### “The Love of Money” Steve Finlan for The First Church, September 25, 2022

**Amos 6:1, 4–7**

1 Alas for those who are at ease in Zion, and for those who feel secure on Mount Samaria. . . 4 Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; 5who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; 6who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! 7 Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away.

**1 Timothy 6:6–12**

6Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

11 But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. 12Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Amos’s threat, “they shall now be the first to go into exile” (6:7), is not an idle one. Forced exile, especially of the ruling classes, was a common social punishment dished out by the Assyrian empire against rebellious states. Approximately sixteen years after Amos delivered these warnings, Israel participated in a rebellion that Assyria crushed, and large portions of the population of Galilee, Israel’s northern territory, were taken away into exile. Probably it was the wealthier classes who were exiled, with the peasants left in place to farm the land. The threat of a forced march into exile was a theme uttered by a number of later prophets, such as Isaiah and Micah, mentioning some of the afflictions of an exilic march, such as hunger and thirst (Isa 5:13), the sheering of the hair (Mic 1:16), and some people dying on the march (Isa 5:14).

So these were not empty threats but were real-world warnings. In the prophets’ view, if the nation was overtaken with greed and materialism, turning away from the principles of the covenant, then the nation was in serious trouble. What the prophets emphasize is the values of the covenant: justice, loving-kindness, righteousness, mercy, truthfulness, and knowledge of God. A similar list of values is spelled out by the Pastor. “The Pastor” is the term that critical scholars apply to the author of First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus, which the church attributed to the Apostle Paul, but which critical scholars believe were actually written a generation or more after Paul. These letters describe well-defined church offices that are not spelled out in the undisputed Pauline letters, and have some concepts and vocabulary that differ from Paul’s usual repertoire.

It is interesting to look at the values the Pastor is promoting. He tells his readers to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness” (1 Tim 6:11).

What tempts people away from those values? It seems to be love of money, and various desires and luxuries toward which money tempts people. Notice that the Pastor does not say that money is the root of all evil, as the popular saying derived from this passage has it. Rather, the love of money is at the root of *much* evil, and it can lead people into other evils. It is the rich, especially, who are tempted in that direction, but also those who are *eager* to be rich. The poor who desire to be rich might be just as misled into evil as are the rich themselves. Instead, believers are to be content with their state, as long as they have food and clothing, and ought to strive for godliness, and fight the good fight of faith.

The letter pictures believers as facing real conflict and real temptations in their daily lives. It may be that there are more such temptations in the cities, but they also exist in the countryside. The Pastor is sure that strongly held beliefs can help the believer resist temptation, therefore he endeavors to bolster those beliefs. At the end of our reading, the Pastor mentions “you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (6:12). This may refer to a vow of faith that the believer made after his or her baptism. It is something worth remembering and clinging to, as one fights the good fight of faith.

The Pastor is concerned lest one start desiring to be rich, because thus one becomes “trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge into ruin and destruction” (6:9). It seems that unspiritual desire is the real problem, more than the riches themselves. For Amos, the problem seems to be the frivolity and hard-heartedness of the rich. They are indifferent to the ruin of Joseph, possibly referring to the devastations of war and heavy taxation. Heavy taxation was a serious burden upon the rural farmers, causing many of them to lose control over their farms.

Our authors are concerned about the moral disorder that comes with the grasping of wealth, Amos more with the arrogance and thoughtlessness of the wealthy, the Pastor more with the disordering of desire itself, leading to ruinous behaviors. It’s the disordered inner life that leads to disorderly external behavior. If you are dragged around by your desires, you are not really free; you are a slave of your shifting lusts and rages.

Especially can money and fame lead one into perilous paths. The actress Lindsay Lohan would be an example. She had a number of starring movie roles, but then began partying and drinking, and ended up losing at least four roles in movies in production, and failing to show for a TV show. She had two DUI arrests. Lindsay had to go through rehab many times, and seems to have gotten her life back on track, but at great cost to her health and career. Money didn’t cause her problems, but it enabled her to indulge many desires. This seems to illustrate the Pastor’s concerns not so much with money itself, but with the temptations to which it leads.

Let’s take a closer look at what the Pastor *does* recommend. He says “pursue righteousness,” which would be moral goodness, “godliness, faith,” those are religious values, “love” is the interpersonal value, “endurance [and] gentleness” are character traits. The believer should be devout toward God, good in his personal behavior, loving and gentle toward others, and have the quality of endurance in the face of adversity. There is vertical connection to the source of love, there is horizontal connection through love to other people, and there is internal integrity in one’s character, which makes endurance possible. And all of this is linked to taking firm hold upon eternal life, “to which you were called” (6:12).

Faith in eternal life, then, can replace the desire for money. And one must make this choice, either the immediate and material pleasures, or the eternal and spiritual goals. Everybody wants to make some kind of advance in life, and that’s legitimate, but the believer puts most value on the advance in the everlasting life that lies ahead, rather than lusting for power or money in this lifetime. The believer values qualities and ideals more than things.