

Overcoming Materialism

Introduction. There is a way of faith, and there is a way of disbelief. Which way you choose will matter in every area of your life.

The way of faith rests on believing what God has told you through scripture (Romans 10:17). The Bible contrasts faith and empirical understanding (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith involves believing what we cannot know through physical resources because God has told us they are so (cp. Hebrews 11:3).

In contrast to the way of faith is the way of disbelief, a way that values human perception above divine revelation. This disbelief is materialism — placing confidence in the perceivable world of human experience rather than in the unseen world of spiritual truth. Notice how this episode played out in Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). Rather than trusting in what God said (the way of faith), Eve formed a contrary opinion based on the desires of her eyes and went down the path of disbelief and ruin (the way of materialism).

This choice, either to believe what God has told us or to invest ourselves in the material world, is at the root of every ethical, moral, and doctrinal decision we make. Materialism, placing an emphasis on the tangible rather than the intangible, limits a person's life to the acquisition and manipulation of material goods (Luke 12:15). Jesus went on to tell the parable of a man who had every material provision, yet this rich man was foolishly unprepared to meet God (Luke 12:20).

A critical factor in overcoming materialism is to realize the blessings of giving. We serve a giving God (John 3:16), and when we give, we are affirming Christ's lordship in our lives; we are dethroning self and exalting Him. Giving is the best way to help us fight the pull of materialism (Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35). Studying several guidelines will help.

I. Give Regularly

- A. Giving is not something we do with irregularity. The Corinthians were instructed to give "Upon the first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Liberal giving requires commitment, discipline, and consistency.
- B. Compare "the first day of the week" to Exodus 20:8, which says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." If the "sabbath day to keep it holy" means every sabbath — as regularly as it comes — then "the first day of the week" means every first day as regularly as it comes.
- C. There are brethren today who believe that there is no authority for a local congregation to have a treasury. However, the term "store" in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 does indicate that churches in the first century had a treasury. Furthermore, there are several precedents for a treasury.
 1. Gifts to build the tabernacle (Exodus 25:1-8).
 2. Gifts for the support of worship (Numbers 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 26:12-15).
 3. Temple treasury in the first century (Matthew 27:6; Luke 21:1-4).
 4. Treasury of the disciples (John 13:29).
 5. Paul's reasoning for the support of preachers (1 Corinthians 9:7-14).

II. Give Sacrificially

- A. David said he would not offer to God "that which costs me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:25). It was out of "their deep poverty" that the Macedonians gave "beyond

their ability” (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). They “first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

- B. Generous and sacrificial giving has been a hallmark of people devoted to God throughout history (Exodus 36:5; 1 Chronicles 29:3, 7, 21; Luke 21:3; John 12:3). Also, the exhortation to give oneself to the Lord is taught in Proverbs 23:26 and demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 16:15.

III. Give Voluntarily

- A. Paul told the Corinthians that “if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Corinthians 8:12).
- B. King Jehoshaphat had rest in his kingdom because of people willing to give themselves, such as Amasiah (2 Chronicles 17:16). The disciples voluntarily wanted to help the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:29), just as Abraham was willing to offer his own son, Isaac (Hebrews 11:17).

IV. Give Deliberately

- A. Giving is at its best when it is a conscious effort that is consistently repeated: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart” (2 Corinthians 9:7). “Purposeth” means our giving should be deliberately determined beforehand.
- B. God set aside every seventh year to release the Israelites from creditors, and their wealthier brethren were not to take advantage of God’s graciousness (Deuteronomy 15:7-11). In Nehemiah’s time, the Israelites were not giving the Levites their portion and he corrected the situation (Nehemiah 13:10).

V. Give Cheerfully

- A. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). If we are not cheerful when we give, then something is wrong with our heart.
- B. It is not difficult to suggest why God delights in the cheerful giver. He himself is such a giver and desires to see this characteristic among those who were created in His image (cp. Romans 12:8; James 5:9; 1 Peter 4:9). Christ taught along similar lines (Matthew 5:43-48).

VI. Give Increasingly

- A. When we raise our standard of giving, God just blesses us even more abundantly (2 Corinthians 9:10-11).
- B. The promise of blessings to God’s creation who give back to His cause is beautifully taught in scripture (Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:7-10).

Conclusion. When we practice the above, we can overcome the pull of materialism. Without doubt, all of us who live in America are caught up in it to some degree. We all like nicer possessions. One of the ways to break the power of materialism is to see ourselves as stewards of what God has entrusted to us (Psalm 50:10-11). This fact should help us abound in giving (2 Corinthians 8:7).