

A CHRISTIAN'S WEALTH AND RESPONSIBILITY

We live in a world of material things and have legitimate needs for our physical lives. However, the essential part of man in God's ultimate plan is spiritual. Consequently, a battle is going on between the physical and spiritual needs. Many of life's priority choices involve properly balancing these needs. In 1954 Abraham Maslow published a classic work on motivation and behavior. The basic premise for his work was that the driving force for behavior is **need**. Maslow saw that people have a "hierarchy of needs" that starts with Physiological needs that are essential to survival. The needs progress from survival to Safety, then to Affection, Esteem and to Self-fulfilment needs. He concluded that once primary needs are satisfied they cease to act as drives and are replaced by needs of a higher order. The results would be that *higher order needs* are predominant when *primary needs* are satisfied. The definition of "self-fulfilment" is *to utilize one's potential to the maximum, working with and for one's fellow beings*. A person who has achieved "self-fulfilment" and a Christian who is operating from a motive of unselfish love would be difficult to distinguish to the casual observer. How many people really achieve this idealized state of self-fulfilment? Not many! Why? They get stuck at a lower level in the hierarchy of needs. How much food, drink, clothing, shelter, or pay is enough?

How would people behave who have trouble getting beyond survival and safety needs? They might become very materialistic. They hoard things. They might buy clothes they don't need or have a compulsion to acquire a bigger house than they need. They might have to have two jobs to have enough money to feel secure. They might tear down their barns and build bigger ones.

A person may get beyond the "food, health, clothing, shelter, pay" set of needs but then get caught in the need to *belong*. Affection that results from belonging to a family unit or other small groups may fail to satisfy. Those who become "stuck" at this position might want to join every club, group, or organization they can. They may seek to establish multiple relationships beyond the family -- that is, get involved in affairs.

Often our self-respect is tied to *achievement* and recognition of our accomplishments. How much recognition is enough? How much stroking does our "esteem" (read that as ego) need? People who get stuck at this level might be driven to accomplish wonderful things. There may be great scientific breakthroughs discovered. The need for recognition sometime drives great athletic ability. I sometime think that many who go into politics and run for office are motivated by the "esteem" need.

Is it possible for us to discover the Christian's hierarchy of needs? I believe that setting realistic priorities for our lives is difficult if not impossible, if we have not identified our goals or the things we want to accomplish. Successful businesses set

goals and objectives and then "what is done" or "what is left undone" is determined by consideration of whether or not the action will help achieve the goal. But what about our personal lives? Should we have goals toward which we are working? Well, the saying that "If you don't know where you are going, you may wind up just anywhere," applies here. We can and should do better than that.

So often we feel inadequate to choose a goal for our lives and, consequently, do nothing about setting a destination or outcome for ourselves. God has given each of us a worthwhile goal. In Roman 8:29 we see that our ultimate goal is to be conformed to the image of Jesus. This is the destination to which the "Christian walk" should be headed. If we stay on the right road, we arrive at the right destination. Sometime, we wander off the road and seem to lose our way. This is where knowing where we are going or knowing our needs is so important in helping us redirect our lives so that we reach the desired destination.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. I Timothy 6:6-10

Paul made good use of contrasts and comparisons in his letters. Paul had written Timothy about the false doctrines that some teachers of that day were proclaiming. One error that had crept into the church was that material success was evidence of godliness. Paul took this idea and turned it around to proclaim the great truth that "Godliness with contentment is great gain." To accept this premise, we must have an appropriate goal for our lives and have defined what we mean by "success." If our only definition of success is in terms of material possession, then we will miss the point of Paul's premise. This condition results from being distracted and changing our focus from life's ultimate goal to some other goal. The solution is to keep focused on Jesus since HE is the ultimate goal.

When we start trying to weigh the value and the benefits of one approach to life versus another, I guess that it could be said that the choices are temporal versus eternal. As Paul states in verse seven, regarding material things, "you can't take it with you." Some pagan religions taught that you could and so they would bury their dead with tools, utensils and weapons. We are somewhat amused by this and yet many people live their lives, even today, as if the material possessions had eternal importance.

God does intend for us to provide for the necessities of life. There are needs to be met; however, once these are satisfied, then we should move on to more noble considerations for our lives. From a practical standpoint, we cannot take the gospel to

a person who is starving and freezing and expect him to appreciate the message until his basic needs are met. Putting what Paul said in terms of the “hierarchy of needs,” he would agree that “survival and safety” needs must be addressed.

Once our basic necessities are satisfied, then we must be careful to not let the desire to have more and more drive us to harm ourselves (or others) in the process. Uncontrolled desire for material possessions and money can cause good people to do foolish and even evil things.

Paul said that the love of money is a cause of all manner of evil. We could move right up the hierarchy of needs and claim that the love (great desire) for “affection” is also a cause of all manner of evil. Social cliques, exclusive clubs, possessive friends, jealous spouses, and extramarital affairs are examples of how the love of “belonging” can control us and harm others. We could give examples of how the love for “esteem” could be a cause of all manner of evil.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, I Timothy 6:11-14

God has an alternative to being dominated by materialism (affection or esteem) for His people, the people of God. Notice that Paul calls Timothy, "man of God" and this title should remind all of us that we are to be men and women of God wherever we are. The alternatives listed by Paul will help each of us avoid the “needs” trap. It is somewhat a matter of choice on the road of life. We may not know exactly where such things may take us, however, we do know that choosing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, etc. will lead to where each Christian should want to be and that is "more like Jesus."

We may find it to be a struggle in getting rid of materialism, selfishness, and pride and we may have a fight on our hands, however, we do not have to fight in our own strength. This is the good fight of faith and it is part of the process by which we possess our spiritual inheritance. Just as the Children of Israel had to fight to take the land of Canaan (even though God had given it to them) we too must join the battle to possess the land of promises that God has provided for us. Part of our witness to the world is wrapped up in how we are seen in making choices. Faithfulness in this arena is a way of confessing Christ before men.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to

share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. I Timothy 6:17-19

Most of the time we do not think of wealth as a responsibility but as a privilege; however, we see in this passage a call to do good (presumably with the wealth we do have) and be ready to share with others. Having wealth does not exempt us from doing good works and being personally involved in advancing the Kingdom of God. In fact, one might logically argue that the more material possessions we have, the more we should be able to accomplish by surrendering those possessions to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Having wealth can be spiritually dangerous in that it is our natural tendency to trust in our own wit and wealth.

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you. I Timothy 6:20-21

As part of the closing charge to Timothy in the conduct of his pastorate at Ephesus, Paul reminding him of the trust that was placed in him. He pointed to his priorities of proclaiming the word of God rather than arguing with people who just want to argue and those who would try to use philosophical speculation to discredit the Bible. So-called intellectuals are still using this sort of error. Our starting premise must be that the Bible is right and then consider how our theories can fit in with the truth. We do not start with the theory and then try to make the Bible fit the theory.

Always we must be on guard to not get caught up in the desire of material things, selfish affections, or false esteem and we can do that if we keep focused on getting ready for Jesus to return. Proper focus on what is really important will free us to willingly use what God has provided to help others and to lead them to know Jesus.