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#1384

Practical Atheist
I Believe In God But In Money I Trust

The first legal challenge to the words “In God We Trust” on our currency happened in 1970. In *Aronow v. United States* the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled: that 'In God We Trust' has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion. Its use is of patriotic or ceremonial character and bears no true resemblance to a governmental sponsorship of a religious exercise.

The next challenge came in 1979 when Madalyn Murry O’hair filed to have the words removed. The phrase was upheld this time by the 5th Circuit.

The latest court challenge came 3 years ago and was filed by Michal Newdow, In June 2006, a federal judge rejected his lawsuit.

This has really bugged certain atheists. If you contact Center for Rational Thought in Portland, Oregon you can order a stamp that says “Atheist Money” or “Secular Money” to use to stamp over the “In God We Trust” slogan on all your bills.

Others have resorted to crossing out the words with a black magic marker. The web site positiveatheism.org has a whole forum dedicated to ideas for changing up our money.

Maybe I don’t get it because I’m a theist, but I’m not sure why some atheists are so offended by those words. When all is said and done it looks a whole lot like the real agenda of certain atheists is to have every last mention of God removed from the public square.

There’s something else though, that fascinates me about this debate. As soon as something like this gets out suddenly there’s emails flying all over the internet and Christians are all up in arms. We’re worried about the words “In God We Trust” being taken off our money but are we as worried about the fact that we tend to trust the money more that we ever trust God?

This is week 3 of a series we’re calling Practical Atheist. We’re asking the question, in certain areas do we live more like atheists than theists? Do we claim one thing, but when push comes to shove, live out another.

In week one we asked the question do we say we believe in God but fail to fear Him. For week two we raised the question do we claim to believe in God but live a luke-warm life. This week we want to take a hard look at the question, do we believe in God but trust money more?

I fully believe there's a good chance that we're going to step on some toes today. I know that because mine are kind of bruised and bleeding from putting this message together. But that's OK. Breaking out of our practical atheist mode can be painful. Materialism is one of those "respectable sins" that plagues the church in America. This morning lets see if we can get a biblical perspective on wealth. In Luke 12:34 Jesus said, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Whatever we really treasure has our heart in it's grip. Whatever we really treasure has our allegiance and our worship.

When we say , "I believe in God, but our trust is in money we're living as a practical atheist. We may say "it's different for me," but we're living as functional atheists.

I. The Number One Competitor For Our Heart Is Money

Turn to I Timothy 6 Page 1055

Over 2/3 of the parables of Jesus are about money. Proverbs, which is a book of practical living, has verse after verse about a right attitude toward money. There's one warning after another in the Bible about the deceitfulness of riches.

In a Worth Magazine poll, couples surveyed said the number one thing they fight about is money and 56% think about money more often than they think about sex. Maybe they skipped the guys on that question, but that's another message.

The fact is that loving and trusting money is a huge problem for all of us.

All down through history there's been accounts of people stranded in the desert, seeing water off in the distance, and traveling miles across the burning sand only to discover there really wasn't any water at all.

What they saw was a mirage. Since a mirage isn't an optical illusion but a phenomenon of atmospheric optics it can be photographed. Here's a shot of an actual mirage in the Namibian desert.

What an illustration of life. We look out over the barren desert of this world and see what we think will satisfy our longings and our thirst. So we go for the mirage. We struggle and push ourselves to get there. But when we finally arrive we end up with nothing but the dry, empty sand of this world.

The problem is the mirage looks so real. It looks so real that at times we're even willing to reject the only guide that can truly show us the way.

God has given us the Bible to show us the path of life. The Bible is the GPS that never fails. Unlike the GPS in my car the Bible never takes us on a wrong turn. It never steers us onto roads that don't really exist.

Read verses 6

Contentment is learned. We think if we just have that car, that house, that thing we'll be content. But we've all been through the cycle. We long for something. We work for something. We strive for it and finally one day we get there.

We're content for a little while and then that sense of dissatisfaction begins to creep in.

If we count on stuff giving us true contentment we'll always be on the journey, but we'll never arrive.

Read verse 7-8

We came into the world with nothing and we leave the same way. That is, nothing material. We're born into the world spiritually separated from God. We're born into the world as *children of wrath, dead in trespasses*.

But then through Jesus Christ God *made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*(Ephesians 2:5-9)

When we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior we're forgiven of our sins and given a new life in Christ.

When that truth captures our heart and mind completely we're flooded with contentment. We have eternal life. We have Jesus Christ. We have what really matters. Everything else pales in comparison.

But what happens when we take our eyes off of beauty of our Savior and start eying out the mirage of this world?

Read verse 9

The Bible is chocked full of examples of godly people who were wealthy. Having money, even lots of it, isn't evil. What's evil is money having us. What's evil is trying to find fulfillment in riches.

Listen to Ecclesiastes 5:10. Plaster this one all over the house. On your TV, your computer, your briefcase, your Speed Racer lunchbox. Don't let it out of your sight. This is a mirage buster.

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

The Living Bible says it this way. *The more you have the more you spend right to the limits of your income. So what is the advantage of wealth- except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers!*

Isn't it amazing. We all know that's true. We've all been there a thousand times in life. And then we see that car or that computer or that job opportunity and we think, if I could just get that, then I'd be content.

When we think that way we love money. **Read verse 10**

Here's one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. Notice, it doesn't say "Money is the root of all evil." If that were true, we could rid the world of evil by getting rid of money. What it's really saying is, money is the root of all types of evil.

Has your desire to possess things and to live the good life kept you from church and the Bible? Has it caused you to take off after the mirage when at the same time your soul is starving?

Isn't it absolutely astounding that we can pierce ourselves through with many sorrows because of our own greediness and not even realize what we're doing?

Here's the question to ask yourself this morning. Do I really trust God for my contentment, or is it the money that says "In God We Trust" that has my confidence?

I. The Number One Competitor For Our Heart Is Money

II. The Antidote For Greed is Grace

Turn to Titus chapter 2 page 1059

The Biblical definition of the word grace is God's favor given to us when we really deserve His judgement.

Grace isn't just God's pity or compassion. Grace isn't God setting aside His justice and simply ignoring our sins. Grace isn't God being so busy that we can slip our bad thoughts, words, or deeds past Him.

Grace is about forgiveness of sin because the full penalty has been paid by another.

The one thing that holds God's love back from us is His justice. God's law has been broken by every person in this room. The NT says, ...*the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.* (Romans 7:12)

Holiness means absolute purity. No taint of unrighteousness. You could take the best of the best when it comes to people on this earth and the Bible says, *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) We've fallen short of the glory of God by a long shot. We've all missed the mark of God's perfection. The biblical term is "sin."

God's infinite, perfect, righteous, lawful justice makes a demand. *The wages of sin is death.* (Romans 6:23a) Sin must be punished.

God's love was restrained by His own holiness. But God did what no human being could do. He made the way to satisfy His justice and free up His love. The Bible says, *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* (I John 4:10)

Propitiation is a theological term that means "an atonement." "A satisfaction."

God's justice was satisfied by Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus died in our place, because of God's broken law.

God made a way to satisfy His own justice so His love could be set free. Grace is God freely showing His love to us because our sins were placed on Jesus at the cross.

Read verses 11-13

God's grace not only brings forgiveness, it's also the perfect teacher. Let me give you a very simple definition for ungodliness. "Not having regard for God."

Now if ungodly means "not having a regard for God" then godly must mean just the opposite, "having a regard for God."

Listen: A godly life is a life of complete, voluntary dependence on God. That means we trust Him. We trust His wisdom. We trust His love. We trust His goodness. We trust His provision.

Dependence on God excludes all dependence on self.

Something can be refined, moral, appealing, socially acceptable, and yet still ungodly.

If something convinces me that I need a bunch of stuff to really be able to enjoy life, it's ungodly. If I believe that my security and sense of well being are wrapped up in my retirement plan or my bank account I've got an ungodly way of thinking.

Grace teaches me that God can be trusted. Grace teaches me the wisdom of trusting in God rather than my own abilities.

Here's a challenge from the Bible: *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32)

If God in His grace freely took my ugly, despicable sins and freely gave me salvation and eternal life why would I look to anyone or anything else to fulfill me?

Grace hits right at the heart of materialism by turning my focus from the temporary to the eternal. Grace undermines the whole appeal of materialism by filling my life with that which is most valuable.

I. The Number One Competitor For Our Heart Is Money

II. The Antidote For Greed is Grace

III. When You Learn To Love God You See All Of Life In A Different Light

We just read I John 4:10 a minute ago but I'd like us to revisit it for a moment. *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* (I John 4:10)

If there is no God, if we're all just cosmic accidents, if we came from nowhere and are headed nowhere, then money and possessions take on a prominent position in our

lives.

What is it that's going to give us that sense meaning? It can't be God, if He doesn't exist so there has to be a substitute. It's going to either be some title or position we hold, or something we own or possess. It's going to be fame or fortune.

Obviously advertisers understand this. I want to read you an email that one of people sent out to his Bible study class a couple of weeks ago. I just thought this was so powerful I asked him if I could use it this morning.

Last weekend during discussion, the topic of always feeling the need to fill our lives with more and more stuff came up.

There is an emotional, non-rational, feeling that at some point it will satisfy us. A trap many, including myself, have fallen into.

My personal opinion is that this is a favorite distortion of truth by Satan, but he has no shortage of help. As some of you know I work for a local high-end advertising agency. Over the years, we have switched from rational advertising to almost exclusively emotional advertising.

Here is a little snippet of the information we use to convince people they need all that stuff. I thought you may want to see what you are up against. And considering how much time people spend watching TV, on the internet, and viewing outdoor advertising, it's no wonder we are winning for our clients.

Why Emotional Appeals Work:

- Consumers feel before they think. We grab them right off the bat.
- Addresses powerful and immediate "wants"; The emotion connection must be made first, before endeavoring to give rational arguments.
- Credibility: Believability is based on gut feeling.
- Positive emotional connections help to overcome skepticism toward advertising.

Effectiveness: Where's the Proof That Emotion Messaging Works Better?

- Emotionally based campaigns outperformed rationally based campaigns on every single business measure in the cases studied: sales, market share, profit, penetration, loyalty and price sensitivity.
- Emotional appeals are almost twice as likely to generate large profit gains as rational ones.

- The more emotion dominates over rational messaging, the bigger the impact on the business; the most effective ads are those with little or no rational content.
- Emotional advertising is particularly good at reducing price sensitivity, and hence leads to large profit gains.
- Even in categories that are supposedly rational, like computers and financial services, people go with their gut feelings first.

Advertisers know that if you can appeal to people's emotions you can win them over to your product.

Buick Ad "Take the stares. The Buick Enclave. Designed to turn heads."

Cologne Ad "The force of attraction of a man with style and sensuality. A unique combination of luxury, art, and modernity for a timeless elegance."

Camaro Ad "About as far from invisible as you can get."

Watch Ad "Unstoppable. Matt Kenseth is. So is his Citizen Eco-Drive. It's unstoppable. Just like the people who wear it."

What are they saying? Here's where your sense of significance comes from. Of course in a couple of years your significance giver will have a few dents, a rip in the seat, and a rust spot by the front wheel. Keep it for 10 more years and people's stares won't come because they're impressed. They'll be staring because they can't believe you're still driving the old clunker.

Isn't it amazing how easily we're distracted from reality by some thing.

What's the truth? The truth is when you learn to love God you see all of life in a different light.

When you realize that God loved us first before we were ever born it changes things. When you realize that God doesn't just talk about loving, He demonstrated His love for us, it puts things in a whole new light.

When you learn to love Him because He first loved us something supernatural takes place. When you learn to love God in response to His love for you, you become strangely content.

Turn to Philippians 4 Page 1045

Philippians is one of 4 letters that we call Prison Epistles. They were all written by an apostle of Jesus named Paul from a Roman prison cell. In Acts 1:8 Jesus had commanded His disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Paul had been chosen by God to get the message of Jesus Christ to Rome itself. The thing was Paul didn't go as a free man, he went as a prisoner. He was arrested, appealed his case to Caesar and was carted off to Rome as a prisoner.

To most people that would have been really discouraging. But Paul saw it as an opportunity. He was going to get to testify about his faith in Jesus in the very courts of Caesar himself.

One thing about Paul the missionary was, he never asked for money for himself.

He was a tentmaker by trade so he supported himself by making and selling tents. He collected money for other projects, like helping the poor Christians in Jerusalem, but he didn't collect money for himself.

Of course he didn't turn down financial support either.

Their church at Philippi, in Macedonia, was not a wealth congregation. They weren't wealthy but they were one of the only churches that sent Paul financial gifts.

Read verses 15-16

This letter to the Philippians is basically a "Thank You" letter to them for showing their love for him by sending him support money.

Now remember, this guys in jail. He's not sure at this point whether he's ever get out alive. But look at what he says in verse 10.

Read verse 10 the "care" he's rejoicing in is the money they finally had the ability to send him. But just so that they don't get the wrong idea he writes...

Read verses 11-13

For this totally devoted follower of Christ, contentment was learned. He says I've learned how to be content with a lot and I've learned how to be content with a little.

It didn't just happen all at once. Learning implies time. It implies process.

He learned contentment and here's who he learned it from...**Read 2:5-8**

The Lord of Glory didn't consider the splendors of heaven something to be held onto but He made Himself of no reputation. Jesus Christ humbled Himself and here's the result... **Read verse 9**

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.(II Corinthians 8:9)

The Son gave up everything so that we could have that which is most important: forgiveness and a personal relationship with God.

That's where Paul learned contentment. He learned it from Jesus Christ. That's the place where we'll learn contentment too.

Have you learned contentment from the example of Jesus? Do you find that money and stuff seem to pull you away from real contentment? Are you more, or less, content than you were last year?

Would you be willing to take an honest look at your attitude toward money? If "stuff" has become a functional savior in your life would you boldly renounce your misplaced trust and commit to filling your mind with the amazing truths of salvation from the Bible?