

“Money, Money, Money, Money”

In the reading that we just heard from the First Letter to Timothy, there was a phrase that has become an aphorism. Did you recognize it? If so, tell me what you heard. Yes, it is “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” More often, we hear this aphorism changed to “money is the root of all evil.” There are slight but significant differences between the two. For one, there is the difference between the definite and indefinite articles. That is “the root” and “a root.” In the letter to Timothy, the writer considers the love of money as one of a group of things that are at the root of evil. Whereas the aphorism makes it the only root of evil. It is interesting how one little word can make such a big difference.

Another difference is that the letter reads “all kinds of evil” as compared to “all evil.” Again, the letter writer is open to a wider range of evil. Where the aphorism is definite that it is all evil.

Finally, there is one more difference. That is the word “love.” In the letter to Timothy, the writer is clear that loving money is the problem. The aphorism removes that caveat, indicating that money is in and of itself the root of evil. On all these differences, the aphorism closes the door. Money and evil are twins. There is nothing good about money whatsoever.

When either the scripture or the saying comes up, they give people of means the heebie-jeebies. I have a colleague who once had a member of a Bible study class get in a huge argument, denying that Jesus and other scriptures said anything about the rich and the problem of money. Being wealthy himself, he could not accept that there are biblical injunctions against wealth.

What is important to note about what is written in the Letter to Timothy is that important word “love.” The author of the letter is not anti-money. What he is warning us about is loving money. We then might think that we do not love money, because we do not worship it. But let us think about some ways in which we interact with money, even if we are not particularly wealthy.

For example, how many people were curious about the wedding of Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez? Even if only to be aghast at the cost and over-the-top extravagance. A Google search reveals page after page of coverage about the wedding. There is even a Wikipedia entry about it. This would not exist if we were not fascinated with wealth and extravagance.

Or remember that show “The Homes of the Rich and Famous”? It was a syndicated show, but there were enough stations that carried it to make it a success and a catch phrase for our culture. We substituted all sorts of concepts to make them the “blank” of the rich and famous. It might have been sarcastic, but it relied on the cultural awareness of that show.

Whether we are wealthy, middle-class, or poor if we focus our lives on

We admire the fabulous jewels of monarchs not just for their beauty, or the artistic value of the settings. Rather, we ponder what it must be like to own such precious things and to be able to wear them. We want to emulate the weddings, vacations, cars, houses, clothing, fragrances, and much more of the wealthy, even if it is just once. We pay exorbitant sums to stay at the Ritz or dine at La Tour Argent just to be with the wealthy or say we had the experience of wealth. The saying used to be, “to see how the other half lives.” What we now consider to be the one percent.

We may not be in love with money, but we are sure to have a fascination with what having vast amounts of money can provide for some people. If we had such extraordinary wealth, would we give it away or hoard it? Would we give insignificant amounts of it away for show while splurging on ourselves?

I heard the story of a person who won a jackpot from Publishers’ Clearing House. She was supposed to be guaranteed a large amount of money for life. Her first expenses were on cars, houses, travel, and more. She did not invest or save any of her winnings. She assumed the money would keep flowing in, but Publishers Clearing House went bankrupt. She is now angry and feels betrayed. But what did she do to deserve that money? She won a game of chance. Then she lost a game of chance. Money bought her short-term happiness, but not long-term contentment.

The epistle writer commands those who have financial riches not to be haughty. He warns us that riches are uncertain. He commends to us to set our hopes on God, because God provides “everything for our enjoyment.” Rather than haughtiness, we are to do good with our wealth. We are to be generous and ready to share with others. This is how we build treasure in this life and in the life to come.

Greed, the lusting after wealth, and the worship of the almighty dollar is destructive. Money is not the problem; the problem is how we view it. If we set up money as a false idol by loving it, we have replaced God with something totally of this world. Something that can be stolen. Something that can be destructive to our spirits. Something that can be devalued by one bad day on the stock market.

Love God and love each other. That is where our love belongs. Money is a tool like those in a carpenter’s kit or mechanic’s toolbox. Can you imagine loving and worshipping a hammer or a wrench? Yet, that is what so many people do with money. Whether it is the root of many kinds of evil or all evil, when we worship something inanimate instead of the living God, we are on the road to perdition. Our only hope is to have the trance broken that we might return to God and the true source of light and full life.