

This False Gospel Pervades American Culture—But Can Kill Your Soul

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9).

How easy it is to desire to be rich. We certainly do not desire to be poor, do we? But here in the Scriptures, Paul issues a sobering warning to Timothy that those who desire to be rich run afoul with all sorts of disaster. I don't know about you, but this causes me to pause and examine my heart because “ruin and destruction” are certainly not part of my long term financial goals.

But is wanting to be rich really against biblical teaching? Yes, yes it is. Consider that just a few verses later Paul exhorts Timothy (and all Christians, including you and me) saying, “But as for you, O man of God, escape these things” (1 Tim. 6:11). God does not want His children chasing after riches any more than a mother wants her child to chase a ball across a busy street. It is not that the object being chased is necessarily wrong, but that the chase will absolutely end in ruin. Take note that Paul is not warning against riches, but rather the *desire to be rich*.

But isn't the desire to be rich what drives our entire economic and investment system? Yes, yes it is. This is a problem because it is quite apparent by even the most cursory survey of the culture around us that most people desire to be rich, which means that they are careening headfirst into “many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction”. They are chasing their ball across the autobahn and the resulting carnage is all around us: Broken marriages,

corrupt businesses, exploitation of the poor, families left destitute by dad's (or mom's) excessive risk taking.

And Christians are just as guilty as everyone else. In fact, many popular "prosperity gospel" preachers actually teach their adherents that they *should* desire to be rich, and that they should petition God loudly and persistently for material wealth, and that riches are a sign of strong faith. This is pure theological sewage, and if someone is trying to feed it to you, run away as fast as possible. The prosperity "gospel" is not the gospel at all. It is exactly what Paul describes in our text, a "temptation, a snare" that "plunge people into ruin and destruction". Flee from it.

And even if you and I are not drinking from the sewer water that so many prosperity preachers are serving up, it is still far too easy in our culture to desire to be rich without even realizing it. How many times have I desired a bigger house, nicer car, expensive clothes, bigger income, lavish vacations, high-performing investments? Or in other words, how often do I desire to be rich? And don't we see the damage even these "normal" American desires can be? We are tempted to buy as much house as we can qualify for, the nicest car we can finance and the largest credit limit we can get approved for. The result is often disastrous. Lost house. Lost car. Mountains of debt. Ruined life. The desire to be rich is insidious.

So, what are we to do? Thankfully Paul does not leave us hanging, but continues, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life" (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

Ruin and destruction? No thanks. Kill the desire to be rich.

Everything to enjoy? Count me in.

Set your hopes on God. Be rich in good works. Share. Store up *eternal* treasure in heaven. Take hold of that which is truly life. God help us. {eoa}

Robert Netzly is the CEO of Inspire Investing, a social enterprise creating meaningful change in the lives of people all over the world by providing low cost, biblically responsible impact investments easily accessible on the NYSE. Follow Robert on Twitter and LinkedIn and get inspired.