

WHAT GOD HAS NOT JOINED TOGETHER (6)

Serving God and Mammon

Continuing our 2026 theme, What God has NOT joined together. We have been addressing some doctrinal issues including creation/evolution, fellowship with unbelievers, denominationalism and last week the role of women leadership in churches. We have more doctrinal concerns to address but today we want to go a different direction. We will address something that most of us need to pay careful attention to, especially in our affluent society: God has NOT joined together serving God and mammon.

This is based on Matthew 6:24 where Jesus is dealing with wealth and worries in life. In vs. 19-21 Jesus said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Then in vs. 24 we read, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.* This leads to His admonition to not worry and trust God as you seek first His kingdom. The idea of serving *mammon* is to be enslaved to material possessions. Some actually substitute the word with money (ESV) or wealth (LSB, NASB). The NKJV word is a transliteration of the original Greek, μαμωνᾶς (mamōnas).

This is a lesson about materialism. It is about making a choice concerning who will be your priority in your life and decisions. Are you serving God first in everything or does He only get a portion of you? This is a lesson I have addressed in times past, but it is something we need to remind ourselves of from time to time.

I. What is Materialism?

- a. The American Heritage dictionary gives 9 definitions¹. The first (and others) address the belief that physical matter is the only reality and that all things can be explained naturally or physically. 3. *Concern for possessions or material wealth and physical comfort, especially to the exclusion of spiritual or intellectual pursuits.* 5. *The tendency to give undue importance to material interests as contrasted with spiritual concerns; devotion to the material nature and its wants.*
- b. Practically stated, it is the pursuit of material things over spiritual matters. This is one who puts his physical possessions above God. Matthew 19:21-22 – the rich, young ruler is an example of this.
- c. A materialistic person will elevate temporal and worldly success over eternal security. Often when faced with choosing between a spiritual or a worldly pursuit he will mostly choose the material option.
- d. We must be reminded that we live in an affluent society with abundant access to wealth, luxuries and comforts. Where we live, we truly are abundantly blessed – in our homes, transportation, eating habits, travel, entertainment options, etc. AND compared to much of the world, we are some of the wealthiest people on earth.
- e. Add to this there are systems of religion that promote wealth building and tie it to our faith. The ***prosperity gospel*** teaches that God wants you to have just about anything you want. It is a false, materialistic driven gospel that says you CAN serve God and mammon. This false gospel is being promoted by some of the most prominent names in religion today – Joel Osteen, TD Jakes, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, etc. In 1 Timothy 6:5, Paul is warning Timothy about corrupt men who see godliness as a means of gain. His command, *“From such withdraw yourself.”* And it leads into a text we will discuss in just one moment.
- f. But that is not what the Bible teaches.

¹ HarperCollins Publishers. “The American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Materialism.” *Ahdictionary.Com*, 2022, <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=materialism>. Accessed 27 Aug. 2026.

II. The Bible's warnings about pursuing materialism

- a. **1 Timothy 6:9-10** – one of the most direct declarations, Paul notes that those who desire to be rich fall into temptations and a snare. The word *desire* means to want something strongly. It is something that becomes important to you so you pursue it. The desire for wealth is not just seeking what you need to live or even wisely looking toward your future (the wise save – Proverbs 21:20, *There is desirable* (precious – NASB, ESV) *treasure, And oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man squanders it.* Proverbs 13:22, *A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.*) Those desiring wealth fall into a trap (Satan's trap) Paul is clear that it leads to all sorts of evils – greed, self-reliance without God, covetousness,
- b. **Hebrews 13:5**, *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*
- c. **Luke 12:15ff**, *And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*
- d. **Matthew 6:19-21** – where is your treasure? Where that is, is where your heart will also be.

III. Materialism was the downfall of many Biblical examples

- a. **Balaam** – Numbers 22-25 (Jude 11, 2 Peter 2:15) – when Balak of Moab tried to hire him in the wilderness to curse Israel, it backfired. But Balaam's greed caused him to find a workaround.
- b. Joshua 7 – **Achan** – he took what belonged to YHWH as Jericho was utterly destroyed. He saw items and wanted, took and hid them. Others paid a heavy price for his sin. If materialism is strong enough it can lead to unethical decisions – stealing, lying, pilfering, etc.). He also coveted that which belonged to God.
- c. 1 Kings 11 – **Solomon** – He began godly, but in later years, his many wives turned his heart away from the LORD and toward idols. Pleasing his wives meant rejected the one TRUE God. Again, it did not turn out well for him. Here we find how prosperity and worldly pursuits can lead one to forget God
- d. 2 Kings 5 – **Gehazi**. Elisha, the successor of Elijah told Naaman to dip in the Jordan 7 times to cure his leprosy. It worked, and then Naaman tried to pay Elisha. He turned the money down, but his servant Gehazi, deceitfully pursued Naaman asking for a reward. Because of his sin, he became a leper for the rest of his life. In him we are warned that God sees and knows everything. He knows your heart and motives. What are you doing when no one is looking?
- e. Matthew 26:4-15 – **Judas Iscariot** – betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver – the price of a slave in those days. Even his remorse did not undo his damage and guilt. With him you find the length someone will go to get what he loves (he sold his soul).
- f. Acts 5 – **Ananias and Sapphira** – struck dead because they lied to God and the Holy Spirit (and to brethren) about the contribution. Are you being honest with your possessions? We can tell ourselves we are doing the right thing, but deep down you know your motives.
- g. Each of these warn us where materialism can lead and they

IV. How do we overcome or avoid materialism?

- a. **First realize that wealth is not wrong, nor is having possessions.** I always begin lessons like this with this caveat. Money is morally neutral – it is what you do with your resources that determines spiritual value. Those with wealth gained honestly are able to help those who are disadvantaged. Furthermore, it is possible for the poor to also be materialistic – making decisions that are contrary to God's will.
- b. **Contentment** – To be content means that you are satisfied where you are at. Spiritually it means you have a proper perspective about things in this world. As long as you have what you need, you ought to be satisfied.
 - i. 1 Timothy 6:6-8 – leading into Paul's warning about desiring to be rich, Paul calls for contentment as a preventative measure.

- ii. Proverbs 30:7-9, *Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, “Who is the LORD?” Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.*
 - iii. Philippians 4:11-12, Paul as an example had learned to be content in whatever state he was in. This is where it can be a challenge – are you content when you are barely getting by?
 - iv. RARELY do things actually satisfy us. Recall that Paul warned the rich about “uncertain riches” (1 Timothy 6:17)
- c. **Gratitude** – means to be thankful (grateful) for what you do have. This is another foundational attitude that will help overcome materialism.
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 calls for us in everything to give thanks.
 - ii. Philippians 4:6-7 instead of being anxious about life, with thanksgiving God to God in prayer.
 - iii. Colossians 2:6-7, *As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*
 - iv. We ought to regularly pause and consider how blessed we are and count our blessings as they are contrasted with so much of the world.
- d. **Give** – a core principle in God’s word calls for us to share with others.
 - i. Hebrews 13:16, *But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*
 - ii. 1 John 3:17-18 – and with this our brethren ought to be our priority
 - iii. Most financial advisors with a spiritual focus will tell you that giving must be a part of your planning and budgeting. There is something healthy about being willing to share with others. Proverbs 22:9, *He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor;* Proverbs 19:17 - *He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.*
 - iv. NOTE: In your giving, watch your attitude and motives.
- e. **A proper perspective about our possessions**
 - i. One thing the Christian has a greater understanding and appreciation of is how material things are temporal. They will NOT last and you cannot take them with you.
 - ii. Matthew 6:19 – again, where is your treasure? What happens to material possessions?
 - iii. 1 John 2:15-17 – the world is passing away with its lusts.
 - iv. Rarely do material possessions satisfy – 1 Timothy 6:17 calls them uncertain, The problem with the materialistic attitude is that it is never enough. Proverbs 30:15 - *The leech has two daughters— Give and Give! Ecclesiastes 5:10, He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.*
- f. **Know the dangers of materialism** – We have mentioned many in this lesson
 - i. Things can become idols and cause you to forget about God – Colossians 3:5
 - ii. It can bring about sorrows because things do not provide REAL security and satisfaction. They may provide temporary relief, but long-lasting relief is NOT found in stuff.
 - iii. It can lead to ingratitude and discontentment as well as causing other virtues to fail.
 - iv. It can be detrimental to our need to trust God.
 - v. It is vanity – emptiness. That is the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes where Solomon is searching to find real meaning in life. His final conclusion was our need to fear God and keep His commandments, “For this is man’s all” – Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.
 - vi. AND it can lead to you missing out on many spiritual blessings that stand in conflict with the materialism of this world. True wealth is found in things like “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), good family, a peaceful and satisfied life, wisdom is better than gold

(Proverbs 16:16), God's law is more to be desired than gold (Psalm 19:17), genuine faith – 1 Peter 1:7 – more precious than gold that perishes, and every spiritual blessing found in Christ Jesus – Ephesians 1:3ff. These are the things money cannot buy!

- vii. Ultimately it can cost you your soul. It can and will distract you from your purpose for being here. And that brings us back to the beginning of this lesson – you CANNOT serve God and mammon.

With this lesson let us be reminded that God in His eternal wisdom has NOT joined together serving Him and serving the things of this world. We have to make a choice – either we are live for God or for something else (ultimately ourselves). The choice you make will have eternal consequences. In Deuteronomy 30:19, Moses was pleading with Isarel as they were about to enter Canaan. He said, *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;* Where is your treasure? Think about it!