

Pharisaism, Money, and the Greatness of God

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the topics of pharisaism, love of money, and the greatness of God. It provides definitions for pharisaism as doctrinal vigilance and moral rigor, love of money as placing more hope in possessions than in God, and greatness of God as His majesty and worth. The speaker shares four reasons for discussing these topics, including personal reflection, societal observations, biblical insights, and ministry encouragement. The sermon emphasizes the interconnectedness of pharisaism and love of money, drawing from biblical examples like Pharisees, the rich young ruler, Judas, and Philippians 3 to highlight the dangers of prioritizing worldly wealth over God. It concludes with the key to freedom from the love of money and Pharisaism: finding surpassing worth in knowing Christ Jesus.

Scripture: Luke 16:13, Matthew 23:25, Mark 10:17, John 12:6, Philippians 3:18, Philippians 3:5, 1 Timothy 6:10, Matthew 7:21

Topics: "Pharisaism", "Love of Money"

Description

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Transcript

I want to talk to you about pharisaism, love of money, and the greatness of God. And we're going to go longer than 12. I know what I was told that I could have.

Won't take that long. Three definitions, four reasons why I'm talking about it, and then a brief glimpse at those three things. Pharisaism, legalism, moralism, a life built out of doctrinal vigilance, moral rigor, a sense of entitlement not rooted in brokenhearted dependence on the undeserved mercy of God bought by Jesus.

That's my definition of pharisaism. Love of money, a condition of the heart that feels more security, more pleasure, more hope in earthly possessions than it does in the fellowship and faithfulness of God.

Greatness of God, His majesty, His beauty, His worth, which if we see it and savor it in the face of Jesus Christ as we ought, sets us free from the deceitfulness of riches and the duplicity of pharisaism.

So those are my three topics, pharisaism, love of money, greatness of God. Why in the world did you choose to talk about that here? Number one, I've got four reasons. Number one, I'm 73, and I feel more keenly than I ever remember feeling that the remaining corruption of my heart, which Paul calls indwelling sin, is so exceedingly deceitful when it comes to money and possessions and security and comfort that I feel the need for more vigilance now than ever.

Reason number one. So this is part of my own processing of reality. Number two, just a few weeks ago, I'm sure you saw it, at least this guy saw it, he sees everything.

Just a few weeks ago, in the news media, clustered in a few days, came revelations that one pastor has a home worth \$10 million and a worth of \$60 million. Another pastor makes a million dollars a year with a discretionary account of another million dollars. And all the Democratic candidates at that time had their charitable giving revealed, which was so tiny that the whole thing made me want to cry.

Church and non-church. That's reason number two to think about this. Number three, I've been working my way through Philipians.

For a look at the book, this online teaching that I do, and came to chapter three, verses 18 and 19, which says, many of whom I have told you before, and I'll tell you with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly.

They glory in their shame with mindset on earthly things. And I had to decide, who are they? Who are these enemies of the cross? It's a big debate. Are they the dogs of verse two? God is their belly, glory in their shame.

Worldlings, or are they the people who are competing with Paul for fair sake rigor? Chapter three, verse four through six. We'll come back to that. That's the third reason this is on my front burner.

These dear lovers of money, are they Pharisees? Four, Crossway Books website says this, we are a not-for-profit ministry and exist solely for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel through publishing and other means. Any surplus that may arise shall be used solely to further the ministry and shall not inure, inure. What a word.

Shall not inure to the benefit of any individual. And I would like these words in the next 20 minutes to encourage you, stay the course. So those are my four reasons and definitions.

So let's get into it. The main thing I want you to see that was fresh to me in the recent weeks was that it is a mistake to segregate people that we think are Pharisees from people we think are lovers of money. At least if you're like me, I have this stereotype that legalists who put a lot of premium on doctrinal rigor and moral vigilance over here and libertines who live for the world and are money lovers over here is a big mistake.

A big mistake to think that way. 1 Timothy 6.10, the love of money is the root of all evils. ESV says all kinds of evils, that's okay, does say all evils.

And some by desiring this have wandered away from the faith. So Paul says that underneath all evils or all kinds of evils like Pharisaism is the love of money. Reason, love of money is synonymous with no faith.

Without faith you cannot please God. Everything that is not from faith is sin. All evils come from this.

Hearts that are more content, more happy, more hopeful, more satisfied, more secure in stuff than in God is the root of all evils. All evils including Pharisaism. So let's see it.

Is that true? Let's look at Pharisees, let's look at the rich young ruler, let's look at Judas and let's look at Philippians 3 and we can do this quickly because you're gonna see it right away. You won't need any fancy dancy exegesis from me to help you see what's plain as day in the text. You just need to be drawn to it.

So Pharisees, number one, let's go to Luke. You don't need to look these up, I'll pass over them but you can jot down the text if you want to or get the tape, tape, tape, that's not the word anymore. Whatever you call it.

Luke 16, 13 to 14. No servant can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one, despise the other. You cannot serve God and money, verse 14.

The Pharisees who were lovers of money heard these things and ridiculed him. Matthew 23, 25 to 28. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside are full of greed and self-indulgence.

Sound like your God is your belly? Self-indulgence, akrasias. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. Almost everywhere in the New Testament where akatharsias is used is sexual perversion of all kinds, sexual uncleanness.

Which most often, I'm sorry, verse 28. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Are you kidding me? The Pharisees, the most preeminent law keepers.

Jesus says no, really they're full of greed, self-indulgence, sexual perversion and lawlessness. Meaning God and his word are not their authority. Their belly, their appetites, their groin is their authority.

That's what Jesus said about Pharisees. Not exactly the way I typically think about squeaky clean sinners called Pharisees. So I gotta rid myself of this segregation of legalistic Pharisees over here and libertine lovers of money over here.

That's not the way Jesus sees the world. Number two, the rich young man. Mark 10, 17 to 22.

As Jesus was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt down before him and asked him, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

And he said, teacher, all of these I have kept for my youth. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him. And said to him, you lack one thing.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Come follow me. Disheartened by the saying, he went away.

Sorrowful for he had great possessions. Who's he? What's going on here? I kept them all. I have devoted my life to law keeping and commandment keeping.

And Jesus said, well, let me just, let me just probe a little bit about where your heart is. And as soon as he puts his finger on money, he's gone. He was, whatever else was going on in this man's life, commandment keeping from his youth was a cloak of the love of money.

That's what Jesus is saying. Number three, Judas. Now, I'm going to Judas, not because he is heralded as a law keeper, a commandment keeper, but because he's a preacher of the kingdom and a worker of miracles.

Here's Mark six, seven, and 12 to 13. Jesus called the 12, that's Judas. Jesus called the 12 and began to send them out two by two.

I'd love to know who was paired up with Judas. Send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits, including Judas. So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

So Judas was a preacher of repentance. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil, many who were sick and healed them. So Judas cast out demons, Judas preached repentance, Judas healed the sick.

We know he did for a couple of reasons. Number one, if they all had this power except Judas, he would have been exposed as a charlatan, but in fact, they trusted him to the end, all of them. To the very end, they trusted him and gave him the benefit of the doubt as he walked out from the Last Supper.

No suspicions, that would not have been true if everybody could do miracles except Judas. And second, we know it because Jesus himself made clear that unbelievers like Judas can do miracles. Because he said in Matthew 7, 21, not everyone will say to me, Lord, Lord.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name, just like Judas? And then, I will declare to them, I never knew you, Judas, you workers of lawlessness. Lawlessness.

Remarkable how that word turns up for the Pharisees, turns up for the rich young man, turns up for these folks. Judas was a worker of miracles, a preacher of penance, a minister of the kingdom, and he was a lover of money. He was a lover of money.

He didn't care about the poor. It says in John 12, 6, Judas did not care about the poor, but he was a thief. And having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

John 12, 6. He sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver after three years of watching this most magnificent of human beings love and doing the works himself. So, not only must we beware of segregating religious Pharisees from the lovers of money, that's a big mistake if that's in your head like it was in mine, but also from segregating lawless miracle workers from lovers of money. There's a lot of those around today.

The love of money is the root of all evils, including Phariseeism and lawless miracle working. Number four. So, Pharisees and rich young ruler and Judas, and now the last glimpse is Philippians 3. Scholars debate who these enemies of the cross are in verse 18 of chapter three.

Behold, I have told you before, I tell you now with tears. There are people who walk as enemies of the cross, their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things, have hearts of gold, hearts that are just like a magnet to the world and not to God. That's the description in verses 18 and 19 of chapter three, and the question is who they are.

Big debate about are they worldly libertines or are they rigorous Pharisees? Like Paul, the dogs, and they mutilate the flesh. They've turned circumcision into a mere mutilation because they don't worship by the spirit of God, they don't boast in Christ Jesus. They live according to the flesh.

If they want to compete, I'll compete. And then he lists his pedigree, which ends with, I was a Pharisee. So is it those folks or these folks? And now I'm just saying, we don't need to choose.

Big, big, big mistake to choose between those two groups. I think it's naive, it's naive in terms of human reality as Jesus sees it to say, I think we need to separate those two out. I don't think Paul would say that.

I don't think Jesus would say that. The Pharisees love money and they don't love God. So that's the relationship between Pharisaim and the love of money that I wanted to point out.

And the last thing is the greatness of God. So Paul said in Philippians 3, 5, and 6, I was a Hebrew of Hebrews as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. So I was the paragon Pharisee, which means according to Jesus, Paul loved money.

He had a heart that was finding more contentment, more peace, more security in stuff of this world. Then in the fellowship and faithfulness of God. And in chapter four, Paul admits this and tells us how he was freed.

And I would like us to enjoy the same freedom that he found. Usually he says, chapter four, verse 11, not that I speak of being in need because he had just thanked them for their gifts. And he so much did not want to be seen as craving their money.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, but I have learned, now that's an important word because it is a confession. I wasn't always like this. I had to learn this.

I was a Pharisee and seethed with discontent and craving. and craving for the gift of God's gift. Not that I'm speaking of being in need.

I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret.

I didn't know it once. I didn't know the secret once of being free from the love of money and having deep, sweet, restful contentment of soul. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

I can do it all. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. And so we should ask in closing, what was that secret? What has he learned? And he gives us the answer very clearly, that the secret that cut the nerve of love of money and cut the duplicity of Phariseeism with one stroke, same stroke, it's found in

chapter three, verses seven and eight.

Whatever gain I had, which was totally not working, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, for the sake of that supreme worth, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I might gain Christ.

That's his secret. The greatness of all that God was for him in Christ. The greatness of all that God was for him in Christ.

The surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. And compared to him, he said, all the money and all the moral achievements, all the money, all the world, and all the moral accomplishments with one blow have become garbage compared to Christ. That was the point of deliverance.

So I've been praying for you. I pray that everyone who leads and serves Crossway Books will know the all-satisfying greatness of Christ the way Paul knew it. Know the all-satisfying greatness of God in Christ and therefore be set free from the love of money and thus sever the root of Pharisaism in this ministry.

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