and faithful dependence on our Savior.