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## Through the Needle's Eye

By David Servant

### Chapter Six

#### The Deceitfulness of Riches

Mark 4:3-10, 13-20

There is yet still more to all that Jesus taught about material stewardship. In light of all that He said on this subject, it is amazing how little of it is mentioned in most churches. When it is, it is too often softened.

As we continue our squeeze through the needle's eye, our own eyes are opened more and more, and we ultimately wonder how we remained so blind for so long. But it is quite easy to gradually slip back into the darkness again, because the world around us is feverishly worshipping at the altar of mammon and continually tempts us to join in her rituals. In this chapter, we will consider Jesus' warning about the danger of that very deception. Start with a prayer and let us begin.

There was a day when Jesus was teaching along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that the crowd grew so large that Jesus "got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land" (Mark 4:1). He then told the crowd a parable, which He later explained to His disciples:

"Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; and it came about that as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. And other seeds fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables....And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these

are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and *the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word*, and it becomes unfruitful. And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:3-10, 13-20; emphasis added).

There is no doubt that this parable has application to salvation. In Matthew’s rendition of the same parable, Jesus explained that the seed is “the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19), which was the gospel Jesus preached (see Matt 4:23; 9:35; Luke 16:16). Also, according to Luke, Jesus revealed the significance of the first soil by stating, “And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not *believe and be saved*” (Luke 8:12, emphasis added). Information about salvation was what Jesus had in mind in the Parable of the Sower and Soils. As the gospel is proclaimed, people of varying receptivity hear it. Consequently, some people are saved and some are not.

### **The Meanings of the Soils**

Note that seed was sown in four different types of soil, but in only three of the soils did the seeds germinate and begin to grow. Additionally, in only one of the soils did the seeds ultimately produce fruit. The question is, *Which soils represent people who are saved?*

Clearly, the first soil represents those who were never saved, rejecting the gospel as they heard it.<sup>1</sup> And obviously, the fourth soil represents truly saved people. But what about the second and third soils?

One’s position on “eternal security” is a primary factor in how he answers that question. To those who believe that true Christians can never forfeit their salvation,<sup>2</sup> the second and third types of soil can only represent either (1) fruitless believers or (2) phony believers who were never actually saved.

To those who believe that true Christians *can* forfeit their salvation,<sup>3</sup> the second and third soils may represent true believers who fell away and forfeited their salvation. (The fourth soil then represents those who don’t fall away, but who persevere in faith and bear abundant fruit.)

So who is correct?

It is impossible for me to believe that the second and third soils represent “fruitless believers,” because the New Testament repeatedly teaches that there is no such thing. A “fruitless believer” is an oxymoron, because faith without works is dead, useless, and cannot save, according to James 2:14-26. Jesus warned over and over again against the false idea that one could be saved without obedience, and so did Paul, Peter, John and Jude, as I’ve shown in Chapters 2 and 3. The second and third soils cannot represent what the entire New Testament says does not exist.

Thus we’ve now narrowed down three possibilities to two. The second and third soils represent either (1) false believers who never truly believed or (2) true believers who fell away and forfeited their salvation. Which is the correct interpretation?

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<sup>1</sup> Amazingly, one of America’s most popular radio and television preachers says otherwise. This first soil, he claims, represents a believer who resists God’s word, and thus never grows spiritually or bears fruit. Yet Jesus plainly said, “And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not *believe and be saved*” (Luke 8:12; emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> This view is known as the doctrine of unconditional eternal security or *once saved always saved*. Calvinists prefer a slightly different version of unconditional eternal security known as the doctrine of “the perseverance of the saints.”

<sup>3</sup> This view is known as the doctrine of conditional eternal security. Adherents of this view do not necessarily believe, as some suppose, that one loses his salvation if he commits a sin. More likely, adherents to this view believe that one forfeits his salvation if he abandons faith in Christ and/or returns to the practice of sin, ignoring the discipline of the Lord over a period of time.

How is it possible that the second and third soils could represent phony believers who were never saved? In both cases there was *true* germination, *true* new life and *true* growth that was sustained for a while.

Added to this is the fact that in Luke's version of the parable, Jesus explained that the second soil represented those who "*believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away*" (Luke 8:13, emphasis added). Jesus declared they believed. Jesus also taught that if one believes, he is saved (see John 3:16), thus, unless Jesus was lying, those represented by the second type of soil were truly saved. Jesus said, however, that they were only temporary and fell away. The plant withered and died.

All this being so, the second soil can only represent one who truly believes, is truly saved, but who abandons his faith under persecution and dies spiritually, forfeiting his salvation.

This is not difficult to accept in light of the fact that it agrees perfectly with what so many passages of the New Testament teach.<sup>4</sup> Christians can forfeit their salvation if they abandon their faith in Jesus. Salvation is received and maintained by faith. That is why Christians are repeatedly admonished in the New Testament to persevere in faith lest they lose what they've gained (see Acts 14:22; Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:6, 14). Are we to think that Jesus will cast into hell people who never believed in Him, and then welcome into heaven those who had faith in Him when they were children, but who were serial rapists and murderers when they died?<sup>5</sup> And what will those sinners do once they're in heaven? Will they invent new ways to show God how much they hate Him?

### **Does True Faith Always Endure?**

In contradiction to those scriptures that admonish believers to persevere in faith,<sup>6</sup> some maintain that true faith always endures. Supposedly, if one receives salvation from God by faith, his salvation could never be forfeited because his faith will persevere to the end. If one dies unsaved, it proves that he never possessed true faith during his lifetime, even if he apparently manifested spiritual fruit. His fruit was not genuine fruit of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> He was never actually saved.

Scripture teaches, however, that true faith may not persevere. Did Peter have *true* faith when he walked on the water toward Jesus? Was Peter receiving a *true* miracle from God then, or was his walking on water a false miracle? The answers to those questions are obvious. Peter possessed true faith and received a true miracle.

Did Peter's true faith endure? No. Did Peter forfeit his true miracle? Yes. Peter lost by unbelief what he had gained by faith just a few moments before. True faith does not necessarily endure.

All this being so, the third soil, in which the implanted seed sprouts and grows until the plant is choked by thorns, may also like the second soil, represent a true believer

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Matt. 18:21-35; 24:4-5, 11-13, 23-26, 42-51; 25:1-30; Luke 12:42-46; John 6:66-71; 8:31-32, 51; 15:1-6; Acts 11:21-23; 14:21-22; Rom. 6:11-23; 8:12-14, 17; 11:20-22; 1 Cor. 9:23-27; 10:1-21; 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:24; 11:2-4; 12:21-13:5; Gal. 5:1-4; 6:7-9; Phil. 2:12-16; 3:17-4:1; Col. 1:21-23; 2:4-8, 1 Thes. 3:1-8; 1 Tim. 1:18-21; 4:1-16; 5:11-15; 6:9-12, 17-19, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:11-18; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:6-14; 4:1-14; 5:8-9; 6:4-20; 10:23-39; 12:9, 14-17; Jas. 1:12-16; 4:4; 5:19-20; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 2:20-22; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:15-17, 24, 28; 5:16; 2 John 8-9; Jude 20-21; Rev. 2:7, 10-11, 17, 20, 26-28; 3:4-5, 8-12, 14-22; 21:7-8; 22:18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Calvinists respond to this question by claiming that such a scenario is impossible, since true faith (supposedly) will always persevere. Thus, one who possesses true faith as a child will continue to have faith all his life. Yet true faith doesn't always persevere, as I will soon prove from Scripture.

<sup>6</sup> If all true believers automatically persevered in faith, there would have been no reason for the authors of the epistles to admonish believers to persevere. Their admonition proves the possibility that believers might not persevere.

<sup>7</sup> If this theory were true, it would be impossible for any person to have assurance of his salvation until his final breath, because only then could he be certain that his faith is genuine, having persevered. He could not trust any fruitfulness that was manifest in his life, as it might prove to be false if he later falls away.

who ultimately forfeits his salvation. And what causes his demise? “The worries of the world... the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things...choke the word” so that “it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19).

If you can't concede that Jesus' explanation of the third soil is a revelation of what might cause a believer to forfeit his salvation, there are only two alternative interpretations. You must believe that Jesus was either warning about (1) what could rob a believer of *all* fruitfulness,<sup>8</sup> or (2) what could keep a person from ever being saved.<sup>9</sup> In any case, Jesus was warning about some very serious issues. The worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things are a terrible triplet—eternally damning at worst and capable of destroying all the Spirit's fruit in believers at best.

All three of these potential pitfalls seem to share some relationship to money, the “deceitfulness of riches” being the most obvious of the three. Consider also, however, “the worries of this world.” Jesus specifically counseled against those worries at other times when He warned against laying up earthly treasures and about the impossibility of serving God and mammon (see Matt. 6:24-34; Luke 12:22-34). Thirdly, “the desires for other things” could certainly include material things. Luke translates the third pitfall as being the “pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14), which, if he was talking about the kind of pleasures that the world seeks, normally require money.

### **A Serious Warning to Believers**

For reasons I've already stated, I'm convinced that the second and third soils represent true believers who ultimately fall away and forfeit their salvation. If I'm correct, then every true believer needs to beware of the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things. Failure to do so could have very sobering eternal consequences.

Unlike the second soil scenario where the believer faces persecution and, as Jesus said, “immediately” (Mark 4:17) falls away, the third soil scenario is more gradual. As the good seeds sprout and grow, so do the thorn seeds. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the thorns began to intertwine with the good plants, robbing them of sunlight, moisture and nutrients from the ground, eventually dominating and crowding them so that the plant is “choked” (Mark 4:7). It was a sad ending to a promising beginning.

Is this not the picture of many professing Christians? Having received the gospel, they begin by following Jesus closely, passionately devoted to Him. He fills their thoughts and lives. They live to do His will, and evaluate everything in light of His Word, which they study diligently.

But then something happens. First they begin to notice that older Christians don't seem nearly as zealous as they are; in fact, some of those older Christians even warned them that their initial zeal would cool. Then they allow themselves to become distracted. There are temporal things to worry about. Temptations that begin to capture their attention present themselves. Although they resist scandalous sins, they find themselves distracted by things that seem harmless—career, innocent pleasures and new responsibilities. They don't realize it, but thorns are beginning to wrap around their legs. Imperceptibly, they are being entangled with worldly, temporal cares and pursuits.

Soon they find themselves less involved in church and Christian devotions. No longer do they attend prayer gatherings or participate in outreach. Witnessing is a thing of the past because it hinders certain financial prospects and invites persecution. Next they begin noticing the faults of other Christians. It makes them feel better.

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<sup>8</sup> Which would, of course, be an indication of the absence of saving faith.

<sup>9</sup> This, again, is difficult for me to accept, because the seed in the third soil did germinate, sprout and grow for a while.

The thorns grow higher, wrapping around their arms and hands, restricting them further. Now there are so many things that occupy their time and energy. As they prosper, they have more money to spend, and so leisure activities and hobbies take more and more precedence. Before long, their devotional life is non-existent. Private prayer and Bible reading are things of the past. The thought of visiting someone who is sick or in prison, or of denying themselves in order to feed the hungry or support a missionary never enters their minds. They're too busy. Making money and spending it dominates their days. Money is now directing their lives. It has become their god.

Finally the thorns weave themselves around their heads, covering their eyes and ears. Darkness has set in. Their religion consists of going to church on Sunday—unless there is something that is more important to do—and avoiding what is openly scandalous. They prefer the early service. Otherwise, as they say, “the whole day is killed.” Sunday becomes a day to enjoy the fruits of their labor. They have no real concern for the lost or for missionary work; thus they give only what costs them little or nothing. If they happen to be in church when a convicting sermon is preached, they are much more apt to criticize the pastor during lunch at the local cafeteria than shed a tear for their own pathetic spiritual state. They would much prefer to hear about how all who profess to believe in Jesus are unconditionally eternally secure, and soon decide that it may be time to start looking for a new church where they feel more comfortable. *They've been completely deceived by riches.* Thinking that they are safe and secure in God's grace, they are unconcerned that their lives reveal no fruit beyond that of decent heathen, even in spite of Jesus' repeated warnings about their condition. They are lovers of money, even though they think they love God. Because they are deceived, they don't know it, and all attempts to persuade them otherwise are futile. “The light that is in [them] is darkness,” and “how great is the darkness!” (Matt. 6:23), just as Jesus said.

Ultimately they die and stand before Jesus at a judgment that they knew was coming, but for some reason their darkened minds never seemed to worry about it:

And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” And the King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” Then He will also say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.” Then they themselves also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?” Then He will answer them, saying, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did

not do it to Me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matt. 25:32-46).<sup>10</sup>

They will be shocked as the truth sinks into their hearts. How foolish they had been to base the security of their salvation on a sinner’s prayer once prayed. They died with a religion that consisted of calling Jesus their Lord while ignoring His commandments.

Take note that Jesus told of the future judgment of the sheep and goats in order to forewarn those who think they are ready to face His judgment but are not. We may call Jesus our Lord when we stand before him. Yet He has forewarned us that calling Him Lord is not enough. Our faith must be proved genuine by devoted obedience:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23).

It will be too late to repent. Deceived by riches, focused on the worries and pleasures of earthly life, having laid up treasures on earth rather than in heaven, they will be cast into eternal flames. As Jesus said, this will be the fate of all those who “practice lawlessness,” which will certainly include those who make a practice of not loving their neighbors as themselves, ignoring the second greatest commandment.

### **An Old Testament Warning of the Same**

The Old Testament also warns against the deceitfulness of riches and the potential danger of falling away from God in the pursuit of wealth. Moses believed that it was actually very possible for those who served God to forget Him while enjoying His many blessings. Before entering the Promised Land, Moses warned the descendants of those who had perished in the wilderness:

Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you shall eat food without scarcity, in which you shall not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

Beware lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and *you forget the Lord your God* who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery....Otherwise, you may say in your heart, “My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.” But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it

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<sup>10</sup> If this passage of Scripture does not teach that there is a relationship between salvation and what one does with his time and money, then what does it teach?

is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:6-18, emphasis added).

According to Moses, the indication that one has forgotten God is that he no longer keeps God's commandments, many of which, even in the Mosaic Law, stipulated self-denying stewardship. Moses also believed that one could be distracted from devotion to God by the abundance of his material possessions. *Things tempt us to love them.* And according to Moses, this is not the only temptation faced by those who possess wealth. They might also be lifted up in pride, deceiving themselves into thinking that their prosperity is due to their own strength.

The result of yielding to either of these temptations is that one "forgets God," an expression that indicates one knew God in the past.

Moses' old covenant message makes clear that wealth can be a blessing or a curse. If wealth keeps us ever mindful of God's faithfulness and goodness, and if we use it to glorify the Lord as His faithful steward, it is a blessing. If wealth usurps God's rightful place in our lives, however, it is a horrible curse. Money can be a wonderful servant, but is always a poor master.

The psalmist warned, "If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10). When riches increase, there exists the temptation to set our hearts upon them. If we do, our hearts are no longer God's. That is precisely why Jesus told us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay them up in heaven: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34, emphasis added). He wants our hearts in heaven, where God is. When we lay up earthly treasures, it proves that God does not have our hearts.

Did not John warn of the same danger? He wrote:

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world (1 John 2:15-16).

John was not only warning against loving the "world's system." He also warned against loving "the *things* in the world" (1 John 2:15, emphasis added), specifically those things that the flesh and the eyes desire and that tempt people to be boastful. As John declared, if we love the world and its things, it proves that we don't really love the Father. If you were asked to testify in your church next Sunday as to how your lifestyle demonstrates that you don't love the world and its things, what would you say?

Agur, the human author of a chapter of the book of Proverbs, penned a wise prayer that also echoes Moses' counsel:

Two things I asked of Thee, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, lest I be full and deny Thee and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God (Prov. 30:7-9).

This was an Old Testament version of "Lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:4). Agur was fearful that even a full stomach might tempt him to forget the Lord. How much more temptation lurks behind our more abundant earthly treasures?

### **The Many Temptations of Wealth**

There is no doubt that the rich are exposed to numerous unique temptations that imperil them spiritually, temptations that the poor never encounter. For example, statistics indicate that wealthy people generally give a smaller percentage of their

incomes to charity than do poorer people.<sup>11</sup> Does this not indicate that the wealthy face greater temptation to be greedy, and that they are more likely to yield?

The wealthy face greater temptation to be prideful and conceited (see 1 Tim. 6:17). How difficult it is for rich people not to think of themselves as being superior to others! Pride stalks them continually. Even as the rich man donates large sums (but small portions) of his wealth to charitable causes, his pride swells within him as he imagines what a good person he is. Most of his charitable giving benefits him in subtle ways.

And what a fertile seedbed is pride for numerous other vices. How well impatience, anger, jealousy, unforgiveness, and self-indulgence grow in the garden of pride. The rich person is swimming in such temptations.

How difficult it is for the possessor of wealth not to trust in his riches. They speak to his inner thoughts all the time, reassuring him that his future is secure: "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his own imagination" (Prov. 18:11).<sup>12</sup>

Not only is the wealthy person tempted to use his wealth for self-indulgence, but he is also tempted to multiply for himself what he doesn't spend, investing in what God hates and helping to build Satan's kingdom. He thus profits by the promotion of sin and by what causes others to stumble. Hidden within the mutual funds he holds are lives wrecked by alcohol, tobacco and pornography, babies aborted with products manufactured by companies in which he owns shares, and foreign slaves scraping out an existence on behalf of shareholders. He reaps delusive earthly returns and eternal fire in hell.

Riches deceive and tempt in so many other ways. Wealth promises happiness and fulfillment, but never delivers on its promise. In fact the more one possesses, the more it seems one desires to possess. Like saltwater to a thirsty man, gaining wealth only creates more craving. Discontentment surfaces on every side of the one grasping at the illusive happiness of wealth.

Greed also drives people deep into debt—they are thoughtlessly lulled into mortgaging their future in a vain attempt to satisfy their current unquenchable lust for more things.

According to Scripture, entire churches can be ensnared. Read what Jesus Himself once said to the Church in Laodicea:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "*I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,*" and you do not know that you are *wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked* (Rev. 3:15-17, emphasis added).

The Laodiceans had become rich, and their devotion to Jesus had cooled. In a lukewarm condition, their hearts were no longer fully His. Mammon may well have become their god. Worse yet, they were completely deceived about their spiritual state. *Riches had deceived them.* Blinded by darkness, they thought nothing could be better. Possessing a comfortable religion, they considered themselves to be in need of nothing. It was well with their souls. But Jesus saw them as they really were—wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. They were rich, but not rich toward God. Their only hope was repentance before it was too late:

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<sup>11</sup> One study in 2001 showed that U.S. residents whose annual incomes were over \$100,000 gave an average of 2.2% to charity, while those who make less than \$10,000 per year gave an average of 5.3%. Other studies have shown similar statistics.

<sup>12</sup> A common smokescreen of the rich is their claim that they don't "trust in their wealth," but keep their trust in God. How can that be true as long as they keep large sums stashed away to protect them from the future?



I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me (Rev. 3:18-20).

Jesus advised them to exchange their earthly wealth for what was much more valuable—richness toward God, righteousness (white garments) and spiritual insight (eye salve). Note that Jesus depicted Himself as standing on the outside, patiently knocking and calling to those behind the door, hoping to gain entrance so that they might enjoy a meal with Him. This picture does not portray Jesus desiring a more intimate relationship with regenerate people (as is often said in sermons about this text). Rather, it portrays Jesus desiring to get in to those He does not indwell (see Rev. 3:20). Had the Laodiceans become so deceived by riches that Jesus was no longer on the inside? It seems so. He had warned that it is impossible to serve God and mammon.

Lover of God! Beware of the deceitfulness of riches!