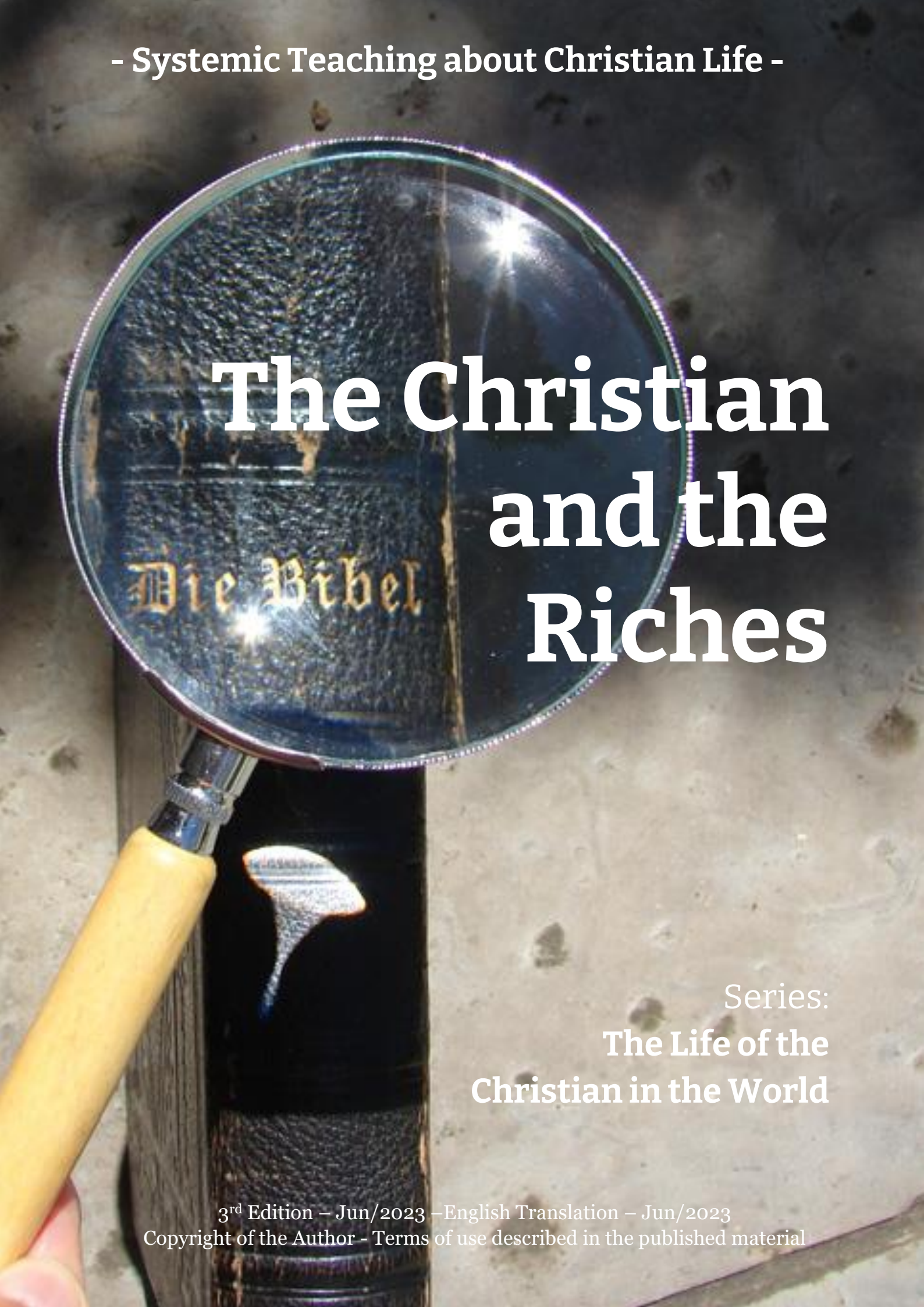


- Systemic Teaching about Christian Life -



The Christian and the Riches

Series:
The Life of the
Christian in the World

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General Considerations about Using This Material:

The subject presented in this material aims to provide support to knowledge and an in-depth study of the Bible and the Christian life.

Based on the understanding that in the Christian Bible is contained the consolidation of fundamental and formal records of the writings inspired by God for humanity and each person of it, the contents exposed in this material are not intended to add, ever, anything to the Bible, nor ever remove anything from it. The aim through this subject is to contribute to the exploration of what already was registered and passed on to us over thousands of years of history by the One Creator and Lord of Heaven and Earth.

The contents presented on the next pages, of course, intend to address just a portion of the essential themes of life displayed with such great amplitude in the Bible. On the other hand, however, this subject is presented in a grouped, colligated, organized and systematized manner with the objective to serve as an aid to knowledge and understanding of the Christian life without losing sight of the main aspects of it.

Ecclesiastes 12: 11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.

Related words put together, as told in the biblical text above, serve as goads and nails for fixing supports and help for the life of people that hear and receive them. Therefore, one objective of this material is to study and seek a broader understanding of the truths handed down to us by the Unique Pastor and God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

We would still like to suggest that the reading and studying of this material also should always be accompanied by prudence and proper investigation, believing that this is a very healthy habit to be practiced toward any material presented to a person.

The act of acceptance, rejection, or “retaining what is good,” is a personal and individual attribute given to those who receive the wisdom from God and which should be exercised or used by them toward all that comes into their hands.

Proverbs 8: 12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion.

Acts 17: 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Proverbs 16: 1 The preparations of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits.

3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

More details about these initial considerations are posted at www.zoominchristianlife.org.

Ronald Gortz and Irmelin Gortz, servants of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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*Revelation 21: 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."
6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.*

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*1Timothy 2: 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

More details about these initial considerations are posted at www.zoominchristianlife.org.

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C1. Starting Points on the Comprehensiveness of the Concept of Riches in the Scriptures

The present theme is part of the series on The Life of the Christian in the World and is preceded by several other materials that seek to address several areas that Christians face while living on Earth, including the practical relationship with Christ and through Him with the Heavenly Father, the Holy Spirit, other Christians, people in general in the world, the Lord's mercy, God's gifts, and with works, labors, and services in general.

Thus, continuing the various themes of the series in reference, we understand that the subject of riches also refers to a very relevant aspect that needs to be widely addressed, for people are exposed to it daily, as well as they also have a high attraction for what is involved in it.

Nevertheless, even before we start to address some topics of some specific riches or material riches, which may be an expectation of some readers, we would like to take a step back to review the very concept of what riches may come to be, as well as some fundamental aspects of their scope and the attribution of value to them.

A more in-depth reflection on some initial or even fundamental aspects related to the breadth of what may be covered by the theme of riches, and some points that surround them, can be of great value and, at the same time, essential for many people.

Many or repeated times, the Scriptures or the texts of the Bible mention that God loves people and wants to manifest His good and precious will toward them. And the granting of wealth to those who fear God also encompasses one of the practical ways in which this love is manifested.

*Luke 2: 14 **Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!***

*Proverbs 22: 4 **By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honor and life.***

On the other hand, what comes to be or which are the riches that God promises to those who seek humility and the fear of the Lord? And can there be distinct types of riches and treasures that people may access?

If we look at the words that the Lord Jesus Christ taught while He was in the flesh in the world, we can see that there can indeed be very different types of riches and treasures that may come to be desired by human beings, as exemplified below:

*Matthew 6: 19 **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;**
20 **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**
21 **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

Furthermore, the fact that God wants human beings well also implies that He offers them instruction and correction about what is appropriate and what is inappropriate for their lives. In this way, also on the subject of riches, the Lord Himself wants to teach us about:

- ⇒ 1) The types of riches that are available to people in the world;
- ⇒ 2) The central or main riches that make it possible for an individual to achieve goods that are also lasting;
- ⇒ 3) Secondary or temporary riches;
- ⇒ 4) The relationship with each of the types of riches.

And yet regarding secondary or transient riches, the Lord teaches and warns us that if this type of riches is not appropriately seen, the relationship with them may cause severe consequences for those who use inappropriate ways to obtain them, even with eternal effects.

In everything, and also regarding riches, the Lord is willing to act toward those He loves and who fear Him to lead them to what is good because He considers them as children, working in some situations even with warnings and corrections so that these children do not come to consume their lives in the pursuit of what is vain and devoid of deeper, lasting, or eternal benefit.

*Proverbs 3: 12 **For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.***

*Proverbs 23: 4 **Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease!***

*5 **Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven.***

Therefore, **regarding the relationship with riches, God's instruction to those who fear and love Him is that they do not place material wealth as a primary focus or objective of their lives, but that they may put love and faithfulness to the Lord as their first purpose in life.**

Thus, **the riches that are for the benefit of people are those that are according to the fair measure that the Lord wants to bestow upon them, and not those that people aim to achieve by their own diligence, dedication, and efforts focused specifically on obtaining material wealth.**

*Proverbs 28: 20 **A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.***

Proverbs 11: 28 **He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage.**

Psalms 62: 10 **Do not trust in oppression, Nor vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.**

Proverbs 10: 22 **The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, And He adds no sorrow with it.**

In the theme we call Colligated or Associated Words and Riddles of Antiquity, we approach the importance of the Christian knowing how to understand the biblical verses firstly according to what the Scriptures themselves define about them.

In this way, when God promises in His word that one of the parts of the reward of the humble man who has the fear of the Lord “are riches,” at no time will the Lord contradict Himself with the other texts of the Scriptures. And many problems occur when people read passages of the Scriptures and define them only based on cultures, traditions, linguistic dictionaries, their own knowledge, or the knowledge in general expressed by others in society.

The definitions of riches in the Scriptures are reported in many parts of the Scriptures themselves. For this reason, for a Christian, the central reference of concepts about riches should be the word of the Lord and not what human beings, dissociated from fellowship with God, propagate as being “riches.”

As an example, we present below a text that directly mentions the expression riches, but that for many people, who do not practically fear God in their daily lives, does not effectively represent what the concept of riches is for them:

Psalms 69: 13 **But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.**

14 Deliver me out of the mire, And let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, And out of the deep waters.

15 Let not the floodwater overflow me, Nor let the deep swallow me up; And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.

16 Hear me, O LORD, for Your lovingkindness is good; Turn to me according to the multitude (or riches or abundance) of Your tender mercies.

Additionally, we emphasize that although the mention of *riches* is several times made by its own term, they also appear in the Scriptures related to the words *treasures, wealth, fortune, abundance, plenty, goods, properties, money, gold, silver, precious stones*, and other terms that signal an idea related to them, significantly increasing the scope of this theme.

And once we pay attention to the different terms that are mentioned in the Scriptures, we can see that the theme of riches can also be identified by the comparative aspects of several items that are made concerning the different terms mentioned above, such as in the two texts below:

*Psalms 19: 9 **The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.***
 10 **More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.**
 11 **Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.**

*Proverbs 2: 1 **My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you,***
 2 ***So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding;***
 3 ***Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding,***
 4 ***If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;***
 5 ***Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God.***
 6 **For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;**
 7 **He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;**
 8 **He guards the paths of justice, And preserves the way of His saints.**

In these last texts, we can observe that the authors register different types of wealth, such as gold, silver, hidden treasures, and even honey with its sweetness. However, we are also told that **there are riches that God offers to people all over the world that surpass anything of value on Earth, for these are not found and obtained from the earthly spheres.**

Time after time, the Scriptures show that there are riches that transcend the items most valued by those human beings whose mind is primarily focused on natural things. The Scriptures repeatedly teach explicitly that there are riches whose source is in regions higher than the tangible world and palpable to people's mere natural senses, as we also approached in the theme Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift, and whose main text we recall again below:

*James 1: 17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.***

Advancing yet in the differentiation of types of riches, we can also look at the beautiful words in which Job and James describe the high and sublime value of wisdom

and understanding that surpasses mere natural knowledge, which, in turn, are granted exclusively by God, as follows:

*Job 28: 12 **But where can wisdom be found?
And where is the place of understanding?***

*13 **Man does not know its value, Nor is it found in the land of the living.***

14 The deep says, 'It is not in me'; And the sea says, 'It is not with me.'

15 It cannot be purchased for gold, Nor can silver be weighed for its price.

*16 **It cannot be valued in the** gold of Ophir, In precious onyx or sapphire.*

*17 **Neither gold nor crystal can equal it,** Nor can it be exchanged for jewelry of fine gold.*

18 No mention shall be made of coral or quartz, For the price of wisdom is above rubies.

19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, Nor can it be valued in pure gold.

*20 **From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?***

*21 **It is hidden from the eyes of all living, And concealed from the birds of the air.***

22 Destruction and Death say, 'We have heard a report about it with our ears.'

*23 **God understands its way, And He knows its place.***

24 For He looks to the ends of the earth, And sees under the whole heavens,

25 To establish a weight for the wind, And apportion the waters by measure.

26 When He made a law for the rain, And a path for the thunderbolt,

*27 **Then He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out.***

*28 **And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.'***

James 3: 13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

*17 **But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.***

When seen under the theme of riches, the wisdom and understanding granted by the heavenly kingdom are of inestimable value in the eyes of God, to the point that the Lord hides them in Himself and only allows them to be found by those who fear Him and who, with the Lord's help or strength, turn away from evil.

In the so-called New Testament, in the book of Colossians, we find an even more objective description of the sublime and exalted condition that wisdom, knowledge, and the place in which these aspects are found present when viewed under the theme of riches, as follows:

Colossians 2: 1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,
2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,
3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

Wisdom and understanding found in the Lord or coming from God are not comparable even with the most valuable things on Earth or in people's natural optics.

Earthly or natural riches, for example, will never be enough to enable a person to access the essential truth for eternal life, as it is in God and can only be satisfactorily reached through the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 17: 3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

1 Timothy 2: 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Therefore, what material or earthly wealth could be compared with the wealth of having access to God, the Heavenly Father who created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them, and who is an inexhaustible source of good gifts and perfect gifts?

Thus, in the eyes of God, it is incomparably richer for a person to have a strong understanding of who Christ is than to have an enormous abundance of riches that are in the world, for Christ is not only the perfect provision for justification, redemption, and salvation for the present life, but He is also the necessary and full provision for everlasting life.

1 Corinthians 1: 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,
31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

In one of the texts of Proverbs quoted earlier in this chapter, we saw that the Lord instructs His children to seek wisdom and understanding that comes from above like

one who is seeking hidden treasures, for from heavenly wisdom and understanding, and not from material treasures, is that a person finds the path to lasting success according to God's will for one's life.

Now, in Colossians, we find the map of the place where wisdom and understanding are kept. This place is not a material land of great value, a physical land exceptionally well located according to real estate values, a lost treasure island, some particular mountain, a cave, a religion, or a community, but it refers to a person, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Colossians 3: 1* ***If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.***
2 ***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***
3 ***For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***
4 ***When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.***

1 Corinthians 1: 9 ***God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

Access to superior and lasting treasures or riches, as well as those that are needed in everyday life in the world, comes to those who fear the Lord through their personal relationship with the person of the Son of God, the Lord, the High Priest and King Jesus Christ, the King of Righteousness and Peace according to the Order of Melchizedek. (Aspects widely discussed in the themes The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ; The Letter or Life; Knowing about God or Knowing God; The Core Principle of Life for A Christian; The Law of Understanding).

So, if wisdom and understanding already surpass all the goods and riches of the Earth or the present world, how much more valuable, then, is not He who holds all the treasures of wisdom and understanding and is able to provide all riches necessary for both a person's spiritual and material life?

- Romans 11: 33* ***Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!***
34 ***For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?***
35 ***Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?***
36 ***For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.***

And finally, in this chapter, we believe it is crucial to highlight once again that for people's lives, there are riches that are true and permanent, transient riches that are important at a given moment, but that, in the present world, there is also a great variety of riches or relationships with them that can represent deceitful and false paths.

We believe it is important to highlight from the beginning of this theme that, on the one hand, there are many riches that God wants to share with people or grant access to them, but also that, on the other hand, there are many riches with which people may surround them which are not assigned by the Lord to them.

Thus, one of the first points that people should pay attention to regarding the theme of wealth is the need to discern continually the origin of each type of riches offered to them.

*Proverbs 10: 2 **Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, But righteousness delivers from death.***

Given this, **a Christian should be aware of the need to discern and separate the types of riches that are offered by God, but also the types that are offered by sources contrary to God's will. And this, so that, with freedom and sobriety in Christ, one may choose only those riches that have a value approved before God, which are also beneficial to the life of this Christian.**

In this way, before moving on to other aspects of the theme of the Christian and the Riches, we would like to mention that in all the material that follows, we will seek to continually or above all highlight that **the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest riches offered by God to all human beings and is God's greatest wealth granted to a Christian, for whoever receives Christ has God's promise to receive everything one needs for one's life on Earth, but also, and mainly, for life to come.**

*John 3: 16 **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."***

*John 17: 3 **"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."***

*Romans 8: 32 **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?***

It is based on the condition that the Lord Jesus Christ, before or above all, is the great treasure offered by God to all humanity that we will seek to present, in the following chapters, different aspects that aim to expose several fundamental parameters found in the Scriptures to increase the task of evaluating or discerning various types of riches, their origins, their purposes, and several very relevant points for the relationship with them.

C2. Assigning Value to Riches

Several studies and articles that deal with the prosperity of Christians assume that all their readers, listeners, or spectators have the same concept of what prosperity or riches are. This, however, is very far from the truth, as the idea of prosperity and wealth may vary significantly from one person to another, from one family to another, from one region to another, and from one nation to another.

For a person who lives in a country with material abundance, the criteria that define prosperity can be significantly different from someone who lives in a country where people are under continuous pressure to obtain the most elementary or essential items for survival on each new day.

Prosperity and riches may also receive different concepts that vary depending on a specific person's life condition and age.

For example, health for a seriously ill individual may become a much greater wealth for him or her than for those who generally enjoy a physical condition without illness and disease.

The value that a child attributes to riches may also be very different from the value attributed to riches by an adult person or even by a person of very advanced age.

Therefore, we emphasize here that, in many situations, it is not the riches themselves that undergo changes in their essence from one place to another, but it may be the “value” that people attribute to riches that may undergo significant variation.

For instance, water, for those who have it in abundance, is as important and necessary as for those who have it in short supply. Both need water to live daily. However, what may vary is “the value” that each person, under different conditions, attributes to it.

Thus, it is highly relevant to know that the value that is given or attributed to each element of riches is something very different from the riches themselves.

In addition, **“the criteria for attributing values to riches” that a given person uses in some moments of one's life may become more crucial for this individual than even some riches, for the success or error in the “judgment of value” of some riches may even play a decisive role in the eternal salvation or perdition of an individual.**

Several riches with which people come across may even present an immutable condition regarding their essence. However, the “value attributed” to them is what defines an accentuated part of each person's relationship with the most diverse types of riches.

God, His virtues, and His gifts, for example, do not undergo any change in value, in the sense of God being the greatest wealth in everything that exists in the entire universe. However, even though the Lord is infinitely or immeasurably valuable and essential for each individual, there are people who do not relate to Him because they do not “attribute to Him the value that is due to Him.” And some even insist on denying the very existence of the God by whom they were created.

Given this, if people use non-equivalent criteria to attribute value to riches, their comparisons of what they consider to be riches will also show divergence already from their most fundamental aspects.

So, for a Christian, it is vital to choose which are the criteria by which one will assign value to the most varied aspects of one's life and what is around him or her, just as one is called by God to carry out all evaluations according to the criteria of the heavenly kingdom and not according to the mere mind of the creation or even the powers of darkness.

When we are faced with the aspect that the “judgment of value” or the “attribution of value” carried out by a person may directly affect one's relationship with all other riches, we are also faced with the fact that, to evaluate or attribute value to riches, it is necessary to establish which will be the instruments, methods, and parameters that this person will use as a reference base to do so, as well as what will be the skills that one will need to know to deal with each of these items pertinent to the “attribution of value to riches.”

Yet another way of seeing the matter of the reference points of attributing value to riches can be found in the considerations about the use of the example of the measuring scales described in the Scriptures and in which we can see that the scales can be equated with the instruments or the tools for the actions mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

“Weighing on the scale” or “putting on the scale” are expressions that exemplify a way of judging, among others, the weight, integrity, and value of some item of riches.

Nevertheless, for the use of a scale to have more real significance, there is also the need to define how to carry out the processes of weighing on it, as well as in relation to which reference items the other wealth items will be compared. That is, the criteria for comparing the weights on a scale may also be called methods of weighing what is measured on it.

For example, when a person weighs 1 pound of gold against a reference weight of simpler material that is also 1 pound, one is not saying that the portion of gold that weighs precisely 1 pound has the same value as the ordinary material placed in the scale to determine the amount of gold. Weighing gold needs to be supplemented later with some method of assigning a price to gold, whether by grams, kilograms, pounds, or some other measure.

And as a third aspect, weight measurements and values used for comparison with other items can also represent what we call parameters used to attribute value to the weighed items, where it is expected that items used as a reference for measurements and weights are reliable, precise, or trustworthy regarding what is declared about them.

Thus, and continuing with the example of the scale, when a person claims that something is of great value, it is also necessary to know on what type of scale, method, and parameter one is basing one's assertion of attributing a degree of value to what one considers a wealth.

If, for instance, a particular person's criteria of measurement measure only earthly things in comparison with other equally earthly things, one's criteria will not be appropriate for diagnosing the value of spiritual riches coming from the kingdom of God, for they will not recognize them as riches

of values superior to earthly things or even as aspects of incomparable value when compared with only natural elements.

Several people, for example, say that “time is money,” thus demonstrating their criteria for measuring life. And, in turn, their scales or their measurement and attribution of values criteria will only measure time compared to monetary gain or loss.

Therefore, the scale that tries to measure time, and everything else, in terms of financial gain is very limited and poor. On the other hand, in the eyes of God or the scale of attributing values according to the kingdom of God, “time is life,” and life granted by the Heavenly Father to be lived always permeated by honor and reverence to the Eternal Lord and His will, even if in various circumstances the adoption of these postures may even incur financial losses.

So, those who adopt inappropriate criteria for attributing values to riches also put themselves at risk of not seeing how relevant time really is, that is, how much life is actually worth. They may become subject to not seeing the real value of a personal and continuous relationship with God, their families, and their fellow men, for their scales do not support these measurements. Or still, when they practice these relationships, they always do so aiming at financial gain.

The weights of those whose scales are based on the parameter that “time is money” will always lean towards the opportunities that most promise to bring in money, leaving aside all the fundamental riches that their scales cannot measure. One's methods and parameters will be based on concepts and literature aimed at leveraging time to earn money, and not to redeem (rescue by remission) the time of one's life to live it under the values of God's will for one's life.

And as time goes by, those who subject their lives to the scale, methods, and parameters that consider that “time essentially equals money” end up also trying to transform their marriage, their family, and their businesses into means of increasing the number of units called “money,” as this is all that their scale can see and weigh.

Nevertheless, worldwide, there are still many other types of scales, methods, and parameters for assigning values.

As a second example, we can see, then, that the search focused on the feeling of happiness and well-being above any price is another set of elements for attributing values that disregards several essential items for a life on Earth that also is looking for eternal life in the Lord.

And as a person surrenders to judging the value of life based on the scale in which everything has to revolve around a constant feeling of happiness, one may incur the condition of simply no longer being able to see the significance and essential values that there are in some moments of quietness, peace, and even sadness that lead to reordering life for what is indeed meaningful in the perspective of the kingdom of God.

Basing life on “feelings of happiness,” and not on the truths of God that can even lead a person to sadness and repentance, is to use a scale, methods, and parameters that are very fragile, subjective, and subject to evaluations that may have a high degree of distortion or corruption.

Let us see below some texts related to the points mentioned in these last paragraphs:

2 Corinthians 7: 10 **For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.**

James 4: 8 **Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

9 **Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.**

10 **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**

Ecclesiastes 3: 4 **(There is) A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;**

Jeremiah 17: 9 **"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"**

...
7 **Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD."**

Thus, those who adopt strictly earthly scales to assign value to what is most important or meaningful to them, even some who call themselves Christians, may even become marked enemies of the work of Christ and the Christian faith, as Paul clearly teaches us in the following text:

Philippians 3: 17 **Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.**

18 **For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:**

19 **whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things.**

20 **For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,**

21 **who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.**

The expression "to set the mind on earthly things" is also translated into some languages as "to think mainly in earthly things" or "to be focused primarily on earthly things."

The expression "only to think about earthly things," written by Paul, expresses the position of a person having a scale, methods, and parameters as a pattern for evaluating life essentially based on the earthly mentality to

weigh riches and assign values to them, and not a mindset renewed by the sobriety that comes from the kingdom of God.

For instance, a person's ego and earthly ambitions can become extremely dangerous and misleading scales for judging the value of riches. They may become the means by which people may allow themselves to be led to highly destructive consequences, as follows:

2 Timothy 3: 1 **But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:**
2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,
4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

A person who is self-centered and focused overwhelmingly on earthly things also easily despises God's judgment about the appropriate value of all things.

Therefore, **the scales, methods, and parameters with which riches are weighed or measured are some of the first aspects that should be defined in the life of a Christian even before one inclines one's heart to some specific wealth, just as the referential classification point of works, labors, and services precedes the qualification of each of these aspects.** (A subject addressed in the theme of Works, Labors, and Services).

In this way, before answering the question of what riches are, would it not be reasonable then to answer this other question in advance, namely: What is the basis on which a Christian should weigh riches before attributing value to them?

We understand that it is worth emphasizing here that the Christian “is in the world but he or she is not of this world” (according to John 17). Therefore, one's scales, methods, and parameters for measuring the value of riches should also not be primarily of this world either.

We have seen previously that **the appropriate wisdom and understanding for the life of the Christian are in Christ and come from the kingdom of God, a point that shows us that these aspects are also the ones that should guide a Christian's attributions or judgment of values regarding riches, and not just the mere natural wisdom found in the world.**

1 Corinthians 2: 12 **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**
13 **These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.**

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Observing the text above, we can see that **the knowledge of the differentiation between heavenly riches and the riches of this world is a crucial instrument for making appropriate decisions or according to the will of God.** (Text discussed more widely also in the theme The Law of Understanding.)

Advancing to yet another example, we can note that the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that the kingdom of heaven operates similarly to a person who trades and seeks fine pearls, as follows:

Matthew 13: 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

On the other hand, or initially concerning this third example, we would like to point out that the kingdom of heaven is not literally like a person on Earth who trades and seeks pearls. The kingdom of God does not specifically deal with the seeking and trading of material pearls and precious stones. There are similar concepts and similar conduct among the man who trades and searches for pearls, but the goals, riches, and values of the kingdom of heaven are not the same as of the person who searches for earthly pearls, as we are also informed in the book of Job and as we may see in the following verse:

Job 28: 18 No mention shall be made of coral or quartz, For the price of wisdom is above rubies (or pearls).

Thus, among the various aspects that we can learn from the example of the similarity between the kingdom of God and the man who sought pearls, there is an aspect referring to the ability of evaluation that the one who sought pearls had. He knew how to discern the value of pearls, to the point of discovering that a rare pearl was more valuable than all the other things he owned.

In this way, **if a person intends to grow in the understanding of the kingdom of heaven, one needs to learn "in Christ" to evaluate different measures of preciousness, as well as to evaluate what has eternal value, what has temporary value, what has no value at all for one's life or even what has apparent, false, and misleading value.**

Returning once more to the example of the scale, which also needs methods and parameters of measurement, we may observe in still other parts of the Scriptures that for God, as well as for the man who sought pearls, also the method and comparative measure of the judgment of values are crucial. The man with the pearls exchanged one type of riches for another because he was duly qualified to know how to weigh different types of riches comparatively.

Moreover, for God, because He is founded on righteousness and truth, it is also fundamental that the methods and comparative measures are carried out according to the truth and heavenly righteousness so that a person does not find oneself in a condition of confrontation with the Lord or in opposition to Him, an aspect also shown in the following texts:

*Proverbs 11: 1 **Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight.***

*Proverbs 20: 23 **Diverse weights are an abomination to the LORD, And dishonest scales are not good.***

Therefore, **adequate recognition of riches, the sober comparison between them, and, finally, the proper attribution of value to them are necessary aspects for every individual who wants to understand and relate appropriately with the kingdom of heaven. Remembering here, then, that an adequate attribution of value depends on reliable instruments, methods, and parameters.**

Because they yearn to hear what pleases their ears, and not what is indeed valuable before the Lord, many people seek in their fellow men or themselves the justification of the value of what they cherish so much. However, a person may even surround oneself with people who say that what one values so much is in fact valuable, but if some aspect is not valuable before God, it will not actually become valuable no matter how much people praise this aspect.

*2 Timothy 4: 3 **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;***
*4 **and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.***
*5(a) **But you be watchful in all things, ...***

*Luke 16: 15 **And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."***

A “misleading or dishonest scale” is one that will also display misleading, dishonest, or unrealistic results. And those who think that they can obtain lasting profits with the use of “deceptive scales” or that they can get some benefits with them without having to give up other much more precious and higher values delude themselves.

For example: Bribery. It may even seem attractive at first to a person and may even seem a faster way to obtain a specific profit. However, if someone engages in bribery, one of the worst consequences it produces is the corruption of the scale or balance of judgment and attribution of values of the one who should make the decisions of one's life with sobriety and righteousness.

So, returning to the formulation of a question: What is worth more, the maintenance of sobriety in a heart, enabling decisions and evaluations based on heavenly wisdom, or the prize of bribes at the cost of the loss of sobriety and at the expense of corrupting the hearts of those who practice it?

Exodus 23: 8 **And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.**

Ecclesiastes 7: 7 **Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, And a bribe debases the heart.**

Bribery “unsettles or destabilizes” the heart in relation to a satisfactory, righteous, and impartial weighing, and it makes the person who adheres to it subject to obscurity regarding what a proper attribution of value to the different types of riches with which one comes across is. Bribery causes a person to fail to make value judgments in “sound conscience or judgment.”

On the other hand, **the weighing according to God and the values and parameters of the kingdom of heaven are unalterable, incorruptible, and guard the hearts of those who value them above merely human values.**

Deuteronomy 10: 17 **For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.**

18 **He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.**

Proverbs 4: 11 **I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths.**

12 **When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble.**

13 **Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life.**

14 **Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil.**

15 **Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on.**

- 16 *For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.*
- 17 *For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.*
- 18 *But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.*
- 19 *The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.*
- 20 *My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.*
- 21 *Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;*
- 22 *For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.*
- 23 *Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*
- 24 *Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you.*
- 25 *Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you.*
- 26 *Ponder (weight, put on the scale, evaluate) the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established.*
-

Thus, a generation that does not measure and attribute adequate values to riches lacks appropriate decision-making parameters. And both the ignorance and the wisdom of a people do not necessarily reside in the abundance or lack of goods or information that they possess, but in the ability to properly discern what is or is not of real value for present and eternal life.

For this reason, too, **in the kingdom of heaven, the riches, the ways and parameters of judging them, and the value attributed to them are very well defined. And through the Lord's Scriptures and fellowship with Christ, a person can know both the Lord's instructions on methods for measuring riches and the value or weight that the kingdom of God assigns to each wealth.**

The world in general or people who are not grounded on the kingdom of God have their value attribution systems corrupted already at their foundations. And because of this, Christians are repeatedly called by the Lord to return and maintain themselves in the sobriety offered to them in Christ Jesus by the Spirit of the Lord.

- 1 Corinthians 15: 32 ***If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"***
- 33 ***Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."***
- 34 ***Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.***
-

Finally, looking more specifically at earthly riches, we can see that the Scriptures recognize that although these types of riches are transient and undergo continuous

changes in values in the world, there are many good and helpful things on Earth, but as long as they are applied at the appropriate time, manner, and purpose.

- Ecclesiastes 3: 1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:*
- 2 A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;*
 - 3 A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;*
 - 4 A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;*
 - 5 A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;*
 - 6 A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;*
 - 7 A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;*
 - 8 A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.*

1 Corinthians 7: 31 ... and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

Therefore, **some earthly riches start to have an expressive and higher value if they contribute to a good purpose established by the Lord, but they should also have their value reclassified or even be set aside when they start to be used in opposition to the will of God.**

Eating well, drinking, and having suitable natural clothing, in principle, are basic necessities of life on Earth and are registered among the gifts that God bestows on people. However, proposing that this is the highest purpose of life or trying to reduce the value of life to obtaining these aspects is a widely mistaken attribution of value and seeks to corrupt what is good and of higher value in the face of the values of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet regarding the example of the previous paragraph, having the riches called “food, drink, and clothing” as a priority purpose of life is a mistaken attribution of value, is an erroneous weighing of what has greater or lesser weight in human existence, starting with the very value that each life has before God, as the Lord Jesus Christ also taught us in the following text:

- Luke 12: 22 Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.*
- 23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.*
 - 24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?*
 - 25 And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*

- 26 **If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?**
- 27 **Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.**
- 28 **If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?**
- 29 **And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.**
- 30 **For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.**
- 31 **But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."**
-

For this reason, once again, we see that the Scriptures show that the parameters of human beings are not sufficient for the appropriate judgments of value and that it is continually necessary for each individual to resort to the Lord's help so as not to incur thinking, by oneself, that one is wealthy when, in reality, one is in a deplorable and miserable condition in the eyes of the Lord, as also the following texts warn us:

- Proverbs 3: 5* **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;**
- 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.**
- 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.**
- 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.**

- Revelation 3: 17* **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and does not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked:**
- 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.**
- 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.**
- 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**
- 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."**

- Romans 2: 4* **Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?**
-

So, also in the “attribution of values to the most diverse riches,” it is necessary for the Christian to be aware that one is called by the Lord to a transformation of life through the renewing of one's mind or understanding so that one may come to discern and experience abundantly what is appropriate to him or her according to the eternal will of God.

*Romans 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God (or the rich mercy of God), that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

*Ephesians 2: 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,
5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

C3. Ways or Manners of Attributing Value to Riches

A. Choosing Riches by Weighing them in Comparison with Other Riches

In the previous chapter, we approached the need to recognize that riches and the values that may be attributed to them are widely different aspects. For this very reason, **knowing the diversity or the main ways mentioned in the Scriptures regarding the attribution of value to riches is also highly relevant.**

Thus, and without the goal of defining some ways of attributing value mentioned in the Scriptures as more important or necessary than others, we would like to begin with the practice of attributing value associated with the concept of “comparing” riches or different types of riches with other kinds of wealth.

If we recall some texts of the Scriptures quoted in the previous chapters, we can see that in several examples, various riches have a part of their value “expressed, weighed, or evaluated” not by their own value, but by the value they have regarding other riches.

And one of the examples we mentioned earlier was the comparison of wisdom and understanding from God with a variety of earthly items considered of high value among human beings, according to the narratives cited basically in some texts of Proverbs and the book of Job.

In the previous chapter, we also addressed the point that “life is more than food” and the “body more than garments,” which, again and essentially, is a gradation of the value of riches performed directly by criteria of comparison.

Comparing different items of riches is a practice widely used in the Word of God. And for this reason, we quote below one more reference of the comparison mentioned in the previous paragraph, but also increased by a list of several other new examples that include expressions of comparison such as *more than*, *it is better than* or *it is preferable to*, as follows:

*Matthew 6: 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. **Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"***

*Matthew 6: 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. **Are you not of more value than they?"***

*Matthew 10: 31 "Do not fear therefore; **you are of more value than many sparrows.**"*

*Matthew 12: 12 "**Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**"*

Psalms 19: 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
*10 **More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.***
*11 Moreover **by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.***

*Proverbs 28: 6 **Better is** the poor who walks in his integrity **Than** one perverse in his ways, though he be rich.*

Proverbs 3: 13 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding;
*14 For her proceeds **are better than** the profits of silver, And her gain **than** fine gold.*
*15 She is **more precious than** rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.*

*Proverbs 15: 16 **Better is** a little with the fear of the LORD, **Than** great treasure with trouble.*

*Proverbs 16: 8 **Better is** a little with righteousness, **Than** vast revenues without justice.*

*Proverbs 19: 1 **Better is** the poor who walks in his integrity **Than** one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.*

*Proverbs 16: 16 **How much better** to get wisdom **than** gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen **rather than** silver.*

*Proverbs 19: 22 What is desired in a man is kindness, And a poor man **is better than** a liar.*

*Proverbs 16: 19 **Better to be** of a humble spirit with the lowly, **Than** to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Yet another comparative aspect that we also find in the Scriptures is the mention of several descriptions or situations that present us with the comparison not only of some specific riches with others, but also the comparison of the sum of riches that there is in a specific side that is being approached with the sum of the riches on the other side being used in the comparison, as exemplified below:

Psalms 37: 16 **A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches (or abundance) of many wicked.**

Proverbs 22: 1 **A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.**

In Psalm 37, exposed above, we can observe that, before God, the sum of the riches of “many wicked” is less than the sum of “the whole of a righteous one, even if it is little.” And yet, according to Proverbs 22, we are informed that many riches are of lesser value and do not equal the value of a good name.

Let us see below yet another Psalm which is even more expressive in comparing the gifts of God to the sum of the riches that there are in the world:

Psalms 119: 14 **I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies more than in all riches.**
(Translated from Spanish, German, or Portuguese versions)

Furthermore, **if we look a little more closely at the expression “more than,” for instance, we can see, particularly concerning this evaluation criterion, that it is more challenging to put this criterion into practice than merely to define or establish whether a specific wealth is acceptable or should be discarded.**

For example, in the texts mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we saw that we are of greater value before God than sparrows and sheep, but this does not mean that sparrows or sheep are of no value before God. On the contrary, the Lord also gives them the breath of life and watches over each one of them daily.

Thus, to carry out the comparison of riches, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of the value of the items being compared, but it is also essential to know what type of comparison is being made.

Depending on the type of comparison that needs to be made between two riches or the sum of them, this comparison will inevitably lead to the choice of one and the rejection of the other. However, there are also comparisons that serve to establish which riches are more essential or which cannot be left aside because of others. There are comparisons that establish graduation between riches that are more central and those that are secondary but not always representing disposable riches.

In several circumstances of life, there is not always the need to make a comparison and choose between one or another wealth, but it is important to know the comparative value of graduation of the riches that are under analysis because situations may arise, even sudden ones, where an eminent choice may be necessary for more specific decision-making on how to use each one or even choose one and leave the other aside.

In one of the texts of Proverbs quoted above, we saw, for example, that “a good name is worth more than many riches.” However, in this text, it is not being taught that a person cannot have a good name and also have riches, but that if one has to choose between a “good name” and other secondary riches, the “good name” is of more excellent value and should prevail even if it is necessary to give up access to secondary wealth. Or yet, if it happens to a person being faced with options for riches that compromise one's “good name,” it is better to give up riches to preserve the “good name” than to cling to secondary riches.

Therefore, in several circumstances, the fact that there are several types of riches may lead a person to the need to adopt an appropriate measure regarding each one of them without necessarily having to choose one or the other. In this case, placing each one in its rightful place so that the secondary riches do not overlap with the primary ones is one of the main aspects that may generate such a great challenge for an appropriate relationship with the riches.

Human life is continually surrounded by the need for decisions regarding riches. And for this reason, it becomes so important that a person knows how to make the due evaluations, comparisons, and choices also in the diversity that can exist in these practices.

That is, before an individual makes the choice for an option that is presented to him or her, one should check whether one is sufficiently supported to evaluate and judge the value of this option in comparison to others that are available to him.

For this reason, a Christian should not wait for extreme situations to occur to just then learn to compare riches and assign proper values to them, especially in relation to heavenly and eternal ones.

And here again, before moving further into the criteria for attributing values to riches, we understand that it is worth emphasizing that human beings, by themselves, are not capable of making the judgment of comparing values for all situations related to their lives.

To assess which riches are or are not appropriate for one's life or to what extent they are adequate, every human being needs God's instruction and direction. One needs to lean on God so that the Lord helps one to weigh the benefits and harms of involvement with the most diverse riches, and mainly to check whether there is or not in one's heart an inclination towards a wrong path that may also lead to an inappropriate value judgment of riches.

Ultimately, the perfect and fully appropriate scale of comparison between the diverse riches or sum of riches that surround each individual is the Lord. Fellowship with God and the way to obtain the instructions that come from the heavenly kingdom are the first and main parameters for

comparing or grading in good measure what is appropriate or inappropriate for the one who trusts in the Lord.

Proverbs 16: 2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits.

John 3: 27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."

Many people, many times, end up getting entangled due to their choices for inappropriate riches, or at inappropriate times, because they are not aware that God is willing to help them in each of their decisions. And the Lord also does this through the instruction of comparison so that they may freely choose what is beneficial to them and to be able to reject what does not suit them at all or what does not suit them to the detriment of riches of more excellent value.

The value that each wealth or riches has in the eyes of God should also be the reference of the value in the eyes of each person, and even more undoubtedly of those who call themselves Christians, for the Lord is the one who knows the real value of each wealth, as well as He also knows the value that each individual attaches in the depths of one's heart to the most diverse riches.

Proverbs 5: 21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He ponders all his paths.

Jeremiah 17: 9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."

Hebrews 4: 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Psalms 139: 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

Only the one God, Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, and all that is in them, has adequate knowledge of the values of all that exist, but He also

knows the individual esteem that each human being bestows on each of the riches. Moreover, also only God can reveal this knowledge to human beings so that they may attribute the value due to each one of the riches first in their hearts and so that they know how to compare them with heavenly understanding in the most diverse moments and situations of their lives.

The comparisons that God makes and teaches us are righteous in everything. And what the Lord says is better than or worth more than other things, He says it because it indeed is so.

Therefore, the adequate discernment of values of riches that the Lord grants to those who seek His advice is also an expression of His grace. And it is only by God's grace that a Christian can distinguish what is best for one's life in its most diverse moments and circumstances.

Returning to the example of the “good name” or remaining in the condition of “righteous” through justification by faith in Christ and His work on the cross of Calvary, we emphasize here that in the world, there are options for some riches or the way to obtain them that mean a choice for the path of these riches instead of the path of sustaining the good name and the condition of being righteous before God.

Thus, because these choices represent associations to paths that can last for a lifetime or even eternity, the Lord also longs so much for us to know His instruction on the most diverse options for relating to riches.

Opting, for instance, for the path that leads to a humble spirit represents choosing the path that also abstains from sharing in the spoils or the riches of the proud. And the proud, in various situations, may even have more material spoils and riches than many humble ones, but their material riches have no value before God because the proud themselves are not accepted before the Lord. On the other hand, the path of humility under the Lord's dependence is always rewarded by God's grace and goodness, even when the material riches of a particular righteous person are of a small amount.

*Proverbs 16: 19 **Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.***

*James 4: 6 **But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."***

So, what is worth more: choosing the path of living with the proud, their riches, and not counting on God's favor to follow the way of the Lord's will and eternal life or choosing the path of humility instructed and guided by the Spirit of Grace, Truth, and Eternal Life?

Let us see below how the Lord evaluates the humble or poor in spirit:

*Matthew 5: 3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

*Luke 6: 20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:
"Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God."*

Compared with the spoils of the proud, what is the value of the Lord and the kingdom of God to dwell with the one who is humble of heart and walks in the fear of the Lord so that God in everything may give this individual a revived spirit to do the works that benefit this person for the present life and primarily for eternal life in the Lord?

Let us see below some more of the Lord's answers to these types of questions:

Isaiah 57: 15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

*Proverbs 1: 10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.
11 If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;
12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;
13 We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil;
14 Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse;"
15 My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path;
16 For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood.
17 Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird;
18 But they lie in wait for their own blood, They lurk secretly for their own lives.
19 So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.*

Additionally, yet regarding the comparison between different riches, there are descriptions in the Bible that even narrate very extreme decisions that people took in favor of the kingdom of God by giving up other riches. And this they did because they preferred to believe in what God told them to be of superior and lasting value. These persons, because they listened to the instruction which God had for them, obtained from the Lord a correct and sober sense of the value of what riches were higher and what were secondary, to the point that their testimonies were recorded for the edification of Christians of all ages that succeeded them, as follows:

Hebrews 11: 8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

- 9 *By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;*
- 10 *for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*
- ...
- 24 *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,*
- 25 *choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,*
- 26 *esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*
- 27 *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*
- ...
- 32 *And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:*
- 33 *who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,*
- 34 *quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*
- 35 *Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.*
- 36 *Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*
- 37 *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented;*
- 38 *of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.*
- 39 *And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,*
- 40 *God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.*
- 12: 1 *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*
- 2 *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- 3 *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*
-

Therefore, the people narrated in the verses of the text of Hebrews 11 presented above were not, in themselves, stronger or more capable than others. However, because they valued trust in God above many, many other riches, God sustained them even in their afflictions and considered them worthy of an eternal testimony that the world that insists in despising God was not even worthy to have received.

Similarly, Paul also uses the aspect of comparison regarding the opposition he suffered for serving the Lord faithfully, testifying to us one of his great reasons why he continually remained delighted in serving Christ until the end of his days on Earth, as follows:

*Romans 8: 18 **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.***

*1 Corinthians 9: 25 **And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.***

On the other hand, when people do not know the sovereign values of God to be able to compare them to their most diverse temporal circumstances, they will tend to lean more towards what is fleeting and passing than towards what is lasting or for eternal life. But the one who perseveres in keeping what is of superior and lasting value, according to the heavenly kingdom, will receive the riches of life in the Lord forever.

*Revelation 3: 11 **"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."***

The Lord, in everything, is righteous in His judgments of value and gracious toward those who follow His comparative recommendation. And it is His will that all trust Him and follow what He instructs them to establish as the primary riches in their lives so that they can be firmly supported when the most diverse decisions and choices regarding riches cross their path.

Given this, we can see that value comparisons are not yet the decision itself for one or another alternative, but, undoubtedly, they provide essential support so that choices can be made based on the riches that are fundamental and higher in value and purpose before the Lord than others.

Thus, when a person seeks God to know whether or not one should associate oneself with some particular riches, the Lord can answer His will directly and objectively. However, the Lord can also respond by exposing *what is more, what is better, of more excellent value, or what is preferable* to be adopted in this person's options, letting the Lord, in these cases, the judgment of value and the choice for what someone wants to follow or reject in charge of the person instructed by Him.

As immeasurably valuable or precious as the gifts and ways proposed by the Lord are, God does not impose them on people. Therefore, in many cases, the Lord remains in the position of offering His opinion of the value that He attributes to various riches but lets people themselves make their decisions for what they, after all, consider valuable or more valuable than other riches.

As discussed throughout the series of subjects on the Gospel of God, the incalculable riches of God's goodness that are offered to us through the Gospel refer to "an offer," and as an offer, there is also the need for it to be accepted or received willingly by their recipients.

Finally, whether by a direct instruction for a choice or an instruction to compare value, the greatest, fundamental, and highest choice for comparing the value of riches that a person will ever have before oneself concerns "whom" one will trust and choose to be grounded on to carry out the various comparisons one will need to make in one's life.

In this way, **the primary comparative choice that a person should make to evaluate the riches is by "whom" one will choose to be instructed about the appropriate value to be attributed to the other diverse riches, remembering that there is no other that can be compared to the One God Creator of the Heavens, the Earth, and all that is in them.**

*Proverbs 8: 11 **For wisdom is better than rubies, And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.***

*Psalms 119: 127 **Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!***
*128 **Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way.***
*129 **Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them.***
*130 **The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.***
*131 **I opened my mouth and panted, For I longed for Your commandments.***
*132 **Look upon me and be merciful to me, As Your custom is toward those who love Your name.***

*Isaiah 40: 18 **To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?***
*19 **The workman molds an image, The goldsmith overspreads it with gold, And the silversmith casts silver chains.***
*20 **Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution Chooses a tree that will not rot; He seeks for himself a skillful workman To prepare a carved image that will not totter.***
*21 **Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?***
*22 **It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.***
*23 **He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.***
*24 **Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.***

25 **"To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?"**
says the Holy One.

26 ***Lift up your eyes on high, And see who has created these things,
 Who brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name, By
 the greatness of His might And the strength of His power; Not one is
 missing.***

Isaiah 46: 8 ***"Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind,***
O you transgressors.

9 ***Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no***
other; I am God, and there is none like Me."

Isaiah 48: 17 ***Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of***
Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who
leads you by the way you should go."

B. Combinations of Riches

Continuing with the ways mentioned in the Scriptures about attributing value to the most diverse riches or types of riches, we can see that another vital factor to be considered in this sense is the possibility of combining riches.

Unlike the comparison between riches, which may even imply the choice of some specific riches, resulting in the rejection of others, the criterion of combination, association, or grouping of riches may mean, in several cases, a value increase or even confirmation and support of other riches.

There are types of riches that oppose people so that they do not receive the riches of more sublime value, but, on the other hand, there are also types of riches, when added to others, that validate or elevate the sublimity of those to which they were associated.

An evident example of riches, gifts, or virtues in particular that confer validity or support to the value of other riches is related to love and faith, as we can see in the following texts:

*1 Corinthians 13: 1 **Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.***

*2 **And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.***

*3 **And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.***

*Galatians 5: 6 **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.***

Faith in God is a wealth entrusted to us by the Lord and of immeasurable value, for it is through it that a person can choose to receive salvation and live a life of trust in the Lord. However, even so, this faith needs to be associated, in the heart, with another immeasurable wealth so that it has its value validated, which is the love of God. Remembering here, yet, that love is also a gift that God bestows on those who receive salvation by the grace of God through faith in the Lord.

*Romans 5: 1 **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,***

*2 **through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***

...

*5 **Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.***

1 John 4: 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

If, on the one hand, God's instruction to a person may be in the sense that one needs to choose between some riches to keep oneself in the will of the Lord, on the other hand, God also adds riches to riches or gifts to gifts so that we can be amply supported to live and walk according to the heavenly will.

2 Corinthians 9: 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Faith in God, or the richness of faith in God, is not given to people only for them to opt for God's immeasurable salvation, but also for people to live and walk in the salvation offered to them, adding other riches to it such as hope and love equally coming from God. Or still, faith in God is an expression of riches granted to people precisely so that they can choose to receive the other gifts or riches for which faith is bestowed on a person.

Faith is an immeasurable richness, as it enables a person to become part of God's purposes for one's life, as well as corroborates for a person to be sustained in the heavenly purpose. However, faith is not greater than the purpose and does not have its confirmation completed in a person's life if one does not achieve the purpose for which faith is granted.

1 Corinthians 13: 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Thus, aiming to reach an increasingly firm love of God and hope of life in the Lord is not to despise the greatness that there is in the faith itself. On the contrary, it is to acknowledge the riches that there are in the faith in the Lord to lead us to the other riches that are in God's purposes for our lives.

By the Holy Spirit, God gives faith to people who want to receive it. However, once they have received faith, they have an immeasurable wealth to grow in the access to the other riches of God. On the other hand, if people do not practice or exercise faith toward the purpose for which it has been given, they may refrain from benefiting from what is so graciously offered to them.

Therefore, receiving faith or coming to have faith in the Lord is not an end in itself. Coming to have the faith to receive what is only possible to be achieved by grace is what enhances the faith offered by God for people to place trust in the Lord and Creator of their lives.

Let us see below two examples that teach us about faith in the Lord, the confirmation of faith, and some of the purposes for which the Lord gives people faith:

*1 Peter 1: 6 **In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,**
7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,
8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
9 receiving the end of your faith: the salvation of your souls.*

*James 1: 2 **My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**
3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

Rich faith in God is already superabundantly rich, but it can have its richness confirmed in a person and become even richer in one's life if, despite trials and opposition, it is practiced firmly towards the purpose for which it is given, which will also result in praise and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ for His mercy and love towards those to whom He bestows the gift of heavenly faith.

If a person wants faith without wanting to add to it also the riches for which faith is granted, this way of aiming to have faith, after all, may severely restrict a person from advancing towards the purposes for which faith in God is given to people.

Similarly, it is not enough for a person to have all the knowledge in the world, to speak the language of angels, or to have riches to distribute to others if to all this is not added the riches of God's love. In this case, despite accessing several riches, these may lose their final value because a richness that would give them a real purpose and validity has not been added to them.

A person may have many riches in the world but, at the same time, one actually may have nothing before God. And this, because of not conferring credibility or validity to what one possesses due to the fact that one does not add to one's riches the supreme riches called love.

On the other hand, a person may be poor in natural resources but still hold a great inheritance in the Lord for having first valued the love of God that the Lord Himself poured out in one's heart by His divine grace and through one's faith in Him.

*James 2: 5 **Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?***

If we still recall the text that declares that God is love, we can also see that those who do not have heavenly love, however much they believe that

God exists, also do not have God in their lives. And by not having God, an individual has nothing that can stand for eternal life.

*1 John 4: 8 **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.***

*1 John 4: 16 **And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.***

To add the love of the heavenly kingdom to life, as an immeasurably precious wealth, is to add God's participation in everything and at all times. (A subject also discussed in the topic Always and In All Things).

Moreover, these last considerations on the fundamental riches of life remind us of the following texts that were also discussed more widely in the theme The Letter or Life:

*John 5: 39 **"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.***
*40 **But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.**"*

*1 John 5: 11 **And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.***

And once again, also in this specific topic, we come across the aspect that has been mentioned in all previous themes, chapters, and topics in the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life, which is that **God, through Christ, is not only the greatest riches that a person needs in one's life, but He, through Christ, is the great essential wealth that every human being needs in one's life so that a series of other riches can be attested with an eternal validity, and not only transient or ephemeral.**

For the branch of a vine, the sap it receives from the vine is essential wealth for its survival. However, for this to happen, this branch first needs to have the richness of being connected to the trunk that gives it life.

*John 15: 4 **"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.***
*5 **I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."***

*John 6: 57 **"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me."***

As we mentioned earlier, there are situations in which it is necessary to give up some aspect of riches in favor of another, but there are also cases in which it is needed to do precisely the opposite. **There are situations in which it is required to maintain, with all zeal, the wealth already received and add another one of greater value to it so that all the others remain with significant value before God.**

And once the aspect of adding riches to support other riches is understood and practiced, and that God and knowing Him, through fellowship with the Lord, are the fundamental and essential wealth to sustain all other riches, the Lord being called therefore as the Unique Foundation upon which a person should build one's life, a whole other series of riches are bestowed from Heaven to be added to the lives of those who unshakably keep the main riches in their lives.

Let us see the considerations of the last paragraphs widely described in the text below:

- 2 Peter 1: 1 **Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:***
- 2 **Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,***
- 3 **as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,***
- 4 **by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.***
- 5 **But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,***
- 6 **to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,***
- 7 **to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.***
- 8 **For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***
- 9 **For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.***
- 10 **Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;***
- 11 **for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***

The addition of suitable riches to the life of the one who has received the faith to believe in Christ, and to be constituted through Him a child of God along with all others who believe in Christ, leads this individual to be established in the condition of being able to receive the abundances of the fullness of God or to receive from the Lord grace for grace or grace upon grace.

Ephesians 3: 14 **For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,**
16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,
17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height,
19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

John 1: 14 **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

John 17: 3 **"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."**

C. Appropriate Measures in Multiple Riches

After seeing that the comparison of some riches and the combination of others may define the attribution of value that a person gives to the most diverse riches, we can observe that in both forms mentioned, there is also a matter related to the factor of proportionality in the use of multiples riches.

As we mentioned in the previous topics, the fact that there is a qualification of some riches as more essential, or of more sublime and elevated value than others, does not mean that those of lesser value should always be discarded. In some situations, as is the case with faith, it should never be put aside for the person to reach a greater wealth that is love, for receiving love itself is related to faith in God.

People, in diverse and frequent situations, may be surrounded by multiple riches where several of these are necessary or cooperate for their good simultaneously with others and where the comparison of value or the combination of riches are instruments so that an appropriate measure of relationship with these manifold riches can be carried out wisely.

A person, for instance, having the health to work refers to a precious wealth in one's life that one should not put aside because one has the riches of being able to pray to God or have fellowship with the Lord, His written word, and with other Christians. But, on the other hand, the fact that an individual has a good state of health and even a privileged vigor to work does not mean that one should dedicate oneself excessively to work to the detriment of the relationship with other precious or even more precious aspects that the Lord granted to one's life.

The fact that a person has an abundance of vigor to work should not imply either despising this vigor given by the grace of God or using it to the extreme point of distancing oneself from other equally valuable aspects of one's life or even more valuable than work.

When writing letters to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy exhort these Christians to work honestly with their own hands and not to be burdensome to their fellow men, but they also instruct them to do so with moderation and quietness in their hearts, so that they may be sober and know how to act with proper moderation in everything, as follows:

2 Thessalonians 3: 5 **Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.**

6 **But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.**

7 **For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;**

8 **nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,**

9 **not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.**

10 **For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.**

11 **For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.**

12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

1 Thessalonians 4: 9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

In a sense, if the choice of riches were only related to the matter of comparing them to choose one and reject the other or if the choice were only to combine those that are good, but without having the challenge of doing so in an appropriate measure, the relationship with riches would perhaps appear to be easier. However, it would not be functional and would not meet the multiple needs that people have in their diverse or multiple circumstances.

In daily life, there are many situations in which two, three, or several riches are needed simultaneously. Therefore, in these situations, it is not a matter of choosing one over the other or prioritizing one over the other.

In many day-to-day situations, it is necessary to have the wisdom to relate to various riches and to attribute the appropriate measure of relationship with each one, which also includes continuously observing the time or attention dedicated to each of the riches involved.

In other words, there are diverse riches that, in several circumstances, do not mutually exclude one another, just as not all moments of life are made of extreme decisions between one kind of riches and another.

In various situations, people may be surrounded by a multiplicity of riches, but also by a multiple need for riches. An aspect that may confuse them if they do not know how to use them in adequate proportions.

On the one hand, the extreme decisions of choosing between one or another riches are indeed reported in the Scriptures and may occur in different situations and specific moments of life. In these cases, understanding the importance of each wealth's value can be crucial and decisive for the right choice. Thousands and thousands of Christians throughout history have had to decide between their lives on Earth or standing firm in their faith in Christ. And many indeed considered their lives in the world less precious than the preciousness of faithfulness to the beloved Lord Jesus Christ and remained steadfast in the Lord even in the face of their imminent death.

On the other hand, however, in people's daily lives in general, many of their decisions, regarding their relationship with riches, are much more linked to an

adequate use of the multiple riches available to them than the need to choose exclusively one or another wealth.

For example, if a person has a good job, an income that allows achieving the essential items in life, and perhaps also a certain degree of comfort, and yet even access to education, why would one want more material resources at the expense of abandoning honesty or principles of truth or, mainly, at the cost of not having more time for a relationship with the Lord who proposes to guide this individual according to His will and heavenly righteousness?

In this example, if the person is content with what one has received and continues to seek the Lord's direction on how to walk in His will, one does not need to choose between having riches, in the appropriate measure, and having fellowship with God. However, if one ambitions a growth of material riches to the point of moving away from the Lord, one will most likely end up advancing to the circumstance in which one will be faced with the condition of having to choose between the multiple riches with which one became involved.

In the Scriptures, there is a specific narrative in which the Lord Jesus Christ responded to a wealthy young man who came to Him, saying that he needed to give all his riches to the poor and follow the Lord to achieve salvation. However, this was not the case for all those who came to meet Christ.

In the case of the rich young man, perhaps we can understand that his riches were more valuable to him than Christ. And in this sense, he needed to value Christ above what he had and start following the Lord to achieve the necessary adjustment in his system of attributing values to riches.

Nevertheless, as another example, this was not the case with Zacchaeus, who returned what he had stolen from others, gave half of his goods to the poor, but kept the other half for himself without the Lord directing him to give up this part. And Zacchaeus still heard from the Lord that **“today salvation has come to this house”** when referring to the life of Zacchaeus and his family.

For the rich young man, the appropriate measure of combining riches to be able to live a life according to faith in Christ was more focused on choosing between one wealth and another. For Zacchaeus, the relationship with multiple riches was more about appropriate measures. And yet for others, the Lord's instruction may have other characteristics according to each individual's heart and need.

Abraham was a man who achieved material riches granted to him according to the grace and blessing of the Lord, and who, even with riches in abundance, remained firm in his trust in God because his heart was in God and not in his material wealth. Similarly also happened to Joseph in Egypt.

Now, in the case of Moses, we see that he chose to give up the privilege of being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and fled Egypt to put himself in line with the people from which he descended and to which the Lord called him to lead them out of Egypt. And Moses, living in the desert until the end of his life, never achieved any material property for himself but was considered by God faithful to the call He had given him.

If we look further at John the Baptist, who ate wild honey and locusts, and wore clothes made of camel's hair rather than fine palace clothes, we can see from the Scriptures that his humble material resources were in no way an impediment to being

considered the “greater man born of woman” before the coming of Christ in the flesh or as the Son of Man into the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ, already born a King, the Son of Almighty God, the Word through whom the Heavenly Father created the Heavens and the Earth, had John the Baptist as the herald, the announcer, the one who went before him as one who introduces and presents an eminence or a king. Jesus Christ, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, had as the one who went before Him a man living in the desert under humble conditions because this was the fair measure that God had determined for Christ to begin His ministry in a more intense and public way on Earth. A point that shows us that neither the ministry of John the Baptist nor the ministry of Christ was based on material riches, but on the God of all material and also spiritual provision.

Therefore, **the needs for measurement and diversity of riches may vary from person to person, from purpose to purpose, and should always be viewed in the light of the Lord's instruction for each circumstance.**

Continuing with the aspect of the joint use of multiple riches, also when the word of God tells us that “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,*” we see that it is not saying that one aspect necessarily excludes the other. This text does not say that man will live on the word of God and that, for this reason, one will not need bread (physical food). On the other hand, it declares that even if a person has an abundance of bread, one still needs the word that comes out of the mouth of God to keep him or her alive according to the concepts of what for God represents the newness of true life and with an eternal purpose.

Mere natural life does not reflect the full range of what the Lord calls life according to His will. On the contrary, the mere natural life of the human being, dissociated from fellowship with the Lord, is characterized as a state of subjection to offenses, sins, iniquities, and death, and regarding which Christ offered Himself as the perfect and eternal sacrifice to deliver and redeem all human beings, as follows:

*Ephesians 2: 1 **And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,***
*2 **in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,***
*3 **among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.***
*4 **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,***
*5 **even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),***
*6 **and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,***
*7 **that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

Returning to the text that declares that man does not live on bread alone, we can observe that it is a text that instructs us not to think that material food is what sustains life in the last analysis, no matter how significant its function might be for a person's life. From this and several other texts, we can see that, above all, what actually sustains a person is the word of God or that without it, not even having physical bread in abundance, a person can subsist, for the Lord upholds everything at all times by the word of His power even though many do not recognize it.

And the essence of the word of God's power towards us and by which God sustains our lives is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Beloved Son of the Heavenly Father, as also stated in the text that follows below:

*Hebrews 1: 1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
 3(a) who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, ...*

There are many people on Earth who live a natural life very well supplied with material things but who also “live as if they were dead before God,” for those who never carry out God's will are as dead in their actions before God. When people do not live and walk in the ways of the Heavenly Father, they do not produce anything of true life or for eternity, for they do not feed on the word or instruction of God that the Lord offers them through fellowship with Christ Jesus.

Natural bread cooperates with life in general and has its role in supporting life on Earth, but the Word of God's Power is what sustains all life, even for a person to be able to receive and feed on material bread. And it is also through this same powerful word that a person can be led to true life according to God's will.

Thus, in the example where the word of God is presented as a type of food distinguished from material bread, we see that the matter is not necessarily about one or the other wealth. Instead, the point is about a good measure of both, but under the firm awareness that the food of fellowship with Christ is a need greater than the material need.

In His teachings, God does not declare that He wants people to seek His word and be deprived of basic material provisions, but that people should put their relationship with Him, His word, His kingdom, and His righteousness first, promising them that the other things necessary for their lives will be added to them by the Lord's generous measure and according to the Lord's instruction.

*Luke 12: 29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.
 30 For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.
 31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."*

Seeking God “first” to be instructed by Him, inclusive in material matters, leads to true life according to God's will. For this reason, seeking the Lord first is more important than seeking first to meet all material needs and then seeking God.

Furthermore, if a person chooses the path that the search for material must precede the search for the Lord, one starts to put oneself in line with the thought that one is “god and provider” of one's own life. And so, one runs the risk of denying that it is God who grants the air one breathes, the strength to work, and everything else in one's life, including the food that is produced in the world.

Let us also see below the first citation of the Scriptures regarding the essential need for the word of God and not just natural bread, as follows:

Deuteronomy 8: 2 **"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.**

3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

...
17 then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

18 But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

19 Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish." (NKJV+AV)

Therefore, although this text from Deuteronomy is in a context more related to aspects of the Law of Moses, the aspect that life comes from the Lord, from His word, and that it is in Him that it needs to be cultivated is also described throughout all the Scriptures, exemplified by a few more texts below:

Psalms 54: 4 **Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is with those who uphold my life.**

Matthew 6: 26 **"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"**

Psalms 104: 27 **These all wait for You, That You may give them their food in due season.**
28 What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.

*29 You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their
breath, they die and return to their dust.
30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the
face of the earth.*

*Job 34: 14 If God should set His heart on it, If He should gather to
Himself His Spirit and His breath,
15 all flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.*

In this way, while a person lives on Earth, one needs the word of God to give direction to one's life, as well as one needs natural bread, drink, and clothing. However, God never authorized material items to be in a superior position or to be a reason for people to distance themselves from the Lord and His good and righteous will.

In addition, even regarding the extreme situations of the continuity of natural life, the Heavenly Father showed us the superior and perfect condition of His will and government over everything by raising Christ from the dead. And this, too, to show that in Him, by the same heavenly power, all who believe in Christ can reach life according to the kingdom of heaven that is not limited to the merely natural life, and so that they may have their faith strengthened to trust above all in their Creator.

*Acts 2: 22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man
attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God
did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know:
23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and
foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have
crucified, and put to death;
24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it
was not possible that He should be held by it.*

...

*36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has
made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

*John 11: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He
who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.
26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you
believe this?"*

*Romans 8: 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead
dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life
to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

So, whether a circumstance involves one wealth, more than one wealth, or when there is an abundance of various natural and spiritual riches involved in people's decisions, the presence of divine wisdom is always necessary to know in what proportion each one of them should be used.

If there is a choice to be made between one or another wealth, God wants to give direction so that it is carried out according to heavenly wisdom.

If there is a need to use appropriate measures within the scope of various simultaneously available or necessary riches, and not just the choice between one or another, God also wants to give direction in the proper use of each of them.

If there is little or even the least, a Christian should seek God's direction in how to use it.

If there is much, a Christian should likewise seek God's direction in how to use it.

Luke 16: 10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much."

Whether there is little or much, comparing riches or combining them in appropriate measures should never interfere with the Christian's search for God's direction, for it is in the Lord that one finds the Spirit of strength and power to use riches, but also the Spirit of love and moderation to be continually guided in everything.

2 Timothy 1: 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (or moderation).

In a similar direction, also Paul, an apostle of Christ, when referring to the use of various resources that were or could be around him, and even though several of them did not present any legal impediment to be used, recorded the following words in his letter to the Christians of Corinth:

1 Corinthians 10: 23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.

1 Corinthians 6: 12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Finally, in this topic, we would like to mention that in the theme Always and In All Things, we addressed the aspect suggested by some people that the personal establishment of priorities can solve the coexistence with multiple works, labors, and services, also encompassing the time for the administration of their riches. However, what, for example, is more priority, relating to the family or relating to the work, labors,

or service that God has called a person to carry out and from which God also provides material aspects for this same family?

If we think even in a strictly logical or rational way, we can see that the issue in the last paragraph is not a matter of choosing one priority over the other, but it refers to the matter of an appropriate measure for each of the aspects. Wanting to define priorities in the last situation exemplified, in many circumstances, may represent “entering a dead end,” for in it, the issue may not be excluding one aspect to the detriment of another, but the dedication in an appropriate measure to each of the aspects involved.

If we return once more to the case of the rich young man whom the Lord called to give up his riches and follow Him, we can further see that the issue for him was neither whether his family was the priority nor whether this young man's profession was a priority. In the case of the rich young man, the priority issue involved him following Christ first of all to find eternal salvation in the Lord, and then to be instructed and guided by Christ for the remaining steps in life as a saved believer in the Lord. And despite being faced with the offer of eternal salvation of his life, the rich young man chose not to follow Christ's suggestion, as he was displeased with the “measure” of relationship with natural riches that Christ instructed him to practice.

Now, in the narrative of the man freed by Christ from a legion of evil spirits, we can observe that after his encounter with Christ and being freed by the Lord, this man wanted to follow the Lord Jesus wherever the Lord would go. However, in his case, the Lord instructed him to return to his home or family to announce and bear witness of his new condition of life in this freedom he had received from Christ. This was the appropriate measure for this man.

There are people who want a life blessed by Christ and the Heavenly Father, but, at the same time, many of them do not want the Lord to instruct them about the measure of riches that is appropriate for them. And so, they end up disliking God and moving away from the Lord in their hearts, even though they often maintain an outwardly routine of alleged godliness, as was the case of the wealthy young man.

Therefore, similarly to what was mentioned in the previous topics, **in practical daily life, only God can accurately assess to what extent a person should have the most diverse riches or how adequate it is to relate to them. Only the Lord knows how to measure how much a heart endures to keep itself guarded in God and remain faithful to Him amid other riches.**

Proverbs 21: 2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.

To conclude, in the book of Proverbs, we can find the example of a prayer made to the Lord in which the person who addresses Him asks for an adequate measure of natural riches so that one's fidelity to spiritual and main riches is duly preserved. And in this example, too, we see, once again, that the Lord alone knows the proper measure of manifold riches with which each individual should relate for one's benefit, which likewise cooperates in showing us again that the Lord alone is God.

Proverbs 30: 7 Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die):

- 8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food allotted to me;**
9 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.

Lamentations 3: 25 **The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.**

D. Grading the Values of Multiple Riches – Part 1: The Need for a Well-Defined Values Scale

In this new topic, we would like to address some more considerations on the manners of attributing value to wealth that in one way or another have already been considered in the three previous criteria seen up to the present point, but not in a specific or punctual way.

In the whole process of comparing and combining riches, as well as using appropriate measures of them, we find criteria that grade or assign a degree of value to riches, placing them higher or lower than others. However, there is a graduation that is still different from those that we addressed up to this topic.

In the Scriptures, there are reports where a differentiated order of magnitude is attributed to some riches among other riches that are also highly valuable and precious.

Let us see below, then, once again, an example of a text already mentioned earlier:

1 Corinthians 13: 13 ***And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.***

Thus, the point that we want to highlight in this topic is that among several very relevant riches to be observed, there are those that should always, constantly, or continuously receive special attention.

Yet another way of naming the criterion of graduation of riches values would perhaps be, then, the use of the expression related to the “establishment or recognition of a scale of values” in which the riches that have the greatest value are placed at the top of this scale.

We believe it is also important to highlight that access to an adequate “scale of values” is already a wealth of vital relevance for those who have it, for identifying the most valued riches of an appropriate scale of values may lead a person never to stop having before one’s eyes those fundamental riches from which no one should depart.

Below are two texts that exemplify the need to have some references from which a person should never deviate one's eyes:

Psalms 141: 8 ***But my eyes are upon You, O GOD the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute.***

Hebrews 12: 1 ***Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,***

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In this way, **the scale of values serves to see an order of magnitude and importance when a person is placed before significant restrictions and difficulties, but also in situations where one is placed before the abundance of multiple riches.**

As we have seen in previous chapters and topics, the Scriptures teach us about the importance of sobriety in life. However, **sobriety is largely related to the scale of values that a person has or adopts as a reference for the most diverse areas of one's life.**

*Proverbs 4: 20 **My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.***

*21 **Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;***

*22 **For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.***

*Psalms 121: 1 **I will lift up my eyes to the hills, From whence comes my help?***

*2 **My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.***

There are several riches that have an importance or degree of value in some specific moments, and there are those that should never be put aside because their value is constant or essential for everything and at all times. And the latter, in turn, should always be at the top of a person's scale of values.

For example, in the last text presented above, we can see that the psalmist knew that the mountains do not come to the aid of people. For him, in the aspect of help, regarding what is a constant and immeasurable wealth, the Lord is at the top of the scale of values. Thus, people should not replace Him in their lives by trusting in places considered elevated or strengthened according to the perspective of human beings.

On the other hand, there is also the scale of despicable values that should never be part of a Christian's riches items.

There are several aspects that are considered riches in the world but are not so before God, which, therefore, are only worthy of being placed on the list of things to be rejected and despised by a Christian. And regarding these aspects, a Christian should not incline one's heart toward them, as exemplified in the following series of texts:

*Proverbs 28: 22 **A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.***

*Jeremiah 17: 11 **"As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool."***

Proverbs 21: 4 A haughty look, a proud heart, And the plowing of the wicked are sin.

Psalms 119: 37 Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.

Proverbs 8: 13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.

Proverbs 29: 23 A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.

Psalms 19: 13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

Therefore, **by the criterion of the scale of values, we can observe, then, that:**

- ⇒ 1) **There are riches that should never cease to be part of a person's life;**
- ⇒ 2) **There are riches that should be part temporarily in a secondary degree and for some specific purposes;**
- ⇒ 3) **There are aspects that are considered as riches by many in the world, but that should never be inserted as a richness in the scale of values that intends to remain in conformity with the heavenly kingdom.**

Starting with the highest items on a scale of values in conformity with the kingdom of God, we can see that they are not only priorities but essential, and whose position on the list should be non-negotiable since they express riches that always should be in the position that the Lord instructs them to be so that they too are always involved in everything a person does.

Thus, so far, we have already seen that the riches that are the greatest among different riches are those that are essential so that the Christian can reach the Lord's purpose in one's path of life and not only live a merely natural life and guided by the flesh or the world.

In addition, we can see that **even among the greatest riches among the greatest, which is the case of the love of God, it is essential to understand**

the scale of values in order not to put in the background what should never be taken from the first foreground.

In other words, even in the same type of riches, there may be a need for the relationship with a specific wealth to be ordered in different degrees according to the kind of use that is intended to be given to it.

If we return to the example of the richness of love, by which an individual can attain inheritance in God and also love other people, we can observe that the practical relationship with love towards God has a different scale position from love towards other people, including those closest to the one who uses the richness of love, as exemplified in the following text:

Matthew 10: 37 **"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.**
38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

The Scriptures teach us that a Christian is called to love those who are close, one's fellow men, and even one's enemies. An aspect that also cooperates with various benefits bestowed on a person by the Lord. However, if an individual loves people more than God, including those who are closest, one may incur the practice of things that are not actually guided by divine love and that will not produce fruits and benefits according to the true and eternal love.

If love towards God is not higher than love towards others on an individual's scale of values, both aspects of love can be seriously impaired in the life of the one to whom these gifts are available, since for a person to be able to love one's neighbor with the love of God, one needs first receive it from the source of heavenly love or the inexhaustible source of this immeasurable wealth.

1 John 4: 19 **We love Him because He first loved us.**

John 13: 34 **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."**

Christ instructed those who are His disciples to love one another. However, He also taught them the proper new way to do it, which was for them to love one another as He loved them.

And was it not with the love of the Heavenly Father that Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us? Was it not because Christ first loved His Heavenly Father and the Father's will that He gave Himself in love for our redemption?

Under the Law of Moses, the requirement was to love God first according to the strength and vigor of the one who wanted to keep the law. And secondly, to love one's

neighbor as oneself. However, this is something that people have not been able to fulfill for centuries.

On the other hand, in the “***New Commandment***,” Christ does not call people to love God and their fellow men according to their strength, but according to the love of God that is poured into their hearts from the moment they receive eternal salvation. For this reason, too, in the New Covenant, it is essential to love God above any other aspect of life, for it is from the Heavenly Father that is granted all true and eternal love.

When a person thinks that one can love one's neighbor more than God, one thinks that one can love others according to one's own strength and will, but, in reality, it is not with genuine love that one loves those close to him or her.

Thus, both the love towards God and the love towards one's fellow men are indescribably wonderful, but the scale of value that a specific person gives to one or the other is what may determine how much they will remain valuable in one's life indeed.

It is in the love of God that the adequate measure of love for one's fellow men and even one's enemies resides, for God knows how far the benefits of love for others should be extended so that the position of love for Him and His righteousness is not reversed.

Given this, every time a person loves others more than God, one does not act according to God's will since one is seeking to invert the position of riches that should never be changed or reversed in one's scale of values regarding the aspects of the heavenly kingdom.

And as the love of God is also expressed in doing the will of God, every time a person no longer walks in the will of God, and this, to do one's own will, that of other people, of the world, or of darkness, one also no longer acts indeed in love toward one's fellow men.

1 John 5: 1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

The one who loves God, loves the Lord Jesus Christ and everyone who has been born of God by believing in Christ Jesus. A point that shows us, once again, that the love for those who are of God's family is primarily a result of the relationship with the Lord, whose position in an individual's scale of values should never be inverted.

The text of 1 John 5 above even reinforces or asserts an instruction on how a Christian, in a practical way, can personally know if one really loves others who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, others who are close, or even one's enemies.

And in turn, the evidence of a Christian's love for other people is in the proof of one's love for God, which is established in a person practicing the instructions given by God to be followed or practiced in one's life. Therefore, personally living and walking in God's will is what demonstrates that a person also loves others.

If someone does not follow God's instructions for one's life, one is not indeed practicing love towards God, just as one is not practicing love towards one's fellow men.

And this, regardless of how much one tries to please others, for it is only in carrying out God's will that someone does good for oneself and towards one's fellow men.

Therefore, **in addition to the fact that the most precious riches on the scale of values should never be set aside, they should also not be placed outside the proper order on the scale of values.** And this, because both their absence and the inversion of their order of magnitude place in an inadequate position before God and also before other people the other actions of an individual. And so, one may even reach the point of being considered among those with whom the Lord is highly displeased.

*Proverbs 1: 7 **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

*Psalms 119: 158 **I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, Because they do not keep Your word.***

Furthermore, **when the instruction of the Lord is of the highest value to a person, one does not just devote a few minutes or hours to it, but one carries it in one's heart everywhere, at all times, and in everything one does.**

*Proverbs 7: 1 **My son, keep my words, And treasure my commands within you.***

- Proverbs 4: 4 **He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live.***
- 5 **Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.***
- 6 **Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you.***
- 7 **Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.***
- 8 **Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.***
- 9 **She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you."***

*Proverbs 9: 10 **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."***

Finally, on this topic, we reiterate that a well-defined scale of values in the heart is highly necessary for a Christian, for several actions contrary to the will of God will not always seek to introduce a direct denial of the inestimable value of some riches that are

according to the kingdom of God. On the contrary, several propositions that oppose the Lord's will often seek to act by suggesting a simple, but disastrous, inversion in the position of some riches in the order of the scale of values of an individual, hiding the fact that they can already cause highly destructive damage with this “simple” action.

Thus, **the riches at the top of the scale of values according to the heavenly kingdom should always be seen and considered by a Christian according to the order that is due to them.**

E. Grading the Values of Multiple Riches – Part 2: The Supreme Value to be Considered in the Scale of Values

Continuing with the same criteria of attributing values mentioned in the previous topic and returning, for example, to the aspect of love, the Lord teaches us that putting the love of God in second place or inferior to this represents following a path that may lead a person to the same consequences arising from the action of not even putting the love of God on the scale of values, although one has the appearance of godliness and the other does not.

In this way, this point teaches us that **there are riches that have an exclusive place in the scale of values of the heavenly kingdom and whose position cannot be inverted, occupied jointly with other riches, and not even have their value equated with other riches.**

Thus, going a little further in the attention to the highest values of the scale of values, we would like to reiterate even more objectively that **the Scriptures show us that there is a riches in particular that is absolutely exclusive and that, absolutely, is above any other riches that there can be found in all existence.**

Let us see, then, some more texts that present us with this situation:

*Psalms 16: 1 **Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.***
*2 **O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."***

...
*5 **O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot.***

*Psalms 73: 25 **Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.***
*26 **My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.***

The importance of the Lord for the psalmists David and Asaph, from the psalms above respectively, was so high that they, despite still living on Earth, even considered that they had no other good besides the Lord. But were they not holders of some material goods?

David certainly had wealth and property, and he had more than almost any other human being at all times. However, looking at life from a slightly more long-term perspective, it is possible to see, even in the natural eye, that a human being, in a broader and definitive way, does not indeed own any good on Earth. Nothing in the physical world is actually of an individual, not even one's own body, for it may collapse at any moment. Everything in the material world is transient, also reaffirmed time after time in the Scriptures.

*1 Timothy 6: 7 **For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.***

*1 John 2: 17 **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.***

While, in the present day, many people claim to follow a “God” who encourages them to “take possessions in the Earth,” David and Asaph claimed that the lasting good they looked to was always the God of their lives and not their “earthly possessions.” For this reason, too, the Scriptures teach us to “take hold of eternal life,” remembering once again that eternal life is to know the Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son Jesus Christ.

*1 Timothy 6: 12 **Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.***

If we look, then, in a condensed, compact, or highly concise way, the only eternal good that a person can have on Earth that actually lasts even after life on Earth is God.

Only because of God's eternal and unchanging condition can a person have life even after a person passes through physical death on Earth.

And if a person confuses the supreme value of God with any other wealth, understanding God as the Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, one will be confusing the value of the only lasting good that can sustain a person both in life on Earth as in eternal life.

Thus, absolutely nothing but God should be at the top of a person's list or scale of values, for the top of a true list or scale of riches is exclusively applicable to God.

An individual should never place oneself, another person, a group of people, a community, a nation, or anything else, as a supreme good that one aims to possess, for without God in the first place, all other things become temporary or without lasting value.

And to a person whose hope is in oneself, what value is this to him or her other than a poor, confused, and mistaken value-attribution scale from which there is no lasting benefit?

*Isaiah 2: 22 **Sever yourselves from such a man, Whose breath is in his nostrils; For of what account is he?***

*Psalms 49: 10 **For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, And leave their wealth to others.***

- 11 ***Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names.***
- 12 ***Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish.***
- 13 ***This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings.***
- 14 ***Like sheep they are laid in the grave; Death shall feed on them; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.***
- 15 ***But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me.***
- 16 ***Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his house is increased;***
- 17 ***For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.***
- 18 ***Though while he lives he blesses himself (For men will praise you when you do well for yourself),***
- 19 ***He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see light.***
- 20 ***A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, Is like the beasts that perish.***
-

God is not comparable to the human being, nor is His value comparable to any person or thing that ever existed or will exist. For this reason, the position of the Lord is unique, and He is also called the Sovereign God or God Most High.

Isaiah 40: 18 ***To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?***

Isaiah 40: 25 ***"To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.***

Isaiah 46: 5 ***"To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal And compare Me, that we should be alike?"***

Psalms 83: 18 ***That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.***

Psalms 7: 17 ***I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness, And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.***

Classifying wealth in degrees or on a scale of values separates what is superior, but it also separates what is of specific, unique, and incomparable value.

As we have already mentioned, there are positions of riches that a person should never remove from their scale of values nor reallocate them from their position of primacy, for the implications of changing their places in one's heart can be extremely serious and have devastating and perennial effects, as we can see still in the following texts:

John 3:18 **He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

19 **And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

John 12: 42 **Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;**
43 **for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.**

1 John 5: 12 **He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.**

And being repetitive here regarding a point that we already approached above, when the psalmists announced that God was their only good, as we saw in previous texts, it is certain that they considered in these declarations also the instruction of God for their lives as a good or wealth superior to all other riches.

Let us see here, then, some more texts that correlate the fundamental, sovereign, and exclusive position of God and His words with true and eternal life.

Psalms 119: 57 **You are my portion, O LORD; I have said that I would keep Your words.**

Psalms 19: 9 **The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.**

10 **More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.**

11 **Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.**

Psalms 119: 127 **Therefore I love Your commandments More than gold, yes, than fine gold!**

- 128 Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way.**
129 Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them.
130 The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

Like the Heavenly Father, also Christ and His words are superior and incomparable in wealth and cannot be measured by human values or words that human beings utter, for the words that Christ pronounces are equivalent to the words given by the Heavenly Father.

For this reason, a Christian should never accept any proposal that tries to equate the value of the Lord Jesus Christ and His words with any other wealth created in the universe, for as coexistent with the Heavenly Father from eternity, with what or whom someone could compare Christ and His life instructions?

And to further emphasize the exclusive position that Christ should have in the hearts of all people, we list below a series of texts related to the subject at hand:

John 1: 15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me."

Colossians 1: 15 He (the Son of God's love) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

John 3: 27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

32(a) *And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies;*"

John 12: 46 "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

47 *And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.*

48 *He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him: the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.*

49 *For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.*

50 *And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*

1 Timothy 6: 3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,

4 *he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,*

5 *useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

John 6: 62 "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?

63 *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."*

On an appropriate scale of values, the Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and their words are the greatest riches of a Christian. And this wealth, in particular, should not only have the highest place in one's heart but also be exclusive and continuous in this position since it cannot be compared even with the sum of all other riches.

And on the one hand, we see that the Lord Himself made a proposition in the Scriptures, presenting a question about Him, saying: "To whom or to what thing could you compare me?"

And the Lord did not do it with the intention of people trying to look for something to compare with God, but so that they would stop trying to compare Him with the created things and so that they would recognize Him as the supreme good for their lives and the One from whom all other good gifts and perfect gifts come.

On the other hand, it is good that we are confronted with the need to continually revise the scale of values we have in our hearts so that we do not allow a subtle

inversion to introduce itself to try to invert what should never be reversed. And asking questions can often help to obtain answers from truly superior and eternal riches.

In the sense mentioned in the last paragraph, and to exercise the practice in reference, we ask then: What are the most valuable riches that can exist for a person? What is the greatest treasure a human being can have? Would it be one's life?

And here again, it is crucial not to invert the highest and exclusive value of the highest part of the scale of values according to the heavenly kingdom, for "**greater than life is He who sustains life.**"

Given this, **the greatest riches a human being can receive, including to dwell in one's heart, is one's God and Eternal Creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.**

Thus, **when someone has to choose between different riches, it is crucial for one to know that, ultimately, God is the only option that has real validity for either the present life or the one that follows after one's earthly life.**

Colossians 1: 26 ... the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, **even more relevant than a person caring about one's own life is that one cares about being in fellowship with Christ and in dependence on God, for it is the Lord who sustains one's life. Neither the person oneself, the riches one possesses, nor the riches in the whole world can play the role of the true provider and sustainer of one's life.**

Psalms 63: 3 Because Your lovingkindness (or goodness) is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

Lamentations 3: 21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.

22 Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.

And once it is established that God is the portion of the person who receives Him as the eternal good to have life according to the will of God,

one can begin to understand more adequately the scale of values and the graduation of other aspects related to the riches that surround one's life or which one needs to live and walk in the will of the Lord.

- Colossians 3: 1* ***If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.***
2 ***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***
3 ***For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***
4 ***When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.***

When a person recognizes in one's heart the supreme position of the Lord in one's life, the Lord can also lead this individual to an adequate perception of value about oneself, other people, and other aspects of life.

Thus:

1 Peter 3: 15 ***But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;***

Romans 12: 3 ***For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.***

Philippians 2: 3 ***Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.***

F. Grading the Values of Multiple Riches – Part 3: The Variable Degree of Importance at Different Moments

Adding in this topic a third item to the two previous topics on the graduation of the values of multiple riches, we would like to approach here the aspect that it is **after the central values are established in the primary places of the scale of values of riches of a person that one can also understand more adequately that there are values that undergo a variation in the degree of importance depending on the moment they will be used.**

So, for instance, what is the most valuable wealth when one has plowed ground to be sown?

At the time of sowing, a wealth of great value, in terms of sowing and reaping, is the seed combined with the capacity and the possibility of carrying out the sowing, for if a sower exchanges the time of sowing for some other activity that is precious to him or her, one may lose an entire cycle of sowing and harvesting.

Therefore, **as for circumstantial riches, some need to be set aside in some particular moments simply because it is not the opportune moment to use them.**

Continuing with the previous example, what, then, is the most valuable wealth for the soil when it has already been sown?

The desired riches at this point are that God grants the rain at the right time and allows the grain to die, sprout, and grow healthy.

An aspect that is repeated similarly also in the harvest, as well as in the times of storing, distributing, and using this harvest.

*Isaiah 28: 24 **Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow? Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?***

*25 **When he has leveled its surface, Does he not sow the black cummin And scatter the cummin, Plant the wheat in rows, The barley in the appointed place, And the spelt in its place?***

*26 **For He instructs him in right judgment, His God teaches him.***

As for the graduation of the value of riches, we can observe, then, that there are values that are constantly essential and that a person should never lose sight of, but there are also other riches that are especially important at certain times.

And in this last aspect, too, **we see again that only the grace, power, and instruction of the Lord are rich enough to help Christians to scale all the diversity of situations with which they may come across. An aspect that equally highlights one more reason why the Lord Himself is the greatest good and so constantly indispensable in the life of every human being.**

*1 Corinthians 8: 5 **For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),***

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

G. The Value of the Power to Acquire Riches

For many people, the word *riches* may be an inducer to think mainly of materially valuable things. However, although some riches can be easily seen in their material aspect, there are many others whose value is not so tangible or easily measurable.

Following, then, the same line of reasoning as in the previous paragraph, we could also see that some riches seem more visible or evident, and others already appear more indirectly or under a more secondary and less visible perspective.

Thus, particularly for the purposes of this new topic on ways of attributing value to riches, we would like to consider primary riches as those that are practically for final consumption, such as physical food for personal nutrition, clothing, housing, transportation, and so on. As for secondary riches, we would like to consider them as those that make it possible to obtain primary riches, such as the ability to work to produce food and other things.

People often know the final value attributed to the acquisition of a food item. However, would they know how to appropriately attribute the value of how much it is worth for them to be able to work to have the resources to access primary riches?

How much is it worth to be healthy? How much is it worth to have a place to produce food? How much is the ability to work combined with the opportunity to work worth?

In most situations, a significant part of primary riches is actually only accessed when there is the possibility of using secondary riches, remembering that in this topic, we are considering that secondary riches are those that cooperate so that primary riches are achieved. That is, various secondary riches are those that serve as an instrument to confer a degree of power or resources to acquire primary riches.

In this way, some types of riches also have their value attributed to the power they grant for the acquisition of other riches. Or yet, one of the ways of measuring the value of secondary riches is also evaluating them regarding their ability to acquire other riches.

In the world, many people are focused on working for their daily bread and cannot or do not pay much attention to how much their potential workforce is really worth. However, there are other people who seek training and continuous training in an attempt to increase the more intense use of their secondary riches or to increase their productive potential to acquire primary riches. And there are still others who even specialize in wanting to lead other individuals so that they also generate more productivity, profits, and increased riches for them.

Nowadays, enormous volumes of riches are spent to obtain primary riches, but also high volumes of riches and fortunes are spent or invested in the search for the enrichment of secondary riches, and not just for the basic items.

However, when a person pays attention to the matter that there are riches that serve as an instrument to acquire others, it is important to observe this aspect with special attention so as not to think that the abundance of secondary riches, because one can buy many primary riches with it, can buy whatever this person wants.

When, in a person's heart, the valuation of secondary riches becomes excessive, and as if these riches are a synonym that with them this person

can buy whatever one wants, this same individual runs an enormous risk of entering areas of intense false measurements and illusions about riches.

For this reason, before attributing, in the heart, a high value to some riches because they confer power to acquire others, it is crucial for a person to counterbalance the value of secondary riches also from the perspective of what is not subject to being acquired through this type of riches.

In other words, **the riches that serve as an instrument to acquire other riches should also have their value judged by what they cannot acquire.**

Several riches in the world's scale of values can be considered as having a high value to acquire an enormity of other riches, but depending on the moment and the situation, these same riches can become entirely useless.

An example follows below:

*Proverbs 11: 4 **Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.***

Thus, **when returning to the theme of righteousness, we understand it is fitting to emphasize, time after time, that neither primary nor secondary riches, which can buy many primary riches on Earth, have any value for the eternal justification of a person before death and before God.**

Neither material goods nor the potential to carry out works on Earth to obtain other riches are of any benefit on the day of accountability before God. As we have already seen, no person, after leaving the natural body, can carry the riches of the Earth to be with him or her in the accountability before the Lord or to use them to acquire the Lord's favor for eternity.

*Romans 14: 12 **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.***

*Galatians 2: 16 ... **knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.***

The righteousness offered and granted by God, through Christ, is the only resource that can deliver from eternal death everyone who believes in the righteousness of the Lord and receives it in one's heart. (A subject widely approached under the theme The Gospel of God's Righteousness).

Many riches in the world are accepted for purchasing many things, but in the face of the need to acquire eternal riches, they lose all their value.

The riches of the world have no power to purchase the rich eternal salvation, which is offered to us by the grace of God and can only be received through faith in the Lord

Jesus Christ and His grace. (A subject approached more widely also under the themes The Gospel of Salvation and The Gospel of the Grace of God).

Starting with the human soul, how can we attribute value to it according to the values of the world? Or what is the worth of a soul to express it in terms of natural resources?

Neither primary riches added together nor secondary riches grouped, which even serve to acquire many primary riches, have in themselves a sufficiently significant value to cover the value of a single soul of a single human being. An aspect that has been exemplified throughout several themes of the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life also through the text that follows below, which we repeat here once again:

- Psalms 49: 1 **Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,***
*2 **Both low and high, Rich and poor together.***
*3 **My mouth shall speak wisdom, And the meditation of my heart shall give understanding.***
*4 **I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp.***
*5 **Why should I fear in the days of evil, When the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?***
*6 **Those who trust in their wealth And boast in the multitude of their riches,***
*7 **None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him:***
*8 **(For the redemption of their souls is costly, And it shall cease forever)***
*9 **That he should continue to live eternally, And not see the Pit.***
*10 **For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, And leave their wealth to others.***
- ...
- 16 **Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his house is increased;***
*17 **For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.***
-

Therefore, **the redemption of a soul from bondage to sin, the body of sin, the condemning Law of Moses, and eternal death cannot be obtained by material goods nor by the riches that have the potential to produce material goods.**

Regarding the provision for eternal salvation, all the riches in the world will run out first, and they can provide nothing for even a single life, let alone for millions and billions of human beings.

In the face of the redemptive value of God's grace, the riches of the world are exposed to their weakness or impotence towards eternal aspects.

All the natural resources that a person may gather cannot attain the power of acquiring salvation. A reason why the salvation of one soul is more valuable than all the riches that the richest of the rich among human beings can accumulate.

As we have already mentioned, there is no provision for a person's eternal salvation without passing through the acceptance of God's righteousness, made available to us by Christ's death on Calvary's cross, and which cannot be bought, bribed, or manipulated as happens with many courts and aspects of human justice.

So, we understand that we can say that **a person who has the salvation of one's soul provided by the grace of the Lord, through faith in Christ Jesus, even if one is very poor on Earth, is incomparably richer than any rich person who has not yet achieved the salvation of one's soul.**

*Matthew 16: 26 **For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?***

*Psalms 37: 16 **A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.***

Since certain riches are more valuable or less valuable than others depending on what they manage to acquire, but also evidenced by what they cannot acquire, we can see that if a soul cannot be saved by the grouping of natural riches, either primary or secondary, that which can save a soul is incomparably superior to the total set of riches that cannot accomplish it.

Still regarding the redemption of the human soul, the matter does not only refer to some riches being more important than others, for in the specific case of the redemption of a soul, there are no riches that can redeem a soul more than other riches. For the remission or redemption of a soul, there is an exclusive and unique expression of riches that made the provision for the redemption of all souls, as remembered and exemplified also in the texts that follow below:

*Revelation 5: 6 **And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.***
*7 **Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.***
*8 **Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.***
*9 **And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,***
*10 **And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."***

1 Corinthians 7: 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

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1 Corinthians 6: 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Thus, the central approach in the last verses quoted above is not only about the emphasis given to a particular riches that is above all human riches, but also the exclusivity of this wealth, as nothing is comparable to the value of a person's redemption from eternal death and to the value of the blood of Christ to purchase for God what is most precious on Earth, namely: human lives or souls!

We also emphasize here that **although salvation is offered or granted freely to human beings, it has cost an incomparably high and unparalleled price in all the centuries of human existence in the present world.**

In this way, **no riches in the world can be equated to the price of Christ's work on the cross of Calvary. And therefore, no person should allow any wealth in the world to take him or her away from faith in Christ Jesus and the justification provided in this work on the cross, just as the notion of the value of Christ's work should also collaborate for a Christian never to accept that one's heart becomes enslaved to men or women, or even to what they propose as riches.**

1 Peter 1: 17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you

21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The price or value of Christ's work on the cross of Calvary is the only price or value that provides true freedom in the heart and which, also in this regard, is exclusive and unmatched.

Galatians 5: 1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

John 8: 36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

In the world, there are riches with which people can buy many things, but which may also keep them enslaved to these many things instead of giving them freedom. Thus, having many riches in the world is not synonymous with being truly free in God.

The Lord has always instructed and continues to instruct people to look beyond what seems so powerful to acquire other riches. And people on Earth often err so much by not looking at the riches that truly support them to obtain both primary and secondary riches, which is the Lord Himself, according to the text already exposed above and which we list again below:

Deuteronomy 8: 17 ... "then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'
*18 **But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.**" (NKJV + AV)*

The Lord repeatedly warns people to attribute the strength to obtain riches to the central source that grants them life to achieve resources, for like king Belshazzar exemplified in the text below, there are many people worldwide who credit a high value to the natural wealth they come to have in their hands, but who do not credit the One who gives them the breath of life with which they can have access to other riches, whether primary or secondary.

*Daniel 5: 22 But you his son, Belshazzar, **have not humbled your heart,** although you knew all this.*

*23 And **you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven.** They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; **and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.***

24 Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

25 And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;

*27 TEKEL: **You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;***

Therefore, what for a Christian, who still lives in the present world, can be compared to the fact that one, still in a perishable body, can harbor the Holy Spirit of God in one's

heart and can offer oneself to God to live and walk in the heavenly purposes even being here on Earth?

And all this is only possible for a Christian because a particular wealth that cannot be acquired with natural resources has been poured into one's heart by the Lord.

*2 Corinthians 4: 6 **For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***
*7 **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.***

Finally, in this topic on “the value of the power to acquire riches,” we would like to emphasize that there are many riches that a person needs, and that are really valuable in more lasting terms, which can never be bought by human riches, whatever they may be, for whatever is really valuable for eternity has no equivalent value on Earth with which to compare or acquire it.

For instance, who, no matter how much money one has, can buy from God one more minute, one more year, one more decade of the breath of life to live on Earth if the Lord determines that it ends? And if not even the time of earthly life a person can buy from God, how could anyone intend to purchase eternal life and the other aspects that accompany it?

No matter how many earthly resources one has, who can buy forgiveness of sins before death and before God, before Him who sees everything and everyone?

No matter how many gifts and abilities one has developed, and no matter how many natural works one has performed, who can boast before the Creator God as if the Lord owed him or her something, longer life, or eternal life?

No matter how much natural resources one may possess, who is the person who can use these natural resources to buy the genuine love bestowed exclusively by the Eternal Lord?

The Lord allows people to achieve various things by handling material wealth, human efforts, or money. However, in the face of many others, natural resources are null. And yet, the things that natural resources may achieve, people only achieve them as long as the Lord gives them the breath of life.

God explicitly instructs us in the Scriptures that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of Lights, who bestows them not because the value of riches or material possessions that people supposedly claim to offer Him. (A subject seen more broadly in the theme Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift).

Thus, although there are many riches that people are so attached to in order to guarantee access to other riches, that which is the basis of present and future life cannot be achieved, and will never be achieved, by money, material goods, or by human's strength and capacity. And whatever a person may accomplish, even on the natural level, one can only do it because the power of life granted by God allows one to do it.

Before God, money or human wealth does not have as high a weight or value as it does for people in the world. For this reason, the Lord invites

everyone to come first to Him to buy from Him, and under the conditions He offers, what is fundamental for their lives, as exemplified respectively once again below:

- Revelation 3: 16* "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.
- 17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;
- 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.
- 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
- 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.
- 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.
- 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Isaiah 55: 1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price."

1 Corinthians 3: 11 **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only "salesman" who goes from door to door, and to all the doors of the world, without partiality regarding people, to "sell for free" the best and exclusive riches in the universe, which He alone has to offer, on the part of the Heavenly Father, to all human beings.

According to the parameters of the world, many people consider more valuable those riches for which it is necessary to pay to obtain them or those riches for which people are willing to pay the highest prices. However, for God, the most sublime riches are those genuinely offered by grace and freely given through true and eternal love.

Given this, the expression "if a particular advice were indeed good, it would not be given for free" is an expression that does not apply to the fundamental riches of life granted by the Lord, for in the kingdom of God, good gifts and perfect gifts are the fruit of the Lord's generosity and goodness.

James 1: 5 **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

2 Corinthians 9: 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

No human wealth can, for example, buy genuine love or genuine peace, as these riches are freely poured into the hearts of those who receive Christ into their lives.

*Romans 5: 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

...

5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

1 John 4: 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

If we consider the value of a particular wealth for what it can acquire, nothing is comparable to what the riches of God's grace, mercy, and love can achieve, which still have their value greatly elevated by what they can also grant to human beings.

And if we consider the value of particular riches for what they cannot acquire, no natural or human riches can acquire the grace, mercy, and eternal love, through which the Lord offers and gives us the abundance of a multitude of other riches.

In this way, also from these perspectives, having the power to acquire riches according to the heavenly kingdom is in no way comparable to the mentality of people who live dissociated from fellowship with the Lord and His instruction.

John 14: 27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

2 Corinthians 8: 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.

Ephesians 1: 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, ...

*Ephesians 2: 4 **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,***
5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
 ...
7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ...

God offers and bestows many natural resources for people to use appropriately to be provided for while they are in the present world. However, these riches will never be able to buy the favor of God and the heavenly riches that the Lord gives them through grace and trust in Him.

After all, why would God let Himself be bought or need to be bought for what is already His by right of creation and which He Himself has given to human beings to be used for what is good?

*1 Corinthians 4: 7 **For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?***

Thus, the fact that God offers and grants natural resources to people should never be a reason for a Christian to think that it is through them that one has value before God.

On the contrary, the mentality that God wants people to keep offering meetings or services of sacrifices of natural riches and gifts to Him is a remnant of the mindset of the Old Covenant or life under the Law of Moses, but that neither pleases God nor contributes to the improvement of the knowledge of heavenly truths in the hearts of those who practice these works, according to some more texts exemplified below. (A subject widely approached in the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

*Jeremiah 7: 22 **"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.***
23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'
24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."

*Hebrews 10: 8 **Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law),***

9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

**Hebrews 9: 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience;
10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.**

What is precious to God in a person's life is that one remains humble and faithful to the Lord, regardless of whether or not one has an abundance of material goods, and that one remains primarily and continually dependent on the riches of God's grace and love so that one may never lack heavenly riches, vision, and garments to continue living and walking according to the will of the Lord.

Micah 6: 8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

**Isaiah 66: 1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?
2 For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.**

Psalms 51: 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart; These, O God, You will not despise.

H. Transient and Eternal – Shakable and Unshakable

Throughout this theme, we have seen several times that there are passing riches and eternal riches, as well as that the perception of this aspect is essential for the appropriate attribution of values to the most diverse riches.

Nevertheless, considering that human beings so often return to allowing their hearts to be attracted mainly and excessively to material things to the detriment of adequately appreciating what is eternal, we would like to highlight in this topic some more considerations and texts that emphasize the passing and the eternal to accentuate even more the vital and elevated condition of the aspects that are everlasting.

Thus, in Peter's second letter, we can note that the things we see in the natural world today will definitely pass away. And Peter still goes on to describe that the awareness of this temporality of the natural things should have an expressive effect already on the present way of life of every Christian, as presented below:

- 2 Peter 3: 7 **But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.***
- 8 **But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.***
- 9 **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.***
- 10 **But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.***
- 11 **Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,***
- 12 **looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?***
- 13 **Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.***
- 14 **Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;***
- 15(a) **and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, ...***
-

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself also warned us repeatedly to work for the food that endures to eternal life and not for that which perishes, further declaring that it is only the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who can guide a person to works that add riches to this individual that subsist for eternal life, whose text we remember below. (Aspect discussed more specifically in the theme Works, Labors, and Services).

*John 6: 27 **"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."***

Similarly, when we also see God's writings addressed to Christians through Paul, we can observe that understanding the importance of the eternal over the passing things should be a characteristic of all those who believe in God and who have elected Christ as the Lord of their lives, as follows:

2 Corinthians 4: 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

5: 1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,

3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Philippians 3: 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

And in yet another text, Paul records a statement that if the eternal did not exist, Christians would be the most unhappy of all human beings.

1 Corinthians 15: 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

Therefore, the attribution of value to the riches that a person practices in one's heart is directly related to one's understanding and faith in relation to the eternal life promised by God to all who believe in Him, and which will be fully manifested at the end of one's natural life.

Advancing a little further, also in the beautiful and extraordinary book of Hebrews, we find a way worthy of special mention on the approach to the theme of the eternal and the transient things, which is the reference to things that can be shaken and things that cannot be shaken, as also exemplified below:

Hebrews 12: 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,

26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."

27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

So, if anything is shakable, it does not make up what is called by the Lord as His heavenly kingdom.

In other words, the kingdom of God consists of unshakable riches, while the kingdoms of the world and the actions of the powers of darkness consist of shakable aspects. And for this reason, too, heavenly riches are incomparably superior to all other riches.

Therefore, people who receive the heavenly kingdom may take things of the world and use them to do good, for God has given the created things to human beings to use them to do many works in the world that are in line with God's will. However, if something is shakable, it, in essence, is not the kingdom of God. If anything is shakable, it is because it also is passing and not the very kingdom of God, which is composed of that which is eternal.

According to the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness should be the first life focus of every Christian, for also concerning riches, when a Christian first relates to the kingdom of God and His righteousness, one learns to distinguish and attribute due value to the eternal and the temporary aspects, the unshakable and what is shakable. And this, so that in one's scale of values, one does not come to denigrate what should not be diminished and does not come to exceedingly exalt what should not be exalted beyond what is convenient.

Matthew 6: 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Transient and shakable things may significantly contribute to the execution of God's will. However, the kingdom of God and His righteousness should always be the first target of search in the life of the Christian, without which all other references of values are subject to be seen through obscured optics and without an unshakable and eternal foundation.

1 Corinthians 3: 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

- 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*
- 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*
- 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*
-

Given this, we can see, then, that **nothing in the world is so valuable that it justifies or is worth the Christian failing to build on the foundation called the Lord Jesus Christ. And nothing in the world is so valuable that it is worth a person building with what the Lord does not instruct one to edify, for, ultimately, everything will be tested by the trial of God's fire. And this is also why the Lord wants to help every Christian to build according to the instruction of the heavenly kingdom and righteousness.**

In everything or all things, also in the aspect of attributing value to the most diverse riches, the greatest riches to guide us in everything is the Lord and the instruction of His kingdom and His unshakable righteousness, through the Holy Spirit given to us.

John 16: 13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

1 Corinthians 2: 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

In the present world, there are many natural riches that God allows people to use in their journeys on Earth. However, the discernment to attribute the due value to each kind of riches and the appropriate degree of involvement with them is something that the Lord has always kept and keeps exclusively in Him and grants it to those who seek it in Him.

In this way, a Christian who behaves with maturity in Christ has already learned that, in everything, one needs the Lord's direction through the Holy Spirit and according to the kingdom of God and His righteousness so as not to build in vain when one makes use of natural resources as instruments of help to live and walk according to the will of the Lord.

Hebrews 5: 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

1 Corinthians 14: 20 **Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.**

1 Corinthians 15: 58 **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

C4. The Deceitfulness of Riches

In several themes that precede this material, we approach various aspects of the parable of the sower who went out to sow the word of God and whose seeds fell on four different soils. (A subject addressed especially under the theme Work Out Your Salvation, in the chapter Take Heed How You Hear or Watch How You Hear).

Observing, however, the referenced parable even more specifically, we can notice that one of the four soils in which the word of the sower was sown was a soil that, in addition to the seed of the word of God, also harbored thorns. And in the narrative of the Lord Jesus about this specific soil, we can see that the thorns ended up prevailing and choking the heavenly word or preventing it from bringing to light the fruits for which it had been sown.

And if we continue to remember the parable of the sower regarding the ground that received the thorns, we can notice that one of the types of thorns narrated in this parable refers precisely to the topic of riches when these are associated with the power of deception or fascination. For this reason, we understand that it is crucial to address this aspect in the present theme about The Christian and the Riches.

Let us see, then, initially, two texts in which the Scriptures mention the expression *the deceitfulness or fascination of riches*, as follows:

Matthew 13:22 ***"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."***

Mark 4: 18 ***"Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,
19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."***

We also understand that it is important to highlight, at the beginning of this new chapter, the fact that it is not the riches in themselves that are equated to thorns, but it is the deceitfulness that may be associated with them that is characterized as an agent contrary to the will of the word of God sown in the heart of a person and who even might have welcomed the word of the Lord with joy.

In the previous chapters, we also approached the point that there is a significant difference between heavenly riches, earthly riches, and the value that is attributed to the different riches. And following the same line of reasoning here, we will also seek to discuss in this new chapter some points about the distinction between riches in themselves and the deceitfulness of riches.

Although earthly riches are transient, most of them were created by God for the benefit of people. And these riches, properly speaking, are not those that the Lord calls thorns, but, rather, some ways people look at the various riches and the values they attribute to them in their hearts, as is also shown in the text below of Paul's letter to Timothy:

*1 Timothy 6: 17 **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.***

The abundance of gifts that God grants to human beings are not thorns that the Lord bestows on them. However, the way in which a person relates to each of the riches or abundance and the degree of importance or value that one attributes to them is what may not be adequate and may become the reception of thorns in the heart.

The way through whom and what people obtain or seek to obtain riches, and, yet, how they value riches, may lead them to an inappropriate involvement with them at certain times in their lives or even in an entirely reprehensible manner.

God created the natural resources that exist in the world for the good of people, but there are riches that are acquired through unrighteousness and by agents committed to evil that turn the relationship with them into a non-beneficial action or into mistakes comparable to the action of the thorns that grow in a sown soil. In the world, there are many proposals for the acquisition of riches that aim to deceive hearts, seeking to subject people to circumstances that oppose the Lord's sovereignty over their lives, as explicitly exemplified also in the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ reported below:

*Matthew 4: 8 **Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.***

*9 **And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You “if” You will fall down and worship me."***

*10 **Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"***

In the text of Matthew above, we can observe a clear strategy of attempted deceitfulness or fascination through the exaltation of the glory and splendor of the kingdoms of the world in opposition to the eternal values of the heavenly kingdom.

Therefore, **the so-called deceitfulness of riches is a real enemy of human beings and the word of God sown in their hearts. And just as it is necessary to have proper instruction to attribute values to riches, so it is also necessary to have appropriate instruction to perceive the operation of propositions coated with the deceitfulness of riches.**

In other words, looking at the last text mentioned, we can see that **riches, both heavenly and earthly, have a glory, a fame, a value attributed to them. And one of the main characteristics of the operation of the deceitfulness of riches is the attempt to distort the glory of riches, associating them with a glory that is not pertinent or true.**

That is, one of the characteristics of the operation of deceitfulness, deception, or fascination is precisely the attribution of distorted values to riches, demonstrating one more reason why the theme of an appropriate attribution of values to riches is so crucial for the life of a Christian while still living in the present world.

In this way, if we observe the attempts of action of the deceitfulness of riches even a little more closely, we can see that **this deceitfulness seeks to act simultaneously, at least, on two fronts:**

- ⇒ 1st) **Attributing unrealistic and overestimated values to what is less valuable, that is, it tries to make people assimilate an overvaluation of something that does not indeed have the value shown to them;**
- ⇒ 2nd) **Denigrating, depreciating, or diminishing the value of riches that, in reality, have a superior, more estimable, or even unique and unparalleled value.**

Returning, then, to observing the temptation that the devil presented to the Lord Jesus Christ according to the last text exposed above, we see that the devil, in his craftiness, aimed to show the Lord Jesus only the part of the glory of the earthly kingdoms despite these kingdoms having not only “glories.” On the contrary, the kingdoms of this world have more sorrows and pains than “glory,” for “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (according to 1 John 5: 9 and discussed more widely also in the themes The Gospel of the Righteousness of God, The Gospel of Peace, The Christian in the World in General, and The Law of Understanding).

So, as for the aspect of deception or fascination, the devil does not tempt people just by showing them evil so that they will fear it and, because of fear, submit to him. Instead, the devil also acts in the opposite way and seeks to tempt people by attracting their eyes and feelings to the facet of the “glory” or “splendor” of the world and riches, omitting, however, the various aspects, facts, and consequences that are not glorious or splendid in the world and the relationship with earthly riches.

Deceitfulness attracts many people because it may even present some aspects pertinent to the glory of riches, but, at the same time, it shows a partial, limited, false, and forged perspective with a goal of objectively inducing a heart to an equally false and momentary view of the limited glory of something that is exposed to a person.

The deceitfulness aims to disguise riches so that people see in them values that are indeed relevant to them, but also values that are not pertinent to them, as well as still seeks to hide the deficiencies and depreciation of the presented riches.

The fascination of riches aims to make a person see something untrue as if it were or could become true, but which will never or can never actually become true. Deceitfulness proposes visualizations of illusions or unrealities under the idea that they are true or may become true.

Nowadays, perhaps we could still say that the deceitfulness of riches seeks to create a vision in virtual reality in a person's heart, but that, in practical life, is not actually how it was exposed conceptually or virtually to an individual.

On the other hand, still concerning the last text quoted above, we can also note that **the Lord Jesus Christ did not allow Himself to be deceived, enchanted, or**

fascinated in any way by the attractive appeal of the riches of the world, for He did not have His eyes on the seeming, false, or transient glory of the world. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ never looked at the riches of the world dissociated from the heavenly perspective and God's counsel on both the reality of material or temporary life and of eternal life.

While the devil tried to show the Lord Jesus Christ the “glory of the kingdoms of the world,” Christ saw what was actually in the hearts of the people who were under this apparent glory of the kingdoms and, above all, put His eyes on the Heavenly Father and in His eternal will.

*Matthew 9: 36 **But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.***

*Mark 6: 34 **And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.***

*1 John 2: 17 **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.***

In addition, another crucial factor concerning the deceitfulness of riches is that it does not seek to fascinate only one group of people and not others. The deception of riches can be presented to both the poor and the rich, those who have little material wealth and those who already have it in abundance, although the warning in the Scriptures to the rich regarding this point is more frequent.

At the beginning of this theme, we saw that the conceptualization of what riches are and what their value may come to be is not an equal or linear task for everyone, for its understanding is often associated with the living conditions of a person according to the place and the conditions in which one lives. For materially rich people, the concept of riches may be very different from those who live in areas or situations in which they suffer from a lack of even food and minimal living conditions.

While some may be indulging in the wild pursuit of more and more riches, others work hard to have the bare minimum to feed themselves and their families.

Nevertheless, in both cases, the fascination with the glory of the riches and kingdoms of the world can be similarly present and intensely active, as it is not constituted by what is real, but by the corrupted expectation or illusion that it seeks to cause in people's hearts.

A person in particular, for example, may have a good home, a good job, and a good general condition of life and not be fascinated by the riches and kingdoms of the world. On the other hand, there may be a person living in extremely poor conditions and find oneself deeply involved in the fascination of worldly riches and kingdoms.

Similarly, the reverse of the previous example may also occur, for **an appropriate and without deceitfulness relationship with the riches and the kingdoms of the world is, first of all, a consequence of the condition of a proper relationship with God and with the values of the heavenly kingdom within a person's heart.**

There are poor people very blessed by God and there are rich people who find themselves on paths of great perdition, just as there are poor people who do not exercise faith in God and people with many natural resources who, despite their riches, live and walk by faith in the Lord and not by confidence in their riches.

Therefore, **a person is not automatically pleasing or displeasing before God because one is rich, poor, or “neither rich nor poor.” The aspects that make a person acceptable before God are not the material resources one has, but eternal grace, faith in God, and how one receives and uses the main riches the Lord deposits in one's “inner man.”**

Let's see below, then, some texts that refer to the poor and the rich, and about what makes a person acceptable or pleasant before the Lord:

Proverbs 22: 2 ***The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD is the maker of them all.***

Proverbs 17: 5 ***He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.***

Hebrews 11: 2 ***For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.***

...
6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Romans 1: 17 ***For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."***

Proverbs 19: 22 ***What is desired in a man is kindness, And a poor man is better than a liar.***

As we have also seen in previous chapters, John the Baptist was considered by God the greatest man born of a woman before the coming of the Lord Jesus in the flesh into the world, for he was given the privilege of preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah, of the Christ, and pointing to the path of righteousness, and not because he had or did not have material goods. John the Baptist, materially speaking, was never a man who possessed abundant material riches and never used palaces and their

luxuries, but he was the only human being chosen to be the forerunner and announcer who personally and formally presented the Lamb of God to the world.

Below, we recall a part of the words that the Lord Jesus Christ said about John the Baptist, as follows:

Matthew 11: 7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

11 Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

In yet another moment of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh in the world, the Lord was expressly objective in declaring that a person's life does not consist of the goods or values that one possesses, warning that the excessive appreciation of the riches of the world introduces a person into the field of covetousness, which, basically, is an enchantment or deceitfulness, for it is also equated in Scripture with idolatry.

Luke 12: 15 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."

Colossians 3: 5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

When the Lord Jesus Christ made the above recommendations to His listeners, He was showing people several essential parameters to evaluate the value they give to different areas and things in life, pointing to the fact that greed makes a person attribute value that is not due to attribute to material riches, which is also basically the action of the deceitfulness of riches.

So, also because covetousness may be equated with fascination, deceitfulness, or idolatry, we emphasize again that the subject of riches needs appropriate instruments and parameters to measure the values that are attributed to them.

Given this, **we can note in the Scriptures that the devil offered the kingdoms of the world and their glory to the Lord Jesus, but the Lord, on the other hand, had parameters and measures to properly weigh and evaluate what indeed was the value of what the devil offered Him in comparison with what Christ had in God.**

The Lord Jesus always discerned the riches of the world from the heavenly discernment about the due value or importance that should be attributed to them. And for this, too, He always chose what had real profitable value and rejected what only had seeming, idolatrous, and perverse value.

But how, then, can people make appropriate choices from what is proposed to them if they do not measure and evaluate what is presented to them?

How can anyone measure the value of something if one does not know the least about a subject and does not even know the instruments to evaluate what is placed before one's eyes?

And how can a person choose what is indeed valuable if one does not take the time to assess the value of what is offered to him or her, but also what one is required to give in return or what one is required to give up?

If we still continue to carefully observe the case of the example of the temptation of the devil toward the Lord Jesus that we saw in the text of Matthew 4, we can notice that the great value to be evaluated above all others at that time was not the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and not even what the devil was requiring Christ to do to obtain them. Instead, it was what the Lord Jesus would have to give up if He opposed what the Heavenly Father had instructed Him to do, as well as what not to do.

However ample the amount of riches of the kingdoms of the world was, their total sum was not worthy to the point of the Lord Jesus Christ contradicting what on the part of the Heavenly Father had already been recorded in the Scriptures about Him, about His ministry while being in the flesh in the world, and about God, to which the Lord Jesus had already access since His childhood.

Therefore, there are situations in which the appropriate parameters for evaluating riches should not be focused on those aspects that assess the very riches in reference only but on what is necessary to contradict, give up, or set aside to obtain some riches in particular.

Understanding the value or central price of many riches may not only be in what one must do or pay to obtain them, but also, and perhaps primarily, in what one must give up or oppose to obtain or receive them!

On the one hand, temptation or deceitfulness seeks to falsely magnify riches beyond what is fitting for them. On the other hand, however, and often as the principal strategy, they seek to minimize or hide the price of what an individual loses or no longer has access to if one adheres to the riches associated with the proposed deceitfulness.

Temptation and deceitfulness mainly seek to falsify or hide the price of what is necessary to give up in order to obtain what is deceitfully proposed.

If, during the temptation in the desert, Christ had judged His condition only by the material aspects of what He could perhaps acquire with the devil's proposal, He could even have been under a greater risk of thinking that He could have incalculably more than He had in the arid and devastated place He was. However, in addition to knowing that the devil is a liar and the father of it, when looking from the perspective that those riches would choke the promise and instruction of the Heavenly Father sown in His heart, and as a consequence, all the will of God for Him as Son of Man, Christ had no

doubt to resort to God's instruction in response to the proposition of the deceitfulness of riches.

But unfortunately, and unlike Christ, how many are not those people who exchange what is valuable for the vile because the vile is offered to them at an apparently low acquisition price, but do not realize that behind it is hidden the high cost of letting suffocate what they have already received from God in their hearts as something priceless?

For example, **the price of committing infidelity to achieve some wealth, pleasure, or privilege may even be materially very low or even minuscule in some cases. However, the price or the loss of abandoning fidelity can be much higher than what someone may acquire with infidelity.**

One of the essences of the characteristics of the “human being” is the possibility of making certain choices. However, we highlight here, once again, **that a person's true freedom does not consist in being able to have everything or being able to do anything but in being able to choose and carry out what is appropriate for one's life on Earth and, above all, for one's eternal life.**

So, **regarding the deceitfulness of riches and dazzling propositions, a Christian needs to practice the Lord's instruction to see and clearly separate what is precious and what is vile. And this, to freely choose what is precious indeed.** (According to an example of God's instruction to the prophet Jeremiah exposed in chapter 15, verses 19 and 20, of his book of prophecies).

The Lord Jesus Christ made His choice when the devil tempted Him. The Lord Jesus chose not to leave the preeminent place that Heavenly Father and His instruction had in His life. The Lord Jesus opted for the greater good, for the precious, valuable, and lasting good. The Lord Jesus opted for the riches that really mattered and not for the deceit that presented a seeming glory, but which was accompanied by a veil that hid what was necessary to abandon to obtain that false glory. The Lord Jesus chose the same option as the psalmist David, which we recall once again below:

*Psalms 16:1 **Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.***
*2 **O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."***

The Lord Jesus Christ did not let the proposition of fascination or deceitfulness enter and lodge in His heart because the Lord never left the precious refuge of God and His instruction. Christ never put aside fidelity to His Heavenly Father and never associated Himself with anything contrary to the heavenly will.

When the devil presented the temptation aiming at fascinating the eyes of Christ, the devil did not show the terms of what the Lord Jesus Christ would have to leave behind to receive the kingdoms of the world. And if the Lord did not know the terms of the heavenly will, the devil would not remind Him of what they were, for, once again, one of the ways in which deceitfulness operates is precisely to try to hide what one loses by adhering to its propositions.

In the book of Hebrews, we find yet another person who made an adequate choice regarding the multiple riches that he could choose to have access to and who did not

accept “the kingdoms of the world” offered to him, preferring to be faithful to the Lord. This person was Moses, whose example we also recall again below:

*Hebrews 11: 24 **By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,***
*25 **choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,***
*26 **esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.***

As is also confirmed in the book of Acts, Moses was a man highly educated in the science known in his day, mighty in what he spoke and performed, and surrounded by a great abundance of material riches, as follows:

*Acts 7: 20 **At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.***
*21 **But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.***
*22 **And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.***

Moses had been welcomed as the son of the daughter of the most powerful ruler of all peoples of his time. However, Moses chose to be associated with the contempt that Christ receives from a large part of humanity and chose faithfulness to God instead of the great opulence he had in Egypt.

Moses was among the greatest rulers of the kingdoms of the world. Thus, what the devil was offering to the Lord Jesus, Moses already had in a great measure by right of adoption and inheritance as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. However, Moses chose to leave behind these kingdoms of the world so as not to have to depart from the hope of God's promises that had been spoken about his life and the descendants of Abraham.

Moses was already among those who had "gained the whole world." However, he chose to leave this world of the powers of men and darkness behind to have his soul taken refuge and be saved in God. He did not accept association with the fascination of riches, preferring the contempt or shame of associating himself with the Christ promised to his forefathers and who would come into the world in due time.

Therefore, it is crucial that a person does not allow oneself to be hooked by the deceitfulness of riches, whether they are few or even in immeasurable volumes, because once a person associates oneself with the fascination of riches, the task of dissociating oneself from these fascinations also becomes highly challenging, even when one comes across the fact that the inappropriate riches do not accomplish what was promised that they would fulfill.

In previous chapters, we have already cited the example of a wealthy young man who sought Jesus Christ to ask the Lord about his salvation, but who ended up opting for riches instead of following Christ. And he did this because, in his eyes, many were his riches and his heart was set on them. Goods and properties for this man became so

important that they came to have more value in his heart than the eternal salvation of his own life.

The rich young man who owned many goods and properties, even though he was saddened, saw more value in the material riches he possessed than in the riches he could find in Christ. Unlike Christ and Moses, this man chose the path of the deceitfulness of riches (according to Matthew 19: 16 to 30).

Thus, we once again see that **the deceitfulness of riches operates by trying to denigrate or hide the values of the fundamental riches of life and to elevate in excess what is of temporary or passing value, aiming to keep people subject to this understanding so that they do not have their eyes open to see the aspects that are fascinating them, but also so that they continue not seeing what is essential for their lives.**

Deceitfulness is not an honest scale. On the contrary, it is false, perverse, and seeks to corrupt in a person's heart every true and correct assessment of the most diverse aspects of the present life and, mainly, of eternal life in the Lord.

And here again, we reiterate that only in Christ and the Spirit of the Lord does a person have the provision to discern what deceitfulness tries to hide or overestimate and to distinguish what kind of spirit is at work in the propositions that try to draw people to a deceitful relationship with riches.

Only with the instruction, direction, and support of Christ can a Christian choose that which comes from God to also live and walk according to the will of the Lord, applying this both for discerning and choosing the riches appropriate for one's life and for identifying and rejecting the most varied subtle propositions of the deceitfulness of riches.

Ephesians 5: 13 **But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.**

14 **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."**

15 **See then that you walk circumspectly (or diligently), not as fools but as wise,**

16 **redeeming the time, because the days are evil.**

God can abundantly add all the natural riches needed by His children so that they may live and walk according to His will. However, not all wealth and material goods that a Christian approaches or that are offered to him or her actually come from the Heavenly Father. For this reason, the aspect of judging the origin and purpose of each wealth offered to a Christian also needs, first of all, to be subject to our Only Lord, Head, and Foundation, the Shepherd Jesus Christ.

Romans 7: 25 **I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind (or understanding) I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**

Many pursuits of riches are initiatives of the flesh or presented to people by the world and the devil. And the flesh, the world, and the devil operate with the use of deceitfulness, for they present the values of riches under distorted perspectives in relation to the values attributed by the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the deceitfulness of riches active in the world aims to corrupt people's sober assessment of each of the riches they encounter in their most diverse circumstances or activities.

Given this, while discernment aims to bring light to an individual's understanding, deceitfulness aims to obscure people's sobriety so that they do not see a broader picture of the set of consequences involved in their choices of relationship with each type of riches.

Therefore, **the deceitfulness of riches is not only a proposition limited to granting some kind of inappropriate wealth to an individual, but it may also encompass objective attempts aimed at distorting the entire system of evaluating a person's life values.**

Yet in other words, **the deceitfulness of riches seeks to corrupt all the reading, perception, and evaluation that a person makes about what riches are and what the relationship with them indeed means for one's life, always trying to hide mainly what of most precious one loses by subjecting oneself to the deceitfulness.**

*2 Corinthians 11: 3 **But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.***

*Titus 1: 15 **To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.***

Yet as another example, we can see that in Eden, Eve's mind became corrupted when she accepted the fascination proposed by the devil. When Eve accepted that the false value exposed by the enemy had for her the value he sought to show her, she gave in to temptation and embraced the suggestion of the action associated with the deceitfulness, being followed in the same practice by Adam.

In this case, the devil raised the value of knowledge to a false level before Adam and Eve and, at the same time, belittled the loss they would have in following the suggestion of value that he proposed for them to follow.

Thus, Adam and Eve's example shows us that human beings are very limited in their knowledge and evaluation of riches. That is, the value judgment made by people when they dissociate themselves from the Lord's counsel is not according to the value judgment made by God, as we can see once again in the text below:

Luke 16: 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

In the face of all this, however, **we can see again and again that the good news of the Lord, also in the aspect of the relationship with riches, shows us that the Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, aware of human limitations, do not leave unassisted those who seek the Lord and trust in Him.**

In the opposite way to the deceitfulness of riches, the Lord offers us His knowledge and His help so that we can overcome the weaknesses in the evaluation of riches to which the natural human being is subject. And this, the Lord does when He offers us His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth He wants to grant to all those who, above all, believe in the supreme riches of the Lord and open their hearts to receive it, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is given to those who trust in the Lord to instruct and guide them into all truth in all areas of life, which also includes perceiving and distinguishing between what is true and what is deceitfulness in the sphere of riches.

John 16: 13 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."

Romans 8: 26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Incorrect or inaccurate discernment regarding the deceitfulness of riches is a human weakness. However, also regarding this weakness, the Lord offers His Holy Spirit to assist those who love His eternal will.

On the other hand, as the bestowal of the Holy Spirit and guidance into all truth refers to a gift offered by the Lord to human beings, it is also up to them to accept and receive the instruction of the Holy Spirit in their lives in general and in their relationship with the most diverse riches with which they may come across.

Some people may not want true discernment about riches and what deceitfulness tries to associate with riches because once there is an adequate distinction of values, an individual may be faced with choices and decisions that one is not always willing to take. However, for a person to think that maintaining a state of ignorance and

recklessness does not bring harm or evil consequences is equally a fascination or a deception.

Therefore, from whatever facet the Scriptures teach us to look at life, deceitfulness is a path toward which no person should be frivolous or choose to remain in ignorance about it. On the contrary, the Lord calls us to live and walk prudently in everything based on what He instructs us.

- Proverbs 1: 1 **The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:***
- 2 **To know wisdom and instruction, To perceive the words of understanding,***
 - 3 **To receive the instruction of wisdom, Justice, judgment, and equity;***
 - 4 **To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion;***
 - 5 **A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,***
 - 6 **To understand a proverb and an enigma, The words of the wise and their riddles.***
 - 7 **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

*Proverbs 9: 6 **Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding.***

We recall here yet that a broader approach about the inestimable richness of the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence with us in everything and at all times, and on the gift of Him guiding us into all truth, can be found in the themes Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift and The Law of Understanding, a reason why we will not expand on this subject in the present chapter.

To conclude, then, this chapter, we would still like to pose the following questions: What has real value and not a value of deceitfulness? Or what is the real value of specific riches and not the value of the fascination associated with them?

And in response to the above questions, and as we have seen in previous chapters, we would like to mention that we understand that **the real and reliable value of each of the specific riches is what God declares and teaches about each type of riches and about what is the appropriate measure of each kind of riches for each person.**

And, on the other hand, **that which goes against the will, judgment, discernment, and opinion declared and taught by the Lord for an individual is what is subject to fall under what is called the deceitfulness of riches.**

Thus, **it is only through continual fellowship with the Lord that God makes ample provision for a Christian to be supplied with a sober evaluation or discernment of the most diverse propositions of riches that are presented before him or her in the world.**

1 Corinthians 2: 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5: 21 Test all things (or examine, prove, judge, or scrutinize to see whether a thing is genuine or not); hold fast what is good.

There are many riches that are good and of an appropriate origin that God wants to grant to His children. However, there are also many riches that are wrapped or associated with the deceitfulness of riches, which invariably wants to lead people away from Christ.

The deceitfulness of riches is something very present in the world and is opposed to the grace of God. For this reason, Christians are also called to continually resist and refute it by maintaining fellowship with the Spirit of the Lord.

Those who depart themselves from the grace of God become vulnerable to deceitful fascinations, but those who abide in the heavenly grace are taught through it by the Lord to remain sober in all aspects of their lives, as also reiterated in the last texts cited below in this chapter:

Galatians 2: 19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.

3: 1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

4 Have you suffered so many things in vain? if indeed it was in vain?

5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

6 Even or just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

Titus 2: 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

¹² ***teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,***
¹³ ***looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,***
¹⁴ ***who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.***

Hebrews 12: 28 **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.**

C5. Ways in which the Deceitfulness of Riches Seeks to Operate

A. Introduction to the Chapter

Just as we have previously seen different ways of attributing value to riches, we aim in this chapter to see several ways in which the deceitfulness of riches seeks to act.

Initially, we observe here that not all forms of deceitfulness can be placed on a list, and it is not even the mere knowledge about them that protects people from the most varied deceitful propositions, for it is only the Lord and fellowship with Him that gives us the protection that we need. However, a good base of knowledge of some ways in which the deceitfulness of riches seeks to operate can provide more support, agility, and security in discerning them, just as a good base of knowledge of the principles of the kingdom of God can contribute much to the instruction of the Lord in the life of a person in particular.

Therefore, the focus of this chapter is not to exhaust the subject of the ways or forms in which the deceitfulness of riches seeks to operate, but to collaborate with a broader awakening to the permanent need for understanding about their existence and to contribute to Christians to be more attentive to remain continually in fellowship with God also concerning these points.

The call for people to seek growth in the Lord's prudence, wisdom, and instruction is something expressed many times in the Scriptures, as we see in a few more texts below:

Proverbs 1: 5 ***A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, ...***

Proverbs 8: 5 ***O you simple ones, understand prudence, And you fools, be of an understanding heart.***

...
12 ***"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion."***

Proverbs 9: 9 ***Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.***

1 Corinthians 2: 14 ***But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.***

15 ***But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.***

16 ***For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.***

The prudence, wisdom, and discernment that the Lord proposes to grant to those who live and walk in fellowship with Him is a continuous need for all people also in the area of riches, for it is impressive how the deceitfulness of riches seeks to oppress each new generation and each person in the sense of trying to turn people away from God's instruction and wisdom for their lives.

For this reason, it is crucial for a Christian to grow in the knowledge of the mind of the Lord, for He is God from generation to generation and knows in detail all the wiles of the powers of darkness. The Lord is the only One truly able to give a proper value judgment of all things, either to testify what is truly good or to reprove what is unsuitable for an individual's present and eternal life.

Accurate discernment in the most diverse aspects of life is found only in God and fellowship with Him. However, people having ample information on the subject of the deceitfulness of riches can serve as a means for the Lord to clarify for them more quickly and broadly how they may decide and act when the fascinations seek to approach their lives to try to deceive them.

Therefore, in the following topics, even though they are not an exhaustive list, we seek to address some of the most striking specific attempts by which the deceitfulness of riches tries to operate with the objective of entangling people with its propositions and so that those who believe in the Lord are attentive to remain under the instruction of God also concerning this subject so continually present in human life.

B. Excessive Self-Evaluation

If we recall human history from its beginnings, we can observe that the first attempt at fascination recorded in the Scriptures that visited human beings was the temptation in which the devil extolled a particular richness before them, which, however, was accompanied by a promise of something that this wealth could not grant them indeed and accompanied by an omission of the damage that adherence to it would cause them, according to part of the narratives presented below:

- Genesis 2: 8* **The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.**
- 9* **And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**
- 10* **Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads.**
- 11* **The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.**
- 12* **And the gold of that land is good. Bdelium and the onyx stone are there.**
- 13* **The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush.**
- 14* **The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.**
- 15* **Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.**
- 16* **And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;**
- 17* **but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."**

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- Genesis 3: 1* **Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"**
- 2* **And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;**
- 3* **but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"**
- 4* **Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.**
- 5* **For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

Among the many aspects that we can observe in the texts above regarding the operation of the deceitfulness of riches, we can see that the temptation that it proposes is not directly related to people's lack of resources or regarding a state of oppression over them, for Adam and Eve were surrounded by a vast abundance of riches in the specific place where they lived.

In addition, Adam and Eve had an environment of comprehensive peace around them, even among the most diverse animals on the face of the Earth. When tempted by the devil's proposal, Adam and Eve enjoyed abundant material provision, an environment filled with everything they needed, and the highest position among all things that the Lord had created on Earth.

And if God had already placed Adam and Eve over all created things on Earth, what else could be so necessary for them that they would accept a fascination or deceitfulness so readily?

Nevertheless, the proposal of deceitfulness did not focus on all the abundance and all the gifts that the Lord had made available to Adam and Eve, but insisted on highlighting what was not appropriate for human beings, that is, human beings wanting to elevate themselves and equate themselves with God who created them, proposing that they should do so by obtaining the knowledge of good and evil through disobedience to God.

By presenting the proposition of a fascination to Adam and Eve, the devil did not address all the benefits in abundance that they had at their disposition from God, but aimed at the value that Adam and Eve could come to attribute to themselves to try to take them to denigrate the value they attributed to God.

Therefore, **the deception of riches aims to disorder the values that people attribute to the most diverse aspects of life, but mainly on the value they attribute to themselves and, consequently, to the author of life, namely, God the Creator.**

And, in turn, **if the basic values about the order of magnitude of the creation are corrupted in a person's mind, starting mainly with the person's evaluation of oneself, one is also highly vulnerable to various other deceptions or fascinations.**

Thus, **a person's self-assessment of oneself or what one thinks one can become may play a decisive role in opening or closing the door to other deceptions. And for this reason, corrupting this self-assessment in people's hearts is a point so desired by the powers of darkness.**

Given this, **how a person views one's position or the position of the creation in relation to God and the rest of the creation is one of the first crucial aspects that need to be adjusted for an individual to view one's scale of values adequately and not find oneself in a state of understanding that is subject in a generic way to the other actions of the deceitfulness of riches.**

We also remember here that the understanding that the creation has of its position regarding God in the general context of life is discussed more widely in the theme The Gospel of the Creator, and from which we recall the text of Romans that exemplifies how broad the effects of an undue self-assessment that creation may make of itself can be, as follows:

*Romans 1: 18 **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**
19 **because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.***

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,

25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

Amen.

The human being created by God is not and will never be “God.” However, it is the proposition of wanting to be “like God or equated to God” that led Adam and Eve to such a strong involvement with deceitfulness.

In other words, when the human being self-evaluates and exalts oneself beyond what is suitable, appropriate, or according to God's truth about His creation, one has already been affected by a fascination that makes an individual vulnerable to many other fascinations, for in this way, one starts to advocate that one knows how to be a “god” and knows how to direct and take care of one's own life. That is, by following this way, the human being starts to see oneself as “the god of one's own life and, many times, even of one's fellow men.”

Thus, the deceitfulness of inappropriate self-assessment of the creation of itself leads people, who allow themselves to be involved in it, to the saddest and most despicable attitudes that a human being may come to practice.

Contempt for God and one's neighbors, pride, domination, or oppression over others, and many other vile things, are some of the results of this terrible deceitfulness of inappropriate self-assessment.

*Proverbs 16: 18 **Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.***

*Proverbs 21: 24 **A proud and haughty man, "Scoffer" is his name; He acts with arrogant pride.***

According to the Scriptures of God, the way to the proper evaluation of life is the opposite path to the fascination of self-exaltation or excessive self-evaluation. That is, the way for a person to position oneself

appropriately in life is widely associated with the path of humility before God and one's fellow men.

Proverbs 11: 2 **When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.**

Romans 12: 3 **For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.**

Romans 12: 16 **Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**

Proverbs 16: 19 **Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud.**

1 Corinthians 4: 4 **For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.**

Psalms 131: 1 **LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.**

And finally on this topic: How, then, can a person protect oneself against this first way of deceitfulness which in a sense is the fascination that precedes and opens the door to many other deceits or fascinations?

In response to this last question, as well as to all the other points mentioned so far in this topic and the other subjects of the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life, we recall that **the appropriate option for a person, in everything, to walk safely in the will of God, and not according to misleading propositions, lies in one persevering in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Lord's instruction about what is most relevant in life, what has only temporary use, and what should be refuted and rejected entirely, as exemplified once again below in several texts of equally immeasurable value:**

Psalms 75: 4 **'I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,' And to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn.**

5 Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck.'

6 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south.

7 **But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.**

Psalms 19: 13 **Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.**

Proverbs 8: 13 **The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.**

Isaiah 55: 7 **"Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.**

8 **For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.**

9 **"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."**

2 Corinthians 10: 4 **For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,**

5 **casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,**

6 **and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.**

1 Peter 5: 6 **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,**

7 **casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.**

Psalms 26: 2 **Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.**

Ephesians 4: 17 **This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,**

18 **having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;**

19 **who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.**

20 **But you have not so learned Christ,**

21 **if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:**

***22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man
which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to
God, in true righteousness and holiness.***

C. Attraction to Independence

Along with or as a result of excessive self-assessment, there is also a delusion in the world that proposes the concept that people can live independently of God. It is the propagation of the idea that people do not need to depend on the Lord or consult the Lord in the most diverse areas of their lives, applying this in an accentuated way also in matters related to riches.

Nevertheless, **a central aspect of life is that human beings were not created to be an individual independent of one's Creator.**

And if an individual does not want to depend on God, or even reaches the point of wanting to deny the existence of one's Creator, one will be putting oneself in a very vulnerable position to become dependent on other aspects of life that are not the one true God and which certainly do not aim at the eternal good of this individual.

In our day, for example, many people express their plans to become “financially independent,” which, however, can be very antagonistic to the instruction of the Scriptures for human beings, as exemplified below:

- 1 Timothy 6: 17* **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**
- 18* **Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,**
- 19* **storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**
-

Moreover, continuing yet to consider about financial independence, what does it actually mean?

What exactly do people mean by being independent as if they no longer depend on God for the air they breathe, the food they eat, or are not dependent on anyone else for the education and health care they receive, and so on?

Does anyone really know how to explain what people mean by this expression that advocates that it is possible for an individual to achieve the propagated independence or what are, then, the arguments that guide this financial independence?

By chance, do the arguments that financial independence grants autonomy to choose what one wants to do in life have support in God and His word indeed?

Could financial independence mean, then, that a person with many material resources would no longer need the Holy Spirit's guidance in everything they do?

And according to the text below, is it not precisely the opposite of financial independence that the Scriptures declare about confidence in riches?

- Proverbs 11: 28* **He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage.**

And yet, would a person's abundant financial condition exclude him or her from the need to heed the following words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ?

John 15: 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Thus, **one of the dangerous and vile points of the fascination with the so-called independence is that it seeks to confuse people's understanding of freedom.**

According to Scripture, independence is not synonymous with freedom. Instead, it is in abiding in Christ and His words that the knowledge of the truth that leads to true freedom in the Lord is promised.

*John 8: 31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

As much as a person thinks that one can become independent of God, and this also applies to the aspect of finances or riches, it is only because of the breath of life that God gives to an individual that one still exists. And it is not people's material riches that essentially sustain them in life.

Therefore, to think that material riches are what sustain a person's breath of life is to be in a position of deceitfulness in relation to what truly allows a person to still be alive in the present world.

And even if people do not pay attention to this, the Lord knows every detail of the life of every human being, as is also described in the following texts:

*Psalms 139: 1 O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.
3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.
4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
5 You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it.
7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?
8 If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me.*

- 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall
be light about me;**
**12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines
as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.**
**13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's
womb.**

Job 33: 4 **The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the
Almighty gives me life.**

- Job 34: 14* **If He should set His heart on it, If He should gather to
Himself His Spirit and His breath,**
15 All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.

According to the Scriptures, the concept of freedom encompasses having the possibility of knowing the will of God and having the strength and conditions given by God to be able to do what is right to be done in the Lord before men and, above all, before God.

Yet remembering the previous chapters, we saw that Paul affirms that **the freedom to live and walk in the will of God, and to reject evil and its deceptions, is only found in Christ Jesus through dependence and fellowship with the Lord.**

For this reason, many people spend years working and making efforts to become independent and to be able to have autonomy of decision over their lives without, however, realizing that they are spending years working in vain for what they will never be able to achieve.

The search for "total personal independence" can become a severe deceitfulness that seeks to rely excessively on the power or guarantees supposedly associated with material riches, for it is a life proposition that will never be able to reach its goal of real or complete independence since the human being was created to depend on one's Creator.

Every person should aspire to be freed from bondage, oppression, and heavy burdens, and one may even aim for a good provision of material riches if God permits or so instructs an individual to be less dependent on other people. However, this is very different from the search for a life of independence from God and the need to be instructed by the Lord every new day and in its most diverse circumstances.

Previously, we also saw that God's salvation, wisdom, and strength cannot be acquired by material means, as they are concessions of God's grace and mercy. In this way, each of these riches depends on being granted by God, as we exemplify with yet other texts below:

Psalms 62: 7 **In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my
strength, And my refuge, is in God.**

Isaiah 38: 16 O Lord, by these things men live; And in all these things is the life of my spirit; So You will restore me and make me live.

Romans 9: 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

So, if a person thinks that one has control of one's life by oneself, one is in an opposite position than those who believe in the Lord and is among those regarding whom the Lord instructs those who trust in Him to be especially cautious.

Isaiah 2: 22 Sever (or turn away) yourselves from such a man, Whose breath is in his nostrils; For of what account is he?

What, then, is the action that God asks of human beings and that should precede all other works? Or what is the initial position that a person should adopt to obtain instructions for the most diverse areas of one's life, including also the aspect of the relationship with riches?

In response to the above questions, let us see below once again the central work that the Lord instructs to be practiced by every person still in the present world:

John 6: 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Considering that the act of believing in the Lord is explicitly associated with the act of trusting, the work that is related to the provision that endures for a person's eternal life encompasses the work of putting one's trust in the one sent by God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and never the search for confidence in the independence of the creature from its Creator.

The main work of a Christian in the world should be aimed at establishing and strengthening one's confidence in Christ Jesus, for it is from dependence on Christ that many instructions, provisions, and protections to live and walk according to the will of God are given for the most diverse areas of one's life.

When a Christian depends on the Lord, there may be times when the Lord instructs this Christian to build up material reserves or savings, as was the case with Joseph in the seven years of abundance also compared to the “fat cows.” However, in a Christian's life, there may also be times when the Lord says to use the reserves for the purpose for which they were stored, as was also the case with Joseph at the time of famine compared with the “gaunt and ugly cows,” showing us this example, that the great gift that Joseph accepted in his life was to be dependent on the Lord in everything.

Therefore, **in its propositions that are opposed to a person depending on God for everything because one supposedly can have the financial independence to take the “reins of one's life in one's hands” or “to take charge of one's own life,” the deceitfulness of riches acts to distance people from the fundamental or primary source of life, the Creator God.**

Furthermore, **the proposition that a person can be independent and free because of having riches, to the detriment of depending on God in everything, is one of the factors that feed the selfishness that is signaled in the Scriptures as one of the main factors that will rise and increase among human beings in the perilous or difficult times of the so-called “last days,” as follows:**

2 Timothy 3: 1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:
2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,
4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

As a complementary observation on this topic, on the one hand, we are not trying to imply that a person cannot have any good, that one should not have savings of riches, and that, for example, a farmer should not make provision for oneself and one's farm for the winter periods or that a person, company, or government should not have reserves for risks or moments of crisis, for this is all part of good management of resources for which the Lord also grants wisdom.

On the other hand, however, **the issue about the deceitfulness of riches addressed here is that it aims to lead people to trust their reserves and assets under the idea that they will be protected by the fact of having these savings. This type of fascination tries to make people start to think that they themselves can plan the most diverse aspects of their lives and that they themselves, independently of trusting God every day, can begin to establish their plans, visions, missions, targets, objectives, goals, and their structures of protection and security, or any other name they want to give to their life plans.**

In a person's life, there are indeed days of planning, days of plowing the land, days of sowing the soil, days of reaping, and days of enjoying the

harvest. However, in each stage of one's life, the central work that God calls an individual to practice continually is "to believe in the One whom the Heavenly Father sent to guide and instruct the lives of people according to the heavenly will."

God never called people to make plans apart from His instruction. And for them to repent of their attempts to live and walk dissociated from divine instruction, the Lord repeatedly admonishes and instructs them throughout the Scriptures, as shown in a few more texts below:

*James 4: 13 **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";***

*14 **whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.***

*15 **Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."***

*16 **But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.***

*Luke 12: 16 **Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.***

*17 **And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'***

*18 **So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.***

*19 **'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."***

*20 **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'***

*21 **So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."***

*22 **Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.***

*23 **Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing."***

And if the abundance of riches could be a synonym for human beings to be entirely independent of the Lord to determine what they should or should not do, what about the following texts presented below?

*Isaiah 30: 1 **"Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "Who take counsel, but not of Me, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin;"***

*Psalms 25: 4 **Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.***

*5 **Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day.***

- 6 **Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses, For they are from of old.**
- 7 **Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD.**
- 8 **Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.**
- 9 **The humble He guides in justice, And the humble He teaches His way.**
- 10 **All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.**
- 11 **For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.**
- 12 **Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.**

Psalms 18: 21 **For I have kept the ways of the LORD, And have not wickedly departed from my God.**

Thus, **material or natural riches** may even be a very useful instrument to purchase many things in the world, but this is very different from the illusion that with them, someone can buy the independence of one's heart or the wisdom for the essential aspects of a life aligned with the will of the Lord.

Finally, since the attempt to be independent in everything, including from the Eternal Creator, is an illusion, it may also turn into an accentuated idolatry accompanied by its consequences. And this has a high probability of occurring because this posture refers to an attempt to replace dependence in which the person who seeks it inclines one's heart to "dependence on riches and possessions with which one thinks one can buy one's independence."

Jonah 2: 8 **"Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy."**

Proverbs 1: 7 **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

Mark 10: 24 **And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"**

D. The Yearning for Rights and Privileges

Another way in which the deceitfulness of riches seeks to make its approach to involving people is through the attempt to corrupt the concepts of rights and privileges to get people to believe that they themselves can define all the rights and privileges they think to be pertinent to their lives.

And if a person has allowed oneself to be involved in the deceitfulness of self-exaltation beyond what is convenient and the idea that one can be independent of God, one will also be the target of the fascination of a growing demand for rights and privileges that one starts to think one has, for if one thinks more than one should about oneself or sees oneself as an entirely independent person, this individual will also be the target of viewing rights and privileges in a distorted way.

Nevertheless, even if a person does not want to “equate oneself with God” and does not want to be independent of the Creator, one may also be the target of fascination with inadequate rights and privileges in an attempt to aim to be the holder of guarantees that do not indeed apply to one's life.

In His grace and goodness, God grants many benefits, rights, and privileges to people. However, this does not mean that people have these aspects guaranteed forever regardless of their postures, much less that they have the right to establish by themselves the whole set of rights and privileges that they find pertinent to them.

The Heavens and the Earth, and what is in them, belong to the Lord. And it is also to the Lord that the definition of the distribution of rights and privileges over them belongs.

So, who is the human being that has the right to demand anything from God? Or which person has the right to receive anything from God?

*Romans 9: 20 **But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"***

*21 **Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?***

*1 Corinthians 4: 7 **For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?***

Furthermore, who in the world is righteous enough in one's life and works that one can claim anything from the Eternally Righteous or Just God?

*Romans 3: 9 **What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.***

*10 **As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;***

*11 **There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.***

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

23 ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ...

Romans 6: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore, the fascination with rights and privileges has as one of its main objectives to instigate or create animosities between people and God. It tries to lead people to think that their freedom means having the right to desire what they intend in their fleshly desires, in their lusts, or their pride, trying, still, to hide the fact that this is not a true freedom, but enmity towards the Creator God of their lives, as also presented in the following text:

James 4: 1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?
2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.
3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.
4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Thus, the person subject to the fascination with rights and privileges is also subject to no longer understanding or accepting the sovereignty of God and the righteous measures that the Lord uses regarding each individual's life. And in this position, a person may even start to fight not only against the Lord, but also against one's fellow men under the banner that one is duly supported to fight or battle for everything one understands to be "one's right."

Once people break with the principle of dependence on God, as well as on the help and instruction of the Lord in their lives, they also begin to be subject to breaking the limits of the rights of others, advocating, however, that they are acting only in defense of their own rights and privileges. (An aspect more fully covered under the theme of The Gospel of Peace).

The exacerbated desire to be supported by rights and privileges leads some people even to create laws based on iniquities to try to sustain their ambitious fascinations or deceitfulness to which they have submitted, as exemplified in the Psalm below:

Psalms 94: 20 Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, Have fellowship with You?
21 They gather together against the life of the righteous, And condemn innocent blood.

Given this, it is crucial to be clear for a Christian that only God knows precisely what rights and privileges a person needs and what will do him or her good in every moment of one's life, just as it is very relevant for a Christian to know that when a person, with meekness, cultivates fellowship with God and trust in Him, one has in the Lord the guarantee of the right to what is good in every distinct moment of one's life.

John 3: 27 **John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."**

Psalms 85: 10 **Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.**
11 Truth shall spring out of the earth, And righteousness shall look down from heaven.
12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good; And our land will yield its increase.

Joel 2: 23 **Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you: The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month.**

Psalms 37: 1 **Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.**
2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb.
3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.
6 He (the Lord) shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.
 ...
11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Additionally, the only "Son of Man" who has a right over the whole world is the one who gave His life for the remission of all people, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. And for this, too, the Heavenly Father established Him as the Eternal Judge over all people.

Acts 10: 36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all):
 37 *that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:*
 38 *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*
 39 *And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.*
 40 *Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly,*
 41 *not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.*
 42 *And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.*

In this way, seated at the right hand of God and even in His position of King and Eternal Judge over the living and the dead, Christ remains with His eternal characteristic of meekness and humility, being able, for this reason, to judge with righteousness concerning the rights and privileges appropriate for every person in the world.

Matthew 11: 27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Therefore, as with any other deceitfulness of riches, the antidote also concerning the fascination of undue attachment to rights and privileges is to remain in fellowship with Christ, continually learning from Him in meekness and humility.

Considering that the promises of the newness of life made by God to Abraham, as well as what comes from their fulfillment, are by right belonging to Christ Jesus, it is in Christ and fellowship with Him that a Christian can have something that actually is one's inheritance or belongs to him or her by due right in the present or for eternal life.

We point out here, then, that every right indeed bestowed on a Christian from heaven is a "joint right with Christ," to whom all and all things belong by right of creation and by right of remission by the work on the cross of Calvary.

Or yet, thinking of rights and privileges dissociated from what is pertinent to Christ Jesus, or to living and walking in Christ, is something that actually is not appropriate for a Christian.

Galatians 3: 16 **Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.**

Romans 8: 17 **And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**

For this reason, **God's rights and privileges to a person are guaranteed if, first, one is willing to be of the One by whom one was created and gave His life as a ransom for one's salvation.**

That is, **for a person to have rights and privileges from God, one oneself needs first to be of the One to whom the assignment of true rights and privileges over all the world belongs.**

Galatians 3: 26 **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**

27 **For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**

28 **There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

29 **And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

E. The Exaltation of Possession

One aspect that gives strength to the deceitfulness of riches before some people is the attempt to act precisely in the areas to which human beings feel very attracted. And the desire to own or possess riches is a point that strongly attracts many individuals.

And although the exaltation of possession is very similar to the desire for rights and privileges, possession is more concerned with issues of owning or dominating wealth, while the aim for rights and privileges may also be for less objective aspects, such as, for example, “having the right to be happy” that many people advocate having.

Because of the exaltation of “owning” or “dominating riches,” many people in the world even prefer having possessions over having riches legally or with the right recognized by others over them. And this happens because many believe that the ownership of properties gives them a condition of superior “status,” security, or even domination over others.

Returning, then, to one of the temptations that the devil presented to the Lord Jesus Christ in the desert, we can clearly see the exaltation of possession as one of the strategies of fascination. Texts that we show once again below:

*Matthew 4:8 Again, **the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.***

9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

+

*Luke 4: 5 Then the devil, **taking Him up on a high mountain**, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.*

*6 And the devil said to Him, "All this authority **I will give You**, and their glory; **for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.***

7 Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

On the other hand, the temptations that the devil presented to Christ also expose the characteristics of the devil himself and his way of acting. For example, in the texts cited above, we can observe the arrogance and ostentation of the devil regarding the alleged possession of the kingdoms of the world and his claim that he was free to give the kingdoms to whoever he wanted.

Nevertheless, the devil is a liar and uses word distortions in everything he utters, which is also one of the weapons of his attempts to entangle people in his deceitful propositions, as also shown below:

*John 8: 44 "You are of your father **the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. **He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand***

in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

Thus, the temptation that the devil presented to Christ is not limited to the offer of riches to Christ but begins with an attempt to introduce a view where Christ, because of the possessions that would supposedly be conferred on Him, would be in a superior condition to the detriment of the subjugation of others.

Therefore, **the hook or trap in the fascination of possessions is rarely associated with just the aspect of having a certain wealth. Instead, it is often also associated with a suggestion of increased power for the person to whom the possession of riches is offered.**

The powers of darkness are usurpers, thieves, and attracted by having possessions and properties, through which they try to grow in power and dominion, for they do not obtain them by gift or right according to the truth granted from the heavenly kingdom.

Similarly, although many people claim that they aim for growth in possessions for their own good, there are people who also grow in their evil and harmful actions in their lives as they add possessions to themselves. And this occurs because seeking to make material possessions their own strength and power of life is an attitude of corrupted conduct in God's eyes and harmful to those who adopt this practice. An aspect exemplified in the following texts:

Ecclesiastes 5: 13 ***There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.***

Psalms 52: 7 ***"Here is the man who did not make God his strength, But trusted in the abundance of his riches, And strengthened himself in his wickedness."***

The devil boasted before Christ, presenting to the Lord a vision of ownership or possession over the kingdoms of the world. The devil presented a proposal that was supposed to grant high power, but which had no consistency regarding a true benefit.

And just like the situation described above, so are all the propositions of the deceitfulness of riches. That is, their propositions claim to offer benefits, but they hide that the result of association with them is for the destruction and not the edification of lives.

In this way, the possession that for many has an appearance of such great value can become, in many cases or situations, an impediment to achieving the possession of what indeed has value for eternal life, which is to do the will of God, mentioned in the texts that we present again below:

Matthew 19: 22 ***But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.***

- 23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.**
- 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."**
- 25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"**
- 26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."**

1 John 2: 17 *And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Thus, when possessions are exalted or elevated to positions that are not appropriate for them, people put themselves in a problematic condition regarding these exalted possessions, for the fascination with possessions aims to subject people to be also dominated by the desire for possession and by what they own.

And when the attachment to a possession moves into the sphere of fascination or deceitfulness, this attachment may begin to drain a person's life force so that one lives for the fascination and no longer for God.

Proverbs 1: 19 *So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.*

If a person comes to think that it is because of one's possessions that one can accomplish what one wants in life, and not because of the grace, love, strength, power, and provision granted by God, one may think that one is the possessor of several goods and riches, but, in reality, one is a slave to them since one can no longer see oneself achieving the goals one wants if one does not have the possessions one thinks one needs.

On the other hand, as we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that He did not come in the flesh into the world to obtain power and dominion through possessions and properties, but He came to serve people and to offer the power of God's salvation on behalf of human beings.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not come to take away people's benefits and possessions. On the contrary, He came to add what they had long lost, namely: the possibility of reconnecting with God and being guided by the Lord by grace and not based on possessions, sacrifices, tithes, offerings, or human works to try to earn God's favor.

Therefore, God can and does grant possessions to the people who are in the world for them to do good or fulfill the Lord's designs, but the possession is temporary and should always be seen as a joint possession with God aimed at the purpose of carrying out the will of God.

Paul, an apostle of Christ, in speaking about the possibility of doing the will of God, declares that it is *in the Lord* that he could do all things, whether he had an abundance of possessions or was faced with a shortage of material goods.

Philippians 4: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.
13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Furthermore, when the devil presented the deceitfulness of riches by offering to grant Christ the kingdoms of the world, in addition that he was also lying about this because he is a liar in everything, the devil wanted that Christ, because of the undue exaltation of possessions and properties, exchanged “the one to whom Christ was subject from eternity” for a new “lordship.” An aspect that shows that prostration in worship before someone also confers possession of the worshiped one upon the worshiper.

Thus, many propositions of possessions may be accompanied by glamour and splendor, but they may likewise be accompanied by the aim of subjecting those to whom the possessions are offered to those who claim to grant the possessions to others. That is, in the world, there are many offers for people to come to have possessions of riches at the cost of cruel and vile subjection to those who offer the assignment of possessions or other aspects associated with them.

And in the Scriptures, there are several texts that warn Christians not to let themselves be involved in supposed freedoms that are not real indeed, as some that follow below:

2 Peter 2: 17 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.
18 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error.
19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

Romans 6: 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

1 Corinthians 7: 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

Added to all this, we still see that **the Lord Jesus explicitly warned His disciples intensely about the vile fascination that the thought of**

possessions and properties may cause in people and what is a central element that acts in it, as follows:

*Luke 12: 15 **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."***

Therefore, also concerning this topic, we understand that **the primary focus of a Christian should not be on having or possessing material goods but on being Christ's, for what good is it for a Christian to have possessions if this implies that one ceases to be of the Lord Jesus?**

*Romans 8: 9 **But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.***

*1 Corinthians 6: 19 **Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?***

*20 **For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.***

In *Christ*, kept in Him, the Christian receives what one needs for life according to the will of God, which is always good, perfect, and acceptable. Why, then, would a Christian make the attainment of so many other possessions a goal of one's life if everything one needs is already his or hers in Christ and His instruction?

In this way, as we saw similarly about rights and privileges, **the problem of possessions occurs when someone wants to have them dissociated from fellowship with God, according to their own intentions, or not according to the will of God and in the appropriate measure that the Lord wants that a person has them.**

Finally, in this topic, we also highlight that, according to the Scriptures, the desire for possessions is closely associated with human vanity.

Thus, **it is also because of vanity that people so often allow themselves to be hooked by the insatiable desire to possess riches, which, in turn, leads them to run after what they cannot retain forever instead of inclining their hearts to seek the Lord and His will for their lives.**

Let us see below, then, some of the actions that a person is willing to practice under the motivation of vanity:

*Ecclesiastes 2: 4 **I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.***

*5 **I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.***

- 6 **I made myself** water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.
- 7 **I acquired** male and female servants, **and had** servants born in my house. Yes, **I had greater possessions** of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.
- 8 **I also gathered for myself** silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. **I acquired** male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.
- 9 **So I became great and excelled** more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.
- 10 **Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.** I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.
- 11 **Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.**
-

Therefore, when granted by the Lord to a person, possessions, rights, and privileges are for one's help or to cooperate with one's life, and not for people to glory in them before themselves or their fellow men.

The gifts bestowed by the Lord are for people to use them with gratitude and praise to God and according to the instruction of the Lord's will.

- 1 Corinthians 3: 21 **Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours:**
- 22 **whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours.**
- 23 **And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.**
-

Any possession of material goods is transitory. And if one is favored by the Lord to have it for a specific time, one should also use it beneficially as long as there is a useful purpose associated with it. However, as soon as any possession loses its usefulness and comes to oppose God's will in a person's life, it should also be discarded or adjusted according to the Lord's instruction, for, emphasizing this point once again, the principal possession of the Christian is to have God as the Lord of one's life and also to be the Lord's forever.

Thus:

- 1 Timothy 6: 12 **Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.**

Job 1: 21 **And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."**

Hebrews 12: 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,

26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."

27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

F. Attempts to Use Earthly Things for the Acquisition of Heavenly Things – Part 1: Money or Goods

Until the current topic in the chapter on some ways in which the deceitfulness of riches works, we have already seen that this type of deception aims at people to assimilate the inadequate ideas that they can:

- ⇒ 1) Raise themselves to the level of God or reduce God to their level;
- ⇒ 2) Become independent of God;
- ⇒ 3) Demand a series of rights and privileges before God and their fellow men according to their own interests;
- ⇒ 4) Come to have the possessions they want and also put their trust in them.

In all these ways cited in the previous topics, we see that the goal of the deceitfulness of riches is to lead people to despise the sovereignty of God in their hearts or their lives.

Nevertheless, at this new point, we want to see that the propositions of the deceitfulness of riches do not act only in the direct rejection of the sovereignty of God, but also advance to another sphere that, in a sense, can be even more subtle than those we have already seen before.

Thus, among the propositions of the deceitfulness of riches, we can note that there are still those that are coated with a concept of seeming recognition of God's sovereignty and that all riches actually come from the Lord or should come from God.

In other words, if human beings understand that they cannot indeed be independent of God and that the Lord is the only source of good riches, it remains for them to seek to obtain riches from the Lord or through the Lord's blessing. And it is also at this point that the deceitfulness of riches aims to introduce its vile propositions or fascinations.

If the deceitfulness of riches fails to keep people from believing in the existence of God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and fails to lead them to seek independence from God or to start trusting in rights and goods as the security of their lives, it seeks to introduce distortions or corruptions, or also the so-called thorns, in the way a person seeks to relate to God to obtain riches.

Therefore, the mere fact that a person seeks to obtain riches in God or through the hand of the Lord does not automatically imply that this search is according to the heavenly will, for even if there is a search for the Lord to obtain from Him the riches, the objective, the purpose, or the way in which a person seeks to obtain riches from God may also be in disagreement with the will of the Lord.

Throughout history, many people who claimed to believe in God, but who did not do so according to the heavenly righteousness, grace, and will, developed the most diverse strategies and ways with the goal that the Heavenly Father would grant them the riches they wanted for themselves and according to their personal intents.

For this reason, in this topic, we want to see at least three of these strategies or historical ways of improperly seeking to obtain riches from God and some of their main

aspects that show their characteristic of being propositions of fascination. And we will try to do this with the expectation that these considerations will serve as teaching and support for a broader perception of the multiplicity of actions of the deceitfulness of riches when it also seeks to act intensely regarding those who want riches from the Lord.

Below follows, then, a more specific mention of three strategies of the action of the deceitfulness of riches mentioned in the previous paragraph:

- ⇒ 1st) **The attempt to buy heavenly gifts with money or goods;**
- ⇒ 2nd) **The attempt to purchase heavenly gifts through godliness or devotion to God;**
- ⇒ 3rd) **The attempt to acquire heavenly gifts through the compensatory practice or fulfillment of a diversity of external rules and works.**

And if we look carefully at the following text, we can see in it a first example regarding the three propositions of fascinations mentioned above:

Acts 8: 9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,
10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."
11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.
12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.
13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.
14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,
15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.
16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
*18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, **he offered them money,***
*19 saying, "**Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.**"*
*20 **But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!***
*21 **You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.***
*22 **Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.***
*23 **For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.**"*

In this last text, we can note a series of aspects directly involved with the deceitfulness of riches, which are perverse and come from immersion in “bitterness and bonds of iniquity,” and not from a heart that understands the condition of God’s righteousness for the granting of heavenly gifts.

Thus, when a person proposes to acquire heavenly riches through earthly and human wealth, one also finds oneself, in doing this act, subject to a worldly or human mentality and not according to God’s instruction, implying, according to this distorted mentality, at the very least that:

- ⇒ 1) Earthly or human riches have the same value as heavenly riches;
- ⇒ 2) God is purchasable by material things;
- ⇒ 3) God is inferior to what He created because created things have the power to buy God, which, in turn, may also lead to the thought that God is manipulable by human interests;
- ⇒ 4) Money is the greatest power that exists in the universe because it can buy even the One who created the universe;
- ⇒ 5) The human being is greater than God since money can buy everything and was not created by God but by the creature.

That is, under the corrupted concept that the Spirit of God can be bought by a person with money or what human beings have created, human beings and their creations are seen as higher and more valuable than God Himself.

Therefore, although Simon was trying to obtain from the Lord the gift of power, he was entangled or bound by iniquities similar to those already mentioned at the beginning of this topic, that is:

- ⇒ 1) Human beings can be gods;
- ⇒ 2) Human beings have their own resources to be independent and negotiate on an equal basis with God;
- ⇒ 3) Human beings have the rights and privileges to speak on the same level with God;
- ⇒ 4) Possession of money or goods gives human beings the power to negotiate freely with whomever they want, including God.

Given this, we can note here again that **the deceitfulness of riches always seeks to reverse the order of the creature in relation to the Creator, as well as the order between the earthly and the heavenly things, or even the order of the created things**, according to the text that we recall once again below:

*Romans 1: 22 **Professing to be wise, they became fools,**
23 **and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.***

...

25 ... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Under various forms of subtlety, the deceitfulness of riches seeks to corrupt people's knowledge and understanding of God, His unique and sovereign position, and what He has done and is doing, presenting to them a proposition that goes beyond what is due for human beings to think about themselves and the creation.

Thus, ignoring the existence of God, seeking independence from God, wanting to elevate the human being to the position of God, or even recognizing the existence of God, but in a lower position than the one due to the Lord, are all actions that have the same elements of the creature's bitterness against the Creator. They are all propositions of bonds of iniquity that aim to ensnare and lead human beings to think on a smaller scale of value than is due to God and on a larger scale than is due to the creature.

In the referenced example of Simon, we can see that his attempt to obtain power, despite having come to believe in the God that the apostles of Christ announced to him, came from an evil heart, showing that the fact that a person comes to believe in the existence of God does not automatically mean that one is in agreement with the Lord.

Simon envisioned that the God who had been announced to him could increase his profits, for what came from this God was greater than his sorcery. Furthermore, if Simon could buy the heavenly gift with money, he would be the owner, he would have the right and ownership over the purchased gift, and thus, he would be able to enjoy the privileges that would come from the use of the heavenly gift that would become his by right of purchase.

If Simon could get God's gift for money, he could also pass it on for money, which, in turn, could earn him ample financial profits.

From what can perhaps be extracted from the narrative about his conduct, although this is not explicit in the text, Simon was a sorcerer or magician by profession and saw in the heavenly gift a more powerful product to offer his services to others, which in his perspective, probably, could also bring a significant increase in his income or material gains.

In this way, in the case of Simon, the deceitfulness of riches did not oppose God's existence and the fact that there was a greater power in God. However, it continued to show itself as that deception that would lead people to rely on their possessions and properties to be prosperous even though they could only get them from God.

On the other hand, Simon's example serves as a direct, objective, and undoubted teaching that God's gift cannot be bought with money.

No amount of money can obtain a single gift from God. No material offerings or money sacrifices can buy God's favor.

Valuations of heavenly riches transcend all methods and measures of comparison that are available on Earth. And if human instruments of value are not sufficient even to evaluate heavenly riches, much less value will something earthly have to acquire a gift from the kingdom of God.

Therefore, the mentality of acquiring the Lord's favor through money is also a form derived from the concepts of the Law of Moses in which God's favor was sought through sacrifices, burnt offerings, or material offerings, but which was never in agreement with Heavenly Father's will. That is also why the mentioned law was considered obsolete and revoked due to the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ, exemplified by two texts that we recall below and which are widely approached in the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ:

Jeremiah 7: 22 **"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.**

23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'

24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."

Hebrews 8: 1 **Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,**

2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

...

6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

Similar to Simon, who wanted in his own way and in the hardness of his heart to obtain the gift of God, so also in the First or Old Covenant, people wanted to attain the gift of God in their own way and based on what they would offer in an attempt to bargain with God, and not according to the grace and instruction of the Lord.

So, one of the worst or most terrible aspects of the deceitfulness of earthly riches is the attempt to induce a person's understanding to the point where one believes that with money, tithes, or other earthly things, one can obtain the eternal salvation of one's soul or any other gift of God, as if the Lord could be impressed and needed to receive back what He Himself created by the power of His word.

Let us see, then, below two more texts that speak of God's sovereignty in relation to all His creation:

Acts 17: 24 **God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.**

- 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.**
- 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ...**

Acts 7: 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

- 49 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest?**
- 50 Has My hand not made all these things?'**
- 51 You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.**

G. Attempts to Use Earthly Things for the Acquisition of Heavenly Things – Part 2: Godliness or Devotion to God

Advancing here even a little further into what was discussed in the previous topic, we can see in the Scriptures that a second example of the characteristics of deceitfulness that wants to lead people to trust in earthly things to obtain heavenly gifts is the desire to purchase the heavenly gift or benefit through demonstration of godliness, piety, or devotion to God.

Godliness or devotion to God should result from an understanding of the great work of God's grace towards the person who has received salvation and newness of life in the Lord, and not as a mere instrument to try to extract the gifts of God for the person to be the holder of them in one's life.

When approached by the operation of heavenly power through his life, Peter explicitly testifies that godliness is not what alone moves the mighty hand of God to manifest His gift to people, as described below:

- Acts 3: 1 Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.*
- 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;*
- 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.*
- 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."*
- 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.*
- 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, **but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.**"*
- 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*
- 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them; walking, leaping, and praising God.*
- 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God.*
- 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*
- 11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.*
- 12 So when Peter saw it, **he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"***
- 13 **The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus,** whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go."*
-

Therefore, God **gives** His gifts to human beings and does not sell them for the price of money, but also not on the merit of people's effort or godliness.

And the attempt to establish a commercial relationship with God, whether by material goods or out of devotion to God, for the sake of the

gifts and not for understanding that God bestows the gifts because of His love for each person, is an attempt to establish the relationship with God on a basis of tangible items in human sight and by which the human being, ultimately, seeks to establish the regency or determination of what the Lord should grant him or her.

Nevertheless, God did not care that the traitorous commercialization of the life of His Son Jesus Christ was done only for a mere thirty pieces of silver. God did not enter into the merit of the value of the betrayal of the life of His Only Begotten Son being very low because the Lord “GAVE HIS SON TO THE WORLD” and did not sell Him to the world for a human price. Furthermore, the Son of God, who also became the Son of Man to provide salvation for the world, has no price comparable with tangible aspects in the world or the devotion of human beings to the Lord.

Thus, material riches, godliness, or devotion to God cannot reverse the position of God and the creation according to what was established by the Lord in line with what is true and righteous. And God will never change His condition of being the GIVER, and not the marketer or seller, of salvation and the newness of life to human beings.

And if the Lord “GAVE” His Beloved Son to the world to save the sinners, the greatest gift offered by God to humanity, it makes no sense to think that He would start to trade the other aspects of the heavenly kingdom in exchange for human goods or godliness, as also the following texts declare:

*Romans 8: 32 **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 5: 8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

*9 **Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.***

*10 **For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.***

*11 **And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.***

We highlight here once again, then, that **godliness or devotion to God is not a conduct of life that gives a person the right to require reconciliation with the Lord, but it should be a consequence of the reconciliation granted by the righteousness, goodness, and grace of the Eternal God.**

And, in turn, receiving God's gifts as a consequence of God's grace, and that godliness is not the cause of grace, is one of the main points that so challenges human beings because they cannot act toward grace with dominion over it through exchanges or commerce.

That is, the condition of waiting and dependence on God are some of the aspects of life that people have the most difficulties living with, for they expose them to the reality of the condition of powerlessness that exists in themselves and in their actions to obtain the riches of higher and eternal values.

Thus, entrusting one's life to God, even though it is the Lord who grants it, represents an enormous challenge for many people.

In other words, no matter how limited and flawed people are in themselves, many insist on thinking that they themselves know how to manage their lives better than the One who created them. And for this reason, they want God's help in exchange or negotiation of riches and conducts so that they do not have to submit themselves in everything to the Lord.

In general, human beings are continually looking for a point of support that supposedly will allow them to place themselves in a position of negotiation or bargaining with God under the idea of not having to recognize in everything the sovereignty that is due exclusively to the Lord.

Nevertheless, as we have seen several times in the Scriptures, **the human being is not God. The human being is inferior to God, and neither human resources nor "people's devotion to God" can equal the human being with God at a "negotiating table," as if "the glory of God could be changed and reduced into the likeness of the image of the corruptible man."**

And asking again, what can human beings offer God that the Lord does not already have, cannot create, or cannot do? What devotion and service can a human being offer to the Lord that the angels cannot perform with greater perfection, more power, and higher glory?

For this reason, as we have already seen in the previous topics, the offer that God aims to find in people is a contrite, broken, or humble heart that recognizes the greatness of God and His love for each person.

In addition, one of the main characteristics of humility encompasses an individual moving away from the lofty positions that the deceitfulness of riches proposes to people to climb.

1 Peter 5: 5(b) ... and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Still looking at the word *humility* according to the comments associated in the Online Bible with the references of Strong's lexicon, we see, among others, the following characteristics:

- 1) *The having a humble opinion of one's self;*
- 2) *Modesty, humility, lowliness of mind;*
- 3) *The having a humble mind.*

In this way, **we can also see here that godliness or devotion to God expresses attitudes or postures that everyone should always practice because this is due to each human being before one's Eternal Creator.**

Godliness or devotion to God is not a bargaining chip to obtain God's blessings. Godliness or devotion to God expresses a right attitude for a person to practice because one is a creature and the Lord is God. And yet, because a Christian, in Christ Jesus, has been made a child of God.

A Christian loves because one was loved first. A Christian loves because one was first made a child of God. A Christian walks in the light because one first received the light to walk in it and because one was made a child of light. And it is not primarily the practice of these actions that makes a person obtain the love, the light of the Lord, and the condition of an eternal child of the Heavenly Father.

Therefore, to think that a person can love, walk in the light, have the power to do good in order to obtain love, light, and power to do good is to consider that the human being, from oneself, can be good, ignoring, however, that one can only do good if these gifts are previously granted from Heaven to an individual.

*Romans 7: 18 **For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.***

*1 John 4: 19 **We love Him because He first loved us.***

*Ephesians 5: 1 **Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.**
2 **And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.***

...
8 ***For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light***
9 ***(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),***
10 ***finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.***

And even more, God also does not want people to adopt a posture that godliness is offering gifts and sacrifices in special services to the Lord, trying to associate the first form of trying to buy God with money or goods with this second way in which they want to use godliness as a means of bargaining with the Lord.

God wants people to do His will for the simple but powerful reason that it is good, righteous, and perfect.

That is, **Christians are called to do what is right and good, first of all, for the simple fact that it is the right thing to do and whose practice does not turn them away from what is right and good.**

And before God's righteousness, trying to add services, offerings of resources, and demonstration of godliness to what is contrary to God's will

can never make what is wrong, evil, or unrighteous become right and just before the Lord.

Matthew 7: 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Furthermore, we see in the book of Hebrews that the godliness that seeks to offer gifts and sacrifices through services or worship to God has no efficacy towards the conscience (or inner convictions) of the one who practices it, for in this type of godliness or worship it is still the creature who is offering to the Lord what the creation wants to offer or what one thinks God wants to receive as an offering. So, in this type of godliness, no one is perfected since people, through it, are still seeking to make the concept of bargaining chips prevail to try to obtain the gift or favor of God.

Hebrews 9: 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience, ...

Hebrews 10: 1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

What God wants from His children is that they accept the call that He as Father and Sovereign God makes them, which is the call to fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ through the grace and faith that the Creator bestows on His creation.

God does not need us to give back to Him what He has given us. The Lord wants us to use the gifts for the practice of good and the will of the Lord among the people of the Earth. And it is so because following His will is the righteous and correct way of life.

God does not grant resources and gifts to people for them to try to use them to bargain with God to obtain even more resources and gifts to satiate their fleshly greed and ambitions. God does not call people to seek material abundance that turns them away from the practice of mercy, righteousness, and humility before the Lord.

And yet as for the services and meetings said to be performed for God, how many of them, in reality, are not ceremonials of supposed offerings to God for people to try to obtain God's gifts for them, thus showing that the purpose of the services is actually directed to themselves?

How many are not the people who go to meetings to be "blessed by God" and not to be instructed by the Lord to walk in humility, mercy, and according to God's righteousness?

In the most varied places, there are countless services and meetings that refer to an attempt to establish a purchase currency and which, therefore, express a position of loftiness and sagacity to try to convince God that those who render worship have the right to the multiplication of their goods because they supposedly have given to God a little of what they received from Him.

Despite not having true fear and reverence for the Lord when they are in their homes or their various affairs in the world, many people seek to offer services and offerings to God as if, in this way, the Lord would be under a demand to bless them.

Thus, do not the actions of seeking to be godly to obtain more goods and more gifts, and not because it is simply the right thing to do and according to the newness of life in the Spirit of the Lord, precisely refer to greedy godliness aiming at a temporary or transient profit in the world? And do these actions not refer to services that lead people away from the path of truth rather than toward the way worthy of a child of light? (The subject of the target of greedy godliness is also covered more broadly under the theme entitled Another Gospel or A Different Gospel).

Given this:

1 Timothy 6: 3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,

4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,

5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

From such withdraw yourself.

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

...

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

If “the promises of blessings” were withdrawn from services that require the offering of sacrifices of time, money, and gifts, would not many people stop attending them? And does this not demonstrate either that these types of worship are not indeed a search for the Lord's instruction to walk under the righteousness and grace of the Lord because they are children of God, but services to seek the guarantee and increase of gifts, resources, and money?

In this way, the services and propositions of offerings that have their objective turned to material profit have in their consistency the same ingredients as the attitudes of Simon seen in the previous topic, that is: Trying to acquire the heavenly gift through propositions of offerings or resources of the creation in order to have the right of possession of the heavenly gifts. And why not also say the dominion over God Himself in order to be able to “determine” how God should or should not act in the lives of those who supposedly worship Him?

Therefore, **like Simon, many people in every generation continue to try to reduce the God-giver of life, grace, favor, and riches to a "god" who is purchasable and manipulated by the material riches of the creation or by their devotions to Him. And because of this, too, they so much lack true heavenly grace.**

When tempting the Lord Jesus, the devil took Christ to a high mountain, for the mountains have always symbolized, for human beings, a place of dominion or elevation, but also the spots of many religious practices and worship of the gods. The devil associated high places with possessions and dominion over goods and kingdoms, but also with worshipping him. That is, among his various evil intentions, the devil also wanted the Lord Jesus to take the bait of fascination or deception that worship, after all, is nothing more than a bargaining chip to obtain the world's riches.

Nevertheless, **God does not associate worship with a bargaining chip, for worship is the fruit of a life that first receives the Spirit of God by grace as a gift to worship the Lord through Him also in truth.**

Thus, **human beings cannot worship God in truth if they do not first receive the Spirit of the Lord to guide them into all truth. That is, the basis of the Christian's worship of God is that one first receives the newness of life in the Lord through eternal grace, and not in a supposed godliness that would serve as a way to obtain the gifts of the heavenly kingdom.**

John 4: 23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Romans 11: 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

2 Corinthians 3: 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The fascination of wanting to be godly, pious, or to render worship to "try to buy" the gift of God is highly recurrent in humanity. This is why it is so essential to know the working principles of the Lord's giving grace and remain in them continually.

H. Attempts to Use Earthly Things for the Acquisition of Heavenly Things – Part 3: The Practice of Human Works

Continuing in this new point yet with the final part of the previous topic, also as a third example about the attempt to buy the gift of God through earthly aspects, we highlight once again the importance of understanding the order of life functioning according to the grace of the Lord and not only according to the works that people practice or accomplish.

That is, if human beings cannot transform money, goods, and godliness into a bargaining chip to obtain the gift of God, could a set of human accomplishments or works that people call good serve as this so longed-for bargaining chip?

And the answer also here again is: NO!

Therefore, following a predetermined set of rules and carrying out external or materially tangible works that human beings practice or perform is also not the reason why God bestows heavenly gifts upon them. (A subject broadly addressed in the themes The Gospel of the Righteousness of God, The Gospel of the Grace of God, The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ, and on Works, Labors, and Services).

Faith in God, trust in the Lord, faith in the justification provided to us in Christ Jesus, and the life guided in righteousness by the Holy Spirit result in good works, but not before God also grants, by grace, the provision for His children to do the works of the Lord.

In God, a person is already blessed in Him even before starting good works and is blessed by the Spirit of the Lord for the accomplishment of good works, and human works are not the source that causes the Lord's favor towards a person, as we briefly recall in the texts below:

Romans 4: 6 ...just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ...

- Galatians 3: 1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*
- 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*
- 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*
- 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain? If indeed it was in vain?*
- 5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*
- 6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*
- 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.*
- 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."*

- 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.*
- 10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*
- 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."*
- 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."*
- 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),*
- 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*
-

Therefore, in addition to the example (1) of trying to buy God's gift with money or (2) obtaining it by greedy godliness, also as regards the aspect (3) of someone wanting to achieve God's favor through the works of the law or the idea that the performance of "good works" is what qualifies them to require gifts from God, we can see that the deceitfulness of riches, by various means, despises what is offered by the Lord to people through His eternal grace.

The deceitfulness or fascination of riches, also represented in the Scriptures as thorns, aims to choke the will of God in people's hearts and wants to entangle them in their tricks and iniquities, repeatedly proposing that people, in one way or another, should strive, work, or make offerings to "deserve" God's grace.

If, however, grace had to be given by merit, it would no longer be heavenly grace.

So, highlighting this point once again, the heavenly gift so desired, and through which the other gifts are manifested, is not sold or exchanged, but is "freely given" to those who believe in the Lord and humbly ask the Heavenly Father for it, as one more text below shows us:

- Luke 11: 11 "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?*
- 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?*
- 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*
-

Finally, given the above, some people may still question the reason for God's grace, then, also not continue to be poured out without restrictions on those who do not live a life of godliness and humility, and who, on the contrary, indulge in pride or the attempt to buy the Lord's gift by works?

That is, some people might question whether the fact that grace is not bestowed by purchase or through the exchange of works does not indicate an incoherent condition regarding the aspect that grace does not need to be earned or deserved.

For this reason, we still consider it necessary to recapitulate the point that the Lord's grace, which bestows salvation and gifts, is offered to everyone and without people having obtained the right to it through good practices. Grace is available to all people on Earth, as we saw earlier. And grace is offered precisely to those who do not deserve it and even owe the Lord huge and unpayable eternal debts.

Nevertheless, heavenly grace is not given to sponsor and sustain sin and unrighteousness, and the Lord restricts the bestowal of His grace when a person wants the divine gift not for good, but to use God's gifts in one's greed and evil lusts.

Thus, **no person becomes worthy of grace by good works, but, on the other hand, a person can place obstructions to the Lord's grace when one oneself creates obstacles to the manifestation of heavenly grace towards one's life**, as we can see once again in the text below:

- James 4: 1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?*
2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.
3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.
4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?
6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."
7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.
-

Heavenly grace is offered to sinners not under some commercial price, which, on the other hand, does not mean that it is not given for a purpose, which, firstly, aims to cooperate so that sinners can be freed from subjection to sin. However, if they do not want grace for the purpose for which it is offered, they are the ones who do not give space for grace to work in their favor, and so they do not see the manifestation of grace working in them and changing their lives.

Concluding this topic, we understand, then, that when a person asks God for something one needs that is for one's good and to have the provision to walk according to the righteousness of God, the Lord freely grants it not for the exchange of money, of previous devotion, or works previously done, but because of the person's inclination to receive the favor of God according to the purpose of the bestowal of grace. If, however, an individual wants the Lord to sponsor and support one's evil practice, it is not the

attempt to buy the Lord's favor through goods, devotion, and works that will cause God to abandon His position in truth and eternal righteousness.

*2 Corinthians 9: 8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***

*9 **As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."***

*10 **Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,***

*11 **while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.***

I. The Mere Fascination with Earthly Things

In the present chapter, we have already seen that the deceitfulness of riches works through various subtle corruptions in the attribution of values that people give to riches, denigrating some and inappropriately elevating others, which, in turn, can also cooperate to see that **regarding human life, there is a kind of fascination which seems simply to seek to make people captivated or overly attracted by the earthly things.**

In the world, there is a kind of deceitfulness that aims to create an earthly mentality by over-focusing on the things on Earth, trying to get people to stay predominantly involved with the things that involve their lives in the so-called present age. And this, to the point of not even remembering or cogitating about the heavenly or eternal aspects of their lives.

In the world, there is a kind of deceitfulness that aims to make people be taken by immediate thoughts, causing some individuals even to say that they only think about the present time and that they see no reason to think about the future or what could happen to them after life on Earth. Thus, this kind of fascination works for a person to create something like a “dome” around oneself in which one not only despises heavenly, spiritual, or eternal things, but may not even take the time to think about them.

And obviously, a person with an excessively earthly mentality moves further and further away from the principles of the kingdom of God for one's life, as one does not even consider dedicating time to them.

In this way, **an excessively earthly focus starts to generate a mentality whose measures of values or importance are entirely partial and unrealistic concerning the broader reality of the human being and one's Creator, which may even lead an individual to the point where one becomes a direct enemy of the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

When a person claims that life is all about food, drink, clothing, the pleasures of the flesh, and other aspects of the Earth, one is saying that Christ did a work in vain on the cross of Calvary. By putting all the focus of one's life on earthly things, a person despises the Heavenly Father, who sent Christ to die on Calvary's cross to bestow eternal salvation on the souls of all individuals. Furthermore, one also despises everything the Scriptures teach about Christ, for if the earthly things matter above all else, Christ's mission would be meaningless since He did not primarily come to deliver people from physical death, but eternal.

When a person declares that one's focus is primarily on the earthly aspects of life rather than the eternal and heavenly, one may think that one is taking a position that is not opposed to God, or one may think that one is taking a position of neutrality. However, by taking a stand on the side of a lie and a deception about the creation and the love that the Heavenly Father manifested in Christ to the world, an individual takes a stand against the Lord and in favor of the work that resists the Creator.

Thus, **there are postures in life where people seek to advocate that their abstention from the heavenly aspects of life exempts them from being against them. However, this is not what the Scriptures teach us, for, regarding Christ, there is no impartial or neutral place or position.**

Luke 11: 23 "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

Philippians 3: 17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things.

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Inclining the heart to the path of the exclusive or excessive exaltation of earthly things is an active action against God and Christ's work on the cross of Calvary, for, in part, was it not for this very reason that people crucified Christ? And have many not endorsed the crucifixion of Christ because He stopped multiplying natural bread for them and because He did not deliver them from the Roman Empire? Or again, because Christ did not accept to become "their earthly king"?

In the last text of Philippians quoted above, we can observe that **the simple excessive inclination to "earthly things," in reality, is not a simple inclination to material things, but is, again, an excessive or undue exaltation that the human being makes of oneself or the creation.**

Excessive attention to "earthly things" is a mistaken exaltation of the creation in which the human being, only otherwise, sees oneself or the creation as the "god" of oneself, characterizing one's attitude as an act of infamy, shame, embarrassment, and dishonor to oneself.

And when an individual considers oneself a "god," how sad is not one's shame for the expressive harm one causes to oneself and others? And how miserable is not one's shame for not being able to defeat the enemy that really needs to be defeated called death and through which one's earthly life so exalted and magnified is extinguished as in the blink of an eye?

A person declaring that what matters is "the here and now," or "let us eat and drink that tomorrow we will die," is also a way of trying to disguise people's contempt for the Eternal Lord by considering themselves as not needing their Eternal Creator.

Therefore, **in contrast to the mentality focused on earthly things, God's instructions for those who believe in Him are very explicit as to what a Christian should focus on first to be able to properly deal with "earthly things,"** as follows:

*Colossians 3: 1 **If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.***

*2 **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***

*3 **For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***

- 4 *When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.*
 5 *Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*
 6 *Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,*
 7 *in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.*

Matthew 6: 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

- 33 *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

Without looking at earthly things in the light of heavenly things, a person places oneself under the darkness of the surrounding world and abstains from the will of the Lord for one's life, which may be known by the renewal of understanding that only proceeds from Heaven and not the sameness of the limited concepts and values that are under the sun.

The newness of life according to God's will does not spring from the Earth. Instead, it descends from the heavenly kingdom and through the Lord Jesus Christ, who from Heaven is given to a person who receives and believes in Him and His work of justification, salvation, and redemption that the Lord offers to all.

Ecclesiastes 1: 9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.

Romans 12: 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

- 1 *Corinthians 2: 6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.*
 7 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,*
 8 *which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
 9 *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*
 10 *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*

11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

A mind focused on earthly things does not reach the point of experiencing the will of God in one's life and does not even come to know the deep riches of the Lord for one's living. For this reason, propositions that attribute excessive value to what is earthly should always be refuted and firmly resisted by the love of the Lord that does not seek to negotiate or distort the heavenly truth.

John 3: 31 "He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony.

33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true.

34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Finally, in this topic, considering that the theme about Christ being the light that came down from the Heavenly Father to illuminate people who receive Him in their hearts as their Lord has already been widely exposed in a specific chapter on the theme of the Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ and others, we will not expand this subject at this time, remembering, here, just a few words directly spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ about how a person should behave while still in the present world:

John 8: 12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

J. The Excessive Value of Outward Appearance

That which receives a positive value attribution in a person's heart may also become a wealth for him or her, even when one attributes value to items that are not necessarily material or sometimes even subjective, as can be the case of appearance, which, when regarded as riches, also becomes an item to be sustained by the one who clings to it.

Of course, there are cares of appearance that are relevant to life in general and that a person should be aware of. If there is the possibility, the action of presenting oneself properly clean, fed, and dressed is part of the daily life of an individual in the world and may represent great benefits for those who practice it.

Through the Scriptures, God even instructs Christians to take care not only of their spirit and soul, but also of their own body since the body of each Christian is also considered as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

*1 Thessalonians 5: 23 **Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

*1 Corinthians 6: 19 **Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?***

Yet in other parts of the Scriptures already mentioned above, we see that God Himself is committed to also watch over the provision of food, drink, and clothing for the lives of those who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And using what God has given or adds to those who seek His kingdom and His righteousness is not undue or inappropriate, and may even represent a demonstration and testimony that the Lord cares for those who are His.

Nevertheless, there are other factors regarding the use of appearance that aim to achieve ostentation or exposure of aspects that do not reflect the reality of facts from the perspective of the heavenly kingdom.

Thus, when people begin to credit appearance with more value than is appropriate to it and begin to see in appearance the possibility of showing themselves and their things in a distorted way or with the intention of ostentation, this is where they enter the space of deceitfulness or fascination regarding the value of appearance.

When people see the possibility of obtaining benefits from using ostentation or falsifying the truth about their lives or what they are trying to expose, they begin to enter the sphere of assigning an inappropriate value to outward appearances to the detriment of remaining in the truth.

For example, the word *hypocrisy*, a practice from which the Lord warned us to stay away, is based on the concept of supporting an appearance in which there is no truth or consistency that indeed supports the appearance displayed.

And hypocrisy not interrupted in a firm and objective way does not cease in its attempts to falsify appearance, for it acts at the beginning through simulations about what it wants to expose, but later it also advances into the sphere of endless dissimulations. And these, in turn, are attempts to support a previous simulation that is beginning to be unmasked or that already starts to evidence its deficiencies, corruptions, or weaknesses.

*Luke 12: 1 **In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, Jesus began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."***

As attractive as some exhibitions that distort appearances are, no person or object is essentially what is presented in a distorted way. And no matter how long someone tries to maintain a deceptive appearance, the essence of what someone or something really is will ultimately prevail.

However well elaborated an action associated with hypocrisy might be, both in its simulations and dissimulations, it will end up exposed over time, for once the appearances laid bare one by one are removed, also what sought to sustain them will be exposed in its weakness of trying to hide in what is not true.

*Luke 8: 17 **"For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light."***

*2 Corinthians 13: 8 **For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.***

Thus, **the excessive appreciation of appearance goes hand in hand with the theme of riches, for the economic values that human beings commit to keeping up simulated "good appearances" are incredibly high. And similarly, the expectation of what they intend to profit or gain from the appearances they want to show to others is also high.**

Nevertheless, if we were to evaluate the moral, true, and spiritual values that many people compromise in their attempts to maintain simulated or dissimulated appearances, or their ostentation, there would certainly not be enough resources on Earth to cover the costs of the damage that the pursuit of inadequate appearances may cause in the hearts and for the eternal life of those who render themselves to it.

From humanity's first act of sin, the search for sustaining the appearance to hide the truth of the facts resulting from sin came into play. And so it has remained for all subsequent centuries to the present day, as mentioned by the psalmists and also in the New Testament, respectively exemplified below:

- Psalms 12: 1* **Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.**
- 2* **They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.**
- 3* **May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things,**
- 4* **Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?"**

Psalms 26: 4 **I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, Nor will I go in with hypocrites.**

Proverbs 28: 13 **He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.**

Jude 1: 4 **For certain men have crept in unnoticed (or by dissimulation), who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV + Portuguese RA)**

On the other hand, as a forewarning, we understand it to be very significant to highlight here that when the Scriptures mention people being transparent also about their transgressions and not using dissimulation (or hypocrisies) to cover them up, they are not teaching people to go out, foolishly, announcing their mistakes and defects worldwide, nor to go out telling the secrets of their hearts to each or every individual with whom they come across.

Therefore, **in everything, a person should first and directly present oneself to the Heavenly Father through Christ Jesus to be instructed by the Lord on how to act in one's life and present oneself to the world. And this also applies regarding the sins one has confessed to the Lord.**

- 1 John 2: 1* **My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**
- 2* **And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**
- 1 John 1: 8* **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**
- 9* **If we confess our sins, He (the Lord) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Psalms 32: 5 ***I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.***

There are many aspects of a person's life that should only be said and shown at appropriate times, places, and to appropriate individuals, according to the guidance that each one receives from the Lord, as we can also see in the following texts:

Matthew 6: 6 ***"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."***

Matthew 6: 2 ***"Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."***

3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."

Thus, using wisdom about what to expose or not to expose, where to expose, and how to expose something is very different from falsifying something with appearances, ostentation, simulations, or dissimulations.

James 3: 17 ***But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.***

And before God, it is impossible for anyone to present oneself with appearances, for all things are visible, naked, or open to the eyes of the Lord. God sees the heart and not appearances. And the use of lies, dressed in a false appearance, does not have the approval of the Lord.

Proverbs 15: 3 ***The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.***

Hebrews 4: 13 ***And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.***

John 8: 44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

In this way, an interesting aspect to be observed in the excessive attribution of value to appearance or ostentation is that it is closely associated with the value that a person gives to what others may think or consider about him or her, which also enters the sphere of the value that an individual assigns to vanity.

In the Scriptures, we find recorded the occurrence of several facts where people, who even had already believed in Christ Jesus, came to move away from the Lord by giving excessive credit to what others would consider about them or the glory that they would fail to keep before their fellow men. And this fascination even led many people who opted for it to terrible attitudes and consequences, as shown in several texts below:

John 12: 42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;
43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
44 Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.
45 And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.
46 I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."

Romans 1: 25 ... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Galatians 6: 11 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!
12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.
13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.
14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.
16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Therefore, **the option for human glory and recognition to the detriment of acknowledging the glory of God, abiding in Christ Jesus, and faith in the Lord can become a cause of perdition, as it expresses the choice to remain on the path of darkness or the way of abstention from light.**

Those who boast in excess can obscure the light of Christ in their lives. And whoever prefers the glory of the creation rather than being seen as justified and accepted before the Heavenly Father, by grace and through the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary, exalts and values the opinion of the creature more than the truth about the creation according to the One Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

And repeating here an aspect mentioned in the previous topics about the book of Ecclesiastes, we also saw there how much vanity and ostentation are intertwined with the desire for riches.

Furthermore, even people who do not have a high degree of direct appeal for material riches themselves may come to aspire to them with the aim of sustaining ostentation or because they may confer value, in their eyes, on some appearances that they seek to present and maintain before their fellow men, an aspect also called in the Scriptures as “the pride of life.”

*1 John 2: 16 **For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.***

Thus, **the vanity, ostentation, or pride of life may become an enormous and vile expression of bondage or captivity with all sorts of corruptions and anguishes, because nothing under these characteristics is truly substantial and lasting.**

*Romans 8: 20 **For the creation was subjected to futility (or vanity), not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;**
21 **because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**
22 **For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.***

When people exchange the glory of God for the glory of men, they begin to compromise their life of faith in God, for they no longer see God and the creation in an appropriate way. And they even want to involve others in their corrupted behavior.

For this reason, vanity, ostentation, and the pride of life, as variants of the deceitfulness of riches, are thorns that may choke the word of God sown in a heart and with which no person should be frivolous so as not to find oneself flirting with the deceit that expresses the search for what is false and, even more severe, expresses the path of death and not of life.

*Job 35: 13 **Surely God will not listen to empty talk (or vanity), Nor will the Almighty regard it.***

*Psalms 66: 18 **If I regard iniquity (or vanity) in my heart, The Lord will not hear.***

*Psalms 4: 2 **How long, O you sons of men, Will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness (or vanity) And seek falsehood?***

*Proverbs 21: 6 **Getting treasures by a lying tongue Is the fleeting fantasy (or vanity) of those who seek death.***

*Jeremiah 10: 15 **They are futile (or vanity), a work of errors; In the time of their punishment they shall perish.***

The deceitfulness of thinking of oneself more than is appropriate, or of presenting oneself to others in a haughty and ostentatious way, may lead people to change the values of their exposures to each other to the level of even being seen as associated with what are abominations before God.

*Luke 16: 14 **Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.***

*15 **And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."***

Finally, in this topic, something impressive to be observed in the last text exposed above is that it was precisely the Pharisees, who acted in the religious leadership of their nation, who were especially fascinated by riches and maintaining appearances of what was not true in fact before God.

That is, through their role or actions in their religions, many individuals want to “sell an image” that they are godly, doing so, however, under the goal of being admired by their peers, to obtain among them the higher places and, if possible, extracting from others all sorts of riches, benefits, or honors for themselves.

Nevertheless, just as mere human knowledge does not protect people from the fascinations or deceptions that operate in the world, neither does religion. On the contrary, religion, in many cases, intensifies or strengthens the yearning for certain earthly things to which many people attach special value, but which do not bring them any benefit before the Lord, as the following texts also show us:

*Matthew 6: 2 **"Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."***

*Matthew 23:5 "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.
6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues,
7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'"*

Where a human work or a religion (which is also a human work) is focused on exalting its leaders or people participating in it before their fellow men, this work, even if it comes to be called Christian, is not Christian indeed. It is a work contrary to God, for it is based on the fascination with appearance, the pride of life, or the greed of wanting to appear in other people's eyes what those who seek to exalt themselves are not in fact.

Jeremiah 14: 14 And the LORD said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart."

*Colossians 2: 22 ... which all concern things which perish with the using, according to the commandments and doctrines of men?
23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.*

The works, the religions, or the very people who sustain them for their ostentation or dissimulation are considered or called by the Lord as painted or adorned (whitewashed) tombs on the outside, but that inside are tombs of rot and death.

*Matthew 23: 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.
28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."*

On the other hand, **redemption into the freedom of truth or the glory that God gives to His children or to those who walk in the glory of the Lord is the hope and the way against the captivity of vanity and corruption that leads so many people to attribute so much value to keep up the appearances of what ultimately lacks consistency and a firm eternal foundation.**

The devil showed the kingdoms of the world to the Lord Jesus Christ with the purpose of fascinating Him through what was exposed to Him according to the glory

sought by the creation subject to sin. However, in His heart, Christ only contemplated the glory of His Heavenly Father and did not allow Himself to be entangled by the earthly and fleeting glory that is so intensely displayed and admired among human beings.

The glory that Christ came to show the world is the true and consistent glory of Him who “in His foolishness or lowliness” is wiser than the world, and who in “His weakness” is stronger than the mighty expressions of strength that human beings try to flaunt before their fellow men.

*1 Corinthians 1: 25 **Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.***

In this way, **to be strengthened against the action of the fascination with sustaining appearances, ostentation, or vanity, every Christian should take shelter in God and ask that the Lord makes him or her know His glory more deeply, for it is from the glory of the Lord that a Christian can know what is true and eternal, as well as what does not stand before the light of the Lord.** (A subject broadly exposed in the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

*2 Corinthians 4: 6 **For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.***

Thus, **also regarding the deceitfulness of attributing excessive value to appearances, ostentation, vanity, or the pride of life, the Lord is the necessary provision for a person to be able to abstain from such great, and often so attractive, deceit.**

It is in the contemplation of the glory of God, and not in the distorted appearances presented by the creature, that a person can find the riches of true newness of life that every human being so indispensably needs.

*Jeremiah 9: 23 **Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;***

24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

*Psalms 119: 37 **Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.***

*Psalms 34: 4 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me
from all my fears.*

*5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not
ashamed.*

...

*8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who
trusts in Him!*

*Ephesians 4: 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you
should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility
of their mind,*

*18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the
life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the
blindness of their heart;*

*19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness,
to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

20 But you have not so learned Christ,

*21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the
truth is in Jesus:*

*22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man
which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,*

23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

*24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to
God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

*2 Corinthians 3: 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a
mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

C6. Crucial Cautions for the Relationship with Riches

A. Introduction to the Chapter

The subject of riches is very broad since there is an enormous variety of them on Earth and even more in the heavenly kingdom, as well as the fact that in everything, in one way or another, a person is involved with diverse riches.

Considering that it is through the variety of heavenly and earthly riches that life is sustained in the world, also an intense attraction of people for riches becomes part of human life.

Nevertheless, no kind of attraction to riches should ever lead people to consider or value some type of riches more than the Eternal Creator, who also sustains their life in the world.

And because this theme of riches is so attractive to people living in the world, the Scriptures also present a wide range of considerations about them, showing that there are superior and eternal riches and that there are earthly and passing riches, but also showing that there may be appropriate and inappropriate ways of relating to riches.

Due to the benefits that the appropriate relationship with riches provides, but also the harm that the inappropriate relationship may cause, the Scriptures address a variety of ways that people should be aware of when dealing with the most diverse facets of the subject of riches.

In the last two chapters, we have already seen that the deceitfulness or the fascination of riches acts as thorns that aim to choke the living word of God in people's hearts to prevent them from reaching the fruition of the Lord's heavenly will in their lives.

Many inappropriate behaviors, oppressions, and evils derive from people's inclination to the deceptions active in the world in relation to riches, and whose origin comes from the earthly and carnal positioning of human beings instigated by the powers of darkness active among them. The fascination of riches, when welcomed into the heart and given the space to grow, can become an increasingly intense and aggravated evil in the life of the one who welcomes it.

Thus, to instruct us to discern the workings of the deceitfulness of riches and the evils it seeks to cause, as well as to guide us in the way in which riches can be used in proper measure and for good, the word of God warns us about various forms of relationships with riches that can bring enormous damage to people's lives on Earth, but mainly regarding the lasting effects on their souls.

And the Scriptures present clear, objective, and severe instructions and warnings regarding the dangers of an inappropriate relationship with riches not with the purpose of oppressing or condemning people, but to lead those who hear the voice of God to salvation and eternal fellowship with the Lord.

It is because of the eternal love that God has for each life that He leads them to a knowledge of the truth not only in the proper aspects of the use of riches, but also in those aspects whose inclination towards them may cause pain, destruction, and separation from the main relationship that each person is called to practice, which is the relationship with the Eternal Creator.

All of the Heavenly Father's instructions to His children, even the restrictive ones regarding the use of riches, are for the lasting good of those who believe in Him.

Proverbs 3: 12 **For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.**

Hebrews 12: 4 **You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.**

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, in the following topics of this chapter, we will try to address even more some of the main points of attention mentioned in the Scriptures about possible relationships of a person with riches, and that aim to cooperate mainly for an individual to "guard one's heart" so that it does not come to be subject inappropriately to the most diverse riches, but to the Lord of all life and giver of all riches that truly cooperate for the good of people.

Considering that the choices for the most diverse types of riches and also for the Lord Creator of Heaven and Earth, ultimately, are made in the heart of each individual, the Scriptures also address specific warnings and instructions for people worldwide about how they can be internally supported to see the most diverse types of wealth appropriately.

And this, the Lord always does with the purpose that His children, in everything, may choose to live and walk on the path that leads them according to the newness of eternal life and to be fruitful according to the will of the Lord.

Isaiah 48: 17 **Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go."**

*Jeremiah 29: 11 **For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.***

*Psalms 19: 9 **The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.***

*Psalms 86: 11 **Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.***

*Psalms 119: 7 **I will praise You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments.***

B. The Undue Space Granted to the Soul

The first point of caution that we will try to address in this chapter about the relationship from the heart with riches is the too much space that an individual may give to one's own soul.

As we also saw in the theme entitled Another Gospel or A Different Gospel, the basis of the devil's work to try to involve people in his tricks is that he considers the things of men and not the aspects of God and His heavenly kingdom. A revelation that was exposed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ in the text that follows below:

Matthew 16: 23 ***But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."***

In another text that follows below, according to the book of Ephesians, we also see that the earthly mentality of a person can become one's guide, underlining, however, that this mentality has behind it the influence of the powers of darkness.

Ephesians 2: 1 ***And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,***
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,
3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

In addition, since childhood, the human being is faced with the condition of believing that one has the right to do what one wants and desires. This path, however, is not an appropriate way, for, in general, the child left to oneself does not walk towards wisdom, but towards shame, as exposed in texts such as the one exemplified below:

Proverbs 29: 15 ***The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.***

Thus, the immoderate pursuit of the fulfillment of one's own pleasures and being subject to oneself directly oppose the Lord's instruction, who is the only one who provides paths according to truth and which are according to what is indeed beneficial for each individual. Only the Lord can instruct people in the way of truth and lasting salvation.

In previous chapters, we have also seen, according to the book of James, that when people's fleshly desires or fascinations prevail in their souls, the resulting fruit is contention, conflicts, and even wars with themselves and their fellow men.

Therefore, **placing the satisfaction of one's own lusts as a major goal in life is the result of pride and personal vanity, causing people, as we saw in Paul's letter to Timothy, to establish difficult times for themselves because they are selfish, lovers of themselves, and lovers of their souls more than lovers of God, the truth, the heavenly righteousness, and the practice of good works.**

A soul desirous of satisfaction through life's delights, even if contrary to the Lord's will, is a condition highly vulnerable to the deceitfulness of riches. It's like a table set waiting for the deceitfulness of riches to serve and satisfy it, but also at a very high cost charged by the fascination.

Let us see below, then, another example presented by the Lord Jesus Christ that is directly related to the riches and pleasures of the world:

- Luke 12: 15* ***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."***
- 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.***
- 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'***
- 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.***
- 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'***
-

From the text above, **we can explicitly see how a person's conversations with one's own soul can be dangerous when one acts from a position devoid of the Lord's instruction.**

And yet much more dangerous can be a person's conversation with oneself if one's soul is deceived or fascinated by the deposits of material goods one possesses.

The talk of an individual who claims to find security in oneself and the earthly riches one has also is a type of talk or language propagated by the great harlot mentioned in the book of Revelation and those who are lukewarm in the faith of God.

That is, this personal confidence of the soul in earthly material prosperity, even advocating that this is a sign of a person being blessed by God, often comes from souls who want to justify themselves as to the undue appreciation and attachment they have for what they consider as their riches, as shown below:

Revelation 18: 7 ***"In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.'"***

Revelation 3: 16 ***"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.***

17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing;' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;'

So, one of the main ways in which a person's inner blindness sets in is manifested when one's own soul begins to define and determine for oneself, in one's own concepts, what one's security and wealth are.

In other words, a soul that bases itself on what it says to itself is a favorable or very appropriate condition for a state of wretchedness, poverty, blindness, and inward nakedness, even if outwardly it is surrounded by great ostentation.

A soul that is highly confident in itself is a soul that is also highly vulnerable and exposed, with the terrible aggravation of not seeing its highly fragile condition.

Proverbs 18: 11 ***The rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own esteem.***

12 Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.

Nevertheless, how does God see and name people who trust what their own souls tell them and the material riches they have accumulated?

Luke 12: 20 ***"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'***

21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The fascination for riches received in one's heart has a significant measure of potential to lead a person's soul to a state of foolishness to the point that the person oneself no longer sees the madness that lodges in him or her, and may even lead an individual not to see the terrible transgressions of life one commits against one's Eternal Creator.

Psalms 36: 1 ***An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.***

2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes, When he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.

3 The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good.

4 He devises wickedness on his bed; He sets himself in a way that is not good; He does not abhor evil.

*1 Timothy 6: 9 **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***

*Proverbs 23: 6 **Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies;**
7 **For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, But his heart is not with you.***

The person who sees oneself under the prism of the definition that one's own soul projects about oneself is an individual who "imagines oneself" and becomes what one imagines. That is, an aberration, a madman in the eyes of God for trusting in oneself, as if the fact of having "an imagination or thoughts so-called positive" could make this individual capable of determining who one is or everything that will happen to him or her.

The last text of Proverbs seen above alerts the wise not to supper or not to have fellowship with people who "self-imagine" or "self-define" themselves. The text teaches that one should not eat the food that this type of person feeds on, for this type of individual can even show oneself to be a sharer of one's bread and one's fellowship, but one only thinks about oneself and what one can extract or extort from others.

Given this, **a Christian should not feed on or take part in the concepts of people who think they can self-evaluate everything that suits them and self-elect all the paths they believe they should follow.**

*Isaiah 2: 22 **Sever yourselves from such a man, Whose breath is in his nostrils; For of what account is he?***

*Psalms 1: 1 **Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;***

Furthermore, godliness is the expression of a life surrendered or devoted to God, while ungodliness is the opposite. That is, the impious or the wicked is the one who does not live a life surrendered to God in the practices of one's life, even if one claims to be very religious.

And if a person thinks that one is self-sufficient in one's soul because of the riches of goods, human wisdom, or earthly knowledge that one may have, one positions oneself in the condition of a "wicked," arrogant, or haughty individual, for one sees in oneself the sufficiency for life.

For this reason, unlike the wicked, Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, declares that he himself does not judge himself and that only the Lord is able to provide him with wise and superior discernment, as follows:

1 Corinthians 4: 4 **For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.**

Similarly, the psalmists also declare again and again how necessary it was for them God's knowledge about their own lives, as we see in a few more examples below:

Psalms 37: 18 **The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever.**

Psalms 94: 11 **The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are futile.**

Psalms 138: 6 **Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.**

Psalms 139: 1 **O LORD, You have searched me and known me.**

...

23 **Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;**

24 **And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.**

Additionally, in the first four books of the so-called New Testament, known as the four Gospels, we find the Lord Jesus Christ making several direct references to each person's relationship with one's own life on Earth, which, however, seen more precisely, are references to a person's relationship with one's own soul.

In some languages, the same word *life* is used several times for different aspects of life and the soul. However, in ancient writings, there is a distinction between this and several other aspects. Thus, in the texts below, for instance, the reference to "life" may be related more specifically also to the "soul" and not just to life in general, as follows:

Matthew 10: 39 **"He who finds his life (or soul) will lose it, and he who loses his life (or soul) for My sake will find it."**

Matthew 16: 25 **"For whoever desires to save his life (or soul) will lose it, but whoever loses his life (or soul) for My sake will find it."**

Mark 8: 35 "For whoever desires to save his life (or soul) will lose it, but whoever loses his life (or soul) for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

John 12: 25 "He who loves his life (or soul) will lose it, and he who hates his life (or soul) in this world will keep it for eternal life."

Therefore, how different are not the words of the Lord Jesus Christ compared to those of the wealthy man exposed in the parable mentioned at the beginning of this topic?

While the foolish man gives all the space to the demands of his soul, the Lord Jesus Christ warns that life, in fact, is found in renouncing the soul's or merely human appeals with the purpose of following the Lord.

The Lord Jesus goes so far as to declare that the soul's longing to be focused primarily on itself, or the earthly things, should even be hated and vehemently rejected.

As we saw more widely in the theme The Christian in the World in General, we also remember here that the Christian is in the world, but the Christian is no longer of the world.

And for this reason, a Christian should no longer base oneself on the weak rudiments that exist in the world, also starting to no longer rely on the mere earthly knowledge of one's soul, but, instead, on the understanding and knowledge that is provided by the heavenly kingdom.

The Christian is in the world to have fellowship with God, serve the Lord, and use the things of the world to accomplish the Lord's will, and not to be focused primarily on one's own soul, the world, and its lusts.

*2 Corinthians 5: 14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;
15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*

At this point, we can still remember the words declared by the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah which, similarly, show us that no human soul, in itself or based on the knowledge derived from what is called the world by the Scriptures, is able to discern what is convenient or what does not suit one's life, as follows:

Jeremiah 17: 9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.

11 As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool.

In the words of the Lord revealed to the prophet Jeremiah, we can also notice that the riches received and improperly welcomed can come to reflect what the Lord Jesus Christ said about those who do so. That is, the end of the soul that trusts in the material riches one thinks one possesses will be an encounter with foolishness or lack of sobriety.

The Lord Jesus Christ declared that God calls a fool the rich man who obtained a great harvest and inclined his heart to see in them his basis of satisfaction and security. And this was because this man placed his hope in something that did not have the consistency to support him in the essential parts of life in the long term and the most critical moments of one's existence. An aspect also addressed in a text of Proverbs that we repeat once again below:

Proverbs 11: 4 **Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.**

In the parable cited above, the Lord Jesus Christ calls the rich man a fool because the attachment he had for the great harvest, which he stored up in his barns, also became an instrument of enormous harm to his soul.

Thus, **the foolishness of a soul may lie in its pondering only for the present life and in its not pondering or not making considerations about the end of its days on Earth and what may happen to it after the end of its natural life.**

The foolishness of a soul lies in yielding to the sudden and momentary appeals that advocate that only the present or the earthly matters. It is the soul that does not consider its eternal future, with the aggravating factor that some souls will only pay attention to this madness when the end of things has already occurred in their lives.

Yet in other words, **the person who wants to nourish one's immaterial soul with material riches is working against the greater good that one's soul needs and is trying to nourish one's soul with that which will not nourish it with food that does not perish.**

Ecclesiastes 5: 13 **There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.**

The foolishness of the man mentioned by the Lord Jesus in His parable, as an example of someone who inappropriately acts focused on one's own soul, was also expressed in the fact that although this man was so focused on his soul, he had very limited and mistaken knowledge about the real needs of his own soul, thinking that his soul could be fully supplied by material goods.

In his foolishness or attachment to material abundance, the man in the example in reference could no longer see the need for heavenly riches such as love, hope, and faith that the Lord declares to be essential for every human being.

For this reason, based on his material riches, this man behaved like a fool by placing himself as the instructor, adviser, or “god” of his own life. He leaned towards folly by failing to consider, with a minimum of sobriety, that a person's life is not limited to the abundance of material goods that one possesses, just as he failed to consider that a person dissociated from the Lord will not find true joy and peace, for these essentially are characteristics of the heavenly kingdom and not of the material world.

Luke 12: 20 ***"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'***

21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Romans 14: 17 ***For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

The man of the parable in reference saw himself in the right to serve himself as he wanted or to be served by himself according to the appetites of his soul. In enlarging the space given to his soul, he projected himself into the position of a throne over his life or into the position of a king who thinks he deserves to grant his soul all the delights it craves and who can define at his pleasure how he will make use of his riches.

The man in check, by leaning on his own thinking, discarded the following word from God from his life:

Romans 11: 34 ***"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"***

35 Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The prosperous man, in his material harvests, became rich in material goods, but also, at the same process, became poor towards God, for he competed with the Lord's position by wanting to assume the future of his field, goods, and, above all, his soul entirely. He despised the One Shepherd who knows all the real needs of the soul and who could guide him in the paths of righteousness and be with him when he reached the valley of the shadow of death.

So, again at this point, we return to the first deceitfulness of riches listed in the previous chapters, which is the excessive personal self-evaluation that also lacks the sobriety and truth only known in the Lord.

Only the Lord can provide what a soul needs, and without the Heavenly and Eternal Shepherd, it wanders astray and lost in the world, even if it might come to have an abundance of goods and earthly riches.

*Psalms 23: 1 **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

...

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

*1 Peter 2: 25 **For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

In trying to take control of future projections of what he would do to please his soul, the prosperous man in his material harvests indulged in what the Scriptures also call evil boasting, as described in the following text:

*James 4: 13 **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";***

14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We stress here, then, that the Lord did not attribute anything wrong to the rich man in reference until he had a good and abundant harvest, but in how he acted regarding the abundance obtained, for it was from the abundance of his crops that this man felt safe to boast of arrogant and haughty pretensions that even go beyond the mere desire for riches and advance to the aspect of the desire to be able, by oneself, to determine all aspects of one's own future.

Thus, we also return here to what we saw earlier, that is, that in the world, there are many people who like to use the expression that declares that an individual needs to reach a moment in one's life when "one has to take one's life into one's own hands" or "take into one's own hands the determination of one's future." However, in their propositions, they do not take into account that this was precisely the attitude for which the wealthy landowner was considered "foolish" or what James calls arrogant and evil boasting.

A person, of course, can seek to make future plans for one's earthly life, as we have also seen previously. However, what the Scriptures teach is that an individual should always do so in conjunction with the Lord and by fellowship with Him, and not "take one's life in one's hands" as if each one could supply and protect one's own life only with the material goods that one comes to possess.

If we still consider that the word *fool* also has similar characteristics to the word *unwise*, the text below explains how a person can stop being “*foolish or unwise*”:

Ephesians 5: 14 **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."**
15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Inadequate attachment to riches may elevate a person's soul or heart to such an extent that one really thinks one can plan and determine the future steps of one's entire life. This, however, to repeat this point again, would only be possible if one were “god,” which, as a creature, no one will ever be.

Proverbs 13: 16 **Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool lays open his folly.**

Proverbs 16: 1 **The preparations of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.**
2 All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits.
3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.
4 The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.
5 Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.

Isaiah 30: 1 **"Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "Who take counsel, but not of Me, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin;**

1 Corinthians 8: 5 **For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),**
6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

Moreover, advancing here yet a little further as to the undue space a person gives to one's soul, or looking at this point from yet another angle, we understand that the foolishness of the man who had an abundant harvest can also be equated with what the Scriptures call avarice and covetousness, which similarly are presented in the

Scriptures as actions that result from the work of the flesh and not the Spirit of the Lord.

And, in turn, as we have also seen in previous topics, covetousness or evil lusts still advance to the sphere of being equated with idolatry.

Thus, **one of the prices that covetousness exacts from those who persecute it is that they become idolaters of themselves and of the fragile and deceitful riches they crave or even come to possess.**

In this way, **the covetous or self-idolater individual gives one's soul ample room in this world instead of giving due honor and glory to God, and instead of humbly seeking the light of Christ to redeem one's time of life and make it worthy, valuable, or rich in the sight of the Lord.**

In their riches, covetous individuals are poor toward God because they no longer trust in the Lord God in a practical way, but in themselves and their riches. They advance on the path of becoming individuals who deceive themselves by thinking and acting as if they could feed or shepherd themselves without actually being able to do so because they are uprooted from a firm foundation of life.

*Jude 1: 12 **These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving (or feeding) only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; ...***

Still regarding covetousness, many may think that it is only a desire for goods and accumulation of earthly riches, but this is only its outward proposal, for it essentially is a fleshly work of idolatry and worship of one's own being and possessions.

*Colossians 3: 5 **Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.***

Therefore, **a person puts oneself in a position of not being rich towards God when one no longer exercises one's faith and dependence on the Lord in a practical way in the various acts of one's life.**

To believe in the riches of the world and not to believe in God is to be poor before God, even if a person is very rich in the eyes of the world, for God's scale does not measure riches as the world's scales measure them.

*John 6: 29 **Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."***

*Hebrews 11: 6 **But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.***

Additionally, also in the Scriptures recorded before the coming of Christ in the flesh into the world, we see the example of a king who, in his abundance, exalted himself beyond what was convenient for him, showing us the prophet that unbridled exaltation in riches leads people to confuse the creation with the Eternal Creator and leads them to thoughts where they exalt themselves and their goods to the detriment of trust in the Lord.

Ezekiel 28: 1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,
*2 "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "**Because your heart is lifted up, And you say, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, In the midst of the seas,' Yet you are a man, and not a god, Though you set your heart as the heart of a god***
3 (Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!
*4 **With your wisdom and your understanding You have gained riches for yourself, And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;***
*5 **By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches, And your heart is lifted up because of your riches),"***
*6 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "**Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god,***
7 Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, The most terrible of the nations; And they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, And defile your splendor.
8 They shall throw you down into the Pit, And you shall die the death of the slain In the midst of the seas.
*9 "Will you still say before him who slays you, '**I am a god? But you shall be a man, and not a god, In the hand of him who slays you.***
10 You shall die the death of the uncircumcised By the hand of aliens; For I have spoken," says the Lord GOD."

So, finally, in this topic, we would like to point out that in the book of Luke, there is still a narrative that contrasts with the parable of the man who ended up being called a fool by the Lord, which is the narrative of a very poor widow who was very rich towards God and which, at the same time, narrates the existence of wealthy people who gave large sums of money as offerings in the temple and who were very poor towards God.

And as a central aspect of the difference pointed out by Christ between the widow and the rich mentioned by Him, we see that the widow placed the trust of her "life" (or "bios") in God while the mentioned rich, despite giving voluminous material offerings in the temple, were not willing to put their trust in the Lord to be instructed and guided in everything by Him according to the heavenly will.

*Luke 21: 4 "**for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had (or all her life).**"*

The word *livelihood* mentioned in the text above may also be seen as *life* or “*bios*,” that is, *physical or natural life*. Therefore, it was not the widow's offering of money that was of value before the Lord, for it was insignificant in economic terms. Instead, the deposit of her life in trust to the Lord was accounted to her as being rich towards God.

There is only one place of true worship for human beings: Humility as a creature before the One Sovereign God and Creator of the world and everything in it!

Psalms 11: 7 For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.

Psalms 34: 4 I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears.

5 They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed.

Exceedingly kind, then, is the Lord when He, in His rich mercy, continues to extend the revelation of the condition of the human being as a creature and the fragile condition of the nations in which they live so that people can still repent and return to sobriety or to the wisdom that comes from the Eternal Creator.

Psalms 9: 19 Arise, O LORD, Do not let man prevail; Let the nations be judged in Your sight.

20 Put them in fear, O LORD, That the nations may know themselves to be but men.

Therefore, whoever believes in the Lord and contemplates Him will never be called a fool by the Lord. On the contrary, one will be invited to be eternally in the presence of the principal, true, and eternal riches: the Eternal Lord Himself.

There is an essential wealth that a person is called to keep eternally, and with which one does not need to fear that “this night your soul will be required of you and what has it prepared for eternal life,” as follows:

Lamentations 3: 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

*Psalms 91: 14 "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
15 He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.*

16 With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation."

John 11: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

*26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.
Do you believe this?"*

C. The Gain of Oppressions

The point of caution in the relationship with riches that we will seek to address in this topic, in a sense, is a derivation of the one that we considered earlier about the excessive space that a person gives to one's own soul.

Thus, when the human being expands the space of one's soul to the point of finding oneself worthy of valuing oneself beyond what is convenient or of thinking that one is worthy of idolizing oneself, one will often also tend to want to expand the space of one's soul for it to be idolized or excessively served by one's fellow men.

Nevertheless, the consequences of these unbridled impulses, in which some individuals think they are worthy that others are always serving them, may trigger levels of much pain and distress for themselves, but also for many people around those who adopt these kinds of positions.

When people begin to think of themselves beyond what is convenient, they soon also tend to believe that they can impose themselves on others to achieve their goals, thus entering the sphere of what is called in the Scriptures oppression or the attempt to attain gain through oppression.

And if we look a little more closely at the term *oppression* or the verb *to oppress*, we can see, according to some comments from the Online Bible associated with Strong's lexicon, that *oppression* or *the action of oppressing* expresses the attitude where some people try to take control over the others' lives. And this, with the purpose of exercising power or domination over or against their fellow men to obtain gains from others for themselves.

In addition, another term that in the Scriptures goes hand in hand with *oppression* is the term *extortion*, or the *act of trying to extort one's fellow men*, which is also related to *trying to intimidate, dominate or subjugate other people to extract gains for those who practice the extortion attempts*. And these attempts may reach the point where some people shamelessly try to plunder even the neediest, those close to them, or even their own family members, as exemplified in the text below:

Ezekiel 22: 29 **"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger.**

...
12 In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me," says the Lord GOD.

...
7 "In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow."

Therefore, **in the world, there are many people who, by allowing themselves to be involved in the deceitfulness of riches, begin to prefer to obtain their gains through the oppression and extortion of their fellow men**

instead of seeking to attain them through the means of just and honest activities with which they could engage.

And once material riches become more important to some than people, it is negatively impressive what human beings do in relation to their fellows to obtain this type of riches. For this reason, the point of caution of the current topic concerning the relationship with riches aims to cooperate so that:

- ⇒ 1st) **A person is careful not to allow oneself to be involved by the desire for riches to the point of leaning towards the oppression and extortion of others;**
- ⇒ 2nd) **A person is careful not to let one's heart be involved by the domination or by the distorted interests of others who want to exploit him or her inappropriately.**

Below we see exemplified, then, the two situations mentioned in the previous paragraph, as follows:

Zechariah 7: 9 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother.

10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.'"

1 Corinthians 7: 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

In the Scriptures, on the one hand, it is clearly described that in human life, legitimate differences may occur in the amounts of possessions and wealth that different people in the world possess. In society, there are people with goods and riches who count on God's endorsement for their lives, for they do not establish their souls in the trust of riches and also keep in mind that a person's life does not consist of the goods that one possesses.

On the other hand, there are also people in the world who, among other things, lack material goods even because they are lazy, unwilling to work, careless in managing the wealth that comes into their hands, or because they spend most of their resources on unprofitable things.

Nevertheless, when people, already from the posture of their hearts, want to obtain material riches through the extortion or oppression of their fellow men, any acquisition of riches by these types of actions or ways does not have the endorsement or the blessing of the Lord over their lives, a criterion that equally applies to all individuals.

Therefore, **God has never been, is, or will ever be an accomplice or connivance with anyone who associates with the deceitfulness of riches to obtain an increase in their earnings at the price of the oppression of their fellow men.**

Even the very access to fellowship and contemplation of the Lord in His beauty is not granted to those who want to take advantage of the gain of oppression, as is also described by the prophet Isaiah in the text that follows below:

- Isaiah 33: 14* **The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"**
- 15* **He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:**
- 16* **He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure.**
- 17* **Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.**
- 18* **Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?"**
-

Thus, the person who longs for gains from oppression pays a very harmful price for one's life because by abstaining from fellowship with the Lord, in exchange for the desired inadequate gain, one troubles oneself and may reach the point of not even thinking in one's heart that God investigates one's mind and actions or that He is knowledgeable of all one's doings.

As the inclination to achieve gains from oppression interposes itself in a person's relationship with God, it has the potential to lead an individual to live under a personal conscience that even goes so far as to consider that God does not exist or as if the exploitation of the innocent would never come to be rebuked and chastened by the Lord, which, in turn, may lead to an even more intense inclination to the oppression of others.

Let us see below two more examples of texts also related to what was exposed in the last two paragraphs:

Proverbs 15: 27 **He who is greedy for gain (or for unjust gain) troubles his own house, But he who hates bribes will live.**

Psalms 10: 3 **For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD.**

4 **The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.**

5 **His ways are always prospering; Your judgments are far above, out of his sight; As for all his enemies, he sneers at them.**

6 **He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity."**

7 **His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.**

8 **He sits in the lurking places of the villages; In the secret places he murders the innocent; His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless.**

- 9 ***He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor; He catches the poor when he draws him into his net.***
 10 ***So he crouches, he lies low, That the helpless may fall by his strength.***
 11 ***He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see."***

In other words, those who place their souls and their goals of gains above the principles of the heavenly kingdom are also those who may fall into wanting to be the supreme advisors of their own souls, inappropriately exalting themselves, trying to elevate themselves to the level or above of God, ending up seeing themselves as independent of God, or no longer fearing God. And this, in turn, probably will also lead them not to respect their fellow men and may even reach the point of becoming people who multiply pain and oppression on others.

In the theme The Gospel of the Creator, we also addressed several aspects of the consequences that may come from a person ceasing to fear God. Therefore, if one does not fear God, whom else will one respect in one's greedy desires?

Thus, those who give themselves individually to the deceitfulness of riches and begin to take pleasure in what the deceit offers them also put themselves in the way of troubling the things and those around them. By inclining to the idolatry of avarice, covetousness, or dishonest gain, they distort their ways of life, introduce oppressions into their own homes, corrupt their relationships, and trouble the professions and works over which they rule or have influence.

That is, those who rejoice in the gains of extortion, because of their covetousness (idolatry of themselves, their positions, and their things), multiply oppression wherever they go and exert influence, aspects mentioned several times in the Scriptures, as some more texts below show us:

Jeremiah 22: 13 ***"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work, ..."***

Proverbs 29: 4 ***The king establishes the land by justice, But he who receives bribes overthrows it.***

Proverbs 28: 16 ***A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, But he who hates covetousness will prolong his days.***

Jeremiah 22: 17 ***"Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, For shedding innocent blood, And practicing oppression and violence."***

So, markedly evil days are those in which the imposition of yokes and heavy burdens is placed even on those already under poverty or affliction.

Amos 5: 11 **Therefore, because you tread down the poor And take grain taxes from him, Though you have built houses of hewn stone, Yet you shall not dwell in them; You have planted pleasant vineyards, But you shall not drink wine from them.**

12 For I know your manifold transgressions And your mighty sins: Afflicting the just and taking bribes; Diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time, For it is an evil time.

14 Seek good and not evil, That you may live; So the LORD God of hosts will be with you, As you have spoken.

15 Hate evil, love good; Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Those who allow themselves to be dominated by earthly ambitions and riches are also those who try to oppress further and subjugate people who are already beset by pain and distress. They are individuals who act by exploiting the fragility of other people, as they want to use them for themselves and to expand their own projects or even empires that they create and build.

Even having goods and properties in high quantity, many individuals are driven by greed to try to oppress even those who have little, making themselves bold in their purpose of obtaining large profits in the times of distress of others.

In the world, there are people who wait and even delight in seeing others weakened to then entangle them in their “nets” that they set up to benefit from those they see as less opportunistic and less intelligent than they are. And the “networks” or “one purse” of the greedy may range from networks of relationships around their greed, networks of boycotts of those who are not part of their networks, networks of shady businesses, and so on.

Nevertheless, when thinking that they are profiting from their networks, those who seek the gain of oppression do not realize that they themselves are the first who are running into becoming imprisoned in the deceitfulness that acts behind their own networks and their folly.

Let us take a look once more at the two texts already mentioned earlier:

Proverbs 1: 10 **My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.**

11 If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;

12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;

13 We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil;

14 Cast in your lot among us, Let us all have one purse," –

15 My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path;

16 For their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed blood.

- 17 *Surely, in vain the net is spread In the sight of any bird;*
 18 *But they lie in wait for their own blood, They lurk secretly for their own lives.*
 19 *So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.*

Jeremiah 17: 11 "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool."

The Scriptures show us that many people even get very rich in their ambitions that are associated with the gains of oppression or extortion. However, even if they come to have abundant riches, what awaits these people in the end, if they do not come to have an encounter with genuine repentance of their evil deeds, is the foolishness of trusting in temporary goods, just as was the example of the rich man called a fool by God in the parable exposed by the Lord Jesus Christ and already approached above.

On the other hand, although what we saw above has already been a lot concerning the current topic, **in their foolishness for the gains of oppression, some people go even further in their corrupted intentions and reach the point of making use of propositions and actions that make them constitute “networks” to ensnare people using the very name of God or the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel.**

And if this last type of foolish attraction for earthly riches, which some people who claim to serve God propagate, is accepted, its propositions act as intense leaven to leaven the good lump and to corrupt entire houses because they are moved not by the Lord, but by greed, as the following texts also warn us:

*Titus 1: 10 **For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,***
 11 ***whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.***

1 *Corinthians 5: 6 **Your glorying (or boasting) is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?***
 7 ***Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.***
 8 ***Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***
 9 ***I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.***
 10 ***Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.***
 11 ***But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an***

idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person.

In the world, there are many people who claim to be shepherds of the flock of God, but whose aim is the gain of oppression and to exploit the people they claim to want to shepherd. These kinds of individuals use subtle words with the appearance of godliness, but what they want is to extort their fellow men under the banner of pretended piety, uttering words that do not indeed or genuinely come from the Eternal Lord.

Thus, **when men and women who think of themselves more than is convenient take control of the lives of others, because they are moved by human passions, they may trouble and lead people to severe deviations in their lives**, as God also warns us through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 3: 12 "As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them.

O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, And destroy the way of your paths."

Therefore, it may happen that a “network,” a “community,” or “one purse” driven by greed even provides material gains quicker to its members, but what is the meaning or value of this if this results in a person turning away from the path or will of God for one's life?

An assembly, congregation, institution, or community that calls itself Christian, but that surrenders to the domination of people eager for gains of oppression, can very quickly become “a net” or “one purse” that imprisons people and destroys the ways that God has for each individual in particular.

When an institution, assembly, congregation, community, or its leaders assume the role of guiding people, this collectivity becomes corrupted, for it seeks to exchange the guidance for people's lives that should be done by the One Head Christ with the direction of men or women whose interest is increased gain for themselves and increased domination over their fellow men.

God instructs Christians to meet and support each other with the intent of encouraging each other to seek and continue to grow in the personal knowledge of the Lord. However, Christians are not called by God to offer protection and spiritual coverage from some to others, much less to do so with the aim of material gain and the extortion of some to the detriment of others.

In other words, the spiritual covering over each Christian belongs exclusively to Christ, just as the gifts of God are not granted to Christians to be commercialized. (Aspects seen in the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ and several others, and also in the topics that follow later in the present material).

Thus, it can be crucial for a Christian to know that in the world, there are several projects, structures, entities, communities, and institutions in which those who lead them have specialized themselves in extorting, without any shame, the riches and the

lives of other people. And some of the most avid among them are precisely those projects that claim the desire to help people or that offer religious provisions in exchange for the material resources of the people who come to them.

Unfortunately, there are in the world many people who go from bad to worse and may reach even a point where they surrender so intensely to the fascination of riches that they want to “plunder or extort” particularly the truly fearful children of God, for the spirit of oppression is contrary to the Spirit of the freedom that is granted in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 4: 29 **But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.***

Given this, **it is also crucial for a Christian to know that the Scriptures do not mask the actions of those who try to attain gain by oppression, not even when they try to hide their evil intentions by supposedly putting the name of God upon them. On the contrary, the Scriptures expose them with great light so that those who practice these evil acts may repent, as well as those who are targets of their oppression may be careful not to be imprisoned by those who want to exploit them.**

In addition, even before approaching some final aspects of how to position oneself so as not to give in to the attractions or the actions that seek the gains of oppression, we understand that it is worth highlighting here that the attempts to obtain gains of oppression may be carried out by people in the most diverse conditions in which they find themselves.

Although the Scriptures, perhaps, mention more frequently the actions of oppression caused by those with more wealth towards those who have less, they also mention the attempts to cause oppression among those who find themselves in similar conditions of poverty or even in situations of submission to others.

Although some employers, for example, may set themselves up as those who aim to obtain gains of oppression from their employees, there are many employers who establish an appropriate and correct relationship with employees. Similarly, there may be many employees who see their jobs as an honest way to obtain financial provisions for themselves, but there may also be many employees who perform jobs aiming at the gains of oppression. There are many employees who do not work properly, and some even try to oppress their employers due to their dependence on the workforce they have on their employees.

Therefore, **the inclination to the gains of oppression is, first and foremost, a position of the heart. And for this reason, it can manifest itself in all spheres and human activities.**

*Proverbs 28: 3 **A poor man who oppresses the poor Is like a driving rain which leaves no food.***

4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But such as keep the law contend with them.

Proverbs 22: 16 **He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, And he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.**

Titus 2: 9 **Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back,
10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.**

Ephesians 6: 9 **And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.**

Colossians 4: 1 **Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.**

And finally, in this topic, as in all other aspects related to the deceitfulness of riches, we would like to mention again that **it is only in the instruction and the dependence on the Lord that a person can be freed both from the aspect of not being oppressive towards others and from the aspect of not being subject to the oppression of others**, as exemplified in a few more texts below:

Psalms 62: 7 **In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God.**

8 Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

9 Surely men of low degree are a vapor, Men of high degree are a lie; If they are weighed on the scales, They are altogether lighter than vapor.

10 Do not trust in oppression, Nor vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.

Proverbs 4: 10 **Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many.**

11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths.

12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble.

13 Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life.

14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil.

15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on.

16 For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; And their sleep is taken away unless they make someone fall.

17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.

18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

Only God can deliver people from the attempts of those who want to use them for their gains of oppression and extortion.

For this reason, the prayer to God for help and protection so that the attacks of the oppressors do not prosper against their lives should always be a central point for those who exercise trust not in themselves, in their wealth, or possessions, but in the Eternal Lord who sees everything and everyone, and before whom everything and everyone is patent, entirely manifested, or completely exposed.

Proverbs 28: 5 **Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all.**

Psalms 10: 16 **The LORD is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land.**

17 LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear,

18 To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, That the man of the earth may oppress no more.

Proverbs 22: 22 **Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Nor oppress the afflicted at the gate;**

23 For the LORD will plead their cause, And plunder the soul of those who plunder them.

Psalms 118: 8 **It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.**

9 It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.

Psalms 34: 17 **The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.**

Galatians 5: 1 **Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

D. The Deceitfulness of Riches Associated with the Trade of Souls, the Word of God, and Christians – Part 1

Any individual who wants to present something to others needs a means of communicating with them. And one of the means used in the world for this communication is also through what is called trade.

Trade is characterized by the offer and sale of products and services on the one hand and the purchase of these products and services on the other, which characterizes trade basically as a set of actions for the exchange of riches between two or more interested parties.

And when the subject of the exchange of riches comes into play, we may start thinking initially about the most essential riches of material life, such as food, drink, and clothing.

However, **since trade is a means, its credibility also depends on those using the means and the purpose for which they use them.**

Depending on the people who use trade and for what objective or purpose they use it, it may be very beneficial for the parties involved, but it may also be deeply corrupted.

In principle, trade should encompass two parties on equal trading terms, where these two parties respect each other and operate with fairness to each other. However, a more complex aspect involving trade is that the items to be exchanged (sold and bought) require attribution of value, a point that makes us also return to the first aspects we saw in this material and the various issues of the deceitfulness of riches.

Since in trade, there are exchanges of values or riches that are in the possession of the parties involved, one of the central challenges to carry it out is related to the criteria used to value the riches that are in possession of the seller, but also the riches that are in possession of the buyer.

And who determines the value of each of the riches that are with each of the parties?

In trade, there are several evaluators of riches, and not all use appropriate measures to do this task.

At the beginning of this theme, we saw that there are people who use misleading or dishonest scales and measurements. They are people who seek to use measures that, in their eyes, always seem to be favorable to them and, of course, are always unfavorable to their neighbor.

Considering that both the seller and the buyer have riches in their hands, both parties may try to use distorted scales, measures, and weights, and not just the part that sells, because, in a way, every seller is a buyer, and every buyer is a seller.

In the world, there are not only sellers who seek to profit improperly from buyers, but there are also many buyers who have great wealth and greatly oppress those who need to sell goods, trying to depreciate them to acquire them for prices below the value that would generally be given for them, as exemplified in the text below:

Proverbs 20: 14 ***"It is good for nothing," cries the buyer; But when he has gone his way, then he boasts.***

Trade, which should be a means or an instrument only for the benefit of the people who carry out transactions through it, may become, in the hands of some people, a very intense means of practices of oppression, extortion, and iniquity.

For this reason, some of the most expressive battles of desires and struggles for riches take place in the battlefield called trade because, through it, people increase their wealth, but also through the riches they acquire, they may come to lead their hearts astray regarding truth and what is righteous.

Let us see below, then, once again, the critical text recorded by the prophet Ezekiel:

*Ezekiel 28: 1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,
 2 "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Because your heart is lifted up, And you say, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, In the midst of the seas,' Yet you are a man, and not a god, Though you set your heart as the heart of a god
 3 (Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!
 4 With your wisdom and your understanding You have gained riches for yourself, And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;
 5 By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches, And your heart is lifted up because of your riches),"*

In this last text, we can notice that a heart can be elevated by the increase of gold, silver, and treasures, that is, by the addition of riches. However, in this same text, we can also see what we mentioned above, that is, that trade is one of the means by which people can increase their riches.

In addition, some types or actions of trades may even become so valuable that they are worth much more than the items they sell. There are trades that become riches in themselves. And this may also be what we call today "brand," "point of sales," "sales strategy," and so on.

The "wisdom in trade," mentioned in the text above, may come to be appreciated with high esteem and valued as a high-value product in itself.

Nevertheless, it is also when trade comes to be seen as "a wealth in itself" that it runs the risk of becoming associated with the deceitfulness of riches like any other riches.

And as "a wealth in itself" and associated with the fascination of riches, trade, in turn, becomes one of the most dangerous items in the world for the aggravation of the evil in a heart, an aspect addressed by the prophet Ezekiel in the sequence of the text mentioned above, as follows:

Ezekiel 28: 16 "By the abundance (or multiplication) of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones.

17 Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you.

18 You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you.

19 All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, And shall be no more forever."

Therefore, **when trade becomes a wealth in itself and is associated with a fascination, it can move from being a means of support for fair transactions between people to being seen as a very attractive agent of inappropriate gains and associated with gains of oppression or extortion, as we have already commented above.**

Trade may grow in importance in people's lives to the point of becoming their reason for living, that is, to the point of making people start to live in everything based on commercializing all things, which, in turn, begins to make them seek to transform all their actions and relationships into business possibilities.

Nevertheless, by adopting this type of attitude in which trade becomes extremely important for them, people also put themselves on the path that leads them to distance themselves from crucial aspects that should be fundamental and precedent in their lives.

According to the words declared by the Lord Jesus Christ, trade was one of the items that darkened people's hearts so as not to perceive the condemnation or punishment that came to Sodom and Gomorrah because of the evil that was practiced in these cities, according to the text below:

Luke 17: 22 Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

23 And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them.

24 For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.

25 But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;

29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."

“Buying and selling” is part of life. However, making this the reason for living, to the point that an individual forgets one's continuous and intense relationship with God and being attentive to the Lord's return, may become something of indescribable harm to those who surrender to this kind of life.

Previously we have also seen that those who have their mind and thoughts primarily on the things of the world constitute themselves as enemies of the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and as those whose own belly is their “god.”

In this way, **to have a heart inclined to live according to eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building is to be involved only with earthly things, thus despising the fact that life does not consist only of these aspects.**

If we still look at the subject of trade as it is addressed in the book of Revelation, we can also see in this book, the level of oppression and enmity to God that this means may reach when it is granted a space or a condition beyond what should to be given to it, as shown below:

- Revelation 18: 1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.*
- 2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!*
- 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, **and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.**"*
- 4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.*
- 5 For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*
- 6 Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.*
- 7 **In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.'***
- 8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day, death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.*
- 9 **The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning,***
- 10 standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, **that great city Babylon, that mighty city!** For in one hour your judgment has come.'*
- 11 **And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore:***
- 12 **merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;***
- 13 **and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.***

- 14 *The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.*
- 15 ***The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,***
- 16 *and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!*
- 17 *'For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance*
- 18 *and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?'*
- 19 *They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'*
- 20 *Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"*
- 21 *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.*
- 22 *The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.*
- 23 *The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, **for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.***
- 24 ***And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."***

Throughout human history, earthly wealth, government power, influence over others, oppression, domination, prostitution, and trade countless times went hand in hand. They walked in partnership. For this reason, the Scriptures present explicit warnings about the joint action of these practices or postures.

Therefore, **something unfortunate that happens when trade is used improperly and abusively is that trade, associated with the deceitfulness of riches, goes beyond the negotiation of mere earthly goods and even advances to the perverse, terrible, and cruel trade of souls.**

Several times on this theme, we have seen that there are no values on Earth that can redeem a soul from perdition (according to Psalms 49: 7 to 9). However, in the above text from the book of Revelation and others, we see that although a soul is priceless in terms of earthly values, one of the items used in corrupt and iniquitous trade is precisely the very trading of people's souls.

From generation to generation, the enchantment that operated in Simon's life, who used magic or sorcery for his work, comes to be accepted again by several people, which, in turn, repeatedly tries to fascinate people into mistakenly thinking that with money and earthly riches, they can achieve the gift of God in behalf of their souls.

Yet another period where the aspect addressed above was also very evident was in the Middle Ages with the practice of trading indulgences, where, associated with them, the promise of the redemption of one's own soul from hell was made for those who

acquired the futile and false indulgences. Or even worse, when the sale of indulgences was associated with the promise that the souls of dead relatives could be benefited by those who acquired them.

Now, if all the goods of a person, however rich one may be, are of no value for the redemption of a soul, it will not be the purchase of a few indulgences that will make an individual reach the gift of salvation. And this line of thinking may similarly apply, for example, to those who nowadays give offerings to have their names written on the stones, walls, or benches of buildings they claim to be made for God and thinking that this may accredit them before the Lord in the day of eternal judgment.

Nevertheless, **due to an excessively commercial mentality of many people, where they think that everything is obtained by selling and buying, many also end up letting themselves be deceived by extremely absurd propositions regarding human souls.**

Thus, the person who indulges in the deceitfulness that material riches, through trade, can buy spiritual and eternal riches also begins to aggravate one's state of fascination to the point where one may surrender to being extorted by others or extort others under the most unreasonable and irrational conceptions imaginable.

The deceitfulness of riches associated with a mentality of excessive valuation of trade may come to exercise blindness and dominion over individuals who surrender to it. And this may occur to the point that they come to sell what is not marketable or that should never be sold, as well as still practicing unreasonable values or prices for what they say or promise to be selling.

In its eagerness to enlarge riches, the deceitfulness of riches associated with trade leads the hearts of individuals who surrender to it not only to try to commercialize heavenly, spiritual, and eternal riches for the price of earthly, material, and temporal things, as if this were perfectly possible, but it also leads them to trade at earthly prices what they should never, under any circumstances, even try to commercialize.

In the text of Ezekiel 28, we can see to what point the king of Tyre reached, namely: ***“You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading.”***

In this way, **trade, associated with the deceitfulness of riches, seeks to corrupt all that is holy, reminding once again that, by the Scriptures, each person, individually, should consider the fact that one is called to be the temple for the dwelling place of the Lord in one's life.**

The king of Tyre, by the multitude of iniquities that he practiced in his unrighteous trade, profaned what was most holy, that is, his own heart. This king defiled his own life, for he was given over to greed or idolatry that consumes the lives of those who surrender to it, as also shown in the text already mentioned in previous topics and which we repeat once again below:

Proverbs 1: 19 ***So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.***

Therefore, **when the association of trade with the deceitfulness of riches is not contained, the Scriptures teach us that it escalates to the point where it will attempt to include as merchandise of its trade also the following items which should never be items of trade, namely:**

- 1) **People's souls;**
- 2) **The Word of God;**
- 3) **The very Christians.**

And since the three items above should never be items of trade, trading them ends up being the expression of a spurious and corrupt trade, but generally under some attempts to cover it up with presentations of something attractive to try to involve subtly and perversely the buyers of their propositions.

As the basis of the concept of trade is the exchange of riches between the party that sells and the party that buys, and as the basis of corrupt trade is an unrighteous exchange, the trade of souls and the word of God is also intended to be done in an obscure or masked way so as not to be identified in its proposed transactions.

For example, concerning firstly the commercialization of souls that uses obscure and indirect tricks, we may observe that one of the most used strategies in the attempt to carry it out is to offer people a large set of activities or entertainment so that they will not feel “the need” and “nor the lack of time” for the search for the truth. And this is because once people become dissociated from knowing the truths of the heavenly kingdom, they also no longer discern what is appropriate and what is not adequate to be traded, sold, or bought.

Through aggressive, intense, and excessive trade, traders offer people things that put them in a high volume of daily activities to the point where they do not have time for the most important reflections about life, which is a very subtle way of making people “selling their souls” to what will not lead them to a truly profitable end when also seen from the eternal perspective of their souls.

The excessive commercialization of the idea that “you have the right always to be happy” is another proposition that seeks to strengthen in people a selfishness under which they are blinded to the most diverse real circumstances of life, trying to lead them to live and walk under an unreal and illusory sophistry or “slogan” that may lead them to severe frustrations and disappointments in their lives. And also because of the alleged “right to be happy,” people may come to negotiate their own soul for not seeking what indeed is appropriate for them, even distancing them from the need to go through moments of repentance, sadness, and humility of heart.

Furthermore, filling people's lives with constant activities or entertainment, leaving no room for people to reflect on the deeper meaning of life, in the light of God's will and on the eternal value of their souls, is also an instrument that makes part of the planning of many kings, rulers, mighty men, and vile merchants on Earth.

Nevertheless, **life is not a constant party, nor is the real and daily world a place of continuous illusory stages and shows. Life is real and with real effects in the present and for the future, for although material things are**

transient, the soul is eternal and not temporal. And as being an eternal aspect is that the soul should be seen every new day.

Ecclesiastes 7: 2 **Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.**

The entertainment trade, for example, presents itself as being worthy of paying high amounts of resources for it. However, how much is the time of life it consumes worth when excessive or undue time is devoted to it to the point of the person moving away from the truth and one's relationship with the Lord?

Remembering here, then, that **as trade encompasses the exchange of riches, we have, on the one hand, a series of activities that a person is challenged to get involved in and, on the other hand, the time of one's life being consumed by them. And this means that the value assigned to each side should also be a matter that should continually be evaluated and reviewed in the light of what is actually profitable not only for the short term but also for eternal life.**

Thus, in trade, sellers try to expose their products generally under monetary prices. However, for many buyers, it should be remembered that the economic values they use to buy what is offered to them cost time of their lives, making us return to the point that there are adequate or inadequate measures that a person can adopt regarding what one may become involved on Earth.

In addition, when accepted by an individual, the trade of souls often only needs to sow a few strategic thorns to stifle the advance of the word or will of God in that person's heart.

As another example, the Scriptures teach us that overwork may also be a factor that leads to foolish issues. That is, the lack of rest to obtain more and more riches may generate great physical harm to people, but also mental, psychological, emotional, or spiritual damage that may subdue people to their life routines instead of them managing their routines.

Ecclesiastes 5: 3 **For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words.**

On the other hand, the excess of rest, leisure, and entertainment activities may also lead people to different situations of loss and damage to their lives, as shown, among others, by the following texts:

Proverbs 20: 4 **The lazy man will not plow because of winter; He will beg during harvest and have nothing.**

*Proverbs 21: 25 **The desire of the lazy man kills him, For his hands refuse to labor.***

In this way, **life, and the soul as an inseparable part of it, needs to be continuously “scanned,” “read,” or “monitored” by appropriate meters or measurement instruments and not just driven by the mentality that traders or merchants seek to impose on it.**

Life is more than buying and selling, as the Lord Christ Jesus exhorted us concerning the days of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, but also as Christ taught us about seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

*Matthew 6: 32 **“For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.***

*33 **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”***

Life is established by a variety of purposes, but for each of them, there is also an adequate measure of time, as was also exposed in the theme Always and In All Things and concerning which we recall the following text below:

*Ecclesiastes 3: 1 **To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:***

- 2 **A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;***
- 3 **A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;***
- 4 **A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;***
- 5 **A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing;***
- 6 **A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;***
- 7 **A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;***
- 8 **A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.***

Therefore, **if people were more occupied in seeking the Lord to obtain a more appropriate reading of God's purposes for their lives, they would gain wisdom not to be guided by the illusory trades that try to involve their souls. And so, they would walk more according to the heavenly will offered to them by the Heavenly Father.**

In the precious and beautiful psalm he wrote, Moses tells us about the brevity of life and shows us that wisdom comes from the Lord to make the short days of an individual on Earth profitable or useful, as follows:

- Psalms 90: 12* **So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.**
- 13 Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.**
- 14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!**
- 15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, The years in which we have seen evil.**
- 16 Let Your work appear to Your servants, And Your glory to their children.**
- 17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands.**
-

As we have seen before, wisdom for life is widely associated with a person's willingness to present oneself personally before Christ Jesus to have an ongoing relationship with the Lord. And this also includes gaining wisdom to discern the suggestions of the most diverse traders in the world for a Christian to know what is pertinent and good for each moment of one's life and not to incur having one's soul subject to trade that does not aim at one's good.

The personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is the only "formula" that works for all areas of life, for all places, and at all times, something that no human commerce can even come close to offer, for the relationship of a person with Christ is the creature's relationship with the Creator and is granted by grace and not by the price of material and passing things.

Thus, if a person does not redeem (rescue or save) one's time from the many commercial proposals with which one comes across and does not allow oneself to be taught by the Lord Jesus Christ about the days of one's life, one will not find true and continuous wisdom for one's soul either.

- Ephesians 5: 14* **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."**
- 15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,**
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
- 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

Romans 12: 2 **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

Hebrews 12: 1 **Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Traders who are unfair and fascinated by trade and riches always have their primary focus on themselves rather than others or are not interested in the lasting benefit of others, but in the profit of earthly riches that others can provide for them. And because of this, they become bold to the point of telling the souls of others what they should do.

Unfair traders do not limit themselves in offering supposed beneficial products to their targeted customers. On the contrary, they also want to format and dominate the opinion of those they want in their commercial networks, also acting in this way in the trade of souls because they want to imprison them in opposition to letting them be free to consult the Lord in everything.

There are many products and services in the world that are really good or profitable, as well as is their respective trade when it is done fairly and for the good of those to whom the products and services are offered. There are people, for example, who grow healthy food and appropriately market it to meet the needs of others, which is largely useful for those who do not directly work in food production. Similarly, there are also people who produce great equipment for others to grow food and for them to increase the production cycle, which can also be of great benefit to people, and so on.

Nevertheless, when people associate trade with the deceitfulness of riches, they seek to push trade beyond its appropriate limits and not use it only to trade benefits. Under the trade associated with the fascination of riches, many aim to turn the souls of others into captive consumers or clients trapped in their propositions, regardless of whether the products or services they market are good for them or not. And mainly, not taking into account the eternal good or evil that they may cause to the souls of others.

Trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches may even try to use not only the enchantment for delight and pleasure, but also appeal to threats and oppression through fear, trying to inculcate in people that they will be disqualified from society if they do not acquire the products or services offered, entering, in this regard, the paths of oppression and extortion that were seen in the previous topic.

In this way, souls who are unaware of heavenly truths and who lack the discernment that Christ wants to grant them may become prey to abusive trade even through very simple and subtle threats, because many people, due to the most diverse aspects of fear, may come to subject themselves to the most absurd propositions.

For example, the threat of being seen as less than others, and this for not having the goods that others have, might be a big hook by which cunning traders hook and exercise significant control over the souls of others. And this is an example of a fear that may continually afflict millions of people.

1 John 4: 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

Yet in other words, corrupted trade seeks to exploit, and a lot, the insecurity and instability of souls. Improper trade, in many ways, seeks to confuse souls so that they become involved and continue to be involved in its proposals.

The Lord Jesus Christ has already explicitly declared that a person's life does not consist of the goods one has. The trade of goods, however, when corrupted, aims to confuse souls in this sense, for its business is precisely to sell goods for the enrichment of those who present the trade of their goods without taking into account what indeed constitutes the lives of the souls they approach.

Thus, **one of the central problems of corrupted trade is that it is excessively focused on enriching merchants and no longer on the condition of products and services to be sold for the good of their fellow men.**

That is, **the fascination of enrichment distorts the perspective of fair trade and adequate prices and does not care about the souls of those to whom the products and services are offered, for the very souls of traders in this type of trade are also already subject to corruption. It is the type of trade in which its merchants only reproduce what they also are subject to, as follows:**

*2 Timothy 3: 13 **But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.***

Additionally, the trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches is in the misleading proposal that it is lawful for a person to get rich through it if one finds someone who absorbs one's proposal, even if the other party involved in the negotiation has been deceived. That is, corrupted trade seeks to establish ways to try to justify the desire for riches, even if through unfair trade that does not aim at any good to those who buy the goods or services traded.

Therefore, **trade corrupted by the deceitfulness of riches does not care about selling illusions, that is, selling lies. It does not mind selling promises it cannot actually keep.**

And if corrupt trade sells illusions, it, therefore, sells false hopes.

When the devil was tempting the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the kingdoms of the world that he was promising to give to Christ, he was trying to sell an illusion at the price of Christ's soul abandoning the exclusive worship of God. The devil's proposition was a fascination for the purpose of domination of a soul by means of an offer of business. It was an offer presented under the concept of trade, but which had a very specific vile purpose of subjugating a soul.

Nevertheless, everything that is an illusion will one day come across disillusionment, for it is not on a lasting foundation to sustain itself eternally.

So, here again, we remember that **only Christ, faith in Him, and a living and continuous relationship with Him can protect a person from being involved by illusions that want to ensnare one's soul.**

John 8: 12 **Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

E. The Deceitfulness of Riches Associated with the Trade of Souls, the Word of God, and Christians – Part 2

Advancing here yet a little more about trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches that we saw in the previous topic, a **second aspect of this corrupted trade is that which involves attempts to “commercialize the Word of God.”**

That is, an aspect also called by Paul as “peddling or selling the Word of God,” and whose attitude Paul never adopted in his life because it was not based on sincerity nor an appropriate posture before God, as follows:

*2 Corinthians 2: 17 **For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.***

Since “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” human beings have a very elevated longing for the Word of God. This is also why corrupt trade sees a big opportunity for spurious profit in the use of God's Word.

One of the aspects that most attract traders are the products for which there is a great demand by people, but also regarding which people have a great attraction or need, making them see in the Word of God an abundance of aspects that they think may favor them if they come to market it.

Nevertheless, although many people see the commercialization of the Word of God as a great attraction for their commercial activities, a person can only justly commercialize a product if one has authorization from the owner of the product to do so. And in this sense, traders of the Word of God incur unrighteousness, for its owner does not call people to sell it.

So, something interesting to note about the traders, marketers, or merchants of the Word of God is that they try to emphasize that they are indeed offering the true Word of God, but, at the same time, they do not address the aspect that the Word of God, being of God, also belongs to God and that they would need God's endorsement to commercialize it.

On the one hand, traders of the Word of God seek to assert categorically that the word is really from God. On the other hand, however, when it comes time to charge “their consumers” for it, they shamelessly act as if they had authorization and domain over the copyright to be able to sell it, which, in fact, they do not have. What they actually practice is an inappropriate trade because they are marketing a product they have not been authorized by the Lord to do so in the way they do it.

Furthermore, also because the Word of God belongs to the Lord, there are merchants who try to disguise the commercialization of the Word of God by claiming that they are not marketing the Word of God itself but charging, with high profits, only the price of its distribution.

Therefore, when the Scriptures declare that the Word of the Lord is the Word “of God,” they are also saying that it is the property of God, including

in this condition all the rights of the Lord over His own word and over how this word should be or may be passed on or distributed.

In their eagerness to commercialize the Word of God, and in order not to be perceived as commercializing what does not belong to them and for which they are not authorized to do so, many who want to make profits through the commercialization of this word try to claim that what they charge is only the mediation they carry out so that the Word of God reaches people.

In trade, there are direct transactions between producers and buyers, but it is also known that there are merchants who intermediate trade and who charge for the intermediation service. And just as there can be producers who carry out appropriate trade in their products, so too can there be intermediary merchants who benefit the parties involved in the trading of their products.

On the other hand, there may also be several intermediary merchants who are not attentive to what is appropriate to be practiced regarding the producers they represent, for they only focus on the aspect that there are products to sell. They may be more interested that there are products for their business than the specific products or people involved at the ends of that trade (producer and consumer).

Still looking at the text of Revelation that we saw in the previous topic about corrupted trade, we can note that one of the words used with accentuated emphasis by merchants is the word *merchandise*, for it is with it that the merchants mentioned in the text conduct many inappropriate trades.

Thus, unfortunately, for many people, the Word of God is another merchandise, commodity, or product with which they intend to do their business directly or through intermediation, and where the higher interest is in doing profitable business and not observing whether their actions are according to the very word they want to market.

In a way, **the Scriptures even allow us to use the analogy of the Word of God as a product, but the problem with the trade of corrupted merchants is the value of the price they want to attribute to the Word of God or to the means by which they want to make its delivery, not respecting the way the Lord determined that His word should be distributed**, according to the texts below in the context of symbolizing the heavenly gifts of God:

Isaiah 55: 1 **"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price."**

Revelation 21: 6 **And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts."**

1 Corinthians 2: 12 **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**

In a sense, our very lives have been purchased by the Lord. As they were sold for the practice of sin into the bondage of sin, they needed to be also redeemed with a price. And when a person sells one's soul to some form of commerce, one has, in a sense, become a product of the one to whom one sold oneself.

Nevertheless, **the only One who paid the price that can effectively redeem a soul from subjection to sin and eternal perdition was the Lord Jesus Christ, who does not allow another price to be charged for what He has already done once and for all, just as He does not authorize anyone to demand material prices in exchange for announcing or preaching what He accomplished on the cross of Calvary.**

Romans 7: 14 **For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.**

Revelation 5: 9 **And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed (or bought) us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ..."**

1 Corinthians 6: 20 **For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.**

1 Corinthians 7: 23 **You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.**

Ephesians 2: 8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.**

Romans 10: 13 **For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."**

All souls are by right of Christ Jesus by right of creation and by right of redemption. Only the Lord can save all souls, for only He has every right acquired over all of them by having paid a very high price for them.

Therefore, **since the Lord Himself does not impose a price on people to receive His salvation for which He paid with His own blood, much less will He authorize other individuals to commercialize for a price what from Heaven is offered to all people through the grace of God.**

And returning again to the Word of God, even if the expression of selling it is used in the Scriptures, we see that the way instructed by the Lord for it to be passed on to

people in the world always refers to being carried out through free offering or sharing or the transfer without charging a price for it.

Selling something whose price is priceless, and yet not charging a price for it, is an action equated with giving. It is the same as a gift or the act of donating something to others who want to receive it.

For this reason, **saying that the Word of God should be passed on by grace, free of charge, or “sold without a price being charged” are synonymous ways of expressing the same act.**

The trade that comes to have its target in material enrichment by passing on the Word of God to others ends up becoming an agent contrary to the grace of God, for it tries to pervert the way whose owner of the heavenly word established for it to be distributed and granted.

Phrases like “if some advice were good, it would not be given for free” are heavily used by corrupted trade. However, God “gave” His Son to the world, the Son who is the expression of the Heavenly Father's righteousness, knowledge, and wisdom.

Now, corrupted trade, on the other hand, cannot see donation, grace, or gift as something good and profitable, as it resists understanding that “*it is more blessed to give than to receive.*”

The trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches views the act of giving with contempt because it sounds like one of the biggest competitors to its evil enrichment intentions.

Corrupted trade is shrewd and very eager to have “goods” on hand to bargain with. And when they run out of them, they try to turn into commercial merchandise even what should never be considered merchandise to be sold at a commercial price.

And going even further than the fact that corrupted trade seeks to present the Word of God as merchandise to be sold for a price, if this does not look good to possible “buyers,” it even presents a corrupted and adulterated word under the banner of being of God to be attractive for sale or to try to justify its corrupt actions.

So, as we have already mentioned above, if even the adulterated word is not accepted, the trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches still seeks to transform the means of delivering the word into merchandise so that, through these means, it may, in some way, obtain the desired profits and enrichment.

Nevertheless, we recall here again that all these actions are abominations in the eyes of the Lord and against the direction that God established so that His Word, the Truth, His instructions, and His teachings are passed on to the people in the world, as also exemplified in the conducts narrated in the texts below:

*Micah 3: 9 **Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity,***
*10 **Who build up Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with iniquity:***
*11 **Her heads judge for a bribe,***
Her priests teach for pay,
And her prophets divine for money.
Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us."

Jeremiah 23: 16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the LORD.

17 They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You shall have peace";' And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'

18 For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, And has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it?

19 Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury; A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.

20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

22 But if they had stood in My counsel, And had caused My people to hear My words, Then they would have turned them from their evil way And from the evil of their doings.

23 "Am I a God near at hand," says the LORD, "And not a God afar off?"

24 Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?" says the LORD; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD.

25 I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'

26 How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart,

27 who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

28 The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD.

29 "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

30 "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who steal My words every one from his neighbor.

31 "Behold, I am against the prophets," says the LORD, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says.'

32 "Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the LORD, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the LORD."

On the other hand, as trade also is established by agreement between those who offer the goods and those who want or agree to acquire them, it may also happen that buyers are the cause of the emergence of some merchants of the word taken as the Word of God, for these are willing to pay to hear what pleases them even if it is contrary to the truth, as Paul warned Timothy:

*2 Timothy 4: 3 **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;**
4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

God grants His Word not for a price and freely gives it to those who desire and want to receive it. However, God never changes or will change His Word to say what the listeners want to hear in their evil lusts.

The Word of God is the truth, it is good, and it is perfect. And the Lord freely gives it to all who thirst and hunger for it. However, the Lord never tampers with His Word to please a person who wants to hear it distorted and adjusted to one's personal interests.

*1 Peter 1: 23 ... **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,**
24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away,
25 But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.*

So, those who want “to merchant or peddle the word of God,” when their target audience is not willing to pay for the free Word of the Lord, create the most diverse versions that “customers want or want to hear,” as long as they pay for the versions designed to fit their ears.

The Lord Jesus Christ prophesied that many, because of vile and unscrupulous interests, will come with false proposals announcing that they speak in His name. However, when doing so through commercial strategies, they also denounce themselves and the distorted and corrupted intentions that there are in their hearts, even though they claim loudly to be acting in the name of God.

And in light of this, we can see, then, that **the attempt to use the Word of God for corrupt interests occurs in every generation, but it also denounces what is behind those who act in this way. In commercial interests regarding God's Word, many wolves dressed in sheep's clothing end up exposing who they really are.**

Something interesting also about the fables that Paul refers to in his epistles is that these fables are not exclusively those that are told by the Gentiles or so-called pagan peoples, but are mainly those that are extracted from the Scriptures themselves and manipulated by greedy interests of those who want to gain improper gain through the supposed spreading of the Scriptures. And for this, these are seen as targets of severe rebuke in the eyes of the Lord.

*Titus 1: 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,
14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.*

Mark 7: 9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."

In addition to the above, the content of the theme Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth may also help for a broader understanding of the inadequate propositions associated with the fables mentioned above. If the reader has access to it and is willing to read or re-read it, we understand that it may also be helpful at this point.

Thus, the commerce of Bibles and so-called Christian books in contemporary times is shamefully impressive. And much of what has been done in these practices of commercializing the Word of God or what is called by the merchants the Word of God is cause for deep sadness in the heart of any genuine and sincere Christian.

However, this is not the only form of commercialization of the Word of God that has been widely practiced in this generation, for what to say about the number of seminars, courses, events, meetings, retreats, pilgrimages, shows, prophetic conferences, and all sorts of actions, idolatries, and paraphernalia that have become means of obtaining profits for those who elaborate and “commercialize” them?

Just by way of example, prophecy is a gift that may be a regular part of the encounters that Christians have with other fellow believers, for the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given by God to be distributed freely among Christians. They are gifts for the edification, by the grace of God, of those who meet as God's family to enjoy a fellowship of love, and not for commercial meetings to sell and buy the product "gifts" to be practiced among those who have been redeemed by heavenly grace.

The proclamation of the Word of God, as well as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, are not items for carrying out commercial meetings for the sale and purchase of products that God proposes to give free of charge to all. The kind of meetings in which the merchants often still try to hide their vile commerce under the banner of only asking for “voluntary offerings” for prophecies or manifestations of gifts that they claim to have received from the Lord to share with others.

Therefore, the mentality of undue trade seeks to corrupt the proclamation of the Word of God, but also the manifestations of the gifts and goodness of the Lord, trying to attribute prices and taxes to them, but obviously, not always calling them prices or taxes for the granting of gifts. In their subtle attempts to conceal the practice of commerce, many make “only a demand for voluntary offerings” so that, in their parlance, “the gifts may flow” or may be distributed.

And these last actions, only with other packaging or using more indirect and even more subtle terminologies, are equivalent to the same posture of Simon, already exemplified earlier, and who wanted to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit with money.

Under the veil of feigned humility, vile trade greatly appreciates using the banner of asking for “voluntary offerings,” making use, however, of the expedient of inflicting

embarrassment and threats towards those who do not adhere to their appeals of “voluntary offerings.”

And here again, we can see the contrary position of these individuals to the will of God, for in what part of the Scriptures do people find the prophets, who truly served God, charging money to deliver the word of God that was entrusted to them by the Lord to be announced to their compatriots or even to other peoples?

It was only among corrupt priests and prophets that the practice of announcing the Word of God in exchange for demanding prices was made, besides which, in most of these cases, also the word they announced was no longer the Word of God indeed, but creations of their puffed up and proud minds.

And in addition to the last question above, which writers of the Bible claimed financial and copyright gains on their writings of the words that they received from God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

On the contrary, the writings of the writers of the texts contained in the Bible were words and letters to brothers, sisters, and friends, and not means of carrying out commerce as is done in many literary spheres of the world. Their writings were words of encouragement for faith in God, exhortations, rebukes, or good news from God to God's people, and never associated with price or any kind of trade.

That is, who writes a love letter to their siblings, family, and friends for money or to extort them?

Thus, when we look more specifically at Paul's various letters to Christians or the children of God, we see how much he also emphasized the point of writing to them "not for a price" to show his position contrary to those who wanted to “trade the Word of God” or those who despised the idea that anything good could be bestowed upon them simply by heavenly grace.

In opposition to the subtlety of the operation of the deceitfulness of riches associated with the trade of the Word of the Lord, Paul warns several of those to whom he sent his letters to review the preference they had for receiving the word for payment or the price of natural resources, for in this attitude, they could expose themselves precisely to corrupted announcers of the Word of the Lord and who were causing others to be scandalized in Paul precisely because he did not peddle or commercialize the word.

In opposition to the vile working of the attempts to commercialize the Word of God, Paul warns the recipients of his letters to be careful not to become like those who received false workers with praise and an open heart precisely because they did not work by grace, but under the concept of charging for the word they preached, as exemplified below:

*2 Corinthians 11: 2 **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.***

*3 **But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.***

*4 **For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not***

received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, — you may well put up with it!

- 5 For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.**
- 6 Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.**
- 7 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?**
- 8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.**
- 9 And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.**
- 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.**
- 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!**
- 12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.**
- 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**
- 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**
- 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**
- 16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.**
- 17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.**
- 18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.**
- 19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!**
- 20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.**

As described in this last text, we can see that the attempt to deceive Christians is in the context of preaching the Word of God, that is, preaching the Gospel.

And here, again, we ask: Why is it so frequent that there are so many false apostles (envoys) who are willing to present themselves as transformed into “ministers of righteousness?” Why are people so interested in presenting themselves in a false way precisely regarding the Gospel of Grace?

In response to the questions above, we can see, also concerning the matters pointed out above, that many people give themselves up to false calls or that do not come from God because of the profits they envision being able to obtain from listeners willing to pay them for what they would not need and should not pay. A way of acting that can also be seen as the aim of some to enslave others to try to “eat and devour the flesh of the sheep of the flock,” which is a practice that some have sought to do for a long time

and which the Lord has always considered reproachable, as we can see in another text of the prophet Ezekiel shown below:

Ezekiel 34: 10 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

So, attempts to trade the Word of God may even begin by announcing the words of the Scriptures. However, in the sequence, they will also always advance to the attempts of falsifying the true Word of Truth, for only with false simulation, dissimulation, and illusions can they manage to prolong the operation of trading their corrupted words as if they were the Word of God for a more extended period.

These actions of falsifying the word or the actions of those who falsely present themselves as apostles, calling themselves anointed or sent by Christ, are the so-called hypocrisies, from which we have already seen that the Lord Jesus Christ exhorts us to abstain first of all, according to the text that we repeat below:

Luke 12: 1 In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, Jesus began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

We also recall here, according to the comments associated in the Online Bible with Strong's lexicon, that the word *hypocrisy* is presented to us as *dissimulation or as the performance of actors on their presentation stages*. And since dissimulation is based on deceit or the concealment of the truth, the dissimulators can also quickly come to see themselves involved with the desire to be recognized and rewarded for their dissimulations, even if by means that operate apart from the truth.

The performance on stages and elevated platforms to deceive people about God and His Word, the Pharisees, avarice, and contempt for the simplicity of faith that is in Christ and His grace already walked side by side for many centuries and have become highly evident since the days when Christ was revealed to the world, as we can also see in the next text:

*Luke 16: 13 "No servant 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."
14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.*

Therefore:

- Colossians 2: 6 As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,*
- 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*
- 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*
- 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

F. The Deceitfulness of Riches Associated with the Trade of Souls, the Word of God, and Christians – Part 3

Finally, yet as to the deceitfulness of riches associated with the trade that we commented on in the two previous topics, there is a **third point** of action of this corrupted trade that we would like to observe, which shows us that trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches, in its eagerness to benefiting from that which proceeds from God and which is not due to be traded, still dares to try to go further than the improper trade of souls in general and the Word of God.

Thus, in addition to the trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches attempts to commercialize souls in general, the Word of God, or the means of delivering the Word of the Lord, **some people who make use of it still aim to transform Christians themselves, the children of God, into merchandise of their list of products when they try to make themselves masters, leaders, or guides of them.** An aspect objectively exposed in the following text of the Scriptures and to which, unfortunately, many people who think they are serving God do not pay due attention:

*2 Peter 2: 1 **But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.***

*2 **And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.***

*3 **By covetousness, with deceptive words, they will exploit you, use you for their trades, or make you their merchandise; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.***

(NKJV + Martin Luther's German Version + Portuguese RA + Spanish RVR95)

In this last text quoted above, it is interesting to note that Peter is writing his letter to Christians and not to unbelievers. And he alerts them to the fact that false teachers will arise who will also claim to be teachers for Christians, but who have in mind to transform the very Christians, whom they say they want to teach, into "objects or merchandise of their trade."

Another aspect we would like to highlight here is that this corrupt behavior of the false teachers, who want to make Christians objects of their commerce, is not something that occurred exclusively regarding the Christians of the first century and that was later extirpated from the world because Peter wrote an exhortation on the subject through the words mentioned above.

Just as trade in general was not extinct in Peter's days and continues to be active till the current day in both proper and inappropriate forms, so **the evil practices of false teachers who want to make Christians their objects of trade have not been extinct in antiquity.** This evil lasts for centuries and visits all generations, and it is up to people in each generation to be careful not to let themselves be involved in the tricks and subtle words of these kinds of teachers.

At several points, the Scriptures warn us that there are people in the world who are dissociated from the truth taught by the Lord and who think that godliness can serve them as a source of gain. And these, when advancing under this distorted concept, begin by trading the word of God, but, ultimately, they want to have the life of godliness and Christians themselves as their products of profit, passing, for this reason, to teach what comes from perverted minds and that do not operate according to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the following text also warns us:

*1 Timothy 6: 3 **If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,***
*4 **he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,***
*5 **useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.***
From such withdraw yourself.

In the various themes of the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life, we sometimes refer to this kind of corrupted and false godliness as a “greedy godliness or piety,” which, in reality, is not a godliness or devotion truly focused on the truth and the will of the Heavenly Father, but it is focused on the personal and fleshly interests of those involved in them. And more specifically, the assumption that some make that they can make greedy profits with godliness is found more broadly approached under the theme entitled Another Gospel or A Different Gospel.

For this reason, in this topic, we will seek to address only some complements more targeted to the aspects associated with the action of false teachers regarding the specific expression of trying to use people who believe in God as objects of their commerce or the means to achieve their greedy goals.

In the mentioned text of 2 Corinthians 11, we also saw that the merchants of the word may become so daring to the point of aiming to subject people to their dominions so that, in addition to the trade of the word, they profit through those who are subject to them, becoming bold to the point of seeking to ambush those they call “their brethren” in their networks and areas of control to increase their earnings.

Thus, those who want to turn their fellow people into their objects of trade, through their teachings that they claim to be about the Christian life, are also those who propose alliances, agreements, and all sorts of strategies for people to remain united with them in some economical way and, often, under the banner of being united under the same purpose or vision of faith.

Those who want to make their fellow people their objects of trade through their teachings, which are supposed to be about the Christian life, become daring to the point of yearning to profit (1) from each individual, (2) from the collective they constitute, and (3) even numerical statistics that people may represent for their advertising or marketing actions. And this happens because the more people the false guides have under their vision or dominion, the greater they consider the power of doing business of each individual, but also of the potential that exists in the gathering of these people and what it means to have them under submission in large scales or quantities.

These false teachers to which Peter refers, equated with the false prophets of antiquity, present themselves as representatives of the interests of those who are subject to them, even reaching the point of offering themselves as “humble mediators” between people and God.

Nevertheless, the target of these teachers, leaders, guides, pastors, or priests is the “throne of the congregation,” the point of domination over others, the highest places among those they call their brethren, the “primacy” over their fellow men, for it is in these positions that they visualize being able to obtain the highest profit over those they call their fellow believers and whom they offer to serve as their guides or spiritual covering.

In their haughtiness and eagerness for gain, some false teachers come to match what is described to us by God, through the prophet Isaiah, about the proud king of Babylon, as follows:

*Isaiah 14: 13 **For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;***
*14 **I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’***

And, in turn, **the false teachers or guides, who seek to sit above those who they claim to be their fellow believers, directly oppose the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and the words of God about the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Heavenly Father has established as the only One worthy to be the Teacher and Head of those who live by grace through faith in God, as well as the One Mediator between all men and God,** as follows:

*Matthew 23: 8 **“But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’ (teacher, leader, or guide); for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.***
*9 **Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.***
*10 **And do not be called teachers (leaders or guides); for One is your Teacher, the Christ.”***

*1 Timothy 2: 5 **For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,***
*6 **who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, ...***

Therefore, those who think they can be teachers, guides, leaders, or priests of their supposed fellow believers and want to make Christians their items of trade see, among others, the following possibilities of commercial gain from those who they say they want to teach:

- ⇒ 1) Participation in the material “blessings” that the so-called “fellow believers” achieve, as they establish rules of participation in the harvests and income of the

“brethren,” making the so-called “fellow believers” think that the gifts they achieve only come to them because they are subject to the teachers, guides, leaders, or priests who claim to teach them. That is, the false teachers subtly teach that a portion of the assets and income of the “fellow believers” also belong to these guides.

- ⇒ 2) Participation in the resources of those they call “fellow believers” by seeing them as their customers to whom they offer the most varied products of their actions presented to others as godliness, but aggravated by the aspect that they still teach their followers that they must be obedient and subject to whatever their leaders say.

That is, when seeing the so-called “fellow believers” as customers, false teachers see the possibility of coercing them to purchase their services and products, for they teach them to be customers without the possibility of questioning and rejecting the products that are presented to them since, previously and subtly, they have also placed them under the banner of being “rebellious to superior authorities” if they do not accept or do not “buy” what is offered to them by the teachers, leaders, or priests who lead them.

- ⇒ 3) The share in the gains that they can obtain from counting the so-called members of their groups as numbers in their statistics, with which they negotiate favors, privileges, and rights on behalf of many, but whose access to the most expressive profits, in practice, is always for a few who rise themselves above others.

Thus, starting with the first group of targeted gains exposed in the previous paragraph, we see that false teachers mine the Scriptures of God to find the words that convince their listeners how important it is for them to invest in their mentors and the visions or causes these propose.

These masters even hook many individuals in the very greed of the people who listen to them. They choose words by which they promise blessings to the individuals of the people if they only participate in the projects that they present to them and, still, if the individuals of the people adopt them as the targets to which they direct their offerings, tithes, and sacrifices of resources and time.

Unfortunately, many others are also hooked by false teachers because of their thirst and hunger for the word of God and their need for fellowship. Aspects that these false teachers also use to say that they propagate the true Gospel and the teaching of God, not teaching, however, their listeners, that they are actually exposing Another Gospel or A Different Gospel. That is, they present a message through which they mix parts of the Word of God that apply to a Christian with parts of the Law of Moses, plus interpretations at the whim of false teachers and even evil spirits to justify the trade they carry out.

In one of their strategies, the merchant teachers or guides even teach the people not to help the needy directly and in secret as the Lord Jesus Christ instructed us to do. On the contrary, they teach the people to do this kind of help through them (the teachers, guides, pastors, or priests) and their visions, for these teachers claim to have more

wisdom in applying resources in line with the kingdom of God than those they call “lay or simple” Christians.

In this way, the religious merchant or trading teachers come to present themselves as special agents of God to accumulate riches in the name of others to pass them on to others, but they also do so by charging high and varied fees to perform these services.

Some of these masters mentioned above even go so far as to nominate themselves as fertile soils worthy of receiving the financial seeds of the people so that they can cultivate them in the name of the people and make them grow. So, it is absurd how far they may go.

Another interesting point to be noted concerning these last aspects, and at the same time a very sad one, is that the teachers who are similar to the false prophets and priests of the past are bold in taking the seeds of the people but, in practice, never give the harvests of their profits to the people. Instead, they tell the people that God will give them to them.

The one who knows the history of Joseph in Egypt knows that he, at the proper time, returned the seed stored in the barns to the people so that the individuals of the people themselves could sow the seeds and reap their crops, and did not take over the sowing and reaping in the name of the people.

Yet another aspect that draws attention concerning the teachers who receive the seeds of the people is that they, generally, only want economic seeds that are free from problematic ties and which they do not even need to plant and cultivate for them to grow, for when they receive them in monetary form, they have already them transformed into what they so much desire.

Furthermore, **because of ignorance of the Gospel of Christ or out of greed and resistance to the truth, religious merchant teachers may go so far as to try to resurrect any biblical passages on fundraising, even those that never were and should never, in any way, be applied to Christians.**

Under the inappropriate concept that fundraising for their institutions is lawful and demonstrates devotion to God, the merchant teachers, guides, or priests distort the application of the Scriptures about riches and that parts of them were addressed to specific groups in human history. In their attempts to persuade others, they unreasonably teach that the Scriptures expressly directed to some groups in the past apply to all generations and all Christians in each generation.

For example, among these behaviors, the greedy teachers, guides, or leaders resurrect the tithe to the Levites that was expressly instituted to be applied to the ministers of the Order of Aaron, trying to propose that this tithe should also be practiced by the very Christians who were never called by God to have any connection with this ancient priestly order and considered repealed and obsolete by the Lord.

On the other hand, it is interesting to observe that there is not, on the part of the merchant teachers, the same zeal for resurrecting the obligations and services that were attributed to those who received the tithe.

In their demands for tithes, or various other types of offerings, the merchant teachers or guides argue the requirements of the law and address with threats the consequences that non-compliance can cause to the people who are subject to them. However, in the obligations and services that the same law assigns to those who receive

the tithe, they claim that the “ministers of Christ” are in the “time of grace” and do not need to fulfill the law of the Levites.

Trading religious teachers come to be so greedy that they teach the obligation of the Law of Moses on tithing, or “the obligatory willingness of the people to tithe,” as they subtly like to call it, but simply suppress the aspects about tithes in the same Law of Moses that foresaw the shared distribution of the collected tithes also to widows, orphans, and poor foreigners.

In addition to calling themselves masters, teachers, leaders, pastors, spiritual fathers, priests, prophets, or apostles in direct opposition to the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ, the merchant teachers present a word distorted to such an extent that those who formerly, by the Law of Moses, should receive parts from the collected tithes, come to be framed in their vile teachings together with those who would have the obligation to pay tithes. The widow, the orphan, and the poor foreigner, who at the time of the Law of Moses were recipients of part of the tithes, are now taught by the merchant teachers that they, even in their economic difficulties, are now equally obliged or “must be volunteers” to give the tithe even of their small income.

Thus, the false teachers seek to distort the Scriptures for an even harsher enforcement than the ancient requirement of fulfilling the Law of Moses, which was already a heavy burden and which no one could fulfill.

And why, then, do these false teachers who use the Law of Moses to justify their acts of collecting other people's resources discard the compulsory retirement of the Levites at the age of 50, whose demand or instruction is recorded in the same law that instituted the tithes for those who were under this law? Why do they not meet this requirement of the law of Moses that requires them to retire at age 50 and withdraw from service and, consequently, from receiving tithes? (According to Numbers 8: 24 to 26).

Additionally, another aspect that the merchant teachers do not teach the people who are subject to them refers to the fact that not even in the Law of Moses did the tithe fall on the income of workers or commercial transactions, for even in the already obsolete Law of Moses, the tithe only focused on what was harvested from the fruit of the earth and on the increase of animals.

In this way, in addition to teaching a law that does not apply in any aspect to the New Covenant in Christ, the merchant teachers still teach it in a distorted or corrupted way and adjusted or increased to their perverse interests.

We understand that it is still worth noting here that not always who is teaching these distorted principles is the source of these corrupted teachings. In some cases, someone may have received them through education or cultural heritage and even think they are doing the right thing. And indeed, there may be people who pass on distorted principles for a while without evil intention in their hearts, but their origin continues to be deceitful and derived from teachers who left thoughts and teaching traces with the purpose of commercial gain on Christians.

Therefore, to those who teach the error because so it was taught to them, but who truly love the Word of God, it is up to them to repent and change their attitudes as soon as they have their understanding enlightened by the Lord.

And advancing even further, there are some of the merchant teachers, tireless in their attempts to transform those they teach into their objects of commerce and gain for themselves, who rise and become bold in asking even for yet an innumerable number of other “offerings,” in addition to the tithes that they want to impose on those who should not even be under the Law of Moses anymore.

When addressing others with the words “*special offerings*,” merchant teachers seek to avoid using terms like *an obligation* or the *requirements of the law*, and seek to replace the expression *paying tithe* with the idea of *voluntary tithing* or *generous offerings*. However, or even though they pronounce that they are teaching voluntary actions, if people who are subject to merchant teachers do not respond to the calls named voluntary donations, these masters launch threatening words over their disciples with the intention of coercing them, even saying that curses or unfortunate consequences can fall suddenly on their lives.

And this not being sad enough, **the more the merchant teachers render themselves to the eagerness of making the “fellow believers” their objects of commerce, the more they grow in the creativity of their vile appeals and the more they grow in the boldness in presenting them to others.**

Thus, **not being enough the appeal to the tithes, which were never due to a Christian, not being enough the “special offerings” of the Law of Moses that are no longer applicable after the perfect offering of the blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary, the merchant teachers still go so far as to ask for the so-called “offerings of the firstfruits” directly for themselves, going to the vilest and most contrary ways to Christ to extort those who they claim to teach and guide to what supposedly would be good for them.**

The one who comes to study the Law of Moses in more detail will be able to see that the “basis of the offering of the firstfruits was a little bread and wine.” That is, a figure, a shadow, that points to the Christian's fellowship with Christ. The fellowship that has as its reference the broken body of Christ and His blood shed on the cross of Calvary.

Nevertheless, because of their greed, the merchant teachers, bold to utter lies and deceit, even teach the substitution of Christ, His work on the cross, His broken body, His shed blood, and the supper of fellowship with Christ for money offerings to be given to them. And with this teaching, they try to trivialize and corrupt the most sacred sacrifice made in all centuries and all times of human existence.

Christ is the firstfruits of the Heavenly Father, and we are the firstfruits of Christ. And the simple and direct fellowship between a Christian and Christ, and through Him with the Heavenly Father, is the true and eternal “firstfruits offering” that a Christian is called to practice continually in one's life.

And the Heavenly Father does not want people's money and possessions. The Heavenly Father wants each person's fellowship in humility with Christ and, through Christ, fellowship with the Heavenly Father Himself.

1 Corinthians 15: 23 **But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.**

*James 1: 18 **Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.***

*1 Corinthians 1: 9 **God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

Christians themselves and their lives are the firstfruits of God's creation, not their material possessions. However, teaching this does not yield the greedy profit sought by merchant teachers who want to make Christians a means of commerce for themselves. And by trying to transform Christians into objects of their trade, the false masters want to transform the firstfruits of God, who is Christ, Christians, and the fellowship between them into goods and material riches as agents that allow them to enrich themselves in their greed for the riches of others.

Let us note once again that Christ is the end of the Law of Moses, or any other that follows similar principles, for all those who receive the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives. However, the merchant teachers resist what the Heavenly Father did in favor of all humanity, for they do not want to give up inappropriately using the Law of Moses and what they associate with it to manipulate those who are subject to them. (An aspect widely discussed in the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

*Romans 3: 19 **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***

*Romans 6: 14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.***

*Romans 10: 4 **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

We highlight here, then, that **Christ is not an adjustment of the Law of Moses. He is not the reformation of this law. Nor is Christ “the spirit of the law that enables people to keep the law.” No, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes in Him!**

Nevertheless, as we have already mentioned more than once above, if there are sellers who manage to carry out their unfair and corrupt trades, it is because there are also buyers and those who accept the sellers' proposals.

We have already seen earlier in Paul's letter to Timothy that there are also listeners who approach corrupted teachers or preachers. And they do so because these say what pleases the ears of the listeners and what sounds according to what they want to be taught or what they want to hear.

In this way, **people who offer their ears so that the merchant teachers have an audience to listen to them also sponsor the growth of distorted words and teachings they announce.**

The people who listen to merchant religious teachers often do so because they see in their teachings a proposal that interests them in one way or another. And one of the reasons some Christians go back to subjecting themselves to some financial parts of the Law of Moses, even though it is already outdated, is in the fact that some unduly also set their eyes on something that these false teachers offer them.

For this reason, merchant teachers offer something to the people that creates a disposition in the individuals of the people to give expressive sums of their resources to these teachers because they also believe in the promises that they make to them.

When a merchant teacher proposes to receive regular offerings similar to the tithes and offerings of the Law of Moses, one is indirectly (or some directly) implying that one is a priest or Levite humbly at the service of God's people. However, it is because of the promise of being blessed by giving their tithes and offerings that many of the people are hooked into giving their resources to false teachers, leaders, pastors, or priests here in reference, or whatever title they use.

Ultimately, those who give space for the merchant teachers to grow in their corrupted teachings are the people who lend their ears to hear them and give them the offerings of resources they ask for or who use the products and services they present to them in exchange for economic returns.

Thus, among individuals of the people subject to false teachers, there are also those who put a high value on the idea that their peers or teachers represent them before God and that these take care of the “spirituality” of their lives. This, however, as also mentioned earlier, is not possible to be accomplished, for Christ is the Only Mediator established by the Heavenly Father between God and all people.

“In Christ,” the relationship and fellowship, first and foremost, are personal and individual with the Lord. And no one is authorized by God to do it for others, much less charge any kind of offerings and tithes in exchange, for “in Christ,” neither dead nor living mediators are accepted!

Furthermore, **many people who claim to be Christians debate whether the requirement to practice tithing applies to a Christian or not. However, the central point for Christians regarding the Law of Moses is not the removal or not of the tithes or offerings described in the law. A crucial point for Christians regarding the Law of Moses is that they are not called to subject themselves to any part of this law or similar to it.**

For instance, if we consider that in the First Covenant, there were mediators to represent people before God and that tithes and offerings were to be directed to these mediators because of the service they provided, this practice of tithes and offerings also became thoroughly unnecessary since, above these practices, all validity of these mediators and their services has already been removed.

Thus, tithes and offerings to human Levites and priests ceased to be authorized because the authorization of the very service of human Levites and priests was revoked before God. That is, if the aspects for which offerings and tithes were given are

removed, the need to continue making offerings and tithes is also automatically removed.

Along with the annulment of the Law of Moses before God, any need for priestly and Levitical services that various people did in antiquity on behalf of their fellow men was also removed. And so, there is also no longer any reason to continue to support, with offerings and tithes, the people who perform this type of service.

In this way, **no Christian is called to practice tithing or any other offering according to the Law of Moses, for the removal of the practice of tithing is a consequence of the removal of the mediating agents between God and people who were under the outdated law. And, once again, if there are no more mediators between God and human beings, then there is no longer any need for offerings addressed to them.**

A crucial point for every Christian regarding the Law of Moses is not whether or not to stop tithing, but to abandon the idea and practice of contributing in any way with mediators who receive tithes and offerings, as these, after the availability of the New Covenant, has no authorization from the Lord to continue to carry out such types of services or ministries.

In other words, if the higher item, which is why the minor exists, is removed, the lesser or auxiliary aspect also becomes automatically meaningless.

On the other hand, it is not enough to want to remove the minor and remain subject to the higher, for once the entire law that contemplates the two aspects in reference is revoked, all aspects of the law also lose their reason to be followed.

Because of this, too, one of the biggest problems that merchant teachers cause is not the material resources they take from those they teach, but the spiritual coverage and services they offer and which are contrary to the Christian faith, for through these propositions, they lead those to whom they teach not to practice the working out of the salvation that from Heaven is offered to all people.

Worse than taking people's material resources is the atrophy in people's direct relationship with God that is produced by religious merchant teachers and through what they propose and teach to those who submit to them.

Furthermore, many of the merchant teachers place a high value on talking about the spiritual covering they have to offer, but they themselves are the first not to subject themselves to any spiritual covering. They offer themselves to be what they cannot actually be, and they themselves do not want the very medicine they trade.

Teachers who claim to be Christians and want to subdue their fellow men are also those who simply pass by or pretend to be unaware of texts such as those exemplified below:

Romans 12: 10 ***Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; ...***

Romans 15: 14 **Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.**

Ephesians 5: 21 ... **submitting to one another in the fear of God.**

The content of the speeches, products, and services of many merchant teachers is that “everyone needs to be subject to them, but where they themselves need not be subject to anyone.” They demand what they are not willing to do in their own lives, matching or revealing themselves with those exposed in the following words of the Lord Jesus:

Matthew 23: 4 **"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.**

5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi. (teachers or guides).'"

When someone teaches that people need spiritual covering from other men or women, but does not practice it for oneself, one is saying that others are inferior and that one is superior to others, which in the Christian life is absurd, is a false service being offered, for the Lord Jesus Christ said that this is inadmissible among those who believe in Him, since they are all equally brothers and sisters of the same family of God. (According to Matthew 23: 3 to 12).

One person wanting to be a spiritual covering for another is like “if a clay tile wanted to be placed on top of another clay tile to cover the second one, saying that every tile needs covering, but that he or she, also being a tile, does not need,” which makes no sense at all. And this is even worse when they want to create a roofing hierarchy (leaders pyramid over the people), for it would be as if the clay tiles were stacked one on top of the other on a roof because the lower tiles need coverage from the upper tiles, something that no one in their right mind would do.

Isaiah 30: 1 **"Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "Who take counsel, but not of Me, And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit, That they may add sin to sin."**

Therefore, **merchant teachers should already be rejected for the fake items they offer, even before they are rejected for the amounts they try to charge or take from others.**

When merchant teachers offer their products, they should already be detected and rejected, regardless of the prices they associate with their services, for something that is fake remains false even if it is offered very expensively, very cheaply, or even for free.

A Christian should reject all false teaching already because it is false and not just because of the price that is associated with it, even though the greedy and undue charging attempt further highlights the intent of the false merchant teachers.

Thus, maintaining the practice of tithing and offerings of the Law of Moses or similar is not a viable option for a Christian, as this practice is, above all, a return to the type of priesthood proposed by the same law, which also leads to the obligation to follow all the Law of Moses or similar to it.

Hebrews 7: 12 ***For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.***

And if a Christian wants to insist on the practice of giving tithes or the offerings of the Law of Moses to people who call themselves “ministers of God” equated with priests or Levites, one is even promoting and offering sponsorship for people to return to subjection to the Law of Moses or similar to it. The Law through which Christ died to free us from the yoke of bondage which it causes upon those who subject themselves to it.

Given this, trying to reinstate the regular practice of tithing or offerings of the Levitical law for religious workers is as if Christians also had to return to the practice of circumcision and, consequently, return to the practice of the entire law.

This practice, however, distances Christians from the grace of Christ, remembering that the adoption of human spiritual covering, even if the tithe is not charged, also leads to the same effects, for, again, if an item of the law is adopted, the others are also automatically mandatory.

- Galatians 5: 1* ***Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.***
2 ***Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.***
3 ***And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.***
4 ***You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.***
5 ***For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.***
6 ***For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.***
7 ***You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?***
8 ***This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.***
9 ***A little leaven leavens the whole lump.***

Galatians 3: 10 ***For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."***
11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."

We emphasize here, then, still in other words, that a Christian should be continually attentive not to incline one's heart to what God has already declared obsolete, for the discernment of the working of good, but also of evil, is a crucial role of the condition of the newness of life that a person comes to have in Christ.

Discernment through fellowship with Christ should be a continuous goal of the Christian, for many merchant teachers can be very persuasive in their teachings with which they want to attract people who serve them and who are subject to them. And yet, because the merchant teachers have as one of their main targets to prevent people from obeying "the freedom of the truth in Christ," for however much this type of instructors, in their teachings, claim to be leading people to fellowship with Christ, they oppose the freedom the Lord gives to those who come to Him.

The teachers associated with the deceitful religious trade are also part of those who attract people to aspire to the kingdom of God, but neither they enter nor let others enter it. (According to Matthew 23: 13).

And returning once again to the issue of tithing, because it is a theme so intensely used by merchant teachers or leaders who want to use Christians as their objects of commerce, we see that in the world, there are a series of teachings that want to support the idea of the tithe on the ground that Abraham also was not under the law and even so he gave tithes. In their assertions, however, they do not consider that Abraham, who was not under the law, was also circumcised without being under the law, and not even because of this, Christians began to have the requirement of having to be circumcised after the end of the Law of Moses in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Abraham was never a "regular tither." He tithed once or only once. And he did it on one occasion with a very special meaning, doing it before the Eternal High Priest, according to the Order of Melchizedek, who came to meet him. Abraham never gave tithes to regular men acting as mediators. (An aspect widely approached in the chapter on "Who was Melchizedek?" of the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

Christ is the only Heavenly, Eternal, and Mediator High Priest between God and human beings. And He did not share this vocation with anyone else before or after He was revealed to the world as the Eternal Christ. So, this is what Abraham testified to all the generations that would succeed him.

1 Timothy 2: 5 ***For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,***
6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Hebrews 7: 12 **For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.**

Hebrews 10: 19 **Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,**
20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,
21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,
22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

“In Christ,” there is no need for any use of finances to support priests and Levites who supposedly open the way or make some intermediation for a person to reach fellowship with God, for from the revelation of Christ to the world, as we mentioned above, there is no longer any need for priests, Levites, pastors, leaders, or guides to mediate this fellowship.

What a Christian needs for fellowship with Christ is given to him or her by the grace of God and personal faith in the Lord, and which takes place, first of all, in the heart of the one who receives the Lord into one's life.

In this way, a life grounded in the grace of God, through faith in the Lord, is not pleased with teachers who see their followers through the eyes of their commercial objectives. On the contrary, it withdraws from those who seek to keep people away from freedom in Christ to keep them bound to the corrupted teachings that they present to them under the claim that they are announcing the Word of God. It distances itself from those that act like the false prophets of old who similarly sought, by feigned words, to draw people away from God.

The Gospel of freedom in Christ Jesus is also the Gospel that is given freely or by the grace of God, which is why the merchant teachers try to corrupt it, for they do not see their covetous interests met in the simplicity of God's offer. Thus, the Gospel that the merchant teachers preach is no longer the Gospel of the Lord, but distorted and falsified versions of the truth and goodness of God.

Therefore, the true Gospel, which the Lord Jesus Christ has assured us will be preached before the present world's end time, was not given from Heaven to serve as an instrument to extort people or to see them as objects of commerce. One more reason why the Lord so explicitly calls Christians to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness first and not to depart from personal fellowship with the Spirit of the Lord who dwells in their hearts.

Matthew 24: 14 **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."**

We recall, then, once again here, that if the reader wishes to know more about the unique practice of tithing by Abraham (and which never again needed to be repeated by Abraham and by anyone else), the fulfillment of the Law of Moses by Christ, the revocation of the Order of Aaron and all items of this law from the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and also, the offer of the Gospel of the New Covenant to all and in which are the principles that should govern the life of the Christian, we suggest reading or re-reading the following themes that we have previously also made available in the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life:

- ⇒ The Gospel of the Kingdom of God;
- ⇒ The Gospel of the Righteousness of God;
- ⇒ The Gospel of the Grace of God;
- ⇒ The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ (which widely addresses the end of the Order of Aaron by the introduction of the Order of Christ);
- ⇒ Another Gospel or a Different Gospel (which also addresses greedy godliness).

And here, although we have already approached this topic extensively, we understand that we still need to advance to the second and third groups of gains desired by the merchant teachers that we mentioned in its opening part.

Thus, advancing to the second group of gains aspired by the teachers who want to make Christians their trade items, we can see that these masters objectively seek to annul people's sense of discernment and decision.

That is, **the merchant teachers seek to annul people's understanding through distorted teachings to use these corrupted teachings as shields to hide their real intentions**, as Peter warns us in the text that we have adopted as a reference in this topic and which we repeat one more time below:

*2 Peter 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as **there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

*3 **By covetousness, with deceptive words, they will exploit you, use you for their trades, or make you their merchandise; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.***

(NKJV + Martin Luther's German Version + Portuguese RA + Spanish RVR95)

The above Scriptures warn us that false teachers or doctors introduce their intentions through feigned words, with an appearance of humility, and with an appearance of caring about the interests of the people they claim to teach, offering themselves as the “counselors,” “consultants,” “mentors,” “trainers,” “guides,” or “priests” of the people who are subject to them. And this, even in matters that affect economic matters, doing so, for example, with claims that they can make people prosperous in material respects.

Thus, merchant teachers may reach the point of advocating themselves as the judges of what is good or not for the “fellow believers” to do or acquire, as if God had given them a “special anointing” to guide the lives of other people in their most diverse decisions they need to make in their lives.

That is, the attitude of the merchant teachers may reach proportions and enter into matters of the life of the so-called “fellow believers” that even the Lord Jesus Christ did not take sides when He was as the Son of Man on Earth, as exemplified below:

- Luke 12: 13* ***Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."***
- 14* ***But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"***
- 15* ***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."***
-

Many teachers given over to teaching corrupted by greed, as is typical when there is an excessive appreciation for trade, seek to display the successes they claim to have in material matters as a means of publicity to get people to trust them. However, the problem is that their speeches, books, or testimonies generally do not tell the whole story of their lives and the price of deviating from the truth they pay to achieve their so-called successes or material prosperity. They repeatedly disregard Christ's warning that a person's life does not consist of the possessions one possesses, as we just saw in the last text above.

Teachers who are fascinated by seeing their fellow men as objects of commerce also appreciate having the focus of their preaching on themselves and not on Christ Jesus as the One Lord and the One Head of those who believe in the Lord. These masters often begin with the preaching of Christ, but then migrate to the messages about their personal and material successes, for since many people are moved by sight or by what is visible, this may attract many who are profitable to them and who consume their products or services, a point to which Peter and Paul also call our attention, as follows:

- Acts 20: 29* ***"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."***
- 30* ***Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."***

2 Peter 2: 2(a) ***And many will follow their destructive ways ...***

Thus, **in many cases, false teachers like to talk about a more privileged and elevated position that they have in relation to the public they address, in addition to which this attitude is often still accompanied by a distortion of the word “authority,” where merchant teachers, of course, claim “to have greater authority than their listeners.”**

And once the idea is sown that merchant or false teachers have a differentiated authority, all kinds and sorts of controls and impositions of their teachings on the people they claim to teach soon spring up.

In their oratory, writings, and teachings, false teachers are fond of claiming that people who question their words are people who “raise themselves against the authorities” and who “are rebellious because they do not submit to them and their instructions.” However, also in this, they use lies, for the authority they claim to have is not authority indeed recognized by the Lord and does not have legitimacy before the New Covenant in Christ.

The teachings about the authority that the merchant teachers present about themselves, and that they try to impose by manipulations on people who they claim to want well, but see them with the eyes of trade or commerce, differ brutally from all the teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave to those who want to follow Him and what the Scriptures consider to be an authority. (A subject addressed more specifically in the theme The Christian and the Authority).

The authority that false teachers claim to have are feigned and manipulative words that aim to get people to put aside a principle that should always be present and active in the life of a Christian, which is the discernment or judgment of all things and which is pertinent to every spiritual person. (A subject discussed more widely also in the theme The Law of Understanding).

And the undue increasing emphasis on the concept that some Christians have greater authority and can exalt themselves above other Christians, in turn, aims to make the trade that uses “fellow believers” as its merchandise still grow to the third group of gains mentioned at the beginning of this topic.

That is, in this third aspect, we see that **many merchant religious teachers still aim to use the idea that a significant population mass and the statistics of numbers of people who follow them or adhere to their intentions represent a great attraction for many human beings and a way of achievement of gains in both economic and power terms.**

Thus, having influence over expressive groups of people has been seen by many as a high wealth or “asset,” as some like to call it.

Population masses attract great attention from society, rulers, and, of course, traders or merchants. For this reason, many are so attracted to and eager to establish domination over them, remembering, however, that this goes against what Christ instructed for the relationship between those who believe in Him and who, for this reason, are fellow believers and family in the Lord.

*Matthew 20: 25 **But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.***

*26 **Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.***

*27 **And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave;***

*28 **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."***

Paul, the apostle of Christ sent to the Gentiles, ended up having many relationships with people in many places over the years of his ministry to Christ. However, as a faithful servant of the One Lord over all, Jesus Christ, Paul never built a chain of commands and centers of supervision and domination of the people to whom he had preached the gospel.

Paul also never linked the relationship of Christians from one city to another city, in the sense of subordinating a local group to another local group. Instead, when moving from place to place, Paul left people in the hands of the One to whom they indeed belonged, namely, God, as exemplified below:

*Acts 20: 32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.
34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me."*

Paul did not see the people to whom he preached the gospel as merchandise, instruments for his trade, and as human masses in whose name he could obtain commercial advantages in the most diverse spheres of society.

Paul saw those who accepted Christ as his fellow believers or brethren in the Lord, equally children of the same God he served. Paul had Christ as the primary purpose of his ministry, with the goal of introducing each one of those who believed in the Gospel to the Only Lord worthy of guiding each person's life.

*Colossians 1: 28 **Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.**
29 **To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.***

Returning once more to the Law of Moses, we can see that it established classes of people in religious services. However, thousands of years of history have proven the total failure of this system, which is why this system has also had its validity revoked by God.

If we also look at the book of Malachi as a whole, and not just the parts that interest those teachers who want to commercialize godliness, we can notice the demonstration that the system of distinct classes in the religious service never really worked. One of the reasons why God also announced that the day of the "sun of righteousness" would come, which was later revealed to us to be the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Peace, and the King of Righteousness according to the Order of Melchizedek. (According to Malachi 4: 2 and Luke 1: 76 to 79, and the entire book of Hebrews).

Under the law of Moses, for centuries, sometimes the people did not fulfill their obligations, and other times, it was the rulers. And when it was neither one nor the other, the classes of priests and Levites became corrupted in the administration of the services and goods entrusted to them.

Thus, the book of Malachi, after showing the failure of the old system of mediating priests, Levites, offerings, and tithes, prophesies and announces the arrival of a new day, a new time, prepared by the Lord in which all that outdated system would be left behind and in which it would be possible for each individual to receive a whole new way of living and relating to God by grace, through faith, and no longer in the oldness of the letter and its useless systems of sacrifices and offerings.

And this day prophesied by Malachi and long-awaited by those who had their hope in the Lord was evidenced with the coming of Christ Jesus in the flesh into the world, continuing to the present day in which the Lord Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father as the Eternal High Priest and as the Righteousness of God for everyone who believes in Him. Aspects that are widely witnessed also in the book of Hebrews, of which we show another text below:

Hebrews 7: 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

...

24 But He (the Son of God), because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

On the other hand, or in opposition to the New Covenant, and despite claiming to be New Covenant preachers, as we have mentioned several times above, the merchant teachers seek to re-establish the religious service distinction classes to separate themselves from the people, for this gives them power over many who submit to them. And, in turn, they do this so that they can use those who submit to them in the most diverse trades they claim to perform in the name of God.

A mass of people attracts the media, advertising, financial institutions, politicians, governments, and many other factors. Because of this, merchant teachers try to establish and use partnerships with other traders who have in common the same target audience. They begin to create routines for exchanging economic favors and domination among the most diverse merchants, and even use the participation and compliments of others, previously chosen, to ratify their teachings and further assert their false conduct.

In addition, some merchant teachers begin to negotiate things for the people as if they were a single block of people, a mass, like a herd, like cattle, accompanied by elaborate speeches of global benefits to all, as if all people were at the same moment or stage of their lives and as if they (the teachers) had received from God the vocation to represent others also before society, in addition to having already nominated themselves as representatives of people before God.

Therefore, **in the accentuation of their ambitions, the merchant teachers create and invent the most absurd and adverse strategies supposedly concerning the teaching of Christ and the will of the Heavenly Father, which, however, have in common seeking to first corrupt the direct relationship of each person with the Lord, but then also the direct relationship of people with their fellow men and with society in general.**

And here again, as we have seen more than once before, the Lord Jesus Christ vehemently rebuked any possibility that among Christians, there might be those who would dominate others, there being no ground in the Christian life for some to elevate themselves to be the representatives of other Christians before the different areas of society. On the contrary, in Christ Jesus, every Christian is called to be the salt of the Earth, the light of the world, and to walk uprightly in the Lord so that the name of the Lord may be exalted directly through all those who believe in Him.

And more, the Lord Jesus Christ still firmly warns that those who want to be masters and superiors to others who are called fellow believers or brethren should be immediately demoted to a servant position of their fellow believers. If an individual is not content to be like one's other fellow believers in the faith in the Lord, then let this person be lowered to learn the lesson of serving others so that one does not continue to want to rise to a higher position than the others in the family of God.

*Mark 10: 42 **But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant."***

And yet before concluding this topic, we would like to mention that some teachers who are merchants of what should never be seen as merchandise, and as pretended traders that they are, are even willing to serve the people for a while. However, they do it in exchange for a later dominion over others, distorting the texts of the Scriptures and hiding that the tense of the verb of the expression "whoever desires to become" is presented in the present continuous tense, which indicates that while someone has the desire to be great in relation to one's fellow believers, one must remain a servant or slave the whole time as long as this desire lasts.

In other words, the day someone wants to elevate oneself above Christians, one automatically, at that very moment, also ceases to be someone worthy of being seen on an equal basis with other Christians, which also denounces false or merchant teachers when they start trying to rise to leadership positions over those they call their brothers and sisters of faith.

The Lord Jesus Christ warns His followers not to accept the division of teachers and disciples among them, as this conflicts with the unique and exclusive position that He and the Heavenly Father have over the entire family of God, whose text we repeat below once more under the goal of enhancing it even more in the heart:

*Matthew 23: 8 "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi' (teacher, guide, or leader); for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.
9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.
10 And do not be called teachers (guides or leaders); for One is your Teacher, the Christ."*

Thus, the teachers who try to trade (1) people's souls, (2) the Word of God, and (3) Christians themselves, the children of God bought by the sacrifice of Christ, when they long to be called guides, leaders, teachers, tutors, mentors, pastors, spiritual fathers, prophets, apostles, patriarchs, reverends, and other terms that resemble them, show ignorance, or pretend to ignore, the clear and objective words of the Lord Jesus already declared on this matter of titles and positions.

And only for this reason, these have already lost the qualification of being worthy of acceptance in the fellowship of Christians, for they speak from their puffed up or arrogant minds and not truly from the Lord, as we have seen in the text of 1 Timothy 6 already mentioned above.

Since one of the forms of gain that merchant teachers use is the statistics of the numbers of people attending their activities, we highlight once again that even those who do not feel committed to them, but attend their meetings and activities, cooperate with them by fattening its numerical data by the audience it gives them.

In this way, for the sake of themselves, but also for the sake of people who have not yet received Christ as their Lord in their hearts, Christians should never be associated with or subject to those who want to make them objects of trade or commerce, because due to the adherence of many people to these types of teachers, and because of the extensive commerce this actually generates, something unfortunate also happens in the world at large, as follows:

*2 Peter 2: 2 **And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.***

Christians are called to bear living witness of the Way of Truth, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, and which can be widely experienced through fellowship with Him. But when they give themselves up to be false teachers or give themselves up as objects of their trade, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is blasphemed in the world instead of being exalted.

Here, then, it is necessary for a deep repentance of many in these days, who certainly have been one of the generations that have given more space to the vile commercialization of aspects said to be referring to the Christian life. And although this

same generation has broad access to the Scriptures, which amply warn them about the false propositions that will be exposed to them in the world, the undue trade of what should never be traded has been exacerbated in several ways.

Therefore:

Revelation 3: 14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:
15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.
16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.
17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing;' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked;
18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.
19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

And finally, in the current topic, we would like to point out that **the restoration of a person in particular does not occur "en bloc"**. That is, it is not the mass of people who are restored by the Gospel of the Lord.

The restoration of life that the Lord performs happens in the hearts of individuals, of unique people, and occurs as each person surrenders to the Lord Jesus Christ and the continuous fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit.

The acceptance of the restoration of life offered by the Lord is a personal decision: "If anyone hears the voice of Christ," the Only Eternal Teacher provided by God, and opens the door of one's heart, Christ promises to come to this individual. And through fellowship with the person who opened the door for Him, Christ is willing to guide and instruct the one who receives Him to know His truth and the freedom that only exists in Him.

The concept of collective and group faith, and not personal or individual, is one of the weapons of those who want to market the Christian life, for this makes it easier for them to manipulate the masses they want to dominate, plunder, and keep away from fellowship with the Lord. However, before the Lord, "each one shall live by the faith that one individually has in the Lord," as exposed throughout all the Scriptures that make reference to the New Covenant provided for us by God in Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, no Christian is called to make disciples of oneself. And because many do not grasp or resist accepting this truth, many also incur the desire to dominate others or subject themselves to others in their corrupted pursuits.

In the Christian life truly aligned with the Lord, the disciples are always disciples of only one Master or Teacher, the Christ, because only in Him were all rescued from the vile way of living, and only in Him can they be kept eternally.

Thus, on the one hand, intense and severe are the Lord's admonitions to those who allow themselves to be involved in the trade of souls, the word of God, and Christians themselves, and who do not repent in the opportune time that God grants them for the repentance of these evil works.

2 Peter 2: 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to also provide for people's deliverance from the bonds and blindness generated by trade associated with the deceitfulness of riches and greedy godliness. But for this, a person also needs to cry out to the Lord Jesus to be saved from this very expressive evil.

Romans 10: 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

John 8: 36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

The Lord Jesus Christ offers His help to all those on whom there are heavy burdens and weariness, including those arising from all the abusive trades that harm and have deeply wounded those who became involved in or by them. However, people need to turn to the Lord directly in prayer and cry, and not expect to achieve in other people what can only be found in Christ.

Psalms 118: 8 It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.

9 It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.

Only the intervention of Christ on behalf of a person and abiding in Christ guarantees protection against the deception of abuses also in this

facet where some individuals try to make a broad and vile trade out of the Christian life.

Thus, may God, through His grace and mercy, continually grant us the sobriety to see the Lord Jesus Christ according to the riches of His glory and sovereignty, and not according to the false teachers fascinated by riches and who do not want people to remain, from their hearts, in the direct and personal fellowship with Christ.

Matthew 11: 28 **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

John 8: 31 **Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**

32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

G. The Love of Money and the Love of Abundance

In the previous chapters in which we began the comments on the deceitfulness of riches, we addressed the aspect that this type of fascination is equivalent to the thorns mentioned by Christ in the parable of the sower and which seek to act to choke the fruitfulness of the word of God in the heart of people.

In the present chapter, however, we began to see that the deceitfulness of riches not only seeks to choke the word of God in people's hearts, but even tries to grow and go further to lead people to act according to the thorns it produces. And this, in turn, can make people, who are subject to it, reach the point of trying to commercialize souls, the word of God, and even Christians, or trying to transform them into objects of their trade.

Because of the fascination of riches, many people are not only driven away from the will of God by allowing it to be stifled in their lives, but they are even stirred up to plunder and oppress others in very wicked ways. Because of the exacerbated yearning for riches or the power they envision achieving in them, many start to follow paths that lead them to try to extract from others what is not seen as appropriate before the Lord.

The deceitfulness of riches, equated by the Lord Jesus and other texts of Scripture with thorns, thistles, and briars, if allowed to grow, is not content to only stifle the will of God in a person's life, but still longs to grow and bear fruit after its corrupted and pernicious kind. So, when equated with thorns, the deceitfulness of riches has its beginning in seeds, which, in turn, want to complete the production cycle of what is contained in them from the start.

Thus, when we look at the Scriptures under the theme of riches and also at the deceitfulness that tries to distort the Lord's words, it is possible to observe that great corruptions of principles may have their beginnings in very small starting points, for the fascination of riches is equated with the principle of sowing tiny seeds that have the potential to generate large growths.

In the previous topic, we also saw some aspects of similarity between the deceitfulness of riches called avarice and the leaven of the Pharisees, teaching us that a small portion of leaven can leaven a whole lump and corrupt it entirely in its behavior and purpose.

Yet another text that has already been seen above is the consideration recorded by Paul about relating to people who only think about the immediate life and do not consider the future and, mainly, the eternal. A relationship that, if cultivated, may increasingly corrupt, similarly to thorns, the good habits of people, leading them to think more and more that temporal riches are the essence of life and that there is nothing important after their life on Earth. Thoughts that Paul and the Lord call deceptive, fascinations, and that lack righteousness or sobriety, as we can check once again below:

*1 Corinthians 15: 32 **If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"***
*33 **Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."***

34 **Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.**

Luke 12: 23 "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing."

Therefore, continuing with the explanations of the Scriptures about the risk of someone sheltering some aspects in a small measure and that may reach large harmful proportions, we find in the same Scriptures, with particular emphasis, also some references that are specifically directed to **the love of money and the love of the abundance of riches and possessions**, as exemplified below:

*Ecclesiastes 5: 10 **He who loves silver (or money) will not be satisfied with silver (or money); Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.***

Thus, in the text that was used in the previous topic, to show that those who distance themselves from the wholesome words of Christ may go down the path of thinking unduly that godliness is a source of profit or gain for their greedy interests, it may also be observed, further on, what is the basic reason that causes this corrupted line of thought in those who oppose the teachings of the Lord, as exposed once again below plus a few more verses:

*1 Timothy 6: 3 **If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,***

*4 **he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,***

*5 **useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.***

*6 **Now godliness with contentment is great gain.***

*7 **For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.***

*8 **And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.***

*9 **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***

*10 **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.***

In this way, knowing that in the world, there are those who teach words that do not agree with the wholesome words of Christ, even though they use the very Scriptures to oppose the words of Christ, is already highly relevant. However, being able to go deeper to know the cause that leads them to do so is even more crucial, as this, in addition to allowing a person to abstain from those who want to corrupt the teachings of the Lord, also cooperates so that one can discern what causes others to adopt the inappropriate type of conduct they start to practice.

Thus, one of the great beneficial aspects in life is also detecting what is indeed the origin of the evils that try to entangle people, for when people are instructed about the origins of what wants to deviate them from the truth and the will of God, they may not only act with wisdom and discernment regarding those who are contrary to God's will, but they may also guard their own hearts so as not to be contaminated by the same evil-causing aspects.

For this reason, more than warning His disciples to be careful with the Pharisees and scribes, the Lord Jesus Christ warned them to be cautious with the leaven or the seed with which the Pharisees, Scribes, and Herod let themselves be contaminated.

If we also observe Psalm 1, verse 1, we can notice that the first care reported in this text for a person to be blessed is not only that one should not stop in the way of sinners or sit around the scoffers, but also not walking in the “council of the wicked or ungodly.”

Psalms 1: 1 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ...

God instructs His children to be aware of bad company. And this, not only because of their company, but also because of what they announce and pronounce as thoughts and as advice for the conduct of life, for the latter are the seeds that a heart may accept and let grow or may reject and resist to have no space in one's life.

If we return to the text of the parable of the sower, we can observe in it that God does not make His word prevail in a heart if there are thorns competing with it. If a particular heart cultivates thorns and the word of God, the Lord does not make His word choke the thorns, but what can happen is the opposite. That is, if a person, in one's heart, welcomes the thorns together with the word of God and does not prevent them from growing, the thorns “compete” with the word of God and choke it so as not to bear fruit, and not the opposite, as follows:

Mark 4: 19 "... and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

Therefore, **the instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ warns every individual not to harbor the thorns in one's heart or, if one has done so, to put them away from one's heart quickly.**

And this, because if the word of God would flourish and bear fruit even in a heart that harbors all sorts of thorns, the Lord would be endorsing and colluding with the joint cultivation of the thorns and His will in the same heart. The Lord would be endorsing the fact that a person could achieve God's will even by giving ample room to the cultivation of evil. The Lord would be endorsing that a double-minded individual could win God's favor, which would be contrary to the statements expressed to us by James, as follows:

*James 1: 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.
7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;
8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Thus, **harboring thorns in the heart is one of the reasons why many people repeatedly seek the word of God but do not reach God's will for their lives.** A situation that is even very dangerous to be maintained, as is also emphatically warned in the text of the book of Hebrews that follows below:

*Hebrews 6: 7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;
8 but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*

In many cases, when evil has already produced its fruits, it is no longer so simple to look into the past and discover the seed or the root that gave rise to a whole harvest of sown evil, making people often ask why there is suffering in the world. However, at the same time, they also often pretend to forget that the evil that plagues humanity may sprout from roots of evil that at first seem insignificant or as if they were mere unpretentious advice thrown to the wind.

Given this, **the fact that the Scriptures teach us that the action of evil in a heart may also occur by the sowing of tiny seeds, ferments, advice, propositions of thoughts, and feelings, aims to instruct people that resistance to evil can also be carried out already preventively and not only after the evil has been sown or has already flourished and established itself productively according to its kind in the life of a person.**

And, obviously, all evil against a person's life should be resisted. However, when the word of God warns us of evils already in their seed and root, it is forewarning us in advance so that the evil does not even find soil to be sown or so that, if someone did welcome it, one promptly may resist it with the Lord's help and drive it away from one's heart before it advances in its actions.

Some of the best, broadest, and most effective programs to fight diseases, for instance, are those that act in a preventive way and that disseminate previous corrective behaviors of people regarding the potential of some diseases.

Thus, **God's preventive instruction is for evil not to have space to be sown in a heart or for it to be immediately uprooted if someone eventually welcomed it.**

God's preventive instruction is for the Christian to learn to filter or discern the seeds that are offered him or her and to only retain those that are seeds that are for one's good indeed.

*1 Thessalonians 5: 21 **Test (prove, examine, judge, or discern) all things; hold fast what is good.***

*Psalms 119: 9 **How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.***

*Proverbs 28: 13 **He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.***

Returning to the aspect that small beginnings or tiny seeds of thorns may have highly harmful actions on people's lives, we want to return, then, also to the aspect of the love of money or the love of abundance precisely because of the highly destructive and even devastating potential that this specific aspect may have.

Among the types of thorns related to the deceitfulness of riches and among the types of leavens related to greed, the description of the Scriptures about the love of money or the love of material abundance is that this type of love is one of the aspects that most objectively and broadly accentuates the potential for evil that there can be in a given type of perverse root.

The evil of the seed or root of the love of money is so serious that Paul, in his letter to Timothy in which he mentions this type of love, not only describes details about how this love operationalizes its actions, but very objectively also gives high emphasis on the high evil potential it contains and the terrible consequences it may produce in those who welcome it into their hearts.

In his letter to Timothy, in addition to mentioning aspects that cooperate with the action of the love of money, Paul also emphatically focuses on the highly dangerous potential that there is at the root or the essential characteristics of the love of money so that people also know the range of effects that it may cause to those who welcome it into their lives.

We recall once more that a seed or a root, though it may be small and unimpressive in its appearance as a seed or root, contains within it the potential to produce everything that is in it according to its kind or species.

So, first, regarding the potential consequences that the love of money may cause, Paul even declares that ***“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”*** and not just a few specific evils, giving us a very succinct definition but that, at the same time, is also extremely broad.

Even more than describing in great detail how the love of money works, Paul gave special attention to succinctly describing how this love seeks to manifest itself in a heart and what is the general potential there is in it. And this, so that people do not try to get close to it or let themselves be attracted to it, instructing everyone to remain distant from it.

Here, then, there is also something very significant to note in the concept of roots, which is the fact that they grow and sprout in the soil in which they are planted. If embraced, they grow regardless of whether a person is good or bad. And if the root of the love of money is sheltered in the heart, it has the potential to give rise to all sorts of evils that may transform that good soil into soil that starts to lend itself to evil, as was previously exposed also in the text of the book of Hebrews.

The matter here, then, is not to give any place in the heart for this so wicked root to sprout and expand.

That is, **the Lord does not tell a Christian to try to manage and control the actions of the roots of evil. Instead, He says not to receive or retain them in one's heart. The Lord instructs Christians to be careful that the seeds of the deceitfulness of riches are never sown in their hearts or, if they have already received them, to uproot them, mortify them, and extinguish them before they grow and take over the heart, for that is what they will do if they continue to be cultivated.**

*Romans 8: 13 **For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***

Thus, regarding the consequences that the love of money causes in those who receive it, in addition to being a root of “all kinds of evils,” Paul tells us the most severe damage that the love of money causes due to the fact that it acts precisely contrary to the essential aspects of a person's eternal life.

Despite the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils, Paul yet makes a point to particularly highlight that this type of love may cause people who cultivate it to experience, among many others, the following central evils:

- ⇒ 1) Falling into temptation and no longer being able to resist the temptations that are presented to them;
- ⇒ 2) Falling into the trap of wanting to deceive and oppress others, as well as being deceived by others (according to 2Timothy 3: 13);
- ⇒ 3) Running into “many” lusts or crazy, foolish, and pernicious passions, for because of the love of money, people lose sobriety or prudence and end up being involved in absurd and harmful follies;
- ⇒ 4) Drowning in ruin and perdition, for because of the love of money, people go from bad to worse and may reach the degree of being submerged by perdition to

the point of not being able to find the place of repentance anymore. Because of the love of money, people, like sinking ships, may be drawn into deep and dark places of ruin and perdition;

- ⇒ 5) Going astray from the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and God because of the ruin and perdition to which they have surrendered themselves;
- ⇒ 6) Tormenting themselves with many pains, which may be manifested in the present, but more markedly in the future because of rejecting faith in Christ Jesus and the salvation offered by God.

In this way, considering that Paul exposes the love of money as a root or as a potential that may produce all sorts of evils, emphasizing more emphatically that it may even cause the shipwreck of a person to the point of moving away from the faith in Christ, we see how important it is to observe even a little more the love of money from the perspective of the fascination of riches and as a seed of thorns and evils.

On the other hand, being able to perceive precisely what is called root, initiator, origin, or seed that may produce all kinds of evil is crucial so that these characteristics are not also attributed to what was not considered as a root of all sorts of evil by Paul.

That is, it is very relevant to realize that what Paul calls a root of all kinds of evil is not money itself, but the love of money. The evil root or seed Paul mentions in the letter to Timothy is not money itself or the general use of it, but rather excessive or inappropriate attachment to it.

Another point to note in the root in reference is that the text also does not declare that the love of money is “the root” of all kinds of evil, but that it is “a root” of all sorts of evil.

The love of money as a root of all kinds of evil is already too terrible, but there are also other roots that have the potential to lead people to the evils that the love of money leads to, such as unbelief, pride, and others.

Yet another matter involved with the love of money is that the Scriptures obviously are not referring only to the love of physical money itself. They are not referring to the love of money in a material and tangible kind, although this aspect is also included in the general concept of the love of money.

The expression *love* related to the love of money is a broader figurative concept. And throughout this theme, we have seen that people on Earth attach values to riches. That is, humanity has always sought to associate wealth with measurement parameters not directly linked to the items of riches themselves.

During some ages, the measure of riches was compared to measures of gold. In other periods, it was compared with measures of silver. And these, further on, began to be divided into small pieces of silver that were called coins or money, remembering that there were times when even clay coins were used.

Without wanting to go into more specific details about the most diverse ways that money was expressed over the centuries, we can note that one of the main points related to it has always been the search for objects and referential measures with which one tried to evaluate or measure the other riches in the world. The purpose of creating money has always been to quantify the wealth of the world in quantities of referential

objects, granting the holder of money a title or a reference of possessions to acquire other riches more easily.

And since the focus of money is a concept of some objects being used as a reference for the value of other riches, many other forms of reference can be considered similar to the concept of money.

Therefore, **the love of money is also similar and comparable to the love of property titles, title to debts against debtors, titles or contracts of participation in business (such as the current shares of corporations), jewelry or precious stones as currency, and many other ways used to express the value of the riches in the world.**

In addition, to understand more fully the expression *love of money*, we can also observe that the reference to it in the original language of the Scriptures was a single word, but that, in turn, was the composition originated from two different words, according to some of the considerations of the comments of the Online Bible associated with Strong's lexicon that follow below:

Philarguria: love of money, who loves money, avarice, being composed of the words:

1) ***Philos, which means:***

a) ***Friend, to be friendly to one, wish him well;***

b) ***An associate;***

c) ***He who associates familiarly with one, a companion.***

2) ***Arguros, which means:***

a) ***Silver;***

b) ***Things made of silver.***

Thus, **the expression *love of money* was initially related to the concept of someone becoming a “friend of silver,” but also in the sense of being a friend of what one could do with the association with the power of what the possession of silver, as a reference of value, attributed to those who held it.**

And if the factor of the great value of coins were silver itself or money minted in silver, the verse referring to the love of money would have lost its purpose for the present day. However, even at the time when Paul made mention of it, silver had already been adopted as a reference of value or coins minted with it.

Given this, money is not wealth in itself, but it seeks to express a consensual reference value to evaluate other riches. Money, in a sense, performs the function of the weights of a scale, where a good, after being weighed or evaluated by some common consensus between some parties, receives an attribution of “how much money” (coins) it is worth.

Furthermore, if money had its primary value in itself, products would not cost one amount of money one day and a very different amount of money the next. And if money had a value of its own, it could not be so easily manipulated by the people who determine its economic value on a daily basis.

Money is a symbolic convention of value, so both money itself and “the amounts of money” that are associated with riches are considerably fragile and vulnerable.

Because it is figurative, money is widely subject to the most diverse fluctuations and manipulative maneuvers. Because it only expresses an attribution of value to the most varied riches in the world, money may come to be manipulated by governments and several other speculators.

And if in some cases in antiquity money still had a value in its own raw material, nowadays we can say that, in terms of the value of its raw material, it is nothing more than mere paper or even, with electronic and digital technologies, it is nothing more than mere digital records that cannot be physically touched by people or seen with the naked eye.

For this reason, as seen earlier, the focus related to the love of money is the love of riches, wealth, or abundance in the world in general, an aspect that can also be observed in the text of Ecclesiastes mentioned at the beginning of this topic and which we repeat once again below:

Ecclesiastes 5: 10 **He who loves silver (or money) will not be satisfied with silver (or money); Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.**

Still regarding the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, which are also considered poetic books, we may observe that one of the poetic ways to explain something is to make a second explanatory reference to the first aspect approached so that what is being tried to be said in the first becomes even more highlighted.

Thus, looking at the latter text from a poetic perspective, we can see that **the love of money, wanting to be friends with or associated with money, is equated with the love of abundance or wanting to be friends with or associated with material abundance.**

In other words, **under the context of Paul's reference to the love of money and the Scriptures in general, someone wanting to be a "friend of silver" expresses, then, the desire that people may have for what in their reference measures they consider valuable in terms of abundance in the world or in terms of material or temporal abundances on Earth.**

And to the above, we can still add to the use of the word *money* also the words recorded in the Scriptures by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 55: 1 **"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price."**

The word *money* mentioned in this last text derives from the *desire to have, the eagerness to have*, according to considerations associated in the Online Bible with the comments on Strong's lexicon that follow below:

- 1) **Keceph, with the following meanings:**
 - a) **Silver, money;**

b) *Money, shekels, talents.*

2) *Kacaph, with the following meanings:*

a) *To long for, yearn for, long after;*

b) *To long for (deeply).*

In this way, **the concept of money has also become for humanity a synonym for power that allows people to satisfy the desires of having, of possessing, of achieving, through money, provisions, needs, and also the most diverse desires that they nourish in their souls.**

Ecclesiastes 7: 12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

And here again, we would like to reiterate that Paul, in the letter to Timothy, does not refer to the very “measurement and exchange instrument called money,” which has been part of the tools for exchanging goods and services since antiquity like many other tools. Instead, **Paul refers to the “love of money” as that by which a person comes to “love the tool” that should only be an item of help in everyday life and not an item to which a person's heart becomes attached.**

In Paul's mention of the “love of money,” we can observe, then, that this point involves at least three distinct aspects, namely:

- ⇒ 1) The money itself;
- ⇒ 2) The love of money;
- ⇒ 3) The person who welcomes the “love of money” into one's heart.

Given this, **it is practically unthinkable for a person to want to abstain from any form of use of money these days, and this is not what Paul is referring to either. However, although people handle money, they, in Christ and following the Lord's instructions, can perfectly resist the “love of money” in their lives.**

Moreover, **even the very root or seed of evil to which Paul refers, the “love of money,” by itself cannot produce anything because, for this, it needs soil and cultivation, which are not found in the material world of money, but in the hearts of people who start to welcome the “love of money.” When the “love of money” finds room within a person, it sprouts and grows after its own kind.**

And advancing here a little further, due to the enormous potential of causing eternal damage to a life that welcomes it, we can note, as a second group of aspects in this topic, that Paul does not limit himself to mentioning “the love of money” without explaining in the same text, still in other words, what it comes to be more precisely. Just as the authors of the books of Psalms and Proverbs often explain a second time what they refer to in the foreground in the different parts of their poems or songs, so Paul also uses more than one way to explain “the love of money.”

Therefore, **considering that every sort of evil that is known or can exist may be derived from the love of money, Paul also highlights more specifically, in the same context, what it actually comes to be or how people give shelter for this perverse love in their lives. And obviously, Paul does this so that people may not do it.**

Considering that the love of money may trigger diverse and severe conflicts between couples, between parents, children, brothers, and friends, even homicides and terrible wars, but mainly the estrangement from faith in Christ and God's eternal salvation, Paul also understood that the essence cause of this type of love could not remain dubious or not clearly explained.

Thus, **after citing the love of money and the evils that may come from this root, Paul also expounds that this type of love, attraction, or craving is more precisely and explicitly presented as “the desire, wanting, or the will to get or become rich,” also calling this desire “greediness.”**

Let us look at this part of the text again:

*1 Timothy 6: 9 **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***
*10 **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.***

In this way, **the love of money is also synonymous with a veiled or open desire to “want to get rich” or “be greedy for riches.”**

In other words, **the desire, the will, or yearning for enrichment is, then, one of the most obvious expressions of greed or love of money or love for the possession of material abundance on Earth.**

Therefore, **the thorns received in a heart that lead people to attachment to money or attachment to material abundance, even if their material riches prosper widely, do not lead people to true or healthy prosperity before the Lord, but rather serve as instruments that lead hearts to lose themselves from what is really most significant, substantial, and essential in life.**

That is, one of the specific and very effective strategies of the powers of darkness to keep a person away from being a soil that bears fruit in the will of God also encompasses the action of granting riches to an individual so that these may become admired and loved, thus giving space for a possible planting of a seed that produces the will of darkness or a root with potential for all kinds of evils.

Taking into consideration the fact that the fascination of riches represents thorns, and among them is the love of money, the path of the wicked may be full of fascination and the love of money. However, since the love of possessions, also called greed, is characterized by a vicious cycle that is never satisfied, it also, ultimately, shows itself as bonds that bind the souls of those who embrace it to lead them to enormous ruins.

*Proverbs 22: 5 **Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them.***

Thus, the way to extinguish wanting, eagerness, or yearning for possessions in the world is to uproot or mortify the root of love for them, for cultivated greed, which is another name for “wanting to be rich,” attracts and seduces people who allow it to act in their lives.

*James 1: 13 **Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.***

*14 **But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires (or lusts) and enticed.***

And yet, as a third group of aspects in this topic, we would also like to mention that the love of money, as a root with insatiable characteristics and with a craving for satiety that grows in demands, will undoubtedly oppose the first love that a Christian should cultivate, which is love for Christ Jesus, the Heavenly Father, and the Spirit of the Lord.

Thus, mainly so that a Christian does not deviate from the first love that is due to him or her, a Christian is called by God never to give shelter to the cultivation of the love of money in one's heart.

Adherence to the love of money is also an opposition to the first love due to every Christian. And that is why it is so dangerous and has such destructive potential.

Or in other words, adherence to “wanting to be rich” is another way of expressing a greater desire for created things than for the Creator of all that was created. An inversion of values that never has the consent of God.

*Revelation 2: 4 **Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.***

*5 **Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.***

The Christian's first love and first work are described throughout the Scriptures and are always related to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, through Whom the Heavenly Father confers all other things together with Christ.

*John 6: 29 **Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."***

*Romans 8: 32 **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?***

Therefore, **when a Christian abides in His first love, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Father, and the Spirit of the Lord, one does not need to love the possession of earthly riches, for in Christ Jesus are all the treasures of life and the promise of provision by the grace of God, if only an individual abides in Him.**

*Colossians 2: 1 **For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,***

2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Material abundance in the life of a God-fearing person, if this is the Lord's will for one's life, should always be a consequence of an individual living and walking in the will of God, but never as a goal of life since the Lord Himself teaches us several times that life does not consist of the possessions a person has and that life is worth more than clothing, food, and drink.

The first yearning and love of a person's heart should always be for God and His will. And under this will, a Christian is called to perform the Works, Labors, and Services (specific theme) that the Lord directs one to do and that aim at the practice of good, as well as also under it, riches are added to the Christian, by the grace of the Lord, for help, and not as a goal, in the appropriate measure that only the Lord knows how to measure and determine for each of the stages of His children's life.

Thus, a large amount of material riches is not what determines whether or not a person is being blessed by God, for each one is called to first yearn for the Lord and live and walk in the will of the heavenly kingdom according to the appropriate measure of riches that the Heavenly Father grants them through His grace and who also knows how to guard and guide each individual to the riches that really matter for eternal life.

*Luke 9: 25 **"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"***

*Joel 2: 23 **Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the LORD your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you, The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month.***

Moreover, **seeking riches directly and not putting the Lord's instruction and will first is also an attempt to self-determine what is needed in life.**

The love of money is also an attempt in which an individual seeks to master one's own life and by which one starts to despise the Beloved Son that the Heavenly Father offers to all to be the Beloved Lord, Eternal High Priest, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace to those who believe in Him. So, this posture is like running after the wind and what the wind takes away.

For this reason, too, **the Lord explicitly instructs that a God-fearing person should not invest one's time, mind, and efforts in seeking to accumulate riches, even from what one keeps or ponders in one's heart. On the contrary, God instructs those who fear Him to have their hearts and their love directed towards Him so that they may also be instructed by Him in everything in their lives,** as described below once again:

Ecclesiastes 2: 11 ***Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.***

Proverbs 23: 4 ***Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease!***

5 Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven.

...

17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, But be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day;

18 For surely there is a hereafter, And your hope will not be cut off.

Looking once more from the eternal perspective, on the day when earthly riches lose all their value, of what use then will be what a human being did dissociated from the Lord's instruction and with the aim of getting rich in the world?

Psalms 49: 10 ***For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, And leave their wealth to others.***

11 Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names.

12 Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish.

13 This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings.

14 Like sheep they are laid in the grave; Death shall feed on them; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.

15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me.

16 Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his house is increased;

- 17 For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.*
- 18 Though while he lives he blesses himself (For men will praise you when you do well for yourself),*
- 19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see light.*
- 20 A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, Is like the beasts that perish.*
-

Repeating, then, once more, just as the love of God has characteristics of its own, so the love of money has its own characteristics already in its seed and root, which accompany it and manifest themselves if allowed to take root and grow in a person's life. If the love of money is allowed to take root and grow, it will produce evils of its kind in the life of the one who embraces it, even if, in their ostentation, many of those who engage with it do not even realize the bonds they are indulging in.

And still, as a last or fourth group of aspects of this topic, after exposing the terrible root of the “love of money” specifically as a passion, a yearning, or a desire to be rich or as an attraction of the heart for the riches of the world and the abundance, **we see that Paul certainly would not fail to present how a person can resist this root in one's life to remain firm in the Lord and Eternal Savior**, as follows:

- 1 Timothy 6: 11 **But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.***
- 12 **Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.***
-

False teachers or false prophets have announced that God encourages His people to seek intensely material riches and cultivate the desire to be rich. However, the seeds they utter to their listeners' hearts do not come from God and should always be considered as obscure and false, no matter how attractive they are and how many voices announce and utter them.

- 1 John 4: 4 **You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.***
-

Therefore, **there are certain oppositions to faith in the Lord that God simply calls Christians to turn away and keep their hearts far from them, calling them to follow firmly in the way and in the aspects that from Heaven are instructed to them, for it is by these that they abide in the eternal life of the Lord to which they are called and whose riches do not end and do not become extinct along with all that is passing.**

*Psalms 91: 14 "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
15 He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.
16 With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation."*

Concluding, then, just as a complement and considering the importance of what Paul describes to us in verse 11 of 1 Timothy 6 also concerning the other fascinations of riches, we inform here yet that further on, we present a specific chapter under the title "Flee these Things" to address this instruction of Paul more extensively.

H. The Difficulty for the Rich to Enter the Kingdom of God

When the subject of riches is addressed, it becomes practically inevitable also to notice the matter of wealth and poverty. And although there are abundant riches spread across the most diverse regions of the Earth, we also find in it the constant figure of those who are called rich and those who are called poor.

However, what does it basically consist of being rich or being poor by the world's standards?

The condition of being rich or being poor in the world, looking at the matter in a very simplified way, seems to be basically associated with the condition of having more extensive amounts of earthly wealth or the state of having smaller amounts of worldly possessions, respectively.

The rich hold a kind of convention of rights over a more expressive amount of wealth or earthly income, while the poor hold few ownership rights or lower incomes. These conventions, in turn, may vary between the various countries of the world, as well as in the most diverse regions of each country.

If, however, we look at the Scriptures more closely and particularly on the subject of the rich and the poor, we can observe that the differentiation between rich people and poor people is not limited only to matters of material possessions, but it also extends to some different treatments given to each of these two groups of people.

The Scriptures teach us that many people, even though they should not, tend to treat their wealthy fellows differently than they treat their poor fellows, as exemplified below:

Proverbs 14: 20 ***The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, But the rich has many friends.***

Proverbs 19: 4 ***Wealth makes many friends, But the poor is separated from his friend.***

Proverbs 22: 7 ***The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender.***

On the other hand, the fact that human beings distinguish themselves based on wealth and poverty does not, in any way, mean that God agrees with the distinction they make between themselves, but reiterates that people actually practice this type of conduct.

God loves all people, and the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross of Calvary to save both the poor and the rich.

The Lord is not a respecter of persons as people are. That is, the Lord “does not respect some more than others” based on the material goods, powers, and privileges they have on Earth.

Proverbs 22: 2 **The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD is the maker of them all.**

Romans 2: 11 **For there is no partiality with God.**

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, many people on Earth adopt different treatment towards their fellow men based on the wealth and goods they have or do not have. And this class division into rich or poor, so emphasized by many human beings, may generate very harmful effects for them, especially when they come to believe that their material condition also differentiates them from others in spiritual matters.

In principle, all human beings have a similar condition before God, where all are sinners and have placed themselves in a state of rebellion against their Creator. And for this reason, all are poor in eternal values and regarding the need for the same mercy and divine salvation.

Given this, as many people reason according to the social classes in which they find themselves, and not according to the references of the heavenly kingdom, the Lord also addresses people under some concepts that they use in their languages, for the Lord wants everyone to know the truth and be saved, including those who do not see themselves in need of salvation because of their material conditions in the world.

The Lord does not offer people His salvation because they deserve it or because they have few or many natural resources, for no one, under any circumstances, deserves it. Also, the Lord does not offer people His salvation because they want it or do not want it. He offers it to everyone because He loves everyone and freely offers it to everyone.

Therefore, when the Lord speaks explicitly words also to the rich, He does not do so because they are more special than those who are not rich. Instead, He does so because the wealthy may be involved or entangled in different mental and conceptual strongholds and prisons than those in poorer conditions.

The Lord Jesus Christ makes some very direct warnings to rich people not because they deserve special deference, but because they may be under situations of specific difficulty that strike the rich more sharply.

In other words, the Lord lovingly exhorts the poor in their material poverty and the rich in their material wealth, but the eternal salvation and newness of life that the Lord proposes in Christ are the same for everyone or are offered without distinction to all. That is, although people may be approached under different circumstances in which they live or according to the context in which they find themselves, salvation in God, through Christ Jesus, is equally offered to all and granted to everyone who believes in the Lord's offer and receives it in one's heart.

2 Peter 3: 9 **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

- 1 Timothy 2: 1 *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks **be made for all men,***
 2 *for kings and all who are in authority (or in eminence), that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*
 3 ***For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,***
 4 ***who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.***
 5 ***For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,***
 6 ***who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.***
-

So, regarding the poor, the Lord wants them to know the riches they have in Christ. And regarding the rich, the Lord wants them to understand how poor their wealth on Earth is compared to what matters for eternity so that these, like the poor who have faith in God, also seek, through faith, the superior riches that are in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*James 2: 5 **Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?***

Therefore, while the world exalts the pursuit of earthly riches and those who attain them, the Lord Jesus warns of the fact that everyone equally needs God's salvation, but with the observation that individuals who have more riches may be more likely to delude themselves or be fascinated with the things of the world, being able to be even more intense targets of the illusions that lead people to abstain from salvation and a life that is according to the will and the kingdom of God.

Let us see below, then, and with great attention, some more narratives of the Lord Jesus Christ about the rich and the risks to which they are exposed by their conditions of earthly riches:

- Mark 10: 23 **Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"***
 24 ***And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them,***
 25 ***"Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!***
 26 ***It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***
 27 ***And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"***
 28 ***But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."***

Luke 18: 24 ***And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!***

25 ***For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

26 ***And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"***

27 ***But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."***

Matthew 19: 22 ***But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.***

23 ***Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.***

24 ***And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

25 ***When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"***

26 ***But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."***

Given this, we can see that in the so-called New Testament and the speeches of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no heavenly approval for a person to dedicate oneself to the accentuated search for riches and material prosperity, as several lines of human teaching that claim to be Christians want to present. Instead, what we can see in the words of the Lord Jesus, and the Scriptures in general, are many warnings about the risks of seeking earthly riches.

As examples similar to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, below we also cite once again some texts that have already been considered previously along this theme:

1 Timothy 6: 9 ***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***

Proverbs 23: 4 ***Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease!***

Let us also note that when the Lord Jesus Christ referred in His words to the enormous difficulty for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, this aroused strangeness in the understanding of His disciples because, for many people, it may seem that the stage of being rich is one of the highest demonstrations that a person is living in line with the kingdom of God and with its principles.

Nevertheless, once again, we can observe that the Lord Jesus Christ tells us exactly the opposite of the claim that intends to present material prosperity as if it were a synonym for prosperity in God. The Lord Jesus tells us that it is hard for a rich person

to be aligned with the kingdom of God or for this individual to be acting according to the kingdom of God.

And since the listeners of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ were amazed that the Lord did not exalt the rich, as was usual in their most diverse social environments, they soon also raised a question about who, then, could actually be saved.

Although the texts that narrate the Lord's words about the rich do not explicitly mention the following aspect, it seems that the question of the listeners about who could be saved exposes that, in their minds, there was the thought that it was necessary for an individual to attain earthly riches so that one could be placed in line with the possibility of salvation, as if wealth represented a stage of being blessed and would also represent a blessing for salvation.

In the listeners' minds, perhaps the following question resounded: If a rich person could not enter the kingdom of God, how much more difficult would it then be for a poor individual?

In other words, the condition of material poverty has always sought to plague the poor with the idea that they are less important, less worthy, and less capable of achieving God's favor than the rich, for many wealthy people enjoy flaunting their wealth as a way of exalting how much more blessed and gifted they are than others, as well as a way of looking down on other people and especially the poor, as also mentioned by James:

*James 2: 6 **But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?***

Contrary to the teaching of Christ, many wealthy people are insistent in their attempts to establish reference marks that a person's life consists of the goods one has. And they do this because of the pride by which they want to place themselves in higher places than their fellow men.

Many rich people err when they want to use their riches as a reference measure of how much a person is worth, as if riches could measure the value of an individual before others or before God. Or even as if a human and eternal soul could be measured by riches or earthly and passing references.

Nevertheless, as much as many wealthy people, in their ostentation and crazy pretensions, try to establish new references for valuing life, their attempts do not prevail against what God has established and do not change the One who is immutable, eternal, and in Whom there is not even a shadow of variation.

Previously, we have already seen several texts about various value references associated in the Scriptures with people and what they have before the Lord, of which we repeat some below to remember:

*Psalms 37: 16 **A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.***

Proverbs 19: 1 **Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.**

Proverbs 28: 6 **Better is the poor who walks in his integrity Than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich.**

Proverbs 28: 11 **The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding searches him out.**

The psalmists of the book of Psalms and the author of Proverbs wisely explain that the riches and the ostentation that the wealthy individual makes of them are of no use in the face of the redemption of the soul and that they, on the contrary, express folly and insult to the Lord Himself.

Psalms 49:12 **Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish.**
13 **This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings.**

Proverbs 14: 31 **He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.**

Proverbs 17: 5 **He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.**

Therefore, once again, **God sees the whole situation of wealth and poverty very differently than human references about it**, as is also reiterated in the following texts:

James 1: 9 **Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,**
10 **but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.**

11 **For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.**

2 Corinthians 8: 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.**

The Lord Jesus Christ made a point of looking into the eyes of His disciples and insisting on the theme of riches when He spoke to them about the difficulty of the rich to enter the kingdom of God, also comparing the possibility of a rich man entering the kingdom of God with the figure of a camel passing through the eye (hole) of a needle, saying that the entry of the rich into the heavenly kingdom is even harder than the example used.

In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ declared that from a rational, logical, and human point of view, it is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

And here again, we need to be judicious in seeing the words of the Scriptures.

Note that the Lord Jesus Christ did not say that no rich person can enter the kingdom of God, just as He also did not say that God automatically rejects the rich because of their status of possessing riches.

Just as the Lord Himself had and used money in the travels of His group, but did not, for that reason, love money, so there are distinctions that need to be noticed in Christ's words about the rich entering the kingdom of God.

And not wanting to dwell here on what has already been dealt with previously on this topic, we just want to briefly recall the point that “no earthly value can acquire the gift of God.” In other words, **earthly riches cannot buy anything that belongs to the kingdom of God.**

Looking yet in this last sense, a rich person, however rich one might be in earthly matters, has nothing to offer to enter the kingdom of God and receive the gifts that the kingdom of God has to share.

Therefore, **just as it is hard for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, so it is difficult for a rich person to use one's riches to achieve something in the kingdom of God. That is, from a human point of view, it is impossible.**

Both the salvation of the rich and the salvation of the poor are impossible to achieve by what they have. No one can be saved on the mere initiative of the human beings or based on the value of their properties.

Thus, **the difference in difficulty between the rich and the poor to be saved is not that one has goods and the other does not, but that the rich are more likely to think that they will be able to enter the kingdom by their own riches.**

In His words about the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus seems to indicate, then, that it is harder for the rich to believe in the insignificance of their riches and to depend exclusively on the grace of God than for many poor people.

Looking at it from yet another angle, **we can see that the valuation attributed in the world to the rich is very different from their position before God.**

Through the use of wealth, people access many things based on the purchasing power that these give them. However, regarding entering the kingdom of God, the rich do not have any extra privileges in relation to the poor, the miserable, the helpless, and even the most despised of human beings in the world.

So, **the difference of risk between the rich and the poor, regarding eternal salvation and entering the kingdom of God, is that the rich person**

may more easily begin to rely on one's riches for aspects that are not possible to be acquired by riches.

The higher risk for the rich is that they may start to think that, through their riches, they can acquire everything they want and run into the obscured view that this does not apply, under any circumstances, to the heavenly kingdom.

In the narrative of the book of Mark, exposed above about the difficulty of the rich to enter the kingdom of God, we see that the Lord described that this difficulty is found mainly in those *“who trust in riches.”*

In this way, the central aspect Christ addresses in the text about the rich points to the fact that a person's trust or faith that should be directed to God and Christ Jesus should never be directed to riches. And this, because the work of faith in the Lord, His grace, and His Gospel is the work that allows people to receive salvation and the relationship with the heavenly kingdom, not demanding and not accepting riches as a substitute for life by faith according to divine grace.

We recall here, then, what we have already seen several times in other topics. That is, one of the central evils that the fascination of riches, the love of money, the desire to get rich, or the confidence in riches may cause is to deviate from faith in God those who follow these aspects.

Under the deceitfulness of riches, we saw that human beings feel attracted by their financial independence (or material riches), for they think that, in this way, they do not need to consult God continuously as if they could make decisions and guide their own lives successfully by their own concepts and possessions.

Nevertheless, the deposit of trust in riches conflicts with the deposit of trust in God, for trust or faith is a unique asset that a person has and that cannot be deposited in two fundamental accounts simultaneously.

Trust as a search for security and the foundation of life cannot be based on more than one foundation. It cannot want to have its ground in the Eternal God and also have its basis in transient riches.

Yet another example to explain the exclusivity of faith is related to the use of a helmet, for God teaches us, through the Scriptures, that Christians should put on the helmet of salvation.

Now, we know that a helmet is individual. Collective helmets are not made. So also salvation is individual, for the Scriptures say, “The one or whosoever believes shall be saved.”

Similarly, a helmet is not made to put a helmet on top of another helmet. People do not make a helmet for a helmet, which also applies to a person's faith.

That is, the Lord Jesus teaches us that trust in riches cannot be placed as the first helmet and then, over them, trust in God or vice versa.

If “material things” or the condition of being rich could turn out to be the spiritual covering for people, God would have to give “material things” in similar measures to everyone or make everyone rich, for people's protection would be dependent on possessions that they owned.

However, **before God, placing material wealth or even people as a spiritual covering for others is equivalent to idolatry**, as was also exposed in ancient times by the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 2: 26 "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, So is the house of Israel ashamed; They and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets,

*27 **Saying to a tree, 'You are my father,' And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.'** For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble They will say, 'Arise and save us.'*

*28 **But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, If they can save you in the time of your trouble; For according to the number of your cities Are your gods, O Judah.***

*29 **Why will you plead with Me? You all have transgressed against Me," says the LORD.***

In the Scriptures, several times, wood speaks of humanity or people, and stones speak of individuals. Thus, if neither the entire humanity nor some individuals can be the protection of their fellow men in moments of deep affliction, much less, then, can their riches successfully assume this role and whose confidence directed towards them is also declared as a vain practice by the prophet Isaiah, exemplified in the following text:

Isaiah 44: 14 He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.

*15 **Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.***

16 He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire."

*17 **And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"***

*18 **They do not know nor understand; For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, And their hearts, so that they cannot understand.***

*19 **And no one considers in his heart, Nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say, "I have burned half of it in the fire, Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals; I have roasted meat and eaten it; And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"***

*20 **He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, Nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"***

Still regarding these last texts, some people may argue that they do not apply to them because they did not make or sculpt material images for themselves. However, it is worth remembering that images are first created in the mind and worshiped in the heart or understanding.

So, how much time do many people not spend thinking about all the strategies they will make and what riches they will use for each possible occurrence that might come to them in the future?

*Proverbs 18: 11 **The rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own esteem.***

There are rich people who do not materialize their images in the form of carved statues or idols, but in the form of walls and images of protection and shelters in their minds.

If we continue to advance a little further in the example of the silver, the tree, and the wood mentioned by the prophets as items of earthly riches that someone may have and in which one may come to trust, we may also remember that money is made of silver or currently paper that also derives from the tree.

How many people, then, do not use a part of the money to buy food and to cook their food, as the prophets above say, and after, with an amount of the same money, create their images of how this money will protect and deliver them in the most diverse situations of life?

The problem, therefore, does not necessarily reside specifically in someone having money, as this, in many cases, is the means for an individual to buy and cook food and may serve as a reserve or saving for days of need. The problem here often lies in the fact that the same money or riches may easily be an attraction for trust to be placed in it or in them, passing a person, in this situation, to enter an area for which one does not have the approval of the Lord.

If the Lord allows a person to raise some savings at some point in one's life, it is still the Lord who granted it and it is still in the Lord that the person should place one's trust, for there are countless situations in life that can turn enormous riches of the world into unstable and even insignificant items from one moment to the next.

*1 Timothy 6: 17 **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.***

Thus, **the fact that a person has riches on Earth does not make this individual better than any other person, neither before people nor before God. The fact that someone has riches does not serve as a justification for exalting oneself above others or becoming proud.**

And if the rich need a specific appeal so that they do not “**trust in uncertain riches but in the living God,**” it is because the Lord Jesus knows that this aspect is a real and powerful temptation with which many may come across.

In many situations, people are concerned about where they are going to deposit their wealth, but they should be even more attentive to what they themselves deposit associated with their wealth, for if they, along with the deposits of their material wealth, deposit confidence in them, they withdraw their hearts from where they should be continually or forever.

Considering yet the last text of the book of Timothy exposed above, we understand that it is worth highlighting here that not only the rich may come to place their hope in riches, but also those who still do not have riches and yearn to obtain them. And is not this the illusory hope of trust in the riches that, for instance, lotteries or gambling games sell?

The last text mentioned above still tells us that **God gives us richly all things to enjoy, but never for earthly riches to serve as a platform, basis, or foundation of trust and faith.**

*1 Corinthians 3: 11 **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.***

The riches given by the Lord to people are granted to be used for their benefit and to accomplish what God directs them to do, and not to place trust in them, because their trust should always be exclusively placed in Christ Jesus and, through Him, in the Heavenly Father.

Additionally, yet another factor based on which the Lord Jesus Christ makes a special warning to the rich concerns the feelings of consolation and pleasure that many people see in material riches.

*Luke 6: 24 **"But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation."***

After coming in the flesh into the world and yet before being exalted to sit at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus made the promise that He would send a "Helper" (or Comforter) to always be with those who believed in Him and, even better, to always be in those who believe in Him, namely: The Holy Spirit, sent by Christ Himself and by the Heavenly Father.

For this reason, **the attitude of those who are content with the consolations of their riches instead of obtaining the help of the Holy Spirit, which is given according to the truth and the kingdom of heaven, and not according to merely transient consolations, is a very unfortunate or sad posture.**

*Luke 6: 25 **Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.***

*26 **Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.***

Thus, a life of abundance, luxury, and pleasure may serve as a consolation for many people. For others, it serves to occupy and fill their time so that they do not have to think about the reality of life and the future. That is, it serves as an escape. For still others, it may be an attraction for the mere fact that they enjoy pleasure and sin.

Nevertheless, if an individual remains in these attitudes, the price of a lifetime of dissolution results in sad returns in the future, regarding which the Lord clearly warns people in advance so that, in time, they repent and change their attitudes.

*James 5: 1 **Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!***

*2 **Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.***

*3 **Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.***

*4 **Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.***

*5 **You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.***

*6 **You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.***

*Proverbs 27: 24 **For riches are not forever, Nor does a crown endure to all generations.***

Once again, we repeat here, then, that **the mere fact that a person holds earthly riches is definitely not a synonym of being under the blessings of God, nor that the person is indeed in a true condition of happiness or joy, for true and lasting joy is given by God in the Holy Spirit and not in material goods.**

*Revelation 3: 17 **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing;' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."***

*Romans 14: 17 **...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

Therefore, once again, **having or being the holder of riches should be a condition or a tool for a person to use them for the promotion of good or to be rich in good works, but not to rely on them, remembering that for someone to be established on the foundation of life, one is called to believe in Christ Jesus as the Son of the living God and to have Him as the Lord of one's personal life.**

- 1 Timothy 6: 17* **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**
- 18* **Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,**
- 19* **storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**
-

Earthly riches are not lasting sources of security for the most essential aspects of life, nor of comfort, or happiness. And for this, too, the relationship with them should be sober so as not to allow them to become illusory sources in the heart.

Earthly riches can play a collaborative role in people's lives on Earth, but there are a variety of aspects central to life and eternity that are never fit or appropriate to be attributed to them.

Given this, we would like to review a few more texts already cited on this topic to show that the value of trust, life, and wise and true consolation should not be attributed to earthly riches:

Proverbs 11: 4 ***Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death.***

Proverbs 11: 28 ***He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage.***

Proverbs 17: 16 ***Why is there in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom, Since he has no heart for it?***

Finally, we would like to present the following question: Why does the Lord make a specific reference to the rich entering the kingdom of God and not only to achieving heavenly and eternal salvation?

The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that the heavenly kingdom is within those who receive God and believe in Him, and not in the apparent or visible aspects that the natural eye can see. (A point more widely discussed in the theme The Gospel of the Kingdom of God).

Nevertheless, even if someone receives Christ and the kingdom of God in one's heart, this does not automatically mean that one will be able to enter in any way into the kingdom that has been granted to one's heart.

A person can “enter” the kingdom of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the cross of Calvary. One can “enter” the heavenly kingdom by trusting in the new and living way into God's presence. One

can “enter” this kingdom by trusting in God and having a relationship with the Lord of Glory and the King of the eternal heavenly kingdom.

And just as earthly riches cannot make a person assimilate the kingdom of God, so they cannot make a person see and interact with it, even if, initially, one has already opened one's heart to receive it.

That is, **despite being so close to a person, the heavenly kingdom may not be accessible to an individual if one wants to relate to it based on earthly riches.**

In this theme, we have already seen the example of Simon who embraced faith in Christ, but who, soon after, was no longer able to advance in the kingdom of God and the gifts coming from it because he began to rely on his earthly wealth, according to the text that we remember below:

Acts 8: 13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

...
 18 *And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,*

19 *saying (or proposing), "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

20 *But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!"*

Thus, when people, in the present day when the Law of Moses has already been revoked, want to obtain the gifts of the kingdom of God through their tithes and offerings that they claim to give to the Lord, are they not again wanting to obtain the kingdom or enter the kingdom by the way of earthly and passing riches? Are they not similarly following what Simon was proposing?

Trying to give tithes and offerings to obtain the gifts of the kingdom of God and Simon's attitude are very similar, only using different words and where people are not as explicit as Simon was. And coating Simon's proposition with words of feigned humility does not change the essence of what is inside the package.

Returning here, then, to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, can a rich person enter the kingdom of God through one's riches or because of one's possessions in which one trusts even to try to flatter or bribe God?

Some trust that with their earthly riches they can buy God and trust that God will answer them in this way, even demonstrating this by trying to present to the Lord the so-called special offerings and sacrifices. This, however, is not the life of faith in God, but rather expresses a life that relies on the power of riches to try to win God's favor.

Therefore, **for those who trust in their material riches, it indeed may be very challenging to come to believe that it is by faith in Christ that God is pleased and that it is through grace that a person can start to live and walk according to the heavenly kingdom, which still grants as eternal guarantee the seal of the Holy Spirit.**

*Hebrews 11: 6 **But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.***

*Romans 5: 17 **For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.***

*Ephesians 1: 13 **In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,***
*14 **who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.***

Indeed, a rich person can never enter the kingdom of God through one's riches. However, if one inclines one's heart to God and puts one's trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and not in riches, God can bring this individual into the kingdom of heaven because of His eternal grace, which can be received equally by the poor and rich only through faith in the Lord.

It is impossible for human beings to introduce anyone into the kingdom of God by any earthly means or however valuable anything is on Earth. However, for God, it is possible to save both a rich person and a poor person through His grace if one receives this grace through faith and not by claiming merits in human or earthly aspects.

In God, a person can find repentance and faith by the grace of the Lord, just as God can bestow riches on a person who serves Him. However, it is never the material riches that God grants that qualify a person before God, but always faith or trust in the Lord, His righteousness, and His eternal grace.

In the Scriptures, there are examples of people with possessions who embraced faith in the Lord and who remained faithful in this very life by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as Zacchaeus, Joseph of Arimathea, and others, for their hearts, which once inclined to the Lord, also continued to remain inclined to the Lordship of Christ and the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Similarly, we find in the book of Ecclesiastes the description of God's bestowing of riches on some people as a gift, but equally, we find that this gift needs to be accompanied by a proper use or in the right measure, which the Lord instructs those who in Him seek the instructions of life.

*Ecclesiastes 5: 19 **As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.***

Thus, **there is an incomparable difference between God granting riches to someone, as a gift of grace to be used in living and walking in the will of God, or the person oneself aiming and wanting to get rich and obtaining one's own riches as one's basis of life, even if one says wanting to follow God.**

Moreover, putting trust in riches is yet another way of expressing trust in created things rather than trusting in the Creator of the Heavens and Earth, and all that is in them, where people try to lower the glory of God and exalt the glory of the creation to aspects that are simply not pertinent to it. An action from which the most varied attitudes contrary to and incompatible with the kingdom of God derive. (A subject discussed more widely in the theme The Gospel of the Creator).

In this way, **the target of every Christian should always be to seek God's will and count on His direction to carry out His will, putting the definition of measures of increased wealth for one's life in the hand of the Heavenly Father, for by doing so, one's confidence is always directed to God and not to the instability of the riches of the natural world.**

- Proverbs 3: 1 My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands;*
- 2 For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.*
- 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart,*
- 4 And so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man.*
- 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;*
- 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

I. Dangerous Comparisons and Indignations

Although we have already seen since the beginning of this theme that riches for people on Earth can be different from the values they attribute to riches, and that one of the ways of attributing value is the comparison between different riches, we would still like to add some cautions to be observed under this particular criterion.

Bearing in mind that the Scriptures warn people not to adopt inappropriate parameters when assigning values to riches, it becomes necessary for them to know the vital aspects for an appropriate comparison, but also some of the main points that are not adequate for comparing the values of riches.

Despite the comparison of riches may be one of the legitimate tools for attributing value to various riches, the deceitfulness of riches proposes the practice of comparisons with a distortion of the criteria by which these comparisons are carried out or with a distortion of the elements used to do them.

And concerning this last aspect, the Scriptures warn us about the importance of avoiding, in particular, a comparison of values of riches that many may practice in the world.

Thus, several times, the Scriptures explicitly warn people who fear God about the danger of them taking as a parameter or giving excessive attention to those who have material prosperity despite not serving God.

In the world, there is a deception that, insistently and recurrently, seeks to make people think that material prosperity and God's blessing are invariably linked together. A thought that, in turn, also has the objective of denigrating the condition of an individual to be truly under the blessing of God, for if material prosperity automatically would mean the favor of the Lord over a person, even the wicked who have more resources than that those who fear the Lord would have to be seen as more blessed people.

While the Lord Jesus Christ taught that a person's life cannot be measured by the abundance of goods one possesses, the deceitfulness of riches continues to insist that people continue to “compare themselves” with one another precisely under the criterion of goods, properties, titles, or social positions that each one has.

Luke 12: 15 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."

Therefore, **using the material conditions of a Christian who fears God and the material conditions of those people who do not walk in the fear of the Lord as a basis for comparison is not appropriate before God and is not salutary. On the contrary, it may become very dangerous and harmful for those who allow themselves to be involved in it.**

Greedy or covetous people enjoy comparing themselves to other people based on their wealth or natural possessions. However, it is worth remembering that

covetousness, according to the Scriptures, is also like a synonym for idolatry, which, in turn, is an abomination before God.

Thus, the comparison of riches between a fearing God Christian and faithful to the Lord with a person who walks in disagreement with the will of the Lord, even though the latter has much more material prosperity, is just not appropriate for the Christian.

That is, as a follower of Christ, a Christian should never aim to find oneself practicing greed or idolatry, by which comparisons are made according to the criteria of men and women who do not fear the Lord and do not keep God's instruction for their lives.

And if an individual bears the name of "Christian" for having chosen Christ Jesus as the Lord of one's life, why would one adopt and come to believe primarily in evaluation criteria about life that men and women who resist Christ use and want to propagate?

The comparisons of riches which are counseled by the Lord extol true and eternal value and riches, as well as expose the due value of those which are transient or fleeting. On the other hand, propositions of comparisons according to the fascination of riches, to which many people are subject, seek to excessively exalt what is passing and even what is false, as well as they always try to denigrate what is superior, lasting, or eternal.

In the previous points about assigning values to riches, we saw that it is possible to combine them with other riches, increasing their value, but it is also possible to combine riches with items that denigrate them. And this is one of the targets of undue comparisons.

And if we observe a little more closely the comparisons proposed by the deceitfulness of riches, we can see that they, in addition to trying to corrupt discernment and sober judgment about the most diverse riches, still aim to lead people who subject themselves to them, at least, to the following two attitudes:

- ⇒ 1) **Undue indignation with people who have goods and possessions;**
- ⇒ 2) **Envy of those who practice improper acts and who have possessions. And this, to drive those who envy them to perform the same corrupt practices as those who are envied.**

The fascination of riches that proposes a comparison between God-fearing people and non-God-fearing people, based on material riches in greater quantity by those who do not fear God, is ambitious and is not content with denigrating the heavenly parameters about riches. It still aims to reach and corrupt people's hearts using indignation and envy about material riches as a vile and perverse instrument.

Thus, we may notice that there are several comparisons between riches that proceed from the heavenly kingdom to enlighten and grant sobriety to a person's understanding. However, when a comparison proposes indignation that leads to envy, its origin is not from the Lord but is earthly and evil.

*James 3: 13 **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.***

- 14 ***But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.***
- 15 ***This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.***
- 16 ***For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.***
- 17 ***But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.***
-

And because of how evil the deceitfulness of riches is also in the aspect of comparing what is not comparable to cause undue indignation and envy, the Lord directly and objectively instructs people to abstain from such practices, as is also exemplified in the texts below and in addition to the text of James already exposed above:

*Psalms 37: 1 **Do not fret (or give way for indignation) because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.***

*Proverbs 23: 6 **Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies;**
7 **For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, But his heart is not with you.***

*Proverbs 28: 22 **A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.***

In the Scriptures, “eating bread with another person or eating another person's bread” can also represent a picture of fellowship. And for this reason, a Christian should not have fellowship with and partake of those aspects and habits that a person who runs after riches cultivates and on which one feeds.

Fellowship around the counsel of the wicked may corrupt the understanding of the person who fears the Lord if one becomes a participant in this kind of fellowship. For this reason, it should be avoided or rejected.

Also in the texts below, we can see that the ways of the envious and lovers of earthly riches conflict directly with the ways of the Lord, with no compatibility between them.

*Proverbs 3: 31 **Do not envy the oppressor, And choose none of his ways;**
32 **For the perverse person is an abomination to the LORD, But His secret counsel is with the upright.***

*Proverbs 23: 17 **Do not let your heart envy sinners, But be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; ...***

Proverbs 24: 19 **Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the wicked;**
20 **For there will be no prospect for the evil man; The lamp of the wicked will be put out.**
21 **My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those given to change;**
22 **For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin those two can bring?**

In previous topics, we saw that **the love of money is a root with a high degree of potential for the corruption of hearts, but so it also happens with undue indignation and envy.**

For this reason, initially, it may even be that a person does not love riches directly, but if one starts to cultivate indignation or envy towards those who love riches or possessions, one may also end up being contaminated by the same concepts, ideas, or thoughts that are adopted by those who do not fear God.

Proverbs 27: 4 **Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, But who is able to stand before jealousy?**

Thus, it is highly relevant to note the negative emphasis that envy receives in the last text of Proverbs mentioned above, which shows us that jealousy is viler than the cruelty of fury and the impetuosity of anger.

If we still remember the narrative of the text of Acts that says that Simon wanted to buy the gift of God with money, we can notice that it reports that he was “poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” However, bitterness represents the state of those who have bitter roots in their hearts. And, in turn, envy and undue indignation are potent agents for cultivating the roots of bitterness. A reason why these attitudes are also so dangerous for someone to deal with.

Great labors and skillful human works are reached because of envy. But even so, and regardless of the greatness of many human works and skills, if they have been moved by envy, their essence is vanity and running after what is vain, as follows:

Ecclesiastes 4: 4 **Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

In addition, **envious people continually compete with other people, and so, ultimately, they may be led, by this spirit of competition or envy, to think that they can also compete with God.**

On the other hand, where in the Scriptures do so many preachers and readers of their texts find support for a life of competitiveness with their fellow men or with their neighbors, or even with God?

The answer is that they do not find it in the Lord's Scriptures, but they find it in their envy and vanity, which are often long and exhausting races after the wind. And which, in turn, may make even those who live moved by what is vain into expressionless individuals before God.

*Psalms 1: 4 **The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.***

Therefore, **chasing after riches is like chasing after what the wind drives away, but chasing after those who chase after the wind or being indignant and jealous of them is likewise chasing after what the wind scatters.**

*Ecclesiastes 8: 8 **No one has power over the spirit (or wind) to retain the spirit (or wind), And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.***

Given this, **trying to combine evil values such as envy, indignation, and undue competitiveness with the good riches given by God not only debases and corrupts the use of what is valuable, but may yet lead those who are inclined to admire the wicked into their same paths, which certainly do not lead to a good and profitable end,** as also mentioned in the text below:

*Psalms 37: 8 **Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it only causes harm.***

*9 **For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.***

*10 **For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more.***

Just as the love of money or the desire to get rich can affect the faith of a God-fearing person, so the comparison of just and unjust based on wealth and material position can also shake the faith of those who commit to the practice of this type of comparison and if it is not stopped in due time.

For example, according to the following text, we find in the Scriptures the description of people who advocated being God-fearing and who put their eyes more on the proud and on those who commit ungodliness than on the Lord Himself, which, however, led them to mistakenly considering those who were contrary to God as people who were actually happy or prosperous.

Malachi 3: 15 "So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free."

In this way, **because of envy, undue comparison, and undue indignation, a person's faith in God and sobriety can be placed under highly vulnerable conditions and at very high risk. A reason why the Lord explicitly instructs His children to abstain from these practices.**

In other words, **we can see several times in the Scriptures that the fight against envy and undue indignation is not something that should be seen lightly or as a small struggle against the lives of those who fear God, but, instead, as a strong temptation that no one should flirt with or keep associated with.**

In the sublime text presented below, the psalmist Asaph also exemplifies some of the enormous proportions that the struggles of God-fearing people may come to have against indignation and envy if they allow themselves to be attracted by the distraction of admiring their fellow men based on their prosperity and material conditions, as follows:

- Psalms 73: 1 Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.*
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.*
- 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*
- 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm.*
- 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men.*
- 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment.*
- 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.*
- 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily.*
- 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth.*
- 10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them.*
- 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"*
- 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches.*
- 13 Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence.*
- 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.*

- 15 *If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.*
- 16 *When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me;*
- 17 *Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.*
- 18 *Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction.*
- 19 *Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.*
- 20 *As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image.*
- 21 *Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind.*
- 22 *I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.*
- 23 *Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.*
- 24 *You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory.*
- 25 *Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*
- 26 *My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*
- 27 *For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.*
- 28 *But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.*
-

If we still reflect a little more on the precious psalm quoted above, we can see how much transparency and sincerity are described in it concerning what may come to confront the thoughts even of those who fear the Lord.

And why, then, is it not worth envying those who love earthly riches and prosper in them?

First, it is not worth being unduly indignant and giving in to envy because these attitudes are works of the flesh that resist and oppose God, are not works that come from the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and because the prosperity of those who trust in their riches and the prosperity of those who fear the Lord are indeed different and established in very distinct aspects.

In addition to envy and inappropriate indignation seeking to fill people's hearts with anger and claims of human, earthly, or evil justice, and not according to the righteousness proceeding from God, these two practices cause people, while they are in the world, to move their eyes on their fellow men to the detriment of keeping them looking unto the Author and Finisher of their faith.

Because of envy and inappropriate indignation, people begin to envision the career of their fellow men to the detriment of looking at the career that

God has reserved for each of them, as if the lives of others had greater importance and value than the direct will of the Lord for each individual.

Furthermore, as a result of the same envy and inappropriate indignation, people not only want to live the lives of others, but also indulge in attitudes that will make them dissatisfied with themselves or their own lives. And as someone else's life cannot satisfy the life of the one who tries to copy it, the person who enters this path enters a path in which one can never find true satisfaction.

Thus, to seek to live the lives of others moved by envy is to love others more than oneself, but also more than the will of God and God Himself, who assigns His will individually to each life.

And here, too, we can note that envy, following other people and not God, and living according to the fleshly nature are ways of expressing the same inclination that resists the Lord's will for each person's life, remembering that this generates nothing but confusion and all sorts of evil things.

*1 Corinthians 3: 3 ...**for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?***

*4 **For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?***

*James 3: 16 **For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.***

Additionally, or as a second group of aspects of this topic, **we believe it is necessary to emphasize here that the damage that the bitterness resulting from envy and undue indignation may cause may even go far beyond the person who harbors bitterness in one's heart.**

In envy and inappropriate indignation regarding others, a person, on the one hand, refrains from God's will by setting one's eyes on what is not due or beneficial to him or her, but, on the other hand, one also turns to be a source of contamination for others. That is, the person who does not seek God's will for one's life because one is bitter, and, this, because one cannot live in a way equal to the life of whom one envies or with whom one is indignant, still becomes a source of contamination for others precisely because one lives and walks outside the will of the Lord for one's life, as follows:

*Hebrews 12: 15 ...**looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;***

The envious are bitter about not having what others have, showing that, for them, what others have is more important than what the Lord has for them. And if they let this kind of feeling or attitude take over their hearts,

they will seek to defile others with the competitive and envious lifestyle to which they have given themselves.

People who indulge in greed or dishonest gain may even become aggressive in the ostentation of their achievements, to the point of troubling not only their own lives but also the whole households of others.

*Titus 1: 11 ... **whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.***

Submission to envy is a foolish condition resulting from human passion and fleshly nature. That is, as envy and vanity go together and are carnal, they also produce the works of the flesh expressed through harmful contentions and disputes with one another. One more reason why every Christian should equally reject both.

*1 Corinthians 3: 3 ... **for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?***

*Titus 3: 3 **For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.***

*Galatians 5: 26 **Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.***

In another example, we may notice that when Peter asked the Lord Jesus about what would happen in the future with John, Christ replied that the main thing for Peter was to keep his eyes on His Lord and that He, Christ, would take care of John, thus showing us, once again, that each person's calling is to follow Christ directly and not want to follow Christ by following Him indirectly by following others or by being envious of what the Lord has for others.

*John 21: 20 **Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?"***
*21 **Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man?"***
*22 **Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."***

Therefore, **it is crucial to know that the Lord assigns distinct callings and gifts to people who believe in Him so that, in many ways, heavenly wisdom**

may be manifested in the world, but also so that a person does not envy those who are one's fellow believers in Christ and equally fellow workers of the same Lord and Heavenly Father.

On the other hand, it is woeful when human ostentation, competitiveness, and envy are installed among those who are called to be fellow believers of faith in the Lord, to love one another with the love of God, and, in many ways, to cooperate with their Unique Lord and Savior.

And worldwide, how many are not the so-called Christian ministries that have emerged and are driven by envy and disputes sustained by those involved in them? How many are not the so-called Christian ministries that have emerged and carry more expressively the titles and names that their founders attributed to them, instead of using the unique name of Christ, because they want to exalt themselves in relation to other people and other ministries?

Thus, many people and groups who claim to act “in the name of God” think unwisely about the things they own and which they claim to have created, which, therefore, may also affect many and equate themselves to the foolish behavior that is described in Psalm 49, which we have already presented in this theme and from which we repeat a few verses below:

- Psalms 49: 11* ***Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names.***
- 12* ***Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish.***
- 13* ***This is the way of those who are foolish, And of their posterity who approve their sayings.***
-

As much as many individuals try to hide their envious motivations for building “ministries that they superbly call their own,” the fact that they use cleverly crafted names does not change the status of their hearts if their origins were founded on envy and the desire to possess that which was not bestowed upon them from Heaven and not authorized to be created and dominated.

When people, in their hearts, contemplate and applaud envy, ostentation, and values according to the world or the flesh, what they claim to be doing for the glory of God is not accepted before the Lord, who, in addition to knowing the outside, also sees the whole interior of all people.

Isaiah 29: 13 ***Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, ..."***

Psalms 50: 16 ***But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, 17 Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?"***

- 18 When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers.*
19 You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit.
20 You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son.
21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.
22 Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, And there be none to deliver: ..."
-

The fact that a person practices external religious acts with regularity, even calling them Christians, is not a guarantee of having a heart close to God, nor does it justify harming others and being envious of the wicked, of other people, or those one calls one's fellow believers of the faith in the Lord.

And taking it a step further, a third group of aspects of this topic that teach us that a person who cares for the fear of the Lord should not envy those who do not fear God and live a life without respect for the Lord is the fact that **the greedy, by delighting in one's covetousness, comes to the point of blaspheming God and devising corrupt plans, and may even, because of one's abundance of goods, also come to think that one no longer needs the Lord in one's life.**

- Psalms 10: 3 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces (or blasphemes against) the LORD.*
4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.

- Proverbs 24: 1 Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them;*
2 For their heart devises violence, And their lips talk of troublemaking.
-

So, why should anyone envy the one who gave up the greatest good a person can have not only for this life but also for eternal life, which is one's Everlasting Creator? Why envy someone who has riches but has them at the price of corrupting one's fear, respect, and love for God?

What is the benefit of a person being prosperous in material riches but not being prosperous in the relationship with the Creator, Redeemer, Savior, and Lord of life?

Given this, if we go back to Psalm 37, which warns people not to enter the path of envy and indignation because of the prosperity of those who do not fear God, those who are not truly godly, we can see that **the antidote to envy and indignation is precisely what those who do not fear God despise, that is, the Eternal Lord Himself and trust in Him**, as described below:

- Psalms 37: 1 Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.*
- 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb.*
- 3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.*
- 4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*
- 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.*
- 6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday.*
- 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.*
-

Therefore, just as the Lord is the sure refuge from all forms of the deceitfulness of riches, so the Lord also is the proper refuge from the envy and inappropriate indignation that is proposed by inappropriate and unfitting comparisons between the righteous and the unrighteous based on goods and possessions of the riches of the world and not according to what is valuable in the sight of God.

Since looking at one's fellow man and his goods may become a source of actions that take people's eyes away from the Lord, looking at the Lord is the solution and the victory against the fleshly work of envy and inappropriate indignation.

- Hebrews 12: 1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*
- 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
-

Looking at earthly things from the merely natural perspective, including what other people have in the world, generates feelings according to the earthly nature. However, looking at those things which are above generates life according to the divine or heavenly nature.

- Colossians 3: 1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.*
- 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*
- 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*
- 4 When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.*
-

In this way, **behind the ostentation of riches and goods on Earth, whose practice many people enjoy doing, there is a higher intention of the powers of darkness, which initially aims at people being "enchanted" by earthly things, but which is also accompanied by the higher goal of making people no longer remember to look to the One and that which gives them truly valuable and eternal life.**

Here we see, then, again, that **the price that envy exacts, similarly to the other deceptions of riches, is to lead people to value the creature more than the Creator. That is, to attribute reduced glory to God and unduly increased glory to human beings and other things in the present world.**

Thus, returning to the similar question repeated throughout this theme, what can protect a man or a woman from succumbing to envy and indignation in the face of the opposition of those who flaunt their wealth, including those who exhibit it under the pretense of doing so "in the name of God?"

The provision of protection against boasting, ostentation, and envy, as against any other opposition, is found in God and His grace which can be accessed through personal and continuous fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit given to the Christian to guide him or her into all truth and to all true consolation from heaven.

Therefore, **considering that salvation in the Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the instruction of the Lord cannot be acquired even by the sum of all the riches in the world, the one who has already received these heavenly and eternal aspects is also the one who is truly prosperous. On the other hand, the one who has not received them, however prosperous one may be in the world, is seen as wretched, poor, blind, and naked in the eyes of the Lord.**

The Lord knows the strength and effort that many who get rich adopt to try to magnify themselves in their glories against those who are apparently less favored. And God knows the fear this may generate in those who are the target of their oppression. However, the Lord calls those who trust in Him to hope in Him and not to fear those who boast about what is worthless before the Lord, for what God grants to those who are His is of incomparably or immeasurably superior value.

*Psalms 49: 15 **But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,
For He shall receive me.***

*16 **Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his
house is increased;***

*17 **For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not
descend after him.***

So, once again, since earthly riches cannot acquire the gift of God, why should those who have received the gift of God, then, have envious of those who cling to the material and not to God? And why should anyone be inappropriately indignant because several

of those who are not God-fearing have riches that avail nothing for the salvation of their lives?

Prosperity arising from trust in riches is not lasting and ends up imprisoning those who surrender to it. The food that those who trust in created things eat entangles them, or their prosperity imprisons them, for what on a given day is called prosperity, the next day is a snare and a trap.

*Psalms 69: 22 **Let their table become a snare before them, And their well-being a trap.***

For this reason, when people surrender to the deceitfulness of riches, including envy and undue indignation, what they reap in the sequence is the denial of the prosperity coming from God by substituting the propagation of prosperity arising from the works of their own hands.

When people start to consider their material prosperity as a major or priority goal in their lives, even to the point of placing this objective as a focus of competition with others, and envision that it comes from their own works or efforts, they may go down very bizarre paths and even subject to the craziest idolatries, as shown in the following narrative of the book of Acts:

Acts 19: 21 When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

*23 **And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.***

*24 **For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.***

*25 **He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.***

*26 **Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.***

*27 **So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.***

28 Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

In the text above from the book of Acts, we can see that the main focus behind the idolatry of Diana was, in reality, blindness and idolatry to the "great profit," excessive attachment to "prosperity coming from their own profession or trade," and the "credibility given to the profession of creators of objects of worship," as well as the exacerbated devotion to the results they managed to achieve with the "trade" of the items they produced.

Thus, those people who begin to serve primarily material prosperity soon may also start to believe that it is they, their strength, their arm, and their trades (professions and businesses) that make them rich, and may even reach the point of admiring so much what they do that their deeds or accomplishments also become their objects of worship.

Therefore, “deifying” material prosperity or inclining the heart to it is not a mere isolated attitude or devoid of other consequences. It is a posture that may lead people to become so attached to the profit and professional prestige of their works to the point of no longer realizing that their actions actually have already become works of avarice, idolatry, and associated with that which is a source of strife, envy, and much bitterness among people. And this, in turn, also leads them to no longer be willing to follow the path of truth that is in Christ Jesus.

And no person zealous of the fear of the Lord in one's life should envy idolaters, for those who contemplate idolatry are still liable to become like the objects they idolize.

Psalms 115: 1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.
2 Why should the Gentiles say, "So where is their God?"
3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.
4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands.
5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see;
6 They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell;
7 They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat.
8 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.

So, turning the eyes away from the contemplation of the Lord does not only imply forgetting what the Lord is, did, and does for the benefit of all human beings, but also instigates people to be more and more devoted to what they look at instead of looking at the Creator of their lives.

For this reason, shakable riches often need to be shaken so that it is seen that they do not have the “status” of true divinity nor the actual ability to provide the protection that people expect from them in their covetousness or idolatry. But even so, there are still those who continually return to raising the deceitfulness of riches because they are unwilling to let wicked gain slip out of their hands.

James 5: 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!
2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

*Ephesians 4: 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,
 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;
 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.
 20 But you have not so learned Christ.*

Lastly, or as a fourth group of aspects on this topic, and given the various necessary cautions regarding prosperity when improperly compared to the prosperity of people who do not fear God, is there, then, still some possibility of prosperity expectations for a Christian?

In answer to the question in the previous paragraph, we can see that in the Scriptures, obviously, there is hope of prosperity for the people of God, but prosperity seen according to what the Lord considers as prosperous for those who love him and delight in His will.

In the prosperity of God for those who fear Him, there are fundamental and essential aspects that must be part of true prosperity, and under which, a person may have a greater or lesser complementary material prosperity that may vary from individual to individual and according to the calling or journey in the world that the Lord has for each one of those who trust in Him.

Among the essential or crucial aspects of prosperity, the Scriptures do not teach us that the righteous will live on one's material riches and abundance, but on faith in God.

That is, **according to the heavenly kingdom, even if someone is not considered prosperous in the eyes of the world, everyone who has faith in the Lord and walks under His instruction is considered prosperous and rich before God.**

James 2: 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

*1 Corinthians 1: 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.
 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;
 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,
 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

The Lord is good to all those who trust in Him. And the path He offers them goes far beyond natural or material prosperity.

And highlighting here again, after God Himself, the greatest good that a person can achieve is the prosperity of one's own soul's salvation and the newness of life in Christ, which is also the highest goal of faith in the Lord.

*1 Peter 1: 9 ... **receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***

*Philippians 3: 7 **But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.***

In God's scale of evaluation of profitable prosperity, the soul's well-being regarding eternal salvation and truth precedes all other aspects. That is, the kingdom of God offers prosperity that does not put aside the most sublime prosperity and the inner good of a person, even if a Christian may face moments of external restrictions and limitations of resources.

If a person even needs to reduce earthly wealth and privileges for the good of one's soul, this is what the Lord will instruct to be done at appropriate times. On the other hand, if someone needs an increase in goods and material riches to advance in the work for which one has been called by God, the Lord will also instruct him or her concerning the appropriate way to receive or obtain the necessary resource.

In the concepts of values according to the heavenly kingdom, the Lord wants the good of people in the different areas of their lives, but even so, the eternal well-being of the soul has a prominent position in relation to physical well-being and material prosperity of a person.

*3 John 1: 2 **Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.***

*Proverbs 4: 19 **The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble.***

*20 **My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.***

*21 **Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;***

*22 **For they are life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh.***

*Proverbs 14: 30 **A sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rottenness to the bones.***

Proverbs 17: 22 ***A merry heart does good, like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.***

Psalms 16: 9 ***Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.***

Let us also see what another Psalm tells us about the prosperity of the souls of those who fear the Lord:

Psalms 25: 12 ***Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.***

13 He himself (or his soul) shall dwell in prosperity, And his descendants shall inherit the earth.

14 The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant.

15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD, For He shall pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, For I am desolate and afflicted.

17 The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses!

18 Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive all my sins.

19 Consider my enemies, for they are many; And they hate me with cruel hatred.

20 Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.

21 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You.

God is pleased also with the material prosperity of those who fear and serve Him, but, above all, the Lord is pleased to grant true prosperity that builds and gives growth in the path of good, peace, and eternal life in fellowship with Christ according to the New Covenant in the Lord or according to the righteousness revealed to us by Christ Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Psalms 35: 27 ***Let them shout for joy and be glad, Who favor my righteous cause; And let them say continually, "Let the LORD be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."***

The prosperity that comes from the Lord cooperates with eternal life, is lasting, and works for the soul to find rest in the righteousness of the Lord forever. It is prosperity established in Christ Jesus, granted by God's grace, through trust and faith in the Lord, and that may also result in material

prosperity, but keeping its support always grounded in God and His light, kindness, mercy, and righteousness.

And considering once again that Christ is the expression of God's righteousness to the world, for He was made righteousness for everyone who believes in Him, we come back again to the same point that **it is in Christ that a person finds the true prosperity witnessed in the Scriptures throughout the centuries**, as also exemplified in the texts below:

Psalms 45: 2 **You are fairer than the sons of men; Grace is poured upon Your lips; Therefore God has blessed You forever.**

3 Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, With Your glory and Your majesty.

4 And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.

2 Corinthians 8: 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.**

Isaiah 53: 5 **But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.**

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked, But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

Colossians 2: 2 **... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,**

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Yes, God wants those who fear and love Him to prosper. However, the “prosperity formula” is not material riches as those who abstain from the Lord's guidance think, believing that they can find security, joy, and satisfaction in material possessions. The “formula of true prosperity” and coming from the heavenly kingdom is, above all, Christ and the prosperous fellowship with Him, which is graciously offered by the Heavenly Father to all who receive Christ as Lord in their hearts.

Moreover, some people still seek to use the conditions of the material wealth of men and women mentioned in the so-called Old Testament to justify their desires for similar wealth. However, the men and women who achieved good testimony before God in antiquity, like Abraham, were also not held in esteem by God because of the goods and riches they possessed, but because of their faith in their Eternal Lord.

Romans 4: 3 ***For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."***

The material goods and riches of those that the Lord considered truly prosperous in antiquity were a consequence of faith in God, but also because their aim was to use their resources in favor of God's will.

The patriarchs that God prospered, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and others, were prosperous also because of Christ, for with their resources, they cooperated with God for the coming of the Savior who would come through their offspring and to whom belonged all the promises of God by inheritance.

Abraham's heart, for example, was not attached to earthly things, but was turned to cooperating with God for the coming of the Messiah for the benefit of all peoples and among peoples for all individuals. Earthly things were helpful to Abraham to collaborate in the coming of the One who could lead people's souls to the heavenly and eternal homeland.

Galatians 3: 16 ***Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.***

Hebrews 11: 13 ***These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.***

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Here, then, we highlight yet another aspect to be observed in messages tendentiously pro-material prosperity and that use the examples of men of faith of the past who also had material riches. And this aspect refers to the fact that these biased messages never include in their models or examples those men and women who lost everything for the love of God, some even their lives, and who likewise were as prosperous in God's calling as were the other individuals faithful to the Lord whom God granted more material riches.

*Hebrews 11: 24 **By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,***
*25 **choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,***
*26 **esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.***
*27 **By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.***

*Hebrews 11: 35(b) ... **And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.***
*36 **Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.***
*37 **They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented,***
*38 **of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.***
*39 **And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,***
*40 **God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.***

There are thousands and thousands of people who have suffered contempt and privation for taking a stand for Christ and who have not enjoyed the great benefits of the world, but for whom a crown and an eternal reward are reserved with the Heavenly Father and the Lamb who is seated at the right hand of the Everlasting Father.

*Revelation 2: 9 **"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.***
*10 **Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***
*11 **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.**"*

+

*Revelation 11: 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God,
 17 saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
 18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth."*

*Philippians 1: 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,
 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.*

Therefore, there is a heavenly dignity in living according to the will of God and for the faithful testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ that cannot be compared in any way with the earthly riches and possessions of people who do not fear God.

Although one of the aspects to recognize and attribute value to riches refers to the comparison between riches, there are things in life that just do not present parameters that are comparable to each other, for the value of the redemption of the soul, for example, surpasses everything on Earth and for nothing in the world should it be abandoned.

Luke 9: 25 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?"

+

Mark 8: 36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

Thus, considering that the condition of blessedness is a condition comparable to the state of true prosperity, it is definitely not the volume of riches, possessions, or great deeds in the world that establish this condition in a person's life, for the true blessedness, like every good gift and every perfect gift, comes from above, from the Father of Lights.

*Romans 4: 6 ...just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:
 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;
 8 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."*

*Psalms 34: 8 **Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!***

*Psalms 40: 4 **Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.***

*Psalms 84: 5 **Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Whose heart is set on pilgrimage.***

*Psalms 49: 1 **Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,***

*2 **Both low and high, Rich and poor together.***

...

*5 **Why should I fear in the days of evil, When the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?***

*6 **Those who trust in their wealth And boast in the multitude of their riches,***

*7 **None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him;***

*8 **For the redemption of their souls is costly, And it shall cease forever;***

*9 **That he should continue to live eternally, And not see the Pit.***

*10 **For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, And leave their wealth to others.***

...

*15 **But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me.***

*16 **Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his house is increased;***

*17 **For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.***

*18 **Though while he lives he blesses himself (For men will praise you when you do well for yourself),***

*19 **He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see light.***

*20 **A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, Is like the beasts that perish.***

*Matthew 5: 3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

J. The Heart's Address – Part 1

Through the writings of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches, edifies, and exhorts us in the will of God, but He also warns us about what is not for our good. And the Lord even does it through various explanations and examples with different characteristics on the same subject, which also occurs concerning the theme of riches and the attribution of value to them.

So, in one of His approaches to themes related to riches, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that the matters of values attributed to riches may become aspects that directly affect people's hearts, as follows:

Luke 12: 34 "**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"

or

Matthew 6: 21 "**For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"

Let us note, then, that the words of the Lord Jesus presented above are very significant or impressive due to the strong influence that a person's treasure may represent for one's life or specifically for one's heart.

That is, **if someone wants to know where one's heart is, one needs to know what one's treasure is.**

In other words, **the address of a heart is the treasure of that heart, or yet, a person's treasure has a force that draws one's heart to it.**

This is why **seeking the proper broad knowledge about a Christian's relationship with the various facets associated with riches is so crucial.**

Furthermore, when the Lord Christ refers to the "treasure," He is not only appointing to earthly conditions, but He is considering all existing conditions in general that can be related to it.

In this way, **a person can come to regard both the heavenly and earthly aspects as one's treasure,** as follows:

Matthew 6: 19 "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;**
20 **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**
21 **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"

And here, then, we can again see that the riches of the Earth are bestowed by the Lord upon Christians to be used for the purposes that God directs them to and under the understanding that they are transient.

On the one hand, the riches on Earth are given to Christians to use them in God's will while they are on Earth and not to accumulate them indefinitely or to make them

their personal treasure. On the other hand, a Christian is called to accumulate heavenly riches and consider them as one's everlasting treasure, for these have eternal validity. And who guards the deposit of the latter or secures them is the Heavenly Father Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ, as also mentioned in Paul's writings:

2 Timothy 1: 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,
9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,
10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,
11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.
12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed,
for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

In the book of Proverbs, we also find the teaching about how essential keeping the heart is for life, as described below:

Proverbs 4: 23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

And considering here that a person's treasure is the place to which one's heart is attracted, should people, then, not be experts in the knowledge of what one's treasure actually is and the details that constitute it?

In other words, **given that treasures can be places to which hearts are drawn, some of the most crucial questions regarding them then become:**

- ⇒ 1) **What are treasures?**
- ⇒ 2) **How is a person's relationship with treasures, or how does one lay up treasures?**

And undoubtedly, the questions presented above are crucial, but are they easy to answer since a treasure can be something so significant and influential as to draw people's hearts to it?

In this way, to advance a little more objectively on what a treasure or the treasure that attracts a person's heart is, we will begin a reflection on the concept of the word *treasure* to see more detailed aspects concerning the relationship with specific types of treasures afterward.

The word *treasure*, then, according to the notes associated with Strong's lexicon in the Online Bible, has, among others, the following meanings:

Thesauros:

- 1) *The place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up;*
- 2) *A casket, coffer, or other receptacle, in which valuables are kept;*
- 3) *Storehouse, repository, magazine;*
- 4) *The things laid up in a treasury, collected treasures.*

or

Thesauros as derived from **tithemi**, that, among others, means:

- 1) *To set, put, place;*
- 2) *To place or lay;*
- 3) *To put down, lay down, to bend down;*
- 4) *To lay by, lay aside money;*
- 5) *To make (or set) for one's self or for one's use;*
- 6) *To set, establish, ordain.*

or

Ruwa:

- 1) *Treasure;*
- 2) *Storehouse;*
- 3) *Cellars;*
- 4) *Armory;*
- 5) *Garners;*

Therefore, some very relevant aspects to be observed in the considerations presented above about the word *treasure*, among others, include:

- ⇒ 1st) **The word *treasure* is more associated with the place where someone keeps and deposits one's riches than with the riches themselves.**
- ⇒ 2nd) **A person's *treasure* is a "place of great value" for him or her, and in which one trusts to deposit what is very valuable in one's eyes.**
- ⇒ 3rd) **A specific *treasure* can become the most valuable place for a person if one deposits in it the most precious or elevated riches of one's life.**

Thus, if we initially consider the banking system as an example of a treasure, we could perhaps also make a symbolic analogy about it to discuss the concept of the word *treasure*.

That is, regarding the banking system, a person, at a given moment, may not give credit to it or not see the need for its services, keeping one's money with oneself or in one's house. In this way, then, the banking system does not represent for this individual a treasure where one wants to keep one's goods or part of them because one considers oneself or one's house a better or sufficient treasure to keep one's resources.

At another time, however, because one has more money or needs to move it more, a person may grow in the attribution of the value one gives to money to the point of wanting to put it in a safer place than one's home, thus, for example, choosing to place

it in a financial bank. And in this way, the banking system becomes a treasure for this individual and where one starts to keep part of one's resources.

Concerning still the banking system, money is a wealth that a person has, but once one chooses a bank in which one deposits part of one's wealth, the chosen bank also expresses a treasure where one keeps part of one's wealth.

Therefore, **returning to the words of the Lord Jesus in which He declares that where an individual's treasure is, there is also one's heart, we could say that a person's central treasure is:**

- ⇒ 1) **The place where one deposits one's heart.**
- ⇒ 2) **The place where the heart seeks shelter.**
- ⇒ 3) **The place in which the person trusts as a safe place for one's heart.**
- ⇒ 4) **The place of refuge of the heart.**

In this sense, we can see below an example mentioned in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

*Isaiah 33: 6(b) **The fear of the LORD is His treasure.***

From the following Psalm of the Scriptures, it is also possible to see this concept of putting or setting the heart on something being applied to what may become a person's treasure:

*Psalms 62: 10 **Do not trust in oppression, Nor vainly hope in robbery; If riches increase, Do not set your heart on them.***

Concerning still the Psalm above, in other languages, expressions such as “do not set your heart on riches” or even “do not hang your heart on riches” are also used, as if they were a hook that could sustain a person who holds on it.

And returning once more to the example of the banking system, it is known that a bank is made to receive financial deposits, but a person should never deposit one's heart together with the financial deposits one makes in the bank, for the banking system is not a suitable place for this second type of deposit.

Therefore, in the first chapters of this theme, we approach riches and the attribution of values to riches as two very different aspects. However, in this present topic, we understand that we can still add the matter that there is also another crucial factor regarding the subject of riches and values that are attributed to them, which, in turn, is the place where the riches are kept or deposited and, above all, the heart.

The number of treasures on which people may trust their lives, even if they should not, is of impressive diversity. However, this broad diversity is drastically reduced when evaluating the capacity of the treasures to actually keep what they promise to protect, for if a treasure collapses, and the riches inside it are not removed in time, also what was deposited in the treasures that collapse may collapse together with them.

Thus, **learning about the relevance of an individual's treasure should never be neglected, for in some situations, the places where riches are deposited may even become more essential than the riches that are deposited in these places.**

That is, **when a person says that one gives one's life into the hand of something, someone, or entrusts one's life to something or to someone, that which received one's life is the central treasure of this life. One of the reasons the Lord teaches us that a person's core treasure should not be made up of natural aspects or other people.**

In one of the examples about keeping one's life, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us very objectively about a treasure that many people tend to trust but which is not suitable for guarding the heart, also teaching us the opposite about the type of treasure in which it is trustworthy to deposit it, as follows:

Matthew 16: 25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

In this last text in reference, the Lord Jesus teaches us that the person who thinks that one oneself is a suitable and sufficient treasure to keep one's life is actually depositing one's life in a treasure that will fail and that will put everything to lose.

Nevertheless, **if a person gives up sheltering one's own life, if a person is willing not to retain one's life in one's own treasure, preferring Christ as one's everlasting treasure, this person will find one's life eternally, for one will be depositing one's hope in an unshakable and always safe treasure.**

*John 11: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.
26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

When a person deposits one's heart in inadequate treasures, one is not guarding one's heart well, for a good treasure is the one that guarantees the security of the riches deposited in it when it is necessary to rescue them.

So, in the sense of life according to God's will and eternal life, Christ alone is the good treasure with everlasting guarantees granted by the Heavenly Father.

And once it becomes more explicit that one of the central concepts about what constitutes a treasure refers to the place of deposit of riches and not necessarily the riches deposited in it, the perspective of the text mentioned at the beginning of this topic also needs to be reviewed more specifically and at the same time more broadly.

In the mentioned text, which is repeated below, we can observe that the Lord Jesus Christ instructs people specifically not to gather or lay up "treasures" on Earth but in Heaven, not referring to the terms riches and money as in other texts.

*Matthew 6: 19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;
20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Thus, **the idea of the instruction to lay up treasures, and not just riches, in the more specific concept of what a treasure is, could also mean a warning for people not to gather or not to lay up an inappropriate diversity of places where they place their trust or the expectations of their hearts.**

The Scriptures teach us that many people place their trust in different aspects of the world, but they also teach us that these aspects are not appropriate to receive the deposit of their trust, hope, and hearts, as we also exemplify in some more texts below:

*Psalms 20: 7 **Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.***

*Psalms 118: 8 **It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in man.**
9 **It is better to trust in the LORD Than to put confidence in princes.***

Looking yet more specifically at the aspect of idolatry in light of the theme of treasures, does not one of the central reasons why the Lord is displeased with the fact that people practice idolatry and greed become more evident?

That is, one of the central reasons why the Lord is displeased with the practice of idolatry and greed by people is because these practices compete with people's trust in God and work to make people incline to inadequate "treasures" to put their trust in what is the work of deceit and lies.

*Habakkuk 2: 18 **"What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, The molded image, a teacher of lies, That the maker of its mold should trust in it, To make mute idols?"***

Therefore, **despite the diversity of treasures offered in the world for people to put their trust in them, no earthly treasure is minimally satisfactory and capable of indeed guaranteeing a heart's security regarding the highest or essential aspects of the present life and to come.**

In this way, regarding the deposit of a heart in a treasure, the advice about "not putting all the eggs in one basket" does not apply because, for the heart, there is only one "treasure" capable of guaranteeing its safekeeping for the present and for eternal life, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The only eternally secure “treasure” is found in the condition of a person being “*in Christ*,” first receiving Him as one's Eternal Lord and then also continually abiding in Him.

*1 Timothy 2: 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

*Acts 4:11 "This (Crist) is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'
12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Romans 6: 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Although there are in the world many offers of places for the deposit of trust and even though there are in the world many places that offer lasting safety and protection to lives, the treasures of the Earth do not have the ballast to grant the ransom of a soul to eternal life at the moment where this is required, for the trust, hope, and everlasting remission of a soul are not grounded in any earthly wealth, not even the sum of them, as we recall below:

1 Timothy 6: 17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Psalms 49: 7 till 9 None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him (for the redemption of their souls is costly, And it shall cease forever) that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit.

Furthermore, the treasury, in the sense that it represents a place of deposit, is also closely related to the idea of barns. However, in the world, there are no material storehouses that can guarantee faith, hope, and love according to the kingdom of God, for these come from the heavenly kingdom in which the Lord Jesus Christ told people to lay up their treasures.

And still observing the concept of treasures also from the aspect of barns, let us see once again another text already mentioned in other topics, but this time from the perspective of barns or treasures where trust and hopes are deposited beyond just material goods and resources:

- Luke 12: 15 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."*
- 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "**The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.***
- 17 **And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'***
- 18 **So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.***
- 19 **'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."***
- 20 **"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'***
- 21 **So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**"*
- 22 Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.*
- 23 *Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.**
- 24 **Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?***
- 25 **And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"***
-

Reviewing, then, the text above under the context of treasures, we could perhaps rephrase the following questions once more: What was the attitude of the rich man in reference that made God call him crazy? Could this attitude be related to the fact that he cultivated the land, saw his plantation prosper, and harvested a lot?

As we have also commented, the reason why the Lord calls the rich man crazy does not seem to be at all that he had reaped a good harvest, for it is God Himself who gives growth to the seeds and plants that grow on Earth.

So, a central issue of the last text presented above seems to point much more to the attitudes that the rich man adopted from the abundance entrusted into his hands, there being no unfavorable mention of him in the process of cultivating the field.

And if we look even a little more closely at the parable in reference, we can see that it also does not point primarily to some possible negligent care or sudden and unrestrained waste that the rich man would have adopted from what he reaped, for he stored up with zeal the plentiful harvest.

Nevertheless, one of the central issues in this parable narrated by the Lord Jesus is that the rich man began to deposit, together with his material abundance, his trust in what he would do in the future days of his life, moving away, with this, from the rich work that matters to be practiced by every individual in the world, which is "to believe in Christ and believe in God," because without faith it is impossible to live a life that pleases God.

For those who are familiar with the ancient stories narrated in the Scriptures, it is known that Joseph in Egypt built many barns to store the large harvests in the years of plenty (the years of "fat cows"). In this way, saying that the simple fact of building

barns would be something a person should never do could also imply that the wise Joseph would not have been indeed so wise.

Also regarding the deposit of resources in banks, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself speaks of a narrative where we may understand that a good servant should prefer to deposit resources in a bank rather than leave them hidden in the land and without income.

In the case of Joseph in Egypt, there was a purpose to the barns and the accumulation of grain in these earthly or material treasures. Joseph followed a purpose shown to him by the Lord and in which, in the sequence, the grains would be essential for the survival of many lives of different peoples. However, Joseph, not even in the face of the possession of the abundant barns, failed to maintain his faith or sure trust in the Lord.

Thus, when we go a little further into the narrative of the parable of the man who reaped in abundance, we see that the Lord Jesus makes a negative mention of him in what comes after the harvest and its storage. In other words, that rich man advanced to a more dangerous and damaging stage in his life due to what he visualized and wanted to do with his treasures (or the barns) in which he was planning to store his great harvest. Let us look at this again below:

*Luke 12: 19 **'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."***

Therefore, **it is one thing to build material treasures to deposit grains, goods, and wealth in them to use or distribute them wisely over time, but it is another to deposit the soul, the heart, and one's plans together in this same type of treasure.**

The soul was not created by God to be placed in treasures (barns) of earthly things!

The soul was created by God to be deposited in God Himself!

Or yet, God is the only treasure worthy of a soul's deposit!

*1 Peter 2: 25 **For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

The earthly riches that God allows people to harvest and the barns that He allows them to build should serve as instruments for carrying out God's will, but they should never be seen as instruments capable of sheltering people's souls.

*Matthew 6: 19 **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;**
20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

The rich man in the parable of the abundant harvest, when he started to have the great harvest, did not ask God what to do with it, but he went on to determine what his soul should do. Relying on the wealth he came to have in his hands, this rich man began to play the role of “god” in his life instead of consulting the Lord, and began to define what was the basis of his security and actions to “the many days to come” he projected for himself.

And, in turn, when the rich man in reference began to designate what his soul should eat, drink, and what it should be delighted with, he defined for it to do precisely what is not the kingdom of God.

*Romans 14: 17 ... **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

So, when people make earthly things the treasures to place the trust of their souls, instead of making God, His kingdom, and His righteousness the address of their hearts, it is also on earthly things that their hearts come to trust, for where a person's treasure is, there is also one's heart.

For some people, as was the case with Joseph in Egypt, God approves or instructs them to lay up treasures on Earth (several storehouses of riches). However, again, the Lord leads them this way because they do not do it for themselves or to put faith in them, but to serve God in His purposes and to bless lives.

*Genesis 45: 4 And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.
5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; **for God sent me before you to preserve life.**
6 For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.
7 **And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.**
8 **So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."***

God Himself assigned Joseph to administer a vast harvest that the Lord granted to Ancient Egypt. And because this designation came from God Himself, the Lord also kept Joseph's heart to remain firm in the eternal treasures and not in the wealthy natural barns.

In other words, it is not the person oneself who can "appoint oneself" for a special task of administering every type of barn or earthly treasure, for the riches deposited in them may become a great attraction so that the one who administers them will also want, mistakenly, to put one's heart into them.

1 Corinthians 10: 12 **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

Given this, it is not prudent for someone, by oneself, to aspire to become rich under the allegation of wanting to serve God and people, for one may end up incurring the risk of “wanting to get rich” and thus giving rise to a root that produces all sorts of evils, as seen in the topic about the love of money.

The Christian's goal should always be to serve God faithfully. And a Christian having or not having an abundance of material riches and storehouses is something that is up to God to determine under what He has called each one to do.

Furthermore, the riches that, for example, Paul, Peter, and John had received from God to administer were not material goods and wealth, and they did not even have large earthly treasures where this type of wealth was stored to distribute. Instead, what these men had stored up in their hearts were the mysteries of God or the great heavenly riches of abundant life in the Lord because their very hearts were set on God.

1 Corinthians 4: 1 **Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

2 **Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.**

1 John 1: 1 **That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life;**

2 **(for the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us;)**

3 **that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.**

In what or when, then, did the rich man who reaped much grain become poor before God, or on account of what was he called a fool because he was not rich toward God?

The man in the parable of the Lord mentioned above was called a fool when he did not incline his heart to the work of faith in God and when he placed the hope of his supposed many future years of his life in his own treasures (barns) and in what he had deposited in them.

The man who received the great harvest inclined to the path of folly when he saw that his barns, banks, or places of storage of natural riches could become the treasure of his life, a place of hope and autonomy, or a place of deposit for his soul.

Luke 12: 20 **"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'**

21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The Lord's parable does not mention whether the rich man trusted his grain while they were yet to be harvested, but it clearly shows us that he began to trust them inappropriately when he visualized them in a treasury (place of deposit) that seemed safe to him and over which he himself supposedly had complete control.

Nevertheless, this man departed from the understanding that the vital point to be guarded was his own life in God, for he was not the one who indeed had control over his life. He forgot that only God gives him the breath of life and can keep his soul in all circumstances.

When looking at his stocked natural treasures, the man called crazy or foolish also distanced his eyes and heart from his eternal treasure, which is God Himself.

Therefore, **in God's eyes, for a person to lean in trust on one's natural treasures is folly and poverty towards God, for by these acts, an individual forgets one's Creator's sovereign position and substitutes it in one's mind with the created things.**

*Psalms 106: 12 **Then they believed His words; They sang His praise.***

*13 **They soon, however, forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel,***

*14 **But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert.***

*Psalms 50: 22 **"Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, And there be none to deliver:***

*23 **Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God."***

K. The Heart's Address – Part 2

In addition to the previous topic and considering the crucial condition that what is called treasures can represent for a person's present and eternal life, we understand that it may be helpful to advance in this new topic even a little more on some characteristics of what comes to be treasures, but also about people's relationship with the most diverse types of treasures they may come across.

Thus, we initially reemphasize here that there may be substantial differences between the characteristics of what are:

- ⇒ 1) Riches;
- ⇒ 2) The values attributed to riches;
- ⇒ 3) The place where the riches are deposited or the so-called treasures;
- ⇒ 4) What someone deposits in the treasures and the actions by which someone deposits something in the most varied treasures.

Therefore, knowledge of what riches are, the value that people may attribute to them, and the treasures or places where wealth is deposited is an understanding that also demands progress toward a broader understanding of the possible ways or postures of the relationship of people with the diversity of riches and with the variety of treasures presented to them.

And if we look here first at the last aspect listed above, we inevitably also come back to the matter of faith or trust, for **the way in which a person entrusts a treasure or what one entrusts to a treasure may also end up being a determining factor for carrying out the deposit operations of a heart in a specific treasure or its withdrawal.**

For example, if someone tries to deposit the wealth of faith in earthly treasures, one will be subject to all the instabilities of earthly treasures and may come to shipwreck along with the succumbing of these types of treasures, for if the hope which should be directed to eternal riches is deposited in earthly treasures, it is also liable to be frustrated, stolen, moth-eaten, or rusted along with earthly treasures.

Proverbs 11: 28 ***He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like foliage.***

Psalms 20: 7 ***Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.***

On the other hand, if one puts one's trust in God, one appropriately relates to a treasure on an eternally unshakable foundation.

Romans 10: 11 ***For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."***

Going back to the last Psalm mentioned above, we see that “some,” “by trusting in,” are demonstrating an action of relationship with treasures called chariots and horses, which also, respectively, may represent what people build or do to get to the points they crave and the strength and vigor to take them to their targets.

Nevertheless, when their means grow old and their natural strength fails, who will deliver those who put their trust in them?

Earlier, we also saw that “some” trust in idols or put their trust in treasures created according to their idolatries. But what is one of the central reasons why no idol or image of idolatry can save a person?

Among many aspects, idols cannot save people also because idols are smaller than people themselves, for people themselves create them.

Furthermore, as idols or images of idolatry are creations of human beings themselves, these also fall into the impossibility of serving for the salvation of their souls since no one can be saved by human works, regardless of what kind they are.

Eternal salvation is a richness of the heavenly kingdom and comes from Him who is greater than any creature. Therefore, the relationship of trust for the salvation of the soul should always be directed to the heavenly treasury (place of deposit) or the only eternal treasure that can keep a soul forever.

*1 Peter 1: 3 **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**
4 **to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,**
5 **who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.***

Thus, since earthly treasures are not eternal either, any treasure on Earth that offers protection and salvation to souls is deceitful and endangers the lives of those who place their hopes toward eternity in them. Something temporal and passing can never issue an eternal guarantee, and if it tries to do so, the guarantee it proposes is false.

However promising an earthly treasure may appear, however attractive and sumptuous it may seem, what is earthly can never guarantee or sustain the guarantees of what is related to the heavenly things and eternal life.

The devil presented the kingdoms of the world to the Lord Jesus Christ to tempt Him so that the Lord would set His heart in these kingdoms. The devil displayed the splendor and the glory of the kingdoms of the world by seeking in return the deposit of Christ's soul before his feet. However, the Lord Jesus Christ knew that a soul should only incline and surrender to the only living God, the only God who created the Heavens and the Earth, for only in God lies the condition of being a true treasure for everlasting life.

The devil seeks to use the splendor and the glory of the kingdoms of the world to blind people's eyes so that they do not clearly see the fragility of the treasures in which

they are placing their soul's trust. And this is one of the primary and most dangerous facets of the lure of riches.

Therefore, under the allure of riches, there is a multitude of aspects on Earth that may come to be considered as treasures for people to place their trust in them. Under the fascination of overvaluing earthly things, people have come to consider the most diverse things in the world as treasures in which they trust beyond what is due.

And when people start to overvalue what is fleeting and what they should not consider as more substantial treasures, what they begin to view as treasures may appear subtly associated with the most varied aspects one may imagine.

In this way, as impressive as it seems, there are many people who:

- ⇒ 1) Begin to entrust their future to what they call “nature's energy,” choosing even simple trees and plants as objects that they think will protect them.
- ⇒ 2) Trust that growth in knowledge will lead them to eternal life, as if knowledge had life in itself or as if it, by itself, was a force capable of saving lives eternally.
- ⇒ 3) Trust in the accumulation of natural goods and resources, as if a larger quantity of goods had power over eternal life.
- ⇒ 4) Place their trust in leaders, pastors, guides, religious institutions, or the communities they participate in, as if these human aspects could accredit them for the future of their lives.
- ⇒ 5) Place their trust in their good works, as if these works had in themselves the power to guarantee eternal redemption in the future.
- ⇒ 6) Even come to trust that the fact that they had children, and dedicated themselves to them, will absolve them even as a substitute for the need to remain in the faith in Christ Jesus, exemplified in the text of 1 Timothy 2: 15. In this case, there are parents who may come to place their expectations on the fact that they have had children to such an extent that they abandon their faith in God.

Given this or considering the variety that exists in the most diverse earthly aspects in which people place their trust, there is no way to make a list of all the earthly treasures that they try to create to deposit what should not be deposited in them. However, in all of them, a common aspect is repeated: the exchange of exclusive trust in Christ Jesus for eternal salvation for trust in some aspect of the creation.

In addition, even when Christians make their groups or meeting places a shelter for souls, they run the risk of trying to deposit their souls in earthly treasures called sheepfolds or religious groups. But sheepfolds, like the earthly treasures they may become, also attract thieves.

And when people start to trust their sheepfolds or the groups they are part of more than directly in God, the Lord needs to intervene so that those who truly yearn for the Creator of their lives are removed in due time from these inappropriate treasures (sheepfolds), as follows:

*John 10: 1 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.
2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*

- 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**
4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.
5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."
-

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and following in His steps, is the Christian's safe place. Christ is the sure treasure of Christians on Earth, not the fenced-in sheepfolds that people in the world constitute.

According to the words of Christ, the sheepfolds are unable to stand up to thieves, for thieves manage to jump over the walls of the sheepfolds and to enter everything that is earthly, when it does not also happen that thieves appear among the sheep themselves, as Paul also warns us:

- Acts 20: 29* **"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**
30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."
-

Although the Lord Jesus Christ is repeatedly willing to cooperate in guarding the material goods of those who trust in Him, His focus and primary commitment are not the keeping of things that can be shaken, but people's faith and eternal life.

The Lord Jesus Christ also did not assume the commitment to defend the sheepfolds in the world indefinitely, for however much they might be helpful in some specific moments, they are earthly aspects. And because they are temporal, they are subject to being shaken, robbed, and destroyed.

Only the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the sure refuge of human souls. For this reason, He invites His sheep to be where He is, to follow Him always, and not to put their trust in sheepfolds and models of gathering people created or practiced by human beings.

- Psalms 62: 1* **Truly my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation.**
2 He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.

- Psalms 91: 1* **He who dwells (remains or is established) in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.**
2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."
-

People can be very important and meaningful to each other. However, people or their gatherings should never be the targets of attempts to be placed in positions that belong exclusively to God.

An individual's trust in oneself or people as a treasure to deposit one's soul is to have an excessive and mistaken expectation of what the creation can actually offer, which can also lead to sad and disastrous consequences.

Thus, a person is called to place one's life's trust first and foremost in the Lord Jesus Christ, for neither an individual nor one's fellow men are "God" and can provide what only "God" can provide, as we may also recall in the following texts of the prophets of antiquity:

Jeremiah 17: 5 Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.

6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings."

Ezekiel 28: 1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,

*2 "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "**Because your heart is lifted up, And you say, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods, In the midst of the seas,' Yet you are a man, and not a god, Though you set your heart as the heart of a god***

3 (Behold, you are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!

4 With your wisdom and your understanding You have gained riches for yourself, And gathered gold and silver into your treasuries;

5 By your great wisdom in trade you have increased your riches, And your heart is lifted up because of your riches),"

*6 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "**Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god,***

7 Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, The most terrible of the nations; And they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, And defile your splendor.

8 They shall throw you down into the Pit, And you shall die the death of the slain In the midst of the seas.

*9 Will you still say before him who slays you, 'I am a god'? **But you shall be a man, and not a god,** In the hand of him who slays you."*

Only God and His kingdom are unshakable.

Therefore, it is only in God and in the heavenly kingdom that a person should place trust and faith for one's salvation and instruction of life according to the will and grace of the Lord.

*Hebrews 12: 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.
29 For our God is a consuming fire.*

*2 Peter 3: 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,
12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?*

And continuing here on the aspect of a person's relationship with treasures, as it is through the relationship with them that an individual "lays up treasures," we would like to see the matter of trust still under the concept of attributing value to a treasure called "credibility" or "giving credit to."

Credibility is another word through which one can talk about trust or faith, for if an individual believes in something to the point of depositing one's riches in that, it is because one has seen some credibility to deliver riches to that place of deposit.

When the devil tempted the Lord Jesus Christ by talking about giving Him the kingdoms of this world, the devil first tried to sell an idea of credibility. The devil said that he was in possession of all the kingdoms. The devil was exhibiting the dominion he claimed to have so that the Lord Jesus Christ would give him credit in his words.

Nevertheless, as we have already seen, the devil is a liar and the father of lies, and there is no truth in what he says and does. That is, there is no kind of credibility in the devil, for he cannot be trusted in anything.

*John 8: 44 "You are of your father **the devil**, and the desires of your father you want to do. **He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.**"*

Yet another word that can be used for assigning value to a treasure is "**esteem**," for what a person holds in esteem is also what one has in particular regard as distinct from other things.

So, the choice of treasures for the deposit of wealth is always closely related to credibility (to believe, to give credit to) and to the esteem "given" to treasures or to "sellers" or "proponents" of treasures. Or yet, it can refer to the hope given or deposited in someone else or in something.

Given this, returning to the aspects considered above in this topic, we can note that **rich hope and precious faith should only be “given,” “delivered,” or “entrusted” to those who have true credibility and esteem to receive the deposit of them.**

That is, **no Christian should be frivolous in readily accepting treasure proponents and their treasures, for before doing so, one should check the credibility and esteem they have before God and in the light of the principles of the heavenly kingdom.**

*Luke 16: 15 **And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."***

In His words recorded in the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus Christ sharply warned people that on Earth, there would be many false prophets, false teachers, and false christes (or false anointed ones), who will seek to gain credibility and esteem from people so that they follow them.

And among the false workers that Christ prophesied would be on Earth in all its generations until the end of the present world, there are many who even offer themselves or offer their visions and works as treasures in which people can deposit their trust and care of their lives. That is, they present themselves as worthy of receiving credit from people so that people deposit in them, as well as in their words and actions, their trust and lives without, however, actually being worthy of credit and esteem regarding these aspects.

False teachers, prophets, or workers offer themselves to be what they cannot really be. They are evil workers who demand from people credit and esteem that should never be attributed to them and that no one should ever “deliver” to them, for these evil workers, who present themselves as treasures worthy of trust, will surely not correspond to the hopes or expectations of life that were deposited in them.

False teachers want to make disciples who will follow them so that their followers will place in them the trust of their lives and, at the same time, subtly, they do not truly teach those they teach so that they may genuinely follow Christ, who is the Only Treasure worthy of receiving the credit and esteem for leading someone to the will of God, eternal life, and the Heavenly Father.

*John 10: 10 **"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."***

*John 14: 6 **Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."***

Evil workers want to be people's foundation, but they are false rocks. They want to be a spiritual covering and mediators between people and God, but they themselves are

not submissive to the Lord who explicitly declared that there is only one Mediator between God and people and who taught that those who believe in Christ should not call their fellow believers as teachers, guides, leaders, or spiritual fathers.

Therefore, **no one should give credit to and esteem evil workers or false teachers in anything they do, for though they use the Scriptures in part, they, in the bigger picture, offer to be what they are not and never can be. Even though they have no basis, foundation, or ballast to receive people's credibility towards them, they esteem and think of themselves more than is convenient.**

Acts 20: 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Philippians 3: 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

Matthew 7: 15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."

Matthew 24: 4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.

24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

25 See, I have told you beforehand.

26 Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it."

The expression “**do not believe,**” mentioned by the Lord Jesus in the last text above, also means specifically the expression “**do not give them the credit of your trust**” or “**do not accept what they say as being the expression of the truth.**”

The Lord Jesus said that many would come in “His name,” but beforehand He also firmly warns that no one should “**attribute credibility**” to them without first

ascertaining their real origin, for many will say that they come in the name of Christ without actually having been sent by the Lord.

And still regarding how they seek to achieve people's credibility, what is one of the main instruments for selling credibility that false teachers or evil workers use?

The Lord Jesus Christ showed us that one of the preferred and most subtle means used by evil workers is "oratory" or "speech," which is demonstrated when the Lord mentions the expressions: "If anyone says to you," "Therefore, if they tell you," "They will speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them," etc.

Thus, the Lord's warnings regarding what false teachers or evil workers proclaim are crucial and should never be ignored.

With elaborate oratory, deceitful words, and propositions dressed in feigned humility, there are many who falsely offer themselves as "anointed ones" (christs) and require that people entrust their lives to them instead of leading them to deposit their respective lives only and exclusively in God.

The Lord Jesus Christ also said that those who falsely announce the word and the will of God use the expedient of pointing to places that they claim to be special and where they promise that people will find Christ or where people need to go to have unique experiences with God. However, they also contradict the Lord's proposition that the glory of God in the Christian life consists in having "***Christ in you, the hope of glory***," and no longer in temples or places prepared and separated by human hands, as was objectified in the repealed Law of Moses.

Proposing special meetings with God in the so-called special and predetermined external places is contrary to what Christ taught and what the Scriptures teach Christians, in addition to being a resistance to the Holy Spirit that Christ sent to dwell in the hearts of those who believe in Him, exemplified in some more texts below:

*John 4: 21 **Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.***

*22 **You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.***

*23 **But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.***

*24 **God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."***

*25 **The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."***

*26 **Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."***

*Acts 7: 47 **"But Solomon built Him a house.***

*48 **However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:***

*49 **'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest?***

*50 **Has My hand not made all these things?'***

51 You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."

1 Corinthians 3: 16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Luke 17: 20 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

The Lord Jesus expressly said not to give any credit to those who say that He is in a specific physical place, in a certain house (sanctuary, temple, space, inner room, or holy place), in a certain institution or denomination (sheepfold), or in a certain desert (a place withdrawn or dedicated to the so-called spiritual retreats).

Christ did not die on Calvary's cross to live in temples made by human hands. He did not die to dwell in things or places of retreat. Christ died and rose from the dead to dwell directly in the hearts of human beings wherever those who receive Him may be.

The Heavenly Father's love does not grant Christ to fill human buildings with His glory, but for Him to dwell in the hearts of those who trust in Him and to be with them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and wherever they need to be because of God's will for their lives.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who directly declared:

- ⇒ **"Nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'"**.
- ⇒ **"Therefore, if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it"**.

Repeating here then, if someone speaks or does differently from what Christ said, this person is not worthy of credibility or esteem, for not even the truth according to the wholesome words of Christ is this individual saying.

That is, the Lord declaring the expression "believe not" is the same as saying "do not give credit, esteem, or appreciation," for the one who falsely claims "to have credibility before the Lord" is not worthy of any trust or any attribution of credit to one's words.

Yet in other words, considering that a treasure can be where a person deposits one's heart, how can one place it in an earthly and fixed place that cannot accompany him or her? Or how can one deposit one's heart in another limited and fragile human being, for, ultimately, a person might only sustain something until one's natural death? And was it not also because of human weakness that God revoked the priesthood according to the order of Aaron that had as its precepts the Law of Moses?

Hebrews 7: 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

...

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

Hebrews 8: 1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

Moreover, if a person's treasure is a fixed place, for example, a sheepfold or a temple, one cannot move anywhere else without losing security, becoming limited to the place one has chosen as one's treasure or to which one mistakenly gave credibility.

So, if, for instance, someone's treasure is an earthly sheepfold, where will one flee when the thief jumps over the wall and enters the sheepfold in which one trusts so much or which one so highly appreciates or esteems?

On the other hand, **if anyone's treasure is Christ, where Christ moves, one's heart accompanies the Lord, and where one moves under Christ's direction, one's treasure, which is Christ, is also with him or her.**

Christ is the perfect treasure for someone to deposit one's heart, for only Christ is the treasure that can be with an individual everywhere one needs to be.

John 10: 4 "And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

John 3: 8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Matthew 28: 20(b) "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Regarding the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit towards human beings, very sad are the propositions for people to go back to the old and outdated practices of trying to confine God and people's souls in fixed places and

houses or under guardianship, shepherding, leadership, or mentoring of other human beings. These propositions are a return to the inclination to bondage after Christ already has provided the freedom for people to choose voluntarily and individually to deposit their lives in Him.

*Galatians 3: 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*

*Galatians 4: 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.
4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,
5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"
7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

*Romans 8: 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

And why do false prophets, teachers, pastors, leaders, apostles, spiritual fathers, priests, or any other title they use, want so much that they or their works may become people's treasure?

As we have seen in previous topics, false teachers or evil workers want the income of people who put their trust in them or want to make their fellow people their objects of gain, trade, or commerce.

Nevertheless, for thousands of years, history has already demonstrated, through the Law of Moses, the temple of Solomon and the temple of Herod, and the workers who acted in them, that these models, or similar to them, are entirely ineffective and always end up falling into the corruption of the leaders of these houses and the cruel bondage of the people who follow them.

Given this, Paul also repeatedly warns the saints not to give credibility to individuals or groups who want to subject them to their dominion or not to deposit their lives in treasures that will not indeed support them on an unshakable foundation and also cannot accompany them in the most crucial moments of their existence.

*2 Corinthians 11: 19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!
20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.*

1 Corinthians 7: 23 **You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.**

1 Corinthians 6: 20 **For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.**

Romans 14: 12 **So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.**

Therefore, when a person sets one's heart on earthly places or people, the mobility of this heart is limited to them and loses the freedom that the life of the Spirit of God wants to grant him or her.

Galatians 5: 1 **Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

Thus, a group of Christians who meet regularly may be very cooperative with the Christians who participate in it. However, a Christian group has never received from God a vocation to be a treasure to receive the deposit of hearts and their expectations.

A person, a good, a wealth, and a group of Christians should remain in the vocation they have received from God and not give credit to oratories that supposedly seek to elevate them to what they are not called to be in the Lord.

Things and people should only be given credibility to what God allows them to be given credit for, not going beyond what they have received from God and not advancing to be considered as treasures that supposedly can receive the deposit of other people's lives, as John the Baptist showed us in his testimony concerning himself and Christ:

John 3: 26 **And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified; behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"**

27 **John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven."**

28 **You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'**

29 **He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.**

30 **He must increase, but I must decrease."**

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is called to remain in the vocation given to it from above. And in this vocation, the Church did not receive from God the vocation of spiritual coverage, head of the members of the Body of Christ, nor refuge for believers. The Church did not receive the calling to be the bridegroom (or husband). The Church is the bride who is subject to the husband Christ, an aspect that applies without distinction to all members who have been and remain individually associated with Christ.

And all the various warnings in the Scriptures for people not to give the creation too much credit and esteem are so necessary because it happens time and again that people try to transform things or other people into the vocation they themselves want the created things to have but for which they were not created.

Repeating then: Many people do not like the vocation that God gave to people and the created things and, therefore, want to attribute to them the calling that they would like created things or people to have. And this has a specific name which is “idolatry,” for it is an expression of stubbornness against what God established for creation.

*1 Samuel 15: 23(a) **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.***

Instead of seeking in God what is due to attribute to the Church of Christ, many want to make the Church of Christ, the Body of Christ, or the Bride of Christ what they wish the Church to be, which, however, is not granted them to do.

Many people aim to bring the members of the Body of Christ into fellowship under their own ideas, goals, aims, visions, or whatever else they want to call it. But these are human visions that subject people under their own visions of what they claim to be the Church of the Lord and that try to prevent them from freely and “individually” accessing Christ.

*Colossians 2: 18 **Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,**
19 **and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.***

Therefore, **the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a treasure to receive the deposit of souls, for only God Himself is the eternally safe refuge for everyone who believes in the Lord.**

The Church of Christ was not called to have visions and call people to deposit their expectations and lives on the visions of the Church or those who claim to lead it. Instead, the Church of Christ, that is, people who individually have Christ as the Lord of their lives, are called to keep their eyes looking unto the Author and Finisher of their faith and to follow the visions and instructions that their bridegroom Jesus Christ has for His bride or individually for each member of His body.

Many people want to make the Church of Christ the church over which they have control or dominion. Many people want to flirt with the bride who exclusively belongs to the groom. They want the bride for themselves and wish to tell her how she should be and what she should do, for they want to put their own expectations on her instead of committing their lives and hopes in trust to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, there are many churches on Earth that claim to be Christ's but are not. Instead, they are institutions that were born as a fruit of the fleshly nature of the hearts that created their most diverse institutions or assemblies, which the Lord calls whitewashed tombs (painted and adorned with whiteness and purity), which promise to offer life and promise to be reliable treasures, but which lead to death those who deposit their lives in them.

*Revelation 3: 1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, **‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.***

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.

3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

4 You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

From the Scriptures, we can see that the Lord calls Christians in general to fellowship with other Christians. However, the purpose of gathering together is to mutually encourage each other to place their personal trust in God and not to become treasure deposits of each other's lives. (Also addressed in the theme of The Fellowship of Christians in the World).

The fellowship of Christians is for the mutual edification of "faith IN GOD," and not a supposed "faith in the fellow believers" or "in what they build together."

Therefore, **no place on Earth or in Heaven, no person on Earth or Heaven, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, has before God the credibility of being a treasure for anyone's heart.**

Only Christ is appointed to be the Head of a Christian. Only He was given this credibility bestowed by the Heavenly Father to guide a Christian throughout one's career. (Aspects widely discussed in the theme of The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

So:

Matthew 24: 4 "Take heed that no one deceives you.

25 See, I have told you beforehand."

*1 John 4: 1 **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.***

*1 Thessalonians 5: 21 **Test (judge in the sense of discerning) all things; hold fast what is good.***

*Colossians 2: 8 **Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.**
9 **For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;***

In this way, if the evaluation and discernment of riches are already of essential relevance, how much more necessary is a sober judgment of the places that offer themselves as deposits of riches and, above all, of people's lives or hearts?

*1 Timothy 4: 10 **For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.***

Finally, in this topic, we would like to address some considerations about what expresses the opposite of credibility and esteem.

The opposite of credibility, then, may include “not believing or giving credit to,” unbelief, or non-acceptance of what is said or offered.

In the words of the Lord Jesus Christ quoted above, we see that He explicitly admonishes His followers “not to believe” the false anointed ones and their words.

If we still observe that credibility is also the attribution of esteem and value to something, not granting credibility may also be a form of contempt for what was offered.

Thus, the Lord teaches us that what is true should receive credibility and esteem, but what is false, which proposes and offers what it cannot actually fulfill, should be discredited or despised in the sense of not being considered as something of value or worthy of trust.

Nevertheless, the practical positioning of people regarding various treasures often occurs contrary to what the Lord Jesus Christ warns. That is, many people believe in what they should not believe and do not believe what should be believed.

If we look back at the events that preceded the crucifixion of Christ, we can see that among the reasons that led religious and government leaders to hand over the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified is also the contempt or discredit they had towards the Lord or because they did not consider Him worthy of credit because they did not believe that He was indeed the only treasure worthy of receiving the eternal deposit of their lives.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is entirely worthy of trust or being believed, but who, at the same time, is also the most despised or discredited person in all human existence.

Isaiah 53: 3 **He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**

Many people, and especially the leaders of the nation where he was born as the Son of Man, despised the Lord Jesus Christ and His preaching.

Luke 16: 14 **Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.**

Luke 23: 11 **Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate.**

Thus, looking at the word *contempt* or *despising* in the context of riches and treasures is also very interesting, as contempt is also a form of attributing value, but in a derogatory sense, as we can see below from the comments associated in the Online Bible with Strong's lexicon:

To contempt:

- 1) **To make of no account, despise utterly;**
- 2) **To hold and treat as of no account;**
- 3) **To Regard as despicable or be set at nought;**
- 4) **Esteem least.**

In addition, contempt is a derogatory attribution of value that comes from the heart, from within the person, and can be correct when it depreciates what has been attributed too much value, but it can also be harmful if the person mistakenly depreciates what should be given credit or due esteem.

And contempt, or the derogatory judgment of some riches or treasures, may also occur due to the lack of investigation of the value of something or because of a disregard for something when compared to other aspects more relevant to the appraisers.

For example, because they attributed excessive value to what should not have received so much appreciation from them, the Pharisees, Herod, his guards, and many other people had the Lord Jesus Christ as something worthless compared to what they thought to be really relevant.

In many respects, human beings basically suffer because they despise knowing God and the Lord's instruction for their lives. That is, many people in the world place

themselves under a series of misfortunes that they would not have to go through precisely because they do not value God, Christ, the Lord's instruction for their lives, and the knowledge that God gives about life and the creation in general.

An enormous portion of humanity prefers to make their own assessments and lean on their own understanding because they consider God's knowledge and instruction to be of no real significance or value. And because of this, they render themselves to live and walk under a reproachful mind.

Thus, **in one way or another, the attribution of value to the most diverse aspects that exist in the universe and the attribution of value to what people consider as treasures, whether of “confidence in them” or of “contempt,” are actions that can impact all other parts of their lives.**

*Romans 1: 28 **And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (or because they despised God in their knowledge), God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;***

Let us see below, then, some additional considerations about the word *despised* or the expression *did not like to retain* mentioned in the last text above:

Despised or did not like to retain:

Absolute Negative of Dokimazo or Dokimos, which may refer to:

- 1) The negative of: to test, examine, prove, scrutinise (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals;***
- 2) The negative of: to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy;***
- 3) The negative of accepted, particularly of coins and money;***
- 4) The negative of accepted, pleasing, acceptable.***

In the ancient world, there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into molds and allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honor who put only genuine full weighted money into circulation. Such men were called "dokimos" or "approved." (Donald Barnhouse).

Given this, if we return to the text about people despising the knowledge of God or knowing God, plus broader information about the word *contempt* used to notify this attitude, we may see that the idea of despising the knowledge of God is the result that people judged this knowledge worthy of rejection because they considered it of little value to them or because they did not consider it genuine and worthy of trust or credibility.

In this way, **to despise the knowledge of God is not to have it as “*dokimos*,” approved, or worthy of acceptance and credibility. Or yet, it is to say that God's testimony is false, corrupted, or untrue.**

And is not this exactly what many claim by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ and what the Scriptures declare about Him?

When human beings want to base the origin of life and the sustaining of life on theories created in their proud fleshly minds, they despise the knowledge that God has already allowed them to know about the Creator and the creation, just as they do not consider worthy (“*dokimos*”) the revelation that God gives them about the salvation that He offers in Christ Jesus to all humankind.

1 John 5: 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.

10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

In other words, the attribution of value, credibility, belief, unbelief, and contempt are actions and practices that appear when something is evaluated and judged.

And giving credibility to what should be despised or lowered to the value that is pertinent to it may have severe consequences even with eternal effects, but so too does the contempt for what is true.

God did not send Christ to condemn people for the sins they had committed, for Christ died to redeem or save them from their condemnation or eternal debt. But if people despise God and His love manifested through His Beloved Son, they despise the way of their remission and salvation by despising the credit that should be given to the Eternal Lord.

John 3: 16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Thus, despising the Lord or treating God as unimportant is not much different from opposing God, for contempt is also one of the terrible ways of rejecting heavenly truths or riches.

Romans 2: 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Looking at the text above, we remember here again that **the one who despises the goodness of God despises the only way that can lead to repentance of what is necessary to do so.**

And what is left for the one who despises the One by whom one was created and who sent His Beloved Son to die as the perfect and eternal sacrifice for one to be saved?

Psalms 10: 13 Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, "You will not require an account."

**Proverbs 1: 29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD,
 30 They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke.
 31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies.
 32 For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them;**

Proverbs 19: 16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, But he who is careless of his ways will die.

Looking at it from yet another angle, contempt for one aspect may also be the result of a preference for another aspect that is more valuable to an individual. Contempt may result from a lack of esteem and respect for something or someone in exchange for another aspect that is more important to an individual.

And the person who appreciates unrighteous ways inevitably also despises God and His instructions, as these aspects cannot be established on the same foundations.

Proverbs 14: 2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is perverse in his ways despises Him.

*Psalms 106: 24 **Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word (or did not give credit to His word);***

*Proverbs 1: 7 **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

Whoever believes the words of the Lord also takes pleasure in them and meditates on them continually. But the one who does not give credit to them, why would he or she take pleasure in them if one already considered them of little value or esteem in one's heart?

*Isaiah 53: 1 **Who has believed (or gave credit, received, nourished) our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?**
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

...

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

Some people go to great lengths to study God's word to see if perhaps they will believe in it. And that is why it is so arduous or heavy for them to stay in this practice. However, those who have already decided to give credit to the Law of God, the Law of Christ, or the Law of Freedom, not to the oldness of the letter or the Law of Moses, are continually attracted by it and do not see continuous meditation on it as a heavy task, for they also began to take pleasure in it.

That is, the word of the Lord in the life of a Christian who values it, instead of despising it, serves as a firm and continuous treasure to shelter one's soul.

*Psalms 1: 1 **Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;**
2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.*

*Proverbs 4: 7 **Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.***

8 Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.

9 She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you.

Thus, **one of the central points why some still resist coming close to the Law of God or the Gospel of Christ is related to the fact that they are unaware or do not attribute, in their hearts, the credibility that the word of God should have in their lives.**

And when contempt leads a heart to despise what it should not despise, or causes a heart to cease to despise what it should despise, it may cause terrible and increasing effects in a person's life, leading the one who despises God to despise or belittle also one's fellow people, for once a heart turns away from God, it also becomes devoid of the love, wisdom, and prudence that come from God.

Proverbs 11: 12 **He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, But a man of understanding holds his peace.**

Proverbs 14: 21 **He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.**

Matthew 18: 10 **"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."**

Psalms 123: 3 **Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.**

Psalms 123: 4 **Our soul is exceedingly filled With the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud.**

Furthermore, the contempt for what should not be despised also results from increasing perversity.

Proverbs 18: 3 **When the wicked comes, contempt comes also; And with dishonor comes reproach.**

Concluding, then, through several examples of the Scriptures, we also see in this topic that self-esteem, or self-esteem of one's own life and the treasures that are offered to a person, may be very dangerous for human beings to carry out, for the human being does not know to evaluate oneself as it suits and does not know, in one's own understanding, to discern what is appropriate to give credit to and what even should be despised.

Nevertheless, if one repents of one's contempt for God and puts one's trust in the Lord, God can instruct this individual to correctly see both the riches and the treasures in which one can safely place one's soul, hope, and faith.

*1 Corinthians 1: 28 ... **and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,**
 29 **that no flesh should glory in His presence.**
 30 **But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,**
 31 **that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."***

Many people are concerned about obtaining credit from other people and the most diverse institutions in the world. But far more important than this is who or what they themselves "give the credit" of entrusting their lives or who or what they entrust as treasures for the safekeeping of their precious souls.

The discernment or judgment of value of the true eternal treasure that houses the salvation of the soul, and the deposit of the heart in it, is then, in a sense, the most significant or crucial judgment of value that a human being can make in one's entire life on Earth.

And to deposit the heart in Christ Jesus, and to keep it placed in Him, is the best and only designation of a sure and unshakable destiny for the soul that God offers to all.

Christ is the treasure or address into which every human being is invited, by the grace of God, to deposit one's heart and from which, after making this deposit, an individual should never withdraw one's heart.

*Psalms 16: 1 **Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.**
 2 **O my soul, you have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You."***

*Romans 8: 38 **For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,**
 39 **nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

*Psalms 91: 14 **"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name.**
 15 **He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.**
 16 **With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation."***

Philippians 4: 7 **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

C7. Flee these Things!

During the previous chapters of this theme, we addressed the aspect that God takes joy in the prosperity of His children and the Lord wants their good in all areas of their lives, but primarily from the well-being or a prosperous condition of the soul or the heart that cooperates for one's eternal life.

As we also saw earlier, God created and made untold amounts of material resources available to human beings. And the Lord is pleased that people use them soberly and in such a way that they continue to put their faith and hope in the Sovereign God who created the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in them.

Nevertheless, when people start to adopt attitudes towards the riches that are in the world in an inappropriate or not sober way, trusting unduly in them and valuing riches more than the Lord, His will, and His instruction, they begin to enter the sphere of what is called in the Scriptures the deceitfulness or fascination of riches.

More specifically in the last two chapters, each one with its respective topics, we approached several aspects of various actions of the deceitfulness of riches and cautions regarding the relationship with riches in general, as well as the aspect of the Lord being the only reliable, safe, and worthy treasure to receive the deposit of people's eternal trust or the deposit of their hearts.

At this point, however, despite having already gone into the referred aspects mentioned in the previous paragraph, we would just like to highlight, once again, a specific instruction given to us in the Scriptures regarding the love of money, greed, or avarice, which is found in the last verse of the text presented below:

- 1 Timothy 6: 9 **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.***
- 10 **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.***
- 11 **But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.***
- 12 **Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.***
-

Writing to Timothy, Paul presents a very objective, practical, and direct instruction on how to deal, in general, with the fascination of riches, which consists of two actions that should be adopted together, namely:

- ⇒ 1) ***Flee these things;***
- ⇒ 2) ***Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.***

Why, then, would we like to return to this point which mentions fleeing and which we have mentioned briefly before?

We would like to return here to the emphasis on “**flee these things**” because people often create their own ideas about the Christian life, or are taught under some supposed versions of it, in which they mistakenly think and believe that the fact that they have chosen a life of faith in the Lord also enables them to face and fight whatever enemy there might be in the world.

For example, under the statement and thought that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” many people despise that the Lord instructs them to flee from certain exposures to evil, conflicts, and combats, showing us that a person who has Christ as the Lord also “can” or has available in Christ the self-control to withdraw from clashes from which the Lord instructs one to flee.

That is, by receiving Christ into one's life, a person is not called to be a superman or a superwoman who has unlimited power to face whatever one wants or what one thinks needs to be faced, but one is called to depend on the Lord and listen to His instruction in everything, including when one is told to flee.

Yes, even being in God, the Lord Almighty, and being in Christ Jesus, who also receives the name of the Mighty God, a Christian, several times in the Scriptures, is called, exhorted, or instructed to distance oneself or even, in some cases, literally “fleeing, run away, or escape from some fights,” as we exemplify again in the following list of texts:

1 Corinthians 10: 13 **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**
14 **Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.**

1 Corinthians 6: 18 **Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.**

Proverbs 14: 7 **Go from the presence of a foolish man, When you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge.**

2 Timothy 3: 1 **But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:**
2 **For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,**
3 **unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,**
4 **traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,**
5 **having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!**

*Romans 16: 17 **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.***

*18 **For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.***

*1 Timothy 6: 3 **If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,***
*4 **he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,***
*5 **useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.***

*2 Timothy 2: 22 **Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.***

Since one already has the Lord's instruction to discern what is good and what is evil, a Christian, for example, does not need to expose oneself to idolatry to try to prove that one can overcome it, just as one is not called upon to flirt with prostitution to show that one is powerful enough not to surrender to it when one is about to commit it.

Christ has already triumphed over the densest darkness, demonstrating the victorious power of the Lord over all evil. And He did so that Christians no longer need to live subject to sin as if it were necessary to show themselves victorious over sin by being under it again. The Christian's victory is in the victory already established in Christ. And for this reason, every Christian is called to walk in the light and the works of light, and no longer in the works of darkness.

And just like the example of idolatry mentioned above, a Christian is not called to subject oneself to the love of money, greed, or any variant of the fascination of riches to try to prove that a Christian can resist the force of this vile fascination by being subject to it.

On the cross of Calvary, Christ became subject to the wages of sin by assuming our guilt and debt. And yet, He did not commit any sin. However, this work of Christ was a perfect and unique sacrifice for all centuries and on behalf of all human beings, which implies saying that Christians are not called to try to repeat this exclusive work carried out by the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

*1 Peter 3: 18 **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ...***

2 Corinthians 5: 21 **For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

Hebrews 4: 15 **For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.**

16 **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Looking at this point still at the second part of the text of 1 Timothy that exhorts Christians to “flee these things,” we can see that this one is also very enlightening, for it declares or instructs the God-fearing person to practice following righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

Now, the righteousness of a Christian is Christ. A life devoted to God or godliness can only be realized in Christ, for Christ is the Author and Finisher of a Christian's faith. And love, patience, and gentleness are characteristics of the fruit of the Holy Spirit assigned to us by Christ.

That is, *in Christ*, people are called to follow the light or walk in the light, righteousness, and the will of God. *In Christ*, the Christian already has available the true freedom that only the Eternal Son of God can grant. Therefore, *in Christ*, no one needs to subject oneself to darkness to try to overcome them or to prove that “one can do all things through Christ by whom one is strengthened.”

In Christ, the Christian is called to turn away from what proceeds from darkness, for the Lord Jesus has already shown us the wages of death that darkness assigns to those who follow them, but He has also proved to us the benefits of someone remaining faithful to the love of God in the face of all passing aspects that the world or darkness offers.

Romans 6: 12 **Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.**

13 **And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**

14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

15 **What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!**

Christ is the Beloved Only Begotten Son of the Heavenly Father who took upon Himself the guilt of our iniquities precisely so that we also can live and walk in the light and no longer need to live and walk subject to darkness.

Furthermore, the fact that a Christian adopts the practice of abstaining from the path of evil, or even “fleeing” from the fascination of riches, exalts

what Christ did on the cross of Calvary and exalts the condition that the Heavenly Father gives as an inheritance to His children by receiving Christ as their Lord.

- Ephesians 5: 1* **Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.**
2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.
3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;
4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.
5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.
8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light
9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),
10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

Once a person has been delivered by Christ from the darkness from which one could not free oneself, and which works to bring people to eternal death, why would the Lord want a Christian to go back to submitting oneself to sin, to darkness, to fascinations, or to obscurities to prove again and again that a person could get out of them or be saved from this kind of bondage?

And what person who has been rescued from drowning or shipwreck with imminent death would, in good conscience, want to re-expose oneself to another danger of drowning and shipwreck merely to prove again that one was saved the first time one was rescued?

Therefore, the deceitfulness or allurements of riches and the sellers of false treasures are not things that people should flirt with and play with as an exercise to prove that they are stronger than these actions contrary to them. This type of fight, confrontation, or opposition is not something to be taken lightly or seen as an adventure, for the results that this may cause are similarly considered as drowning or shipwreck, as we recall below:

- 1 Timothy 6: 9* **But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.**

Thus, considering that the root of the love of money is already present in the very longing or desire to get rich, how could a person want to get rich without waiting to be contaminated by the root of the love of money to prove that one would not succumb to the love of money itself?

In other words, a person is not called by the Lord to voluntarily want to associate with the development or growth of evil or darkness to try, after that, to overcome evil or darkness, for this would be stimulating, in some circumstances, the very expansion of evil works.

God is explicit about what kind of relationship a Christian should have with evil, as follows:

1 Thessalonians 5: 21 ***Test (or judge in the sense of discerning) all things; hold fast what is good.***
22 ***Abstain from every form of evil.***

Ephesians 5: 11 ***And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose (or reprove) them.***

Psalms 97: 10 ***You who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.***

Given this, **running away, abstaining, despising, or not getting involved with something or someone that the Lord instructs a Christian to move away from is not an attitude of cowardice on the part of the Christian, but of wisdom and understanding that darkness and light cannot be under the same yoke and that there is no way to conciliate a fellowship between them.**

If a Christian has been saved from evil to live and walk in God's good and righteous will, one is not called to voluntarily invest a part of one's time in the fascinations and practices of evil and then try to overcome them. The call to good excludes the call to evil. And the way to overcome evil is not by merely facing it, but also by following the Lord's instruction to detach oneself from it and dedicate oneself to the practice of good.

Psalms 34: 14 ***Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.***

Psalms 37: 27 ***Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore.***

Proverbs 3: 7 ***Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.***

Romans 12: 21 ***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

In turning to Christ, the kingdom of God, and His righteousness or following righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness in the Lord that evil is overcome.

A Christian is not called to face evil in one's own strength or to approach the things of the Earth to try to show oneself strong or powerful in the face of them, but one is called to seek the things that are above and to follow what one is instructed from the heavenly kingdom.

Also in one of His teachings on how to pray to God, the Lord Jesus Christ instructed people to ask the Heavenly Father “not to be led into temptation, but to be delivered from evil.”

That is, in teaching about prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ did not tell people to go out into the world facing all kinds of evil nor to pray for strength to enter temptations and, under them, try to overcome all evil. What the Lord Jesus instructed was for people to pray to Heavenly Father that He would deliver them from even entering the perimeter or the area of temptation. (Topic more broadly exposed in the theme The Gospel of the Righteousness of God, chapters on the temptation of sin).

Therefore, Christ's advice to a Christian not to enter into temptation is repeated by Paul when writing to Timothy when he says to flee from certain things and people, as well as when he declares, in one of the texts listed above, that the Lord grants the “escape” regarding temptation when people look to Him for instruction on how to proceed in the most diverse circumstances of their lives.

God can and does warn a Christian who is attentive to Him when temptation approaches one's life. And once the possibility of temptation has been detected, the Christian should reject it and move away from its proximity without even giving room to enter it or for it to involve him or her in its area of activity.

The Lord Jesus Christ does not teach people to go deeper into temptations and then overcome them. The Lord does not teach people to approach and deepen the practice of evil and then try to overcome it. On the contrary, once detected that some aspect is evil, the Christian should immediately or right from the beginning despise it and not give any space for it to approach one's life.

Thus, ***in Christ Jesus, a person can be instructed about what one needs to know about evil not needing to be an accomplice of evil to be later freed from it.***

Light reveals darkness, and it is not the darkness that reveals itself. For this reason, the Christian is always called to present oneself with a disposition to be instructed in everything by the Lord, as the following text also shows us:

- Ephesians 5: 11 **And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.***
*12 **For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.***
*13 **But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.***
*14 **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."***
*15 **See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,***

16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Therefore, ***flee from these things***: From the lust of riches, from the desire to get rich, from the love of money, and flee, also, from those who despise God and who make themselves and earthly things their treasures.

For a Christian, it is due and wise to do what the Lord directs one to do. That is, “***follow, rather, righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness***” because these aspects are pertinent to the path of life and not to the root of submersion and drowning.

Finally, when someone follows the Lord and what the Lord instructs one to follow, the Lord also guides this individual to the means of obtaining riches to continue following what God teaches to be followed and to have one's needs supplied in everything.

When a Christian follows what the Lord instructs to be done, including avoiding inappropriate involvement with riches, the Lord is committed to supplying everything His children need to live and walk according to His heavenly will.

Matthew 6 :33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Philippians 4: 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

C8. The Heavenly Father's Forgiveness to an Individual regarding the Dissipation of Riches in the World

When we observe the matters of riches and the treasures that house them, it is practically impossible not to associate them with gains and losses, for the handling and evaluation of riches and treasures may also be subject to valuation failures and the most diverse wear and tear, depreciation, and even theft or deceit.

Because of riches and treasures, and already from childhood, people may suffer from pressure or the burden of the loss or damage of riches. And when they break or lose something that has been given or entrusted to them, many people may feel ashamed or guilty and even try to repress or withdraw themselves so as not to expose the damage they may have caused.

We have also seen, in previous chapters, that the riches and treasures in the world can be different than the values attributed to them. However, there is also a measure that is frequently used in the evaluation of wealth, which is the “value given by the breaking or loss of a wealth or treasure,” which, in turn, may also be carried out in a sorrowful and inappropriate way.

Because of goods or riches that are damaged or lost, many families and relationships, for example, are entirely dismantled and broken up.

And do the lost or damaged riches always have such a high value as to justify the rupture of the relationships exemplified above?

Because of the weight of value attributed to the most diverse losses of riches or treasures, people's unfavorable relationship with them, many times, may try to impose on them embarrassment, shame, downheartedness, and, perhaps the worst of them, many feelings of guilt and condemnation.

In many situations, the value that a person actually attributes to a specific asset or wealth even becomes more evident or comes to light only when a particular item is threatened, damaged, or lost.

Who has not already been saddened or annoyed by something one dropped and saw it break before one's eyes? And who has not already been annoyed by a good stolen from him or her? Or who has not already felt aggrieved because someone “scammed” or deceived him or her, and so on?

Thus, if they do not adequately deal with these issues, the guilt for damages caused, the shame for having been deceived, and the blame for having committed mistakes that led to the loss of one's own resources or of others are aspects that may become enormous burdens for those who have been involved in these kinds of situations.

Losses, debts, names on a debtor's list, bankruptcies, and many other similar aspects, are issues that have manifested themselves in all human societies ever since Satan deceived Eve or the sin committed by Adam affected his life and that of all their descendants.

People accuse and condemn one another over matters of loss of earthly wealth and treasures that surround them. People attribute blame to themselves or others for damages that have occurred, even when, in many cases, they and others do not even have a relevant role in a particular process.

Disputes and frustrations over the loss of riches that God has granted for the enjoyment of people often even distort the good use and benefits of so many other more valuable riches that people also have at their disposition.

It is impressive to observe what people may carry in their hearts for years because an object or a resource that was in their hands was dissipated when they were children, teenagers, young people, or even adults.

And are all these accusations, insults, weights, or burdens really so necessary? Are the dissipated goods and riches indeed worth the price of continual accusation and the burdens imposed on people's hearts?

So many times, the value attributed to various losses is undoubtedly not worth the weight attributed to them.

Therefore, we understand it to be very significant to emphasize here once again that God does not evaluate people and their riches in the same way as human beings judge them, just as the Lord does not judge them by the loss of riches as the world judges and condemns them.

On the one hand, we understand that a person should not be frivolous with natural riches entrusted to him or her by the Lord. However, this also does not mean that material goods and riches can reach the point of being more important to God than people themselves.

We have already seen that **a person's life does not consist of the amount of wealth and material goods one has in the world. For this reason, it also does not consist of some riches or natural goods that one has lost or that have been taken from an individual due to carelessness, deceit, or theft.**

The Lord does not guide people to waste and does not approve of making light of what is entrusted to them on Earth, but still, the value of life or the souls of people are more esteemed than goods and riches that may have been damaged or dissipated by an individual.

Although the Lord does not endorse indifference or negligence with the resources He entrusts to people on Earth, it is essential to know that, according to the principles of the heavenly kingdom, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation with the Lord exceed the values that people attribute to earthly riches.

If individuals, families, peoples, and nations would pay attention to what matters most before God, they would also be more long-suffering with one another. They would be kinder and more loving. They would not be so obsessed with possessions of earthly wealth and properties, and they would not try to be so possessive over others. On the contrary, they would be more giving and blessing oriented, as well as more willing to forgive themselves and the people who dissipated their natural riches and goods.

In this context, we quote below, then, two texts from the Scriptures that cover scenarios of riches, goods, mercy, and forgiveness, but also the contempt of people for their fellow men because of the dissipation of riches.

*Luke 15: 11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.
12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.*

- 13 *And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*
- 14 *But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.*
- 15 *Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*
- 16 *And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*
- 17 *But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!*
- 18 *'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,*
- 19 *and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."*
- 20 *And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*
- 21 *And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*
- 22 *But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.*
- 23 *'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;*
- 24 *'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.*
- 25 *Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.*
- 26 *So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.*
- 27 *And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'*
- 28 *But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.*
- 29 *So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.*
- 30 *'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'*
- 31 ***And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.***
- 32 ***'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'***

Matthew 18: 23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

- 24 *And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.*
- 25 *But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.*
- 26 *The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'*
- 27 *Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

28 *But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying,*

‘Pay me what you owe!’

29 *So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’*

30 *And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.*

31 ***So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.***

32 ***Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.***

33 ***‘Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’***

34 *And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.*

35 ***So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”***

Although the context of the two texts above is not limited to the forgiveness of economic debts, but refers to the context of sins in general, in both accounts of the Lord Jesus Christ exposed above, despite the large amount of wealth and goods that both the son and the debtor dissipated in a way or another, we can notice that the Father and the King were extremely merciful respectively to both, showing us that the heavenly principles also prevail over people's conduct regarding earthly riches.

Nevertheless, also in both narratives, we can notice the presence of individuals who are reluctant to forgive and oppose it if there is no reparation or punishment regarding the loss or debt related to material goods that they themselves think it is appropriate to require from others.

In this sense, in the first text above, we can see the older brother's position, who had his heart more focused on the wasted goods than his brother's return. And in the second text, we can notice the one who received mercy because of the goods he was unable to return, but who, at the same time, did not replicate the same mercy to his fellow man when the return of his goods was the focus.

Without wanting to go into more detail here about the last two texts cited, as they are very rich in many ways and have already been addressed in other themes, we would just like to point out that those who suffered the highest losses, that is, the Father and the King, were those who were most willing to forgive because they saw greater value in people than in the possessions they lost, while those who had few losses could not see anything beyond their losses.

Thus, again at this point, we can note that the attribution of value to riches or goods cannot be carried out without making appropriate comparative and appreciation actions concerning the set of different riches that are involved in the most diverse situations.

Although the Father and the King witnessed the dissipation of material riches that they had delivered to other people's hands, the richness of people's lives and the richness of mercy were not depreciated before them, for before God, the things of this

world are not considered and established according to the values that the world attributes to riches.

Therefore, still in the respective accounts, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that the value that the Father and the King (who are figures of the Heavenly Father) attribute to mercy is incalculably higher than the riches dissipated by the son or the debtor, as well as this also shows us that the Father and the King are not sparing in bestowing their mercy when people seek it from God.

The penalty of the first debtor, who in the end was imprisoned, was in no way related to his high debt of material things and earthly riches to the King. He was only detained by the King because, on the one hand, he wanted to receive compassionate treatment according to the heavenly kingdom, but, on the other hand, he tried to deal with his fellow man according to the standards of debt collection on Earth.

The debtor was imprisoned because he used different or incompatible weights or measures in his judgment criteria, an attitude not accepted before the Lord.

In the face of this, we can see that God grants forgiveness to people for the time of life, resources, talents, and gifts that they dissipated in their lives, even if they are in a very high amount. However, if they are not willing to do it with their fellow people, the Lord may also come to withhold forgiveness towards them not because of what they dissipated, but because they do not recognize the greater richness that there is in mercy, forgiveness, and in the form of operation of the heavenly kingdom.

James 2: 12 ***So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.***

13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Creator God of Heaven and Earth is rich in mercy and is rich in forgiving, including people's wrong relationship with riches and natural goods. However, when people despise heavenly riches towards themselves and their fellow men, what remains to be offered to them for the redemption and salvation of their lives?

Ephesians 2: 4 ***But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,***
5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),
6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah 55: 7 ***Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.***

*Romans 2: 4 **Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?***

Continuing still in the text about the eldest son who was not happy with the return of his younger brother and the debtor who did not forgive his fellow man, we see, then, that both were reprimanded, respectively, by the Father and by the King because both did not depart from the way of perversity and the thoughts of iniquity by which they valued material goods and resources more than God and the riches of His mercy and forgiveness.

This also shows us that among those who are covetous, there are, on the one hand, those who want God to be generous to them, but who, on the other hand, cannot bear to let others benefit from them, preferring to sustain disputes and contentions rather than be generous and merciful to their fellow people.

*Proverbs 28: 25 **He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered.***

*James 3: 16 **For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.***

The covetous one likes to see oneself at the center of everything and may even come to the point of thinking that God and others should be one's servants, but in one's covetousness, he or she does not heed to be saved from what one most needs to be redeemed, namely, being saved from oneself and the idolatry of covetousness that reigns in one's heart.

In addition, people who surrender to greed can become bitter individuals because they will never achieve everything they want, as we saw in the example of Simon, who tried to buy the gift of God with money, for the one who loves abundance never gets enough of it.

*Proverbs 1: 19 **So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; It takes away the life of its owners.***

God's mercy is powerful to overcome any material loss that anyone may have generated or suffered on Earth. However, when people continue to cling more to the riches of the Earth than to the riches of the heavenly kingdom, even after they have been forgiven by the Lord, they put themselves in a position to reap sad results from the earthly treasures in which they chose to deposit their hearts, as we saw in the previous chapter.

So, knowing more widely the theme of God's mercy, as well as the Lord's grace, is an essential subject for Christians, for although mercy and grace extend redemption and forgiveness to the vilest sinners, they are not synonymous with God being complacent or accomplice of sins, dissimulations, and dissipations of people's resources and lives.

For this reason, in addition to the previous paragraph, we also recall here that the fact that a person forgives another does not always imply returning to walk together with a person who has been forgiven, nor does it imply saying that the person who forgives others must continue to let oneself be plundered by others.

Forgiveness to a person is related to what one did or practiced, but reconciliation and walking together with someone forgiven is also related to the present conduct of life that one chooses to adopt and the path one chooses to walk, for we have also seen in previous chapters from the current theme that if a person persists in the way of avarice, covetousness, and the love of money, this individual is to be avoided by the Christian.

If a person insists on not repenting of behaviors that go against God's will, one oneself puts obstacles to the fellowship of others with him or her not because of what one has done, but because of what one continues to do.

Anyway, **just as it is necessary to be instructed according to the kingdom of God to attribute appropriate value to riches and goods on Earth, so it is also necessary to be instructed according to the heavenly kingdom on how to deal with situations in which goods and earthly riches have been lost, wasted, or dissipated.**

Whether in gain or loss, in everything, a Christian needs the leading of the Spirit of the Lord to walk in truth and to understand that God is rich in bestowing resources, but that He is also rich in bestowing His wisdom and mercy when resources are subtracted.

Therefore, regarding the riches that are on Earth, here too we see that there is no wealth that compares to reconciliation with God, who did not impute condemnation to people even for surrendering themselves into the bondage of sin.

2 Corinthians 5: 18 **Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,**

19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

In this way, also regarding the heavy burdens of riches that have been wasted or dissipated in the world, which many people carry in their hearts, the Lord says:

Matthew 11: 27 **"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

***29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

Thus, the summary in this chapter regarding the attribution of value to lost or dissipated riches, forgiveness, and mercy, as well as in all other chapters, always ends up falling back on the same central principle of the Christian life, which is abiding in Christ and fellowship with the Lord to be guided and instructed by Him in everything.

Colossians 3: 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

And to conclude this present chapter, we would still like to inform here that this subject of God's mercy in the different areas of people's lives is addressed more widely under the theme of The Great Mercy of the Heavenly Father, a reason why we will not expand further on this aspect in the present material.

C9. Natural Needs and the Attribution of Values to Riches

The fact that human beings have natural needs for their life on Earth is evident or obvious. For this reason, their needs may also, in turn, represent a significant influence on the values that people attribute to the riches that supply these needs.

Nevertheless, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, we could not say that needs alone are sufficiently qualified items to define the values that human beings attribute to riches. Or, put in the form of a question: Should the goal of meeting natural needs be the main guide for defining what is valuable for a given person?

And before we try to analyze this question, it might also be important to analyze a little more what actually comes to be a need.

In their life on Earth, people are continuously approached by concepts that aim to awaken them to an enormous series of needs that, on a large scale, may not actually be needs. Not everything people believe they need or say they really need is a need for survival, and there may be a big difference between needs, facilities, and amenities.

There are many things in the world that can be useful, facilitating, and pleasant to people, but that, in many circumstances, cannot indeed be framed as a matter of a real need.

Similarly, much of what is presented to people in the world to awaken in them a perspective of need is related to attempts to awaken a desire for what is offered to them, not referring indeed, in many cases, to an essential need.

And when a person starts to believe (give credibility) excessively that one's desires invariably reflect the expression of needs, one also begins to be much more exposed to a higher possibility of running into the deceitfulness or fascination of riches.

On the other hand, it is also worth noting here that not every desire is evil. There are desires in the hearts of people who fear the Lord that come from God and strengthen them to carry out God's will. There are also desires that indeed result from real needs.

Nevertheless, understanding that desires and needs are different things and that so they should be understood and considered may be crucial in many life situations.

And as for the aspects that indeed are basic natural needs, the Scriptures teach us that the Heavenly Father knows each of His children's needs even before they present them to God, as described below:

- Matthew 6: 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*
- 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*
- 8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*
- 9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*
- 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.*
- 11 Give us this day our daily bread.*
- 12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.*

13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

...
31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

In two parts of the last text above, The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that people's needs are known by the Heavenly Father. And in the two times He quotes them, He indicates that the importance of the search and yearning for the kingdom of God and His righteousness should precede even people's basic needs.

Also in the text above, we can notice that the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that the most natural needs of human beings are not many. In the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can observe that the basic natural needs that He declares for life on Earth are food, drink, and clothing.

Thus, from the Scriptures, we can see that God is pleased to grant abundance and helpful things to people, but also that this does not mean that abundance should be transformed into a necessity or considered as such. And it may be crucial to realize these distinctions so that we may always see the generosity of the Heavenly Father towards His children and not to make our hearts subject or excessively attached to what is not indeed a need, but, instead, an ease or complementary help, still remembering that the things of this world and their appearance pass away.

When writing the following words to Timothy, Paul also reaffirms what people's basic needs really are, declaring that those who have them already have a great reason for contentment.

1 Timothy 6: 6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.
7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.
8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Therefore, **returning to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and the matter of attributing value to riches, we can observe that the Lord teaches us that basic needs alone are not the sufficient and preponderant parameter to assign values to riches related to life in the world, also showing us that it is in the kingdom of God and His righteousness that reside the main aspects for us to live and walk according to the will of God and not merely driven by the yearning for basic needs.**

In the current theme, we have also already seen the words of the Lord Jesus in which He referred to the purpose for which a person should work and that a human being is not called to live on “bread” alone, symbolizing the natural supply, but also on every word that comes out of the mouth of God, mentions repeated once more below:

*John 6: 27 "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."
 28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"
 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."*

Matthew 4: 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

In this way, according to the instruction of the heavenly kingdom and however essential they may seem or indeed are, natural needs are not the references of a Christian for attributing values to what is or is not more important or necessary in life, for it is only the Lord of life who can show us both what is most valuable in each moment of an individual's life on Earth and what subsists for eternal life.

In other words, God did not call people to live only for earthly things. And for this reason, as relevant as some basic natural needs are, they do not represent the global set of what people need for the prosperity of their souls and eternal life, for above all, first of all, and in everything they need the Lord who even gives them the breath of life.

Similarly, people are not called to attribute value to riches based on their own desires and understandings, or those of their fellow men, for in the breadth of all that encompasses life, God alone is able to lead an individual to His good, acceptable, and perfect will.

Despite the crucial condition that basic natural needs represent in people's daily lives, the understanding of life and the degree of importance of each type of riches need to be grounded and continually renewed from the instruction of the heavenly kingdom to human beings.

*Isaiah 55: 6 Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.
 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.
 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Romans 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As essential as the basic natural needs of life or some desires of people may seem, the mere living under the basic natural needs and desires of human beings does not contemplate the riches that are fundamental for a life according to the will of God and with hope for a future in the Lord when that which is transient will have passed.

Thus, when the Lord calls people to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and also to recognize the value of the most diverse riches soberly, He is calling them to what is essential not only for the present, but also for eternity because for God, our life is more than food, and the Lord wants everyone to receive what is more than what is merely natural.

Luke 12: 23 "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing."

Jeremiah 29: 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

No need, provision, abundance, or natural desire can replace the Lord Himself and His instruction, for it is in Him that a person can have a hope that goes beyond the natural aspects and that is also accompanied by the guarantee of the future fulfillment of this hope.

For this reason, living a life that has in greater esteem those aspects that are less than what a life is worth before God or living a life that has as its primary value the desires and passions of the flesh does not refer to a sober life in the eyes of the Lord nor the life to which the grace of God has appeared to all people.

Titus 2: 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,
12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,
13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,
14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Put yet in another way, **if people consider their natural needs or their desires as the highest matters in life, they do not consider God, the One who created them, as their greatest wealth and their greatest treasure, which, in turn, represents an inappropriate inversion of what sustains life in fact and what are support resources to help to sustain it.**

When the Lord Jesus teaches that Gentiles or people in general run after their basic needs or desires without putting God first, He is also teaching us that for many, “their god is their own belly” and they think that they themselves are solely responsible for achieving the resources for their lives. These do not realize or acknowledge that the Eternal Creator also offers to guide people in their lives and even add to them the provision of their essential needs, returning, in another way, to contempt for God and surrendering to trust in the power of the fleshly arm, whose aspects have also been previously mentioned.

Furthermore, **the Scriptures still teach us that not even anxiety is a reason to put basic needs or fleshly desires in a position of greater importance than God, for He already knows all of them beforehand and is ready to take care of all those who place their faith and hope in Him, as follows:**

Philippians 4: 6 ***Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;***

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 5: 6 ***Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,***

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

And finally, in this chapter, we would like to highlight that, **dissociated from the Lord's instruction, the human being is not even able to assess what one really needs, for dissociated from the fellowship with the Lord, the human being is not even able to discern what the heavenly will for one's life is.**

God allows several basic natural needs of an individual even to come to be known and met by various equally natural approaches. However, that which exceeds natural matters and is associated with other specific needs can only be appropriately known through the discernment given to a person by the Holy Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2: 12 ***Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.***

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Therefore, for a Christian, it is also crucial to know that there is a **distinction between personal needs and the necessary aspects to carry out the will of God, for depending on what a person is called to by the Lord, one will also have specific needs to be able to carry out this will of the Heavenly Father.**

For example, for the coming of the Messiah to the world to be fulfilled and for His work to be carried out, the Heavenly Father ensured that each of the needs of this purpose were met throughout this entire process.

For the Lord Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, rulers issued a decree calling people to a population census that made Joseph and Mary travel to this city. And when they got there, God provided a stable for them to fulfill the promise that had been predicted by the prophets about the birth of the baby Jesus.

Many other natural resources were also placed before the Lord Jesus Christ in His ministry so that He could carry out what the Heavenly Father had assigned to Him. However, the Lord Jesus was also always ready to leave them behind when it was necessary to move forward in the heavenly purpose. That is, despite having received collaborations with natural goods, Christ, while in the flesh in the world, did not attach Himself to any of them, always following the instruction that the Heavenly Father gave Him through the Holy Spirit.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ, also as the Son of Man, had the Heavenly Father as His source of instruction for His life, He lacked absolutely nothing according to the riches of the Earth, but He also lacked nothing according to the riches of the heavenly kingdom.

John 3: 34 "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."

Luke 4: 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

Even regarding His physical death, Christ did not lack the cross, rulers who condemned Him as predicted centuries before, there was no lack of an army to ensure His crucifixion as had been prophesied, just as there was no lack of a new tomb for the Lord to be buried, as also was foretold by the prophets. And not even after His death and burial did He lack the power of God to raise Him in glory from the dead.

Although the Lord Jesus Christ personally, as the Son of Man, lived the life of a simple person in society and at times did not even have a roof over His head during the

time of His ministry, placing Himself in this sense even in an inferior position to the foxes and the birds of the air, which respectively have holes and nests, the Lord Jesus had at His disposition every supply necessary to carry out the will that the Heavenly Father had assigned to be carried out through Him.

In this way, when a person trusts in God to be instructed by Him according to the heavenly will, there may even be an increase in needs for the fulfillment of this will to a level that is even greater than a person even thought one could come to need in one's life.

Thus, **the will of God precedes needs, and it is in it that one can know what is really necessary for it to be fulfilled, which, once again, points to the need for a Christian to seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness of the Lord.**

And similarly to what happened with Christ in His condition as the Son of Man, the Lord can also fully supply all needs so that those called by Him can abundantly carry out the work entrusted to them.

2 Corinthians 9: 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (or generosity), which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Philippians 4: 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Still regarding this last point, **if, on the one hand, the Lord instructs us to be grateful and content with the supply of basic natural needs, the Lord, on the other hand, is powerful to provide us with His abundance for the accomplishment of every good work and for all the generosity to which He calls us.**

The Lord gives abundantly so that His work may be enlarged, disseminated, and manifest throughout the Earth. However, in no case are the natural needs themselves guides or instruments for assigning value to riches, for this is done according to the heavenly will and instruction.

It is in the instruction of His will that the Lord also guides those who are His to know how to correctly assign values to the riches they will need to deal with, remembering again that the beginning of every relationship with the will of God is always associated with fellowship with Christ Jesus, for it is *"in Christ"* that the Heavenly Father supplies for every need of those who walk according to His purpose.

*1 Corinthians 1: 9 **God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

*Romans 8: 28 **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.***

...

*31 **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***

*32 **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?***

C10. Serving God or Serving Riches: A Crucial Personal Choice

After verifying that there are substantial differences between the riches themselves, the values that people attribute to them, the deceitfulness of riches, and the treasures in which people intend to deposit their riches and, mainly, their trust or their hearts, we understand that it is also crucial to advance further to one of the most objective and direct statements that the Lord Jesus Christ made about each individual's relationship with the subject of riches.

If after seeing in the Scriptures that the deceitfulness of riches, the love of money, the desire to get rich, working only for the food that perishes, and laying up treasures on Earth for one's heart cannot bring lasting benefit an individual still continues to insist on wanting to reconcile serving God with the aspects mentioned in this paragraph, the words declared by the Lord Jesus Christ in the texts presented below reduce even more any possible doubts about the proper position that a person should have regarding riches, as follows:

Matthew 6: 24 ***"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 (or the riches)."***

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Luke 16: 13 ***"No servant 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 (or the riches)."***

When teaching about riches, the Lord Jesus established a very objective and specific statement about a particular relationship that someone may have with God or with riches, declaring that, in the context of serving, being loyal, or devoting oneself to someone or something, the act of turning to one automatically excludes the other.

While the various teachings mentioned in the introduction of this chapter are given to people to understand the reasons and consequences why they should not subject themselves to serving riches, in the words of the last-mentioned text, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that it is even impossible for a person to serve both God and riches at the same time.

Through the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that the much information that God grants about riches has a purpose to support people so that they know how crucial it is to make an adequate choice and decision regarding the subject at hand also because there is no way to group or associate serving God with serving riches.

Looking a little more closely at the last text mentioned above, and according to the comments associated in the Online Bible with Strong's lexicon, we can see that the term *riches* used at this specific point is the ancient Greek word that follows below:

Mammonas, which has, among others, the following meanings:

- 1) **Mammon;**
- 2) **Treasure;**
- 3) **Riches.**

Still regarding the ancient Greek word “*mammonas*,” it seems that the basis of the idea of this word, translated in some Bible versions also as “*mammon*,” encompasses the subject of riches in general, extending both to earthly riches in themselves and also to the treasures that house them.

Thus, **the Lord Jesus Christ informs us that the relationship with the set of riches and treasures that exist on Earth needs to be looked at with special attention, for the riches and the treasures to keep them may come to reach a condition of “lord” over people's lives, to the detriment of the “Lordship of God” that should be exclusive in every human heart.**

In the parable of the sower, the Lord warns that the thorns received in the heart may grow and choke the good seed of God's will in a person's life, just as Paul warns that wanting to get rich or the love of money may lead a person to drown and the shipwreck of faith. However, in the last text in reference, the Lord Jesus declares even more objectively and expressly that a person cannot or is not able to reconcile or combine serving God and earthly riches and treasures but can only make the option to serve one over the other.

On the other hand, just as was explained in the chapter on the deceitfulness of riches, also on this specific point, **it is crucial that riches or treasures are not confused with “serving riches,” for these two aspects are different points, and so they should always be considered.**

The Lord Jesus Christ did not declare that people should not have or should not use riches for the most diverse needs and the adequate purposes of life. Instead, what the Lord Jesus Christ taught is that a person cannot “serve” the riches and at the same time also “serve” God or “serve” God and at the same time also “serve” riches.

Of course, a Christian who loves one's Lord Jesus Christ does not want to find oneself serving riches and, as an automatic consequence, not serving one's Master who died for him or her on the cross of Calvary. On the other hand, however, the fact that a person loves the Lord Jesus Christ also does not mean that one should despise every material wealth that God has entrusted into one's hands and merely discard them.

The Lord Jesus Christ was not teaching, for example, that a person who has a prosperous farm should no longer take care of it or that a person who has a house for one's dwelling should no longer use riches to maintain it, for this would be contrary to what the Scriptures teach about honoring God with the goods that a person has, exemplified below:

*Proverbs 3: 9 **Honor the LORD with your possessions.***

We know that a farm, in part, produces because people carry out work on it and because many earthly riches demand care and services to be maintained. Growth comes

from God, as well as the gift of protection for the farm, the cattle, the herds, the goods, the rain, the breath of life for workers and animals, and many other aspects. However, even so, part of the production comes from the cooperation of people with God and the work they accomplish in what the Lord has entrusted into their hands.

And some people's farm may be a table in the office where they produce their work, while for others, it is the place where they make and serve food to others, a classroom where their good is sharing instruction, the auto repair shop where they fix cars, a service position they occupy at the hospital, the building they cooperate to build, the day-to-day care of the home and family, and so on.

The farm can be compared to the place of production that has been given to someone. It can be compared to the "field of work" where a person can carry out the activities that God has given him or her to carry out.

And if those who are in charge of farms or goods are negligent of them, how may they be honoring God in all that they do and in what God has given them to do?

Therefore, understanding the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ about people not being able to serve God and riches should not be focused only on the aspects of the word *riches*, but firstly on the expression *to serve*.

In the referenced text, then, the Lord Jesus did not say that a person cannot handle riches or that a person cannot use them, or even that a person cannot donate them. On the contrary, we find in the Scriptures that those who are possessors of riches and goods should make good use of them in the practice of good, according to the text that we recall once again below:

- 1 Timothy 6: 17* **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.**
- 18* **Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,**
- 19* **storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**

If the mere use of riches itself were the same as serving them, the advice to the rich would be that they should get rid of all riches as urgently as possible. But this is not what Paul writes to Timothy when he teaches that people should use riches for good works and be generous in giving and sharing, for no one can share what one does not have first.

- 2 Corinthians 8: 12* **For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.**

Indeed, there are cases in which it is profitable for a person to completely dispose of one's material riches, as in the situation of the rich young man who came to talk to the Lord Jesus about the salvation of his life but who also trusted in his riches. In the case

of this rich young man, it was necessary to get rid of his goods as his treasure in order to place his trust in God. However, there are several other situations in which this was different, for example, the case of Zacchaeus, also described in previous chapters.

The rich young man had set his heart on the treasury of "goods and riches" and needed to take away his soul's dependence on them to walk with God, showing us that he not only possessed the riches but was dependent on and subject to them or served them. That is, what the rich young man had also had him. And this condition needed to be changed to follow the path of the Lord and the salvation of his soul.

Therefore, considering that different words in the language in which the Gospel Scriptures were written are funneled down to the same expression "*to serve*" in some other languages, let us look for the more specific word that was recorded about serving in the text we are adopting as the primary reference in this chapter:

To serve:

Douleuo or doulos from which it is derived, meaning, among others:

- 1) **To be a slave, to serve, to do service;**
- 2) *Metaphorically: To obey, submit to;*
- 3) **In a good sense, to yield obedience; in a bad sense, of those who become slaves to some base power, to yield to, give one's self up to;**
- 4) **A slave, bondman, man of servile condition;**
- 5) *Metaphorically: one who gives himself up to another's will;*
- 6) **Attendant.**

Thus, verifying a little more the concept of the expression *to serve* in the text in question, it seems to us that the understanding of the words of the Lord Jesus becomes more comprehensive, allowing us to observe that this term is related to the concept of "lord and slave" or "*the demander of a service and the attendant who performs what is requested.*"

In the words of the Lord Jesus, it is possible to observe, then, that riches and their respective treasures have the potential to be seen and adopted as "lord" and have the potential to be served as a slave or servant who serves one's "master or lord" or as an attendant providing services to the person requesting the services.

This perspective on serving also agrees with the first words of the verses uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ, namely: "***No one can serve two masters.***" That is, the Lord Jesus declared clearly and objectively that it is not possible for an individual to serve more than one "lord."

Yet in other words, the Lord Jesus makes it explicit that there is no intermediate position or joint accommodation of the interests of more than one lord or master when He says: "***No one can.***"

Therefore, **it is impossible or there will never be a success in an attempt to reconcile these two lords: God or the riches personified as lord in a person's life because one has stopped seeing them only as tools of help, also placing oneself under the subjection of serving the riches.**

Additionally, if the reader has access to the topic Works, Labors, and Services, which is also part of this series, we believe that reading or re-reading the chapters "Whom Do You Want to Serve" and "Whom Do You Want to Worship" may also be of great use at this point.

Advancing here a little further, then, regarding the matter of serving addressed more specifically in the subject of riches, we will try to consider below some more examples and topics related to it.

In this way, in the case of the example of the farm mentioned above, we can see that the care of it could be carried out, among others, due to several different aspects, as follows:

- ⇒ 1) A person can take care of the farm because God asks him or her to do it at a particular time in one's life.
- ⇒ 2) One person takes care of the farm because the farm itself requires care. Takes care of the farm for the mere need of its maintenance.
- ⇒ 3) A person takes care of the farm because one simply sees in it a possibility of profit and expansion of one's material riches.
- ⇒ 4) A person takes care of the farm or its assets because one wants to get rich.
- ⇒ 5) A person takes care of the farm (one's profession, assets, or goods) because one sees in it a future protection for oneself and one's children, and so on.

And looking at the list presented in the previous paragraph, which of the listed aspects can we consider as “serving God?” And which of these items can we see as corresponding to “serving riches?”

In the list presented above, briefly speaking, we can see that only the first aspect is “serving God.” And all the others express some kind of variation of “serving riches themselves.”

Furthermore, when a person works at something without ever consulting God about what one is doing and for what purpose one should be doing it, one shows very little or no interest in whether one is serving God, and, therefore, it is very likely that one is working for another master.

Returning to the list above and the situation in the previous paragraph, we understand that it is worth noting here that **there is also no way for a person to make a conciliation or partial compensation of attitudes to try to serve God and the other lord called riches simultaneously.**

For instance, a person may claim to be dedicating oneself to farm work to get rich, but to try to compensate for one's desire for wealth, one may promise to give a portion of one's earnings to God. This compensation, however, is impossible to make or God does not accept it because they express an attempt to divide services to two masters or lords.

Sacrifices and offerings called by some as specials, firstfruits, or even tithes can never compensate for the “non-obedience” or “non-service” of an individual to the will of God, for the central matter is not in the offerings or sacrifices, but who or what is the “lord” one is following or to whom or what one renders obedience, remembering here again that the gift of God cannot be purchased with riches or money.

Offerings, sacrifices, and tithes can never compensate for and conciliate the evil that a person does to oneself and others by not consulting the Lord's direction for one's life or walking outside the will of God.

The Lord does not want the sacrifices that people themselves want to offer or try to offer according to their own understanding. Instead, the Lord wants them to follow or practice the heavenly will for their lives, which was also demonstrated in the coming of Christ in the flesh into the world or as the Son of Man, as exemplified below:

1 Samuel 15: 22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

23(a) For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."

Hebrews 10: 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me.

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.

7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the volume of the book it is written of Me) To do Your will, O God.'"

8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law),

9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

And why does the Lord want people to know and do His will? To impose Himself as God over the creature?

The answer, of course, is no! On the contrary, the Lord wants people to walk in His will because in it is what will do them good for the present and, above all, for eternal life, plus the fact that it also contains the ways to provide for all other needs of personal life and for the farm (profession, work, etc.) to which the Lord calls an individual to perform one's activities.

Only in the will of the Lord can a person find food or provision that endures for eternity and that is increased by God's care also for the natural provisions that are necessary to live and walk in the will of the Eternal Lord.

John 6: 27 "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

John 4: 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

We also remember here that the instruction or the word of the Lord is not restricted to the Scriptures or the Bible, but also encompasses the living word that the Lord utters to each individual in the most diverse moments of one's life in line with His Written Word.

It is through His written word, but also by His living and personalized word, that God is willing to instruct each individual about His will. (An aspect addressed more widely in the themes The Letter or Life, Knowing about God or Knowing God, The Core Principle of Life for a Christian, The Law of Understanding, and The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

Thus, **since there can only be one “lord or master” from whom a person takes instructions for one's life as a whole, there is no way to “serve God's will” and to “serve riches” at the same time.**

The Lord Jesus Christ says:

*John 14: 6 **Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”***

*John 15: 5 **“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”***

Whom, then, do you want to serve? To whom do you lend your ears to hear instructions for life? To whose instructions do you obey and serve?

In this way, regarding the set of riches and treasures also called “mammonas or mammon,” it is still interesting to observe that it is possible to give it a certain type of life, for it has the potential to demand attention and, if allowed, it also starts to demand submission and obedience to it.

In other words, the Lord Jesus teaches us that it is not possible to be submissive and obedient to the requirements of the set of riches and to God simultaneously, and that there is no way that can conciliate or match the service to both.

Therefore, after seeing Christ's firm and explicit statement about the impossibility of serving two masters, as a second set of aspects of choosing who or what someone wants to serve, we also understand that it is highly necessary to advance toward the understanding of some points concerning the discernment of when it is God or when it is riches that are motivating the action of serving.

And for this, if we return to the last text mentioned above, we can notice that the Lord Jesus Christ has already told us how we can discern what comes and what does not come from the heavenly kingdom, telling us: **“He who abides in me and I in him.”**

So, without abiding in Christ and without Christ dwelling as Lord in the Christian, the task of understanding God's will becomes an effort with an unattainable end, applying this also to the subject of the relationship with the set of treasures and riches.

That is, if someone has one's heart set on the riches of the world, one does not have one's heart set on Christ, for ***either one will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.***

In His extremely direct or objective words, the Son of God, the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace, instructs us, then, that in addition to not being possible to serve God and simultaneously the set of riches, the service to God and the services to riches are antagonistic and opposed to each other or that surrendering to the service of one will automatically cause annoyance or repulse towards serving the other and vice versa. Render service to one will automatically cause devotion to one and contempt for the other.

Some people claim they want to get rich or intend to devote themselves first to riches to accumulate a certain amount and then serve God with these riches. However, the Lord Jesus Christ says that this is not possible because, in this way, it is the people who are determining the way to try to reach the will of God, forgetting the fact or despising the fact that Christ is the Only Way for a person to come to God and that riches cannot pave this kind of path.

God does not ask people to present themselves to Him with riches and goods, as if the Lord needed them, just as He does not ask people to present themselves to Him with the works done in the strength of their flesh. What God asks of people, and does not reject, is that they first present themselves willing to be instructed by God and to follow His will, whether there are more or less natural riches involved in what they are called to accomplish.

*Psalms 51: 17 **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart; These, O God, You will not despise.***

And why did the Pharisees, King Herod, and all his guards despise and ridicule the Lord Jesus Christ, as we saw earlier about the attitude of despising or hating the things of the heavenly kingdom?

Many people despised, ridiculed, hated, or were unwilling to serve the Lord because Christ was not covetous like them and because the Pharisees and Herod served riches, whose action has the effect of contempt for the Lord.

*Luke 16: 14 **Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.***

Thus, serving God increases love for the Lord, but also increases rejection of attachment to or serving the riches of the world. On the other hand, devotion to the wealth of the world increases the “love of money” and the opposition to God and everything that comes from the heavenly kingdom, even if some, with their words and actions, try to dissimulate or hide their annoyance towards the Lord.

The one who surrenders oneself to the service of the set of riches will come to love them more and more and will become more and more disgusted with the genuine will

of God. The one who surrenders oneself to serving the set of wealth will become more and more devoted to it and, at the same time, will increasingly despise serving God or living and walking in the will of the Lord.

Nevertheless, the very positive and encouraging aspect is that the opposite is also true. That is, those who adopt the posture of having God as their Lord will also grow in the love of God and will start to hate more the vile demands that serving riches wants to impose on them.

The one who chooses in practical life to have God as the Lord will also increasingly become devoted (godly) to God and, simultaneously, will despise more the demands that the set of riches presents to be served.

Therefore, the aspects involved in this scenario of serving one or another “lord” are very expressive and can generate strong tensions between them. And if in the same house or region, there are people who are, individually, serving different masters, the tensions and annoyances between them may also manifest themselves very expressively.

*2 Timothy 3: 12 **Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.***

*John 15: 20 **"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."***

Returning at this point to the matter of serving one or the other “lord,” also for the purpose of discerning the will of God, **we can note in the words of Christ that it is not enough for a person to want to be partially godly (devotion of the heart) to God and partially devoted to the set of riches that one possesses in the world or that one aspires to possess, for either a “lord” will assign him or her the way and the instructions to walk or the other “master” will designate another path and the instructions to walk in it.**

And “in Christ Jesus,” people are not called to live and walk in two distinct and opposite paths, just as they are not called to try to stand on two different and incompatible foundations.

A Christian can only serve God properly by being “in Christ,” being able to use the riches that God grants him or her also in the way the Lord directs him or her to make use of them and without subjecting oneself to serving the riches or wanting to have them first to then start one's devotion to God.

The first service of a Christian is always faith in the Lord and fellowship with Christ and His instruction or word. Aspects that God offers not for a price and grants not for money, but by grace, through faith in Him, for if the possibility of devotion to God or a life of godliness were subject to the size of a person's riches, one would be subject to the effects of one's set of riches and not to God.

Given this, if a person is not willing to love God and walk according to the Lord's instructions when one has few or even minimal resources, one also will not have it when one has many resources, no matter how much one declares that one will do if one will come to have abundant riches.

Luke 16: 10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much."

Therefore, if a person has little riches in one's hands, one is called to live and walk in the will of God even with the little riches one has. And if a person has a lot of riches in one's hands, one is also called to do the will of God, for having riches is no justification for a person not to be equally dependent on and needy of God, as if through riches one could determine the paths of one's life.

Material riches come and go, but God abides forever, just as the one who does the will of God remains forever.

1 Timothy 6: 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

1 John 2: 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Moreover, **people may call God and Jesus Christ "Lord" repeatedly, but if they do not do His will because they think they have little or many riches, they are not really serving the Lord, for when they believe that riches define serving or not serving God, they express their dependence on earthly things or riches and not on God.**

Matthew 7: 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Said still in another way, **the set of riches that God grants to a person should always be seen only as a servant of the Christian for him or her to serve God in His good, perfect, and acceptable will. And a Christian should never allow the "servant of riches" to rise to the point of being the master or lord of one's life.**

Thus, continuing still with the second set of aspects related to the choice of who or what someone wants to serve, we believe it is very relevant to highlight here **the sequence or order of positions that a Christian is called to establish in one's heart to serve God and discern what is His will, namely:**

- ⇒ 1st) **Choosing God as one's exclusive Lord or whom one always wants to serve;**
- ⇒ 2nd) **To remain continually in fellowship with Christ;**
- ⇒ 3rd) **To be attentive to the teaching and instruction that Christ shares with him or her through fellowship with the Lord;**
- ⇒ 4th) **Looking at the material or natural riches, or always considering them, from the perspective of being only tools or helping aspects to live and walk in the will of the Lord for one's life.**

The Lord blesses and rejoices with individuals who wait in Him, who relate to Him, whose heart is willing to serve Him, and who have riches as tools of help and not as the “lord” of their lives.

On the other hand, when a person allows riches to grow to the level where one serves them or allows them to exercise decisional and instructional lordship in one's heart, the sequence of how one is called to live and walk is reversed, and so, automatically, one comes to despise walking in the will of the Lord.

The sequence of instruction in serving God, then, is not (1) choosing to serve riches, (2) seeking instructions on how to enrich or protect riches, and (3) seeking to serve God in the spare time or trying to make up or compensate, through offerings, sacrifices, or tithes that the Lord never required of Christians, for not serving God.

In addition, wanting God to accept a sequence of instruction contrary to the order of what is according to His will, or where someone first needs to obtain riches to be later able to serve God, would also imply saying that the Lord Himself would have to be subject to having to prosper a person's earthly riches so that later one could find prosperity also according to the heavenly kingdom. Something that is certainly not true, starting with the example of the criminal who was saved despite being in a deplorable condition on the cross next to our Lord also crucified on Mount Calvary.

Even though Christ was crucified and placed in a condition of complete contempt and misery before all men, materially speaking, and even though the criminal beside the Lord was materially in a deplorable condition similar to that of Christ, nothing in this scenario could prevent Christ offering the rich mercies of God and the salvation of eternal life to the criminal who was about to die to the present world.

Apart from Christ, nothing and no one, and no human or earthly wealth, need to be placed between God and the person to whom salvation is offered. And this is an essential part of the truth that God wants everyone to know and that should be repeated as testimony at all times when it is opportune to do so.

- 1 Timothy 2: 3* **For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,**
4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Recalling here also the Law of Moses, what was a crucial problem with it and because of which it also needed to be removed after Christ fulfilled it in order to rescue those who were under the bondage of this law?

One of the central problems of the Law of Moses is that its sequence of life instruction, to which those who adhered to it were subject, was not a direct relationship with God but an indirect one. It was a proposition where people tried, without ever succeeding, to follow the sequence of instruction for a blessed life in which the law and its propositions of works were placed between God and people.

By asking for a law of external conduct to attain life according to the kingdom of God, people placed the law they asked for as a covering over them instead of direct access to the Lord. A covering that was never sufficient to lead them to the kind of life available to them in the Lord because when the individuals of the people asked for ministers (priests and Levites) and still other material things as mediators between them and God, the very people chose to follow the path with impediments to their relationship with the Lord. And similarly to the Law of Moses, it may also happen with the set of riches that exist in the present world.

The Lord Jesus Christ also came into the world to fulfill the Law of Moses, but this, with the purpose of repealing it in order to take people out of the yoke (of bondage) of this Law. Christ came to free people from subjection to the Old Covenant law so that nothing else but God takes the place of “lord” in their lives, which also includes any kind of riches that are in the world.

In a similar way regarding the Law of Moses, the Lord Jesus gives us an explicit instruction that it is not possible for a Christian to place oneself as a servant of riches and still want to have a relationship of fellowship and serve God together with serving riches.

Therefore, **the Christian is called to walk in the Law of Christ continually, the law of freedom in God and personal and direct access to God.** (Aspects widely exposed in the theme The Gospel of the Righteousness of God and The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

*Romans 3: 19 **Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***

*Romans 6: 14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.***

*Romans 7: 6 **But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.***

The Christian's primary service to God is always the maintenance of a direct relationship between God and the Christian, a child and the Heavenly Father, or a redeemed and saved person and one's Savior and Lord.

God is not subject to created things in order to relate through them to His children. And also for this reason, the instruction to them is to submit themselves in everything first and directly to the Lord Himself.

*James 4: 7 **Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.***

*1 Peter 5: 6 **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,**
7 **casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.***

At this point, yet as a third set of aspects related to serving God or riches, another example that we can see in the world about the attempt to invert serving God or riches includes even many people who think they see or perceive the need to doing what they call Christian work and to set up enterprises to raise funds and wealth for the so-called works of God, but who do not even ask God if this is indeed the Lord's will for them.

Many people even have a high disposition or are very intense in raising money and resources under the justification that with them, they will be able to serve God, but who, at the same time, have no disposition to seek God, His kingdom, and His righteousness with the same intensity with which they want to serve "their projects," thus also becoming servants or slaves of the objectives of obtaining resources for their own works instead of having the aim of serving the Lord above all.

In the Scriptures, the Lord teaches us about the importance and necessity of God's work being carried out on Earth also with the cooperation of His children. However, He does not instigate people to seek an inverted order of lordship where His children determine how, when, and with what resources they should carry out these works, as if God expected that Christians, by themselves and dissociated from the exclusive, living, and continuous Lordship of Christ, should try, by their own understandings, to accomplish what they think needs to be accomplished and in the way they understand it should be performed.

When people seek to do and raise funds for what they want to do for God, it may even happen that they have a zeal for God, but this, without proper understanding coming from the Lord, as mentioned below:

*Romans 10: 2 **For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.***

And when the Lord Jesus Christ said that the harvest was truly plentiful, what did He tell His listeners to do first, according to the text below?

*Matthew 9: 37 **Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.
38 **Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to (or for Him) send out laborers into His harvest."*****

In this last sense, it is impressive to observe in the world the number of people who “call themselves” workers in the harvest that belongs to the Lord because they do not read or despise the text of the second verse above, which instructs them to “pray to God for workers of His harvest.”

When speaking of the plentiful harvest, the Lord Jesus Christ did not tell His disciples to go to the field to begin the harvest. The Lord Jesus Christ first said that it is up to the Lord of the harvest to send to it who He understands is ready to do this work or who He understands should be sent to carry out the harvest. So, also concerning this point, it is to the Lord of the harvest that a Christian should address first, for it is from God that the direction, the time, the way, and the instruction about the resources come so that one can properly go to the field to carry out the harvest.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in fact, wanted to awaken the hearts of the disciples to the “extreme relevance of harvest time,” but so that this awareness of urgency would first lead them to seek the Lord of the harvest and so that they would receive instructions from Him on how to act, as well as what resources they should count on to carry out what they would be instructed from Heaven.

In due time, the Lord did not accept that the works-based Law of Moses would continue to get in the way of His primacy or preeminence over those who want to serve Him. And similarly, He also does not accept that so-called Christian works compete with His sovereignty in the instructions for all the actions of those who are faithful to Him.

Neither riches, law, works, nor other people have a God-given vocation to “lordship” over people's relationship with God, but many people repeatedly attempt to ascribe power to created things to exercise lordship over them.

Therefore, **either one serves God, and that first, or one serves the law, works (even those called Christian), riches to do these works, or even other people.**

Yet in other words, **a Christian is called to be, in everything, first, or above all, a “God-driven or oriented” person and then a purpose-driven or oriented individual according to God's will, but never to be firstly a “purpose, works, or riches-driven or oriented” individual.**

Mention it yet in another way, **if a Christian aspires to be a purpose-driven person, one is called always to have one's first purpose oriented towards fellowship with God and knowledge of the will of one's Eternal Lord for one's life.**

Added to this, trying to place any aspect of the mere creation between God and people is an act of affront to the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and an attempt to avoid exclusive obedience and service to the One God, which may yet become an

attempt to compensate, with material riches, people's desire to walk in their own ways. The gift of God, however, is not acquired with earthly things.

Colossians 1: 18 ***And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.***
 19 ***For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,***
 20 ***and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.***
 21 ***And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled***
 22 ***in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight,***
 23 ***if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.***

At this point, it seems to us that a significant observation still fits here. That is, sometimes, when it is said that a Christian should not be subject to the law, works, and riches but to the will of God, some people ask if the Christian then should stand still or “do nothing” all day?

And the answer, of course, is “no”!

That is, **the Christian who hopes in the will of God will not be doing “nothing.” One will do the will of God, which begins by seeking fellowship with the Lord, His kingdom, and His righteousness, followed by living and walking in Christ or the Holy Spirit as instructed by the Lord.**

And on the other hand, may there, then, not also be times when a person is called by God to “do nothing” from an earthly point of view?

Surely there can be, but when a person waits on God for guidance, one is not really “doing nothing.” One is obeying the Lord's instruction to stay at His feet, this work being a good part that will never be taken away from him or her, which is reaffirmed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ when He visited the house of Martha and Mary and whose text we recall below:

Luke 10: 38 ***Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.***
 39 ***And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.***
 40 ***But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."***
 41 ***And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.***
 42 ***But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.***

For many, Marta would be an excellent model of dedication and service to God. It was she who hosted the Lord Jesus and not Mary. It was she who was tidying up the house and occupied or “***distracted with much serving***,” not Mary.

Nevertheless, Marta had a serious problem, she was not trusting in the Lord and was a servant of her concerns. She served the house (her farm and her riches) and could not stop so that she could pay attention to the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ, who ended up saying to her: “***Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.***”

From what the text indicates, Marta was dedicated, not lazy, or not lazy to work, for she herself said: “***Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?***”

Martha's problem, however, was that Christ was not her “lord” in her practical activities or the Lord she served. Instead, Martha's “lord” was the house, her concepts of affairs in the world, or her riches.

While Mary “served the Lord sitting at His feet,” Martha “served other lords” despite having the Lord Jesus in her house and very close to her, showing us the Lord that it is not possible to “serve two Lords” not even having both under the same roof.

Returning here again to an earlier question, is the Christian's service, then, to stay only at the Lord's feet, as Mary did?

No, that's not it, either. **The Christian remains at the Lord's feet until instructed by Him. And once instructed by the Lord, one will accomplish, through the same Lord and being in the Lord, what the Lord oriented him or her to do. That is, one lives and walks as instructed by the Lord in every moment of life.**

On the other hand, **those who serve other masters are annoyed with the Lord Jesus and also with those who indeed serve God, just as Martha was upset with the Lord and Mary.**

And is not this precisely what the Lord Jesus Christ said about serving God or riches?

***for either he will hate the one and love the other,
or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.***

Before the Lord, Martha was annoyed with Mary, but if we look more closely at the narrative, we can see that, in reality, she was also upset with the Lord Jesus or especially with Christ, for she wanted Him to recognize the service she was doing and thus command Mary to do what she was doing. However, Martha's service was not for the Lord Jesus, but for the many services and concerns with which she was occupied.

Mary indeed “devoted herself” to the Lord Jesus Christ, and for this, Martha despised Him. Martha had the Lord in her house, but she considered the cares of life more important than serving Christ or her serving Christ more important than being served and instructed by the Eternal Lord.

And as simply as in the facts reported in this story of Martha and Mary, a person may live day by day serving God or serving “mammon” (which expresses the set of one's goods and the tasks that this requires). Highlighting, however, once again, that choosing to serve both together is impossible.

Therefore, **the Christian is called to break the cycle of serving the riches that crave more riches, the work for the sake of work, the works to be worthy of God's favor, the work focused on the food that perishes, and so on, bearing in mind that what breaks this vicious cycle is practical and real love and devotion first and foremost to God.**

And this certainly encompasses quieting down at the Lord's feet at the appropriate time, trusting that He will also grant His precious instructions and call each of His children to the services that are for the good of the life of the one who comes close to Him.

The yoke of riches, the yoke of the Law of Moses, and the yoke of works as masters of one's life are very hard and not light, but above all this, the estrangement of people from the true Lord of their lives is one of the most expensive aspects charged by these yokes.

So, when the Lord Jesus Christ teaches people that they cannot serve two masters, He does not do it to admonish them to turn to God alone so that the Lord may assign them more and more burdensome services. On the contrary, He does it so that they can throw off the arduous yoke of creation's propositions and find, in Him, relief, teaching, and appropriate practical actions that also grant them rest for their souls.

Matthew 11: 27 ***"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.***

28 ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

29 ***Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

30 ***For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

There are times when all things and other people need to be laid aside to sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Heavenly Father because, for every purpose, there is a proper time or there is an appropriate time to be used to move forward in a particular purpose or to accomplish it.

Matthew 6: 6 ***"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."***

And if a person is to wait for all of life's demands, including riches, to be resolved to only then “separate time for God” amid one's various activities,

this may never actually happen, as there is always a concern or care of life to be taken care of, a delight calling to be enjoyed, or a fascination of riches demanding to be met.

If a person waits for all of life's demands, including riches, to be resolved before “setting aside time for God” and for the growth of the Lord's word in one's life, the delay because of getting involved primarily in so many other activities may become one of the biggest or most active thorns that work to choke this word in one's heart.

Martha did not listen carefully to what the Lord Jesus had to say to her in her own home. Mary yes. And for this reason, the words that the Lord spoke to Mary also express the good part that she chose and that could no longer be taken from her. The house, goods, and the many tasks of life pass away, but never the word of the Lord.

Psalms 127: 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

2 It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.

Matthew 24: 35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

God would not ask His loved ones anything that was not for their good. When the Lord says that it is good to hear His instructions, it is because it is actually good for those who do so, to the point that God also gives them rest and proper sleep, which are also benefits for life in the present world.

Psalms 91: 1 He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide (or rest) under the shadow of the Almighty.

Nevertheless, when a person insists that “one needs to sort everything out and take care of everything one has,” even under the pretense of obtaining enough resources to serve God, one is saying that taking care of things does not indeed depend on God. And so, the person is subject to being a servant (slave) of what one has, what one does, and what one wants to achieve.

God gives us things so that we may have them as a consequence of fellowship with Him and to serve as a help to practice what the Lord calls us to do, and not that things have us and that we become subject to the lordship of riches.

An essential aspect that a Christian should never consider losing in one's life is the Lordship of God in one's heart, which cannot be replaced by anyone, by any work, and by any wealth that there is in the world. However, it is precisely this aspect that the service to riches wants to achieve in order to distance people from the love of God.

We also remember here that a more specific perspective on Marta and Mary regarding works and services is also described in the theme Works, Labors, and Services.

Therefore, given what we have seen in this topic so far, as a fourth set of aspects related to serving God or serving riches, we fall back again on the text of Romans 1, in which **the basis of the problems of human beings is associated with depreciating God as the One God and Lord because of the attempts of raising the created things to the stature of God or a “god” or “lord.”**

In each person's life, there is a throne, which, however, was created with the characteristic of being able to receive only one “lord” or “god” for the various moments of life. And although God's call for people to establish the “lord” on this throne is for them to incline or voluntarily surrender to the Lordship of the One who is the author of all life, people can give way to other aspects that want to reign in their lives, such as their fleshly desires and the deceitfulness of the riches of the world.

Nevertheless, **the attempt to place oneself on the throne or to place other aspects of the creation as the “lord” over the heart, including riches, as we saw earlier, already enters the sphere of what the Scriptures call idolatry, which, in turn, encompasses placing any person, object, law, wealth, or powers of darkness in the position that is pertinent exclusively to the Creator of Heaven and Earth.**

Observing, then, the position that serving riches aims to reach, it is not to be impressed by the word *hate* that the Lord Jesus Christ used to refer to the impossibility of serving two masters or lords.

The expression *to become upset* used in Portuguese, for example, is actually a mild word when compared with its original meaning and other translations such as the English and Martin Luther's German translations.

The expression *to become annoyed or upset* used in some languages, but expressed by the word *to hate* in others, is thus presented in the commentaries associated in the Online Bible with Strong's lexicon:

Miseo:

- 1) ***From a primary “misos,” hate;***
- 2) ***To hate, pursue with hatred, detest;***
- 3) ***To be hated, deteste.***

In this way, **knowing that “serving riches” militates for a person to no longer “serve God” or to no longer have a life aligned with the will of the Lord is something that should arouse annoyance due to the appeal that there is regarding serving riches. And this, for a Christian to take a firm stand against or resist these kinds of propositions just as one should resist the propositions made by sin, knowing that both are hateful and deserving of contempt.**

The appeal to serve earthly things and then try to serve God is, therefore, deserving of contempt because it despises the Lord Himself, going even so far as to want to make a person start giving orders to God and trying to lord over the Lord.

Returning to the story of Martha and Mary, where Martha showed herself so helpful and dedicated, we can see that Martha's annoyance reached the point where she rebuked the Lord Jesus Christ, her Eternal Creator. And this not being enough, Martha grew in her zeal for the things of the house to the point where she sought to make the Lord Jesus her servant by requiring Him to command her sister to do what she, Martha, wanted Mary to do.

Thus, when people subject themselves to the service of other lords in opposition to the Eternal God, they may advance to the point where they want to determine that the Eternal God serves them with resources and people so that they may continue to serve their gods and lords.

*Luke 10: 40 **But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell (or command) her to help me."***

Given this, we can see that while some people think they can serve riches and God, the "lord riches" does not withdraw, is not intimidated, and does not refrain from opposing or causing hatred for the Eternal Lord.

In the Scriptures, we may easily see, then, that people who do not submit to the Lord also try to reverse the order of their lordship, trying to demand what the Eternal Lord should do for them and not asking Him to instruct them in His eternal will. And so, they also do not realize that in this way, they do not actually invoke Christ as Lord or "pray in the name of Jesus," but do their most diverse activities and even their prayers in the name of their own interests, although they often even end their prayers by saying that they do them "in the name of the Lord."

Seeing this last set of points still under the aspect of the term *friendship*, the Lord teaches us that Christians are called to live and walk according to the will of God and to use the things that God gives them according to this will, but not to the point of becoming friends with earthly things.

Friendship is practiced first with God and then with people in a sober and prudent measure as indicated by God. However, friendship is not an aspect to be practiced towards the things or the riches of the world, as these may increasingly require dedicated service to them.

No person should forget that "man's (or human being's) best friend" is always the Lord Jesus Christ, not other people, things, or animals.

*Proverbs 18: 24(b) ... **But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.***

*James 4: 4 **Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.***
*5 **Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?***

*Romans 8: 6 **For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.***
7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.
 ...
9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Similarly also to the aspect of surrendering the heart to the Lord and friendship with God, and remembering that to worship the Lord is to surrender before Him to receive from Him the instruction to carry out His will, we return here to the aspect that the one who loves God also serves or worships the Lord in Spirit and Truth and allows one's life to be guided by the Holy Spirit, for worshiping the Lord is synonymous with serving Him according to the Lord's will in the most diverse areas of life, as discussed at greater length in the theme Works, Labors, and Services.

Sometimes, a Christian may think that one's contribution in life is very small compared to the immense universe of things that are practiced on a daily basis in the world, but it certainly is not. If each Christian was aware that even in one's daily service one is carrying out a living worship of God if one does it under the Lord's instruction and not moved by the lordship of riches, people's lives would undoubtedly be surrounded by much less unrighteousness, disputes, cruelties, and evils that are required by serving that which opposes and despises serving the Eternal Lord.

Whoever loves God also loves to do His will, receiving, as a fruit of this practical love, the greatest reward that a person can receive from God, which is the presence of the Lord in one's heart forever and by which a Christian can also manifest oneself as light in the world.

*John 14: 23 **Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."***

*Matthew 5: 16 **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."***

Thus, **the basis of "serving God" is love and devotion to God, not love for the earthly riches that God can give.**

And to love God is not to love only what God has to give, but it is to love Him, who He is, or as He is, for God is as He is. And this will never change.

*James 1: 17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.***

And advancing still briefly to a fifth set of aspects related to serving God or serving riches, and considering that serving God implies not being moved by the demands of riches, but being moved by the direction of God, we see that it is evident once again that **serving God also implies not contributing to institutions or works that proclaim that with riches or offerings of wealth one can obtain the gift of God.**

Both those who give offerings and tithes and those who receive them, thinking that because of these actions God needs or is obliged to return material riches to them, do not serve God but themselves and the riches they want to have.

Therefore, whoever “gives” offerings to enrich or to support those who think like that, does not serve God and does not actually “give” something, but serves one's or others' desire to get rich, falling back to the point of having godliness as a goal of gain and greed. (A subject more widely discussed in the theme Another Gospel or A Different Gospel and the previous chapters of the current material on the precautions to be adopted regarding those who inappropriately want to commercialize the Word of God and the lives of those who fear the Lord).

Finally, to conclude this chapter, it seems to us that when the subject of serving God and His will without serving the riches of this world is brought up, also at this point the thought of doubt may again arise about the provision for those who serve the Lord from their hearts, such as: “But if I do the will of God and do not serve riches, how will I survive in the practical things of the Earth and everyday life?”

Nevertheless, also to this question, or similar ones, the Lord answers:

*2 Corinthians 5: 14 **For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;**
15 **and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.***

*Hebrews 6: 10 **For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.***

*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."***

*Colossians 3: 23 **And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,**
24 **knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.***

Thus, in all the above situations that are opposed to serving God, and if we remember once again the story of Martha and Mary, we can also notice that even in the face of many oppositions to serving Him, the Lord is meek and longsuffering with people with the intention that they may repent and again incline their hearts to HIM. The Lord was longsuffering and kind even when Martha wanted to subject Him so that He would also serve her riches or her house in the indirect sense of Him giving orders to Mary. In His love, then, the Lord taught Martha what truly is most precious in life.

Thanks be to God for His mercy and longsuffering to also rebuke and exhort us when we are unduly inclined to riches and neglect the Lord, and, above all, for so lovingly calling us back to such a precious fellowship with Him.

C11. The Riches of God

Before advancing to the last chapter of the current theme, we understand that it would still be appropriate to dedicate at least a few more specific considerations about “the riches of the kingdom of God,” in addition to the various mentions that have already been made to them throughout the other chapters.

The Scriptures explicitly warn those who fear God to be mindful of their relationship with natural riches and not to lay up their treasures on Earth. However, the same Scriptures also address even more fully the theme of the greatness of the endless eternal riches that are offered to them in God.

When the Lord warns human beings about cares and restrictions that they should also adopt in life concerning the riches of the Earth, He does not intend to impose punishments and privations of all sorts on them. On the contrary, when the Lord teaches about the temporality and the limited benefits that the riches of the Earth can provide, He does it so that people may be awakened that they need much more the riches that are lasting and whose limits are not restricted to material or transient life.

Although the Scriptures exhort people to be careful not to attach themselves inappropriately to the riches that are in the world, the same Scriptures also exhort people to seek intensely and with a fervent spirit the riches and treasures that are offered to them by God. Remembering here that concerning those who are *in Christ Jesus*, there is no distinction of races, peoples, languages, or other natural distinctions to be able to access what is available in the Lord of their lives.

Romans 10: 11 ***For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."***

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Throughout this theme, we have already seen that the Lord promises to supply the material needs of all those who live a life of trust in Him, but we have also seen that the Lord's greater purpose is to grant everyone His righteousness and the superior riches that are directly associated with Him and that never run out or can be shaken.

Proverbs 8: 18 ***Riches and honor are with me, Enduring riches and righteousness.***

Thus, when exhorting people not to attach themselves primarily to natural riches and not to place themselves as their servants, the Scriptures do not present the restrictive side more preponderantly, but they point out in an even more accentuated way the magnitudes of what all people, everywhere in the world, can achieve in God and His gifts.

On the other hand, learning and renewing the understanding about the riches of God requires humility before the Lord, just as it requires that the eyes of the

understanding be turned to God to be appropriately enlightened by the Lord, and not be turned primarily to what is material and transient.

*Proverbs 22: 4 **By humility and the fear of the LORD Are riches and honor and life.***

*Colossians 3: 1 **If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.***

*2 **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.***

*3 **For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***

*4 **When Christ who is our life appears (or will manifest Himself), then you also will appear (or be manifested) with Him in glory.***

And the knowledge of the riches that are in God also needs to be known according to the God of these riches and not only by merely human knowledge and understanding. And for this, the Lord Himself gave us the Holy Spirit to help us and to know what is freely given to us in God.

*Romans 11: 33 **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!***

*Romans 15: 13 **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

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*1 Corinthians 2: 6 **However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.***

*7 **But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,***
*8 **which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.***

*9 **But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."***

*10 **But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.***

*11 **For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.***

*12 **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.***

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

Therefore, **the possibility of a person being able to relate in the heart with the Holy Spirit is a gift or heavenly riches of immeasurable value that God offers and grants to all those who receive Christ as the Lord of their lives so that, through Him, they may be under a continual and increasing enlightening of the eyes of understanding about the other riches which are likewise available to them in the Lord.**

Through the riches of God's goodness and longsuffering, a person can receive salvation in Christ Jesus when one believes in Him and receives Him as Lord of one's life. However, this is only the beginning, for by receiving Christ, one also receives the rich gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in one's life to continue to have enlightened eyes to know countless other greatnesses and depths of one's riches in the Lord.

Paul also expresses what we have mentioned in the last paragraphs in the following ways:

Colossians 2: 1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,
2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,
3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Ephesians 1: 15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,
16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:
17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,
18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power
20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,
21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Colossians 1: 9 **For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;**
10 **that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**
11 **strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;**
12 **giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

Now, on the other hand, people who do not serve God and do not relate to the Holy Spirit end up not having an adequate understanding of the riches of the kingdom of God. And also because of this, they deprive themselves of them or even despise them and end up inappropriately attaching themselves to passing riches.

1 Corinthians 2: 14 **But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**

The values of God's riches are not understandable by the mere natural mind, for the knowledge and understanding of them are only given to a person if one allows the Spirit of the Lord to open the eyes of one's understanding and enlighten them with heavenly truths.

Thus, **only by being in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, can a Christian experience the riches of understanding and wisdom to harmonize or adjust one's relationship with all other riches and to understand the proper relationship with them for a profitable end and according to God's will.**

In life in God, learned increasingly through fellowship with the Lord, the Christian can realize that there are riches in the Lord that are precedent for adequately understanding other riches and having the wisdom to relate to them.

In addition to being the expression of God's salvation offered by the Heavenly Father to all people, Christ is even greater than salvation itself and other riches, for it is He who sustains everything with the word of His power. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the greatest riches a person can receive from the Heavenly Father.

It is in Christ Jesus that God supplies all the needs of those who believe in Him, and it is in Christ Jesus that God gives us the Holy Spirit so that we may know Christ Himself more profoundly and, through His glory, also the Heavenly Father or the Father of Lights, from whom comes every good gift and every perfect gift.

Philippians 4: 19 **And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**

Colossians 2: 2 ... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,
 3 *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Therefore, it is very challenging to try to describe, in human terms, the riches that God gives us *in Christ Jesus*, as no matter how much someone tries to describe them, they are offered to people to be unveiled and experienced even more widely by each Christian's fellowship with Christ.

Given this, God shows us that the *riches of the full assurance of understanding* are first to understand that all the wisdom needed by the Christian is given to him or her *in Christ* and that experiencing the living and daily relationship with Christ is more important than merely having some theoretical information about the greatness of Christ.

The information that *in Christ Jesus* are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that precede understanding and the wisdom to know how to relate appropriately to the other riches is not information that was revealed by God to humanity for people only to contemplate and admire, but to experience it in a lively and continuous way in their lives so as not to incur the problem that the Lord Jesus Himself narrated in the following words:

John 5: 39 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.
 40 *But you are not willing to come (personally and directly) to Me that you may have life.*"

God's riches are just not comparable with any earthly values. This is also why they are so challenging to be understood by the human mind that is not instructed by the Spirit of the Lord, but which, on the other hand, become more and more known by those who receive Christ Jesus and His Spirit in their hearts.

Galatians 4: 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.
 4 *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,*
 5 *to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*
 6 *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*
 7 *Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

How can anyone understand with a mere natural mind how much it is worth, for example, to have hope in the present life and to have a firm and sure hope also in the face of natural death?

How much is it worth to understand the forgiveness of sins regarding the bondage to sin, the condemnation of death, and the body of sin? And how much is forgiveness regarding God worth, to whom human beings have so intensely opposed?

How much is it worth to have the eyes of the understanding enlightened to comprehend that the life of the soul is not limited to earthly and passing matters and that there is an eternal life with the Lord available to all who receive what is offered to them through the Gospel of the Creator, of Christ, or the Kingdom of God?

How much is it worth for a person to be constituted as a child of God, heir of God, and joint heir with Christ?

And already as a child of God, how much is it worth for a person to be able to be guided into all truth by the Spirit of the Lord, whether in the bigger or minor aspects of one's life?

*Romans 8: 14 **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***

Observing, then, how much higher are the riches of the heavenly kingdom that God offers to His children and that there are not enough parameters on Earth to measure them, we may also see that the main focus concerning these riches, in reality, is not even necessarily try to know how much they are worth, but actually have them and experience them in one's personal life.

*1 John 5: 11 **And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.***

*12 **He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.***

*13 **These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.***

And because of the sublimity of God's riches, we can also understand more why the devil is so fiercely engaged in trying to blind people towards ***the riches of the full assurance of understanding*** that it is in the living relationship with Christ that an individual is also instructed about a proper relationship with other riches, for specifically against the Lord's very riches, the devil can do nothing and also has nothing worthy to offer in return.

As we mentioned in previous chapters, the objective of those who oppose the will of God is to unduly exalt the riches of the world so that people do not raise the eyes of their hearts to God, for when they turn to God, the perspective on natural life will

undoubtedly suffer adjustments in the graduation of its importance and corrections in its evaluations.

In a sense, perhaps we could say, then, that the part of the Lord's teaching in which He exhorts us about the possible undue or abusive relationships that a person may have with natural or worldly riches is like a warning for people not to look at them inappropriately so as not to succumb to their fascinations and always keep their heart's eyes on God to continually see riches according to the heavenly kingdom's understanding of them.

Ephesians 5: 14 **Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light."**

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Anyway, despite the importance and the need to know that there are many aspects in the world related to the fascination of riches, we would like, in this chapter, to highlight in a special way that the considerations about the riches of what is offered to us in God should occupy much more our time and attention, for it is through these riches that a person effectively advances into a living and appropriate relationship with the Lord to be instructed for all the other actions of one's life.

Philippians 4: 7 **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things.

Thus, we would like to draw attention here once again to how essential it is for a Christian to look first to the Lord, His kingdom, and the heavenly riches, a point widely described throughout all the themes of the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life.

Concluding, then, this chapter, and recalling some of the previous topics, we would like to mention once more that **all the riches of the glory of God to a Christian always have one and the same address as its starting point, which is the Lord Jesus Christ, and He in us and we in Him so that we are under a living and growing fellowship, protection, and instruction.**

Colossians 1: 27 **To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

C12. Generosity

A. The Sublimity of Generosity

A wide variety of subjects and topics were addressed in this material on The Christian and the Riches also because there are many riches, values attributed to them, and treasures in which people deposit riches and, mainly, their trust or their hearts.

Thus, although it is far from trying to exhaust the theme, the present material, on the one hand, has as one of its objectives to point out the diversities of facets that exist in this subject in reference. On the other hand, it aims mainly to serve as an aid to awaken people to seek God so that He may guide them in their most varied options and decisions related to the diversity of facets associated with riches in general.

It is through fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ that a person can receive specific guidance for one's own life choices also in the area of relationship with the diversity of riches and treasures. Considering that similar riches may have different effects for each person, there is no way to define pre-established rules of everything that a person should or should not receive and keep under one's care.

Some people, for instance, receive natural riches in their hands and do not make them their treasure, keeping their hearts trusting in God. Others, however, when faced with earthly riches, place inappropriate trust in the goods they possess, relegating their hearts to earthly treasures and not to the Lord.

As another example, some people use their professions and possessions to serve God and do good in the world, but there are also others who have their professions, needs, and personal desires for riches as their “masters.”

For this reason, only the Lord knows the depths of each heart and knows how to guide all people in the paths that are correct in the eyes of the Heavenly Father. The Lord knows all things, all intents, and scrutinizes the most intimate thoughts to offer the light and wisdom of the heavenly kingdom to all those who place their trust in Him.

In the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ can be found the hidden treasures of wisdom for the life of the Christian, applying this also to the most basic and practical aspects of how each individual should deal with the diversity around the theme of riches.

*Isaiah 48: 17 **Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go."***

*Psalms 23: 1 **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

And among the different characteristics of walking with the Lord also regarding the aspects related to riches, there is a very special aspect that we reserved to be seen in the final notes of this material, which is **generosity**.

We have already mentioned several times in this theme that **the Lord always wants the good of people, but also that among the many good and excellent**

things that He offers them, the Lord wants people to reach the best of the best, and among which, generosity is one of the points of life that fits among the aspects that receive particular emphasis in the Scriptures, as exemplified in the text below:

Acts 20: 35 "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

In the context of generosity, however, we understand that, initially, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has declared that giving is more blessed than receiving does not mean that a person should only act in the practice of giving.

When the Lord Jesus Christ said that it is more blessed to give than to receive, He is not saying that a person can cease to receive and proceed to give only.

Every human being needs to "receive." There is no way a person can live without "receiving."

No human being can only be a giver, for generosity is a quality or virtue that has its origin in the Lord Himself, from whom a person receives every good gift and every perfect gift that can be generously shared, thus exalting the sublimity of generosity also because of the source from which it comes.

*Psalms 116: 7 **Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.***

God is kind and giving. God is a constant giver and the source of every good and perfect gift. (An aspect discussed more widely in the theme about Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift and The Gospel of Grace).

Even when human beings became despicable and unworthy, the Lord continued to pour out His gifts and His love upon them, an aspect clearly and repeatedly described in the Scriptures, of which we exemplify a text once again below:

*Romans 5: 7 **For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.***

*8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***

*9 **Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.***

*10 **For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.***

*11 **And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.***

Despite people's opposition to the Eternal Creator, God did not impute the sins of human beings onto them, but, on the contrary, He sent His Beloved Son to make the only perfect and generous provision of forgiveness and remission of sinners from the yoke or body of their sins.

For this reason, no person remains estranged from fellowship with God because there is not available a generous, complete, and abundant provision of reconciliation with the Lord, but one remains apart by not knowing the heavenly generosity or by repeatedly choosing to reject God's generosity towards one's life.

Nevertheless, in addition to receiving God's immeasurably valuable salvation, a person may reach an even more blessed condition or perform an even more blessed practice than being a constant receiver. One may reach a condition where one also experiences the richness of what is even more sublime. That is, one receives what one needs from God, but one still goes beyond this stage and also becomes a giving individual who shares with or gives gifts to others.

Thus, **the most blessed condition is to go even beyond being an exclusively receiving recipient to being a receiving recipient to also give, share, and distribute generously.**

In other words, **generosity is an intrinsic characteristic of the heavenly kingdom. And the one who becomes a child of light, a child of God's kingdom, is also called to practice the conducts of the kingdom of light because they are an intrinsic part also of one's new condition of life in the Lord.**

*Ephesians 5: 8 **For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light***
*9 **(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),***
*10 **finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.***

As the Lord Jesus Christ declared, the generous person is even more blessed for practicing this characteristic of one's new nature in God, experiencing even more the prosperity in the Lord in the newness of life that is added to those who have received a new heart from the Heavenly Father.

*Proverbs 22: 9 **He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor.***

*Proverbs 11: 25 **The generous soul will be made rich (or will prosper), And he who waters will also be watered himself.***

Let us also note here that the prosperity promised to the generous is, first of all, the prosperity of one's soul or one's life, a point that has already been seen before, showing

us this, that, before God, it is necessary that the soul prospers and not only or necessarily the amounts of goods in other earthly areas, whose text we also recall below:

3 John 1: 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

In the world, there are several people who prosper materially, but who often also become impoverished in the soul, this not being the goal of prosperity coming from the heavenly kingdom.

In the following verses from the text of 3 John that were last quoted above, we can see, then, what are the conducts of the prosperous soul to which the author John makes reference first, as follows:

3 John 1: 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,

6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well,

7 because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.

8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

The prosperous soul is a soul that walks in the truth of God (walks in Christ and His instructions), walks in the love of the truth. And in this truth, this soul takes pleasure in being generous towards God, fellow believers in Christ, and even strangers so that they equally may come to the knowledge of Christ, who is the Truth and the Son of God who truly sets free those who believe in Him.

Therefore, in His infinite grace, God aims to grant His children not only to receive His love, but also to be participants, by living and walking in His truth, in proclaiming and sharing His eternal love.

The Lord wants His children to experience the greatness of His gifts, but also through them to experience the rich gift of cooperating with Him in announcing and spreading His love and His truth to other people in the world.

If a Christian offers oneself as a vessel for the Lord's use or presents oneself to serve the Lord, which is the practical expression of the worship of God, the Lord not only

grants His mercy for one's own life, but also invites the Christian to be a vessel of mercy and goodness to make known heavenly mercy and generosity to other people.

2 Timothy 2: 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

The receiving of mercy is indescribably excellent. But being able to share mercy is yet another addition to the condition of being blessed. And the Lord always wants the best of the best for all of His children.

For those who place themselves in God's hands to serve him according to the principles of His eternal truth, the Lord makes them, despite being fragile, vessels that receive immeasurable riches to be generously announced or distributed to other people.

Romans 6: 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

2 Corinthians 4: 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Thus, when a Christian makes Christ His great treasure where one places the trust and hope of one's heart, the Heavenly Father sends Christ Jesus to dwell in one's heart as the treasure and the main riches of one's life to benefit him or her eternally. However, God also does this so that the riches of the newness of life according to the heavenly kingdom may be manifested by those who have received it to other people in the world. And this, so that the glory of God may be presented also in this way to people who have not yet known or have not yet opened their hearts to receive heavenly love for them or who need to be helped by their fellow people through the heavenly generosity.

Knowing that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is His Body made up of people who have the work of the Lord on the cross of Calvary as the basis of their salvation and who remain united to the One and Sovereign Head of the Church, and that the Church is not institutions, associations, and constructions made by human hands, we can observe that Christians are also called to make known the generosity of God towards all human beings, as well as before principalities and powers even in the heavenly places, as we are taught in the following words written by Paul:

*Ephesians 3: 8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,
 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;
 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,
 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*

In Christ Jesus, the Christian is justified, redeemed, saved, and has one's soul restored in the Lord and to eternal salvation. And yet, in addition to all that is bestowed on a Christian in the Lord, the Christian is also called to generously announce or share with others various facets of the same generosity, love, and salvation of God that has been granted him or her from the heavenly kingdom, allowing this, that one may become a cooperator with the Father of Love and Father of Lights who extends such great salvation to all who believe in Him.

B. The Supreme Model of Generosity

After seeing that generosity is a condition of great sublimity that the Lord longs for His children to come to know and practice, we can also see that there are several aspects peculiar to the very practice of generosity that are highly necessary and relevant to be considered.

And as a first consideration, **we can say that the subject of generosity is closely associated with the theme of riches, for an action is only generous if a person gives something good to others or announces something helpful to others.**

No one is generous to other individuals when one gives, shares, or announces something that is not good or something that is deceitful to those toward whom one aims to practice generosity. Therefore, it is not appropriate that this type of individual is called generous, as the Lord teaches us through the prophet Isaiah, as follows:

Isaiah 32: 5 ***The foolish person will no longer be called generous, Nor the miser said to be bountiful;***

In a second consideration about generosity, **we may observe in practical life that there are many ways for people to manifest generosity**, which may be done through aids that involve material goods or help that involves actions of support, assistance, and the sharing of something that is not necessarily related to a material good.

In this variety of practices of generosity, we may also see that it may be the concession of something integral or partial, where a person may also grant something to others at cost or reduced price so that, in this way, one may help others in their needs.

Nevertheless, as a third consideration, **when we look at the example of God's generosity, we also see that His generosity more specifically refers to the practice of giving completely and freely what is offered or granted to people.**

And it is more related to this supreme model of generosity that we would like to continue focusing on this current topic since the Lord Jesus Christ declared that it is a more blessed thing to “give” than to receive.

As much as many people try to be generous with their fellow men, some of them are reluctant to the idea of effectively “giving” something “free of charge” to other individuals, under the allegation that if something is given freely, people do not value what is given or granted to them. However, it is precisely concerning “giving” that the Lord Jesus Christ also associates the expression ***“it is more blessed to give than to receive.”***

As much as in some situations it may indeed be wiser to give something to people for a reduced price and not give it completely free, it is essential that the Christian knows that **in the supreme model of the generosity of the Heavenly Father, one finds the model that effectively gives freely, not by price and not by reduced**

or partial price. One of the central reasons why the Lord is also the God of all grace.

While there are situations where a person may be generous with other individuals by giving them items at a reduced or partial price, there are situations where the Lord also wants His children to be generous by sharing entirely free what they have to give or announce, for this is the model that they also find in the Heavenly Father, in Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

There are several gifts that a Christian receives to share in generosity with other people and for which one should never receive payment in return or share them for a price, such as the gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit in one's life for the benefit of one's fellow believers in the Lord. (A subject addressed more widely in the theme Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift).

As much as many individuals claim that people do not value what they receive freely, there are many riches that can only be shared according to God's righteousness if they are also given entirely free of charge.

Yet in other words, regarding a series of gifts in particular, if a person does not announce or share them freely, one turns away from what is righteous to be done in the eyes of God and from the example that the Lord gives about Himself, as follows:

2 Corinthians 9: 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

Thus, one aspect to which a Christian should be very attentive to share it in generosity, according to the supreme model of free concession that one has demonstrated in God, is the sharing of the proclamation of the truths of the Gospel of the Lord.

Since the Lord Himself, who is the provider of all that is offered in the Gospel, does not offer His Gospel for a price, but gives it freely, much less should a Christian do this so that one does not find oneself among those or does not come to be equated with those who become intrepid in evil to the point of trying to trade with the word of God, with people's souls, and even with the lives of those they call brothers and sisters of faith, as seen more particularly and at the same time more broadly in previous chapters.

There are many services and products that people produce or offer to their fellow men and for which it is perfectly lawful to charge an adequate price, for the Scriptures themselves declare that the laborer is worthy of one's wages. However, no person is authorized to charge their fellow men for the salvation offered by God or for the gift of the Holy Spirit and His manifestations granted for the spiritual edification of one's fellow believers in the Lord.

If Simon, mentioned in previous chapters, was severely rebuked for wanting to buy for himself with money the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his heart, how reproachable is not anyone who wants to pass on to others for a price what is from heaven designated to be shared freely with all those who want to receive it?

Paul, an apostle of Christ, regarding serving God in proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord, declared:

*1 Corinthians 9: 18 **What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.***

Since God, in His supreme model of generosity, established that the heavenly riches associated with His Gospel should be granted to people not for a price, but rather freely, who is the human being or who are the people to say that what is given for free has no value or that people do not value what is given to them not for a price?

What of all that is truly good, and to which human beings have access, was not freely given to them first?

*1 Corinthians 4: 6 **Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.***
*7 **For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?***

As we mentioned earlier, it is essential to highlight that the source of generosity and riches is the Heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Christian has nothing eternal to offer from oneself since one was also redeemed, by the grace of God, from sin and the despicable state one was in like any other person.

From a merely natural point of view, the Christian is a fragile vessel like any other human vessel, and, in many cases, even more fragile, for God also chooses the weak things of the world to put to shame the strong. (According to 1 Corinthians 1: 26 to 31).

Therefore, **the Christian's generosity is not based on what one oneself can naturally offer people but on the riches of God that strengthen a Christian, through which one is called to distribute, share, or make known the goodness of the Lord towards people on Earth, but also to do so according to the supreme model of kindness that one finds in the Lord.**

Although helping people with material goods is an excellent practice in many cases, and a Christian is also called to do it according to the resources and different opportunities that are granted to him or her, we understand that it is also worth noting at this point that **in terms of sharing what should be shared freely, a Christian is called to dispense or be a steward of “the mysteries of God” as the Lord requires these mysteries to be shared.**

And to share the so-called “mysteries of God,” a Christian may not even need to have an abundance of material riches to bless others, for the proclamation of salvation and life in Christ is the greatest riches and mystery to be offered to the world and shared with others.

Let us recall below some texts that clarify some points about the so-called mysteries of God and what is the position of the stewards regarding them, texts concerning which we suggest once again special attention:

1 Corinthians 4: 1 **Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

1 Corinthians 2: 7 **But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ...**

Ephesians 1: 7 **In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**
8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,
9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,
10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him.
11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,
12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.
13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,
14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Colossians 1: 26 **... the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.**
27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 2: 2 **... that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, ...**

1 Timothy 3: 16 **And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.**

- 1 Peter 3: 14* **But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."**
- 15* **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;**
- 16* **having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.**
- 17* **For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**
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Thus, although it is good and proper for Christians to be generous to others through material riches in various situations, their participation in Christ's witness and support for God's Gospel to be known is even more important. And this, because when it comes to sharing material goods, even the people of the world do it, but sharing the proclamation of "Christ in us, the hope of glory," from a personal experience and in a free manner, is something that only genuine Christians know and can do.

In its living and walking in the grace of the Lord, the Church of Christ (that is, the people who individually believe in Christ and are connected with Him without mediators) is primarily called to make known "*the manifold wisdom of God*," which, in turn, is the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom. And to give testimony about Christ, Christians can do even under conditions where they themselves do not have plenty of material abundance and since they themselves received salvation by grace and not by price.

Whoever has Christ in one's heart is fortunate or rich even if one may be poor in the eyes of the world.

Revelation 2: 9(a) **"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)."**

Even under conditions of limited natural resources, many Christians can cooperate widely to make God's riches known, for the main riches a Christian is called to share is not according to the riches of the world, but according to the inexhaustible kingdom of God.

When a poor man has a need met by the grace of God, or gives glory to the Lord of one's life in all circumstances, one demonstrates the riches and goodness of God far more than the rich man who thinks he is self-sufficient and who has no heavenly riches to share, as we have seen previously and according to some texts that we remember below:

Proverbs 16: 8 **Better is a little with righteousness, Than vast revenues without justice.**

Psalms 37: 16 A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.

Jeremiah 9: 23 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;

24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

Given this, we may notice more widely how precious it is to know or understand that generosity is also expressed as a result of God's life in a person's heart, and that sharing the riches of the heavenly kingdom is the most central aspect in the practice of generosity even if a person cannot share material goods in abundance.

On the other hand, or since generosity or the free granting of gifts is a characteristic that exalts God and His kingdom, it also becomes one of the targets that the powers of darkness and the world subject to darkness most seek to denigrate and resist intensely and persistently.

The powers of darkness and the world subject to darkness insistently seek to disdain generosity in the most diverse ways. The powers of darkness despise or consider as an object of scorn and mockery all that is generously given. The darkness despises that which is "given freely for the good of people," for the powers of darkness have nothing good to offer, nor do they intend any good for people.

Since God offers His counsel or wisdom for free, if a person does not know to receive things for free or according to the generosity towards him or her, one will also restrict oneself from reaching the Lord's advice for one's life. And this is precisely one of the targets sought by the darkness for people who listen to them.

James 3: 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

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James 1: 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Thus, in cases where the powers of darkness succeed in blocking the understanding in people's hearts about generosity, both concerning

receiving and sharing gifts, they also succeed in keeping many of these people under blindness and oblivious to the knowledge of the riches of the glory of Christ.

Several people think that receiving something for free is a demonstration of weakness. In reality, however, the resistance to recognizing that there are many gifts that can only be received for free is what expresses a lack of wisdom and understanding even about the most basic aspects of how life works. A point that also because of this is considered in the Scriptures as blindness.

If we go back to the example where some people insinuate “that the advice offered for free is not good,” we may observe that this cogitation is entirely impracticable. That is, if all the counsels given “not for a price” were not good, every human being would have to throw away everything that parents taught them as children, for thousands of instructions that parents gave their children were given to them “for free” or by the “generosity” of parents towards their children.

Furthermore, the natural life that a person has at this moment is only given to him or her because of the living and present generosity of God at this very moment. Take away the present working of this generosity, and life is instantly gone.

Isaiah 42: 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, And spirit to those who walk on it: ...

Job 33: 4 The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

Isaiah 2: 22 Sever yourselves from such a man, Whose breath is in his nostrils; For of what account is he?

Therefore, **contrary to the positions of those who are opposed to what is given according to the generosity of God because they think that receiving something weakens them, God declares, and Paul confirms, that it is because of what is freely given that a person can be strong.**

*2 Corinthians 12: 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities (or weaknesses), that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Looking at it from yet another perspective, **if a council of God had to be paid for, there would not even be enough riches in the world to pay for it**, as we have also seen in previous chapters.

God does not charge for His advice and the breath of life He gives human beings because the Lord is Love and loves all people. And in turn, because He loves them, He is generous to them.

John 3: 16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

It is impossible for a world without generosity to survive.

God is constantly generous. And without His generosity, the universe would instantly stop.

Psalms 104: 24 O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions (or riches).

25 This great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great.

26 There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there.

27 These all wait for You, That You may give them their food in due season.

28 What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.

29 You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever; May the LORD rejoice in His works.

32 He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

Job 34: 14 If He should set His heart on it, If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath,

15 All flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust.

God's grace, or His generosity and goodness, sustains all life in Heaven and on Earth. And all heavenly good shared is given to human beings by heavenly kindness.

Considering yet on the last aspects exposed above, it is facilitated, then, once again, to understanding the reason why the powers of darkness so much aim to corrupt or defile people's knowledge of God's generosity, for God's very generosity can never be compromised and corrupted.

Jude 1: 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace

of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In all generations, there are individuals who want to introduce themselves among the people with the intention of transforming the grace of God into shame, into contempt, sometimes perversely saying that God, because of grace, does not see sin or sometimes corruptly saying that God's grace is not generous but must be earned by human works, by offerings of riches, or money.

If we ask, however, what is the work of human godliness that a newborn child has done for God that accredits this child to receive the breath of life? And, of course, the answer is: None.

Thus, **the essence of all life is surrounded by generosity.**

Nevertheless, **we have also seen that the one who serves riches will despise and act against God. Which, obviously, also includes opposition to the virtues of God, and among which generosity is also especially highlighted in everything that the Lord does for people's lives.**

When a person announces God's grace in a distorted way, one is trying to make generosity outrageous and disgusting so that one's greed or avarice is not highlighted and one is not challenged also to behave generously. And the greedy or avaricious person does not act generously even when one gives something to others, for what he says one gives to others, one gives it in the sense of charging some bargaining return in the sequence.

*Psalms 10: 3 **For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD.***

*Isaiah 1: 4 **Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.***

*Proverbs 23: 6 **Do not eat the bread of a miser, Nor desire his delicacies;**
7 **For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, But his heart is not with you.***

Therefore, **someone adopting the conduct of charging sacrifices of works, labors, earthly objects, offerings, and tithes in exchange for God's grace is a practice that aims to transform the understanding of God's grace or generosity into dissoluteness, offense, and a stumbling stone for many,** according to the text that we have already mentioned and repeat below:

- 2 Peter 2: 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.***
- 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.***
- 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.***
-

Many people see with contempt receiving something for free or giving something for free, not paying attention or not wanting to stick, however, to the fact that their dissolute and perverse practice regarding God's generosity is precisely the posture of not receiving or not sharing the Gospel of God according to the grace and generosity of the Lord. Those who despise the action of receiving or announcing the Gospel for free often do so to justify their evil acts by which they try to charge for the Gospel and make their followers their objects of commerce and perverse profit.

We have already seen that several dissimulators or false teachers are daring to the point of considering those who they claim to be “their fellow believers,” the “sons of God bought by the blood of Christ,” as objects of their commerce and their most varied and creative ways of plundering others' lives.

Acting in the sense of trying to twist the truth into a lie, generosity into obligations of works and sacrifices of material riches, or grace into commerce or trade is a lot of boldness in evil. However, dissolution or dissimulation is just like that. That is, it is audacious to render itself to evil because of the love of money, the fascination of riches, and for choosing earthly treasures for the heart instead of choosing God as the true and eternal treasure.

The so-called “libertine or destructive practices or ways,” mentioned by Peter, and which are opposed to the true grace and generosity of God, even though they may be presented adorned with fictitious or feigned words of wisdom or even humility, represent an expression of the *objective of destruction and shipwreck in ruin*, as we see below in the commentaries associated in the Online Bible with Strong's lexicon:

Destructive or libertine ways:

Apoleia, which, among other points, means:

- 1) Destroying, utter destruction;*
- 2) Act of destroying vessels;*
- 3) A perishing, ruin, destruction, for example, of money or even the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell.*

For human beings, the Gospel of God is the greatest riches existing at all times and in all places, but at the same time, it is also the most generous offer offered at all times and in all places. And for this reason, too, the Gospel is the object of so much opposition from those who do not love the generosity of the propagation of the Gospel of God according to heavenly grace.

God offers the unfathomable riches of His Gospel to all human beings, poor or rich, without distinction of race, culture, language, or location. However, God also offers His Gospel to everyone without any distinction of price, for it is only through personal faith in the Lord's grace that a person can have access to what the Lord has promised to give according to His generosity and according to His Gospel.

Whether for the rich or wealthy, whether for the poor or even the miserable, the Gospel of God is given equally to all “not for a price,” but by grace, through faith in Christ Jesus. We remember here, however, the warning declared by the Lord that the rich are more likely to trust in their riches than to set their hearts in the Lord.

Furthermore, we believe it is necessary to highlight here again the importance of not confusing generosity with the value of what is given through grace, for the Gospel of God, because it is freely given according to the goodness of God, is not ragged, poor, weak, of little value, and nor is it a cheap offering.

The Gospel of God is the offer that had the highest cost in the universe to be granted. It is the offer that had the price of the Son of God coming in the flesh into the world as the Son of Man and killed with all His blood shed in a death on a cross. And precisely because something so precious is offered by grace, it is also the greatest expression of generosity in the universe, something that the “destructive ways” resist accepting and propagating.

The fact that something perfect, priceless, excellent, and truly good is given or granted by grace exalts and ennobles even more what is being offered, but it also exalts and ennobles the Giver of the so high gift.

Thus, it is God that people mock, despise, and oppose when they try to belittle the proclamation, acceptance, and bestowal of the Gospel of God according to the generosity of the Lord.

Luke 16: 13 "No servant 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 (or the riches)."

When people try to assign a human price to the Gospel of God, they try to depreciate the understanding of the immeasurable generosity of the Lord. However, as the Gospel of God is a heavenly gift that cannot be acquired by money or any other natural or human riches, people who run after the Gospel through the resources of the Earth are always instigated to add sacrifice to sacrifice, offering to offering, tithe upon tithe, failing, however, to achieve anything they truly need for the true and eternal good of their souls.

Putting the previous paragraph in other words, we ask: For what value or set of values on Earth could someone buy something whose value exceeds the entire global set of values on Earth?

That is, the previous question is meaningless or rhetorical, showing us that this is also why **the Gospel of Christ is generously given, for it is priceless according to the resources that there are on Earth.**

In this way, when someone wants to impose an earthly price on the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, this is also when one is trying to denigrate what is immeasurable. And it is also in this way that one is trying to reduce it to an earthly measure, doing so, often, by the resistance of simply not recognizing God's generosity and goodness towards one's life.

Therefore, again, resisting God's generosity and goodness is compared to paths of destruction or shipwreck in ruin, as it expresses contempt for the only true, firm, and eternal help that all, without distinction, need.

*Romans 3: 21 **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,***
*22 **even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;***
*23 **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,***
*24 **being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ...***

Resisting God's generosity and goodness is an act of pride for the very destruction of the people who remain in it, for if an individual wants to reduce the Gospel of God to the price of earthly things, this cheapened gospel, which many insist on trying to create, will never be able to pay for a salvation that is eternal.

And if someone tries to depreciate the Gospel, by seeking to equate it to earthly prices, one is declaring with one's attitudes that the "gospel one preaches" will not, in the end, be able to save oneself or save those who have adhered to it. And this "type of gospel" that many preach is not the true Gospel but the so-called Another Gospel or A Different Gospel. (A subject addressed in more detail in a specific theme).

If a proposal or offer has an earthly price, it can only conquer things according to the earthly price, which, however, and if they last long, will subsist at the most until they are destroyed along with the present natural world. This is why Peter also warned Simon, who wanted to buy the gift of God, that his money was for the destruction of his life if he did not come to repent of wanting to obtain the gift of God through earthly riches.

And at this point, one might even think that the approach to the theme of the Christian and riches, and even more about generosity, perhaps should be milder and only speak of the virtues and wonders of God's riches and His generosity. However, this would not be honest and complete, for it is also necessary to know that God's generosity is very strongly resisted and fought for the purpose of corrupting people's understanding of it to, ultimately, keep people separated from the mercy, kindness, and grace of the Lord.

*Hebrews 12: 28 **Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.***

Additionally, something very valuable also has its value revealed by the opposition it suffers and by the desire that its opponents have to seek to belittle, steal, or destroy it because it annoys those who want to profit from their works done under darkness and not under the light of God.

Thus, the devil always seeks to oppose God's gifts to human beings, for God's gifts are given for the freedom of life of those who receive them. Liberty that the devil and those who serve themselves, according to their own understanding, do not want others to achieve and live.

The devil did not want the Lord Jesus Christ to give His life in generosity to free people subject to darkness.

The devil insistently tries to resist the gifts that truly deliver people, as shown by the Lord Jesus Christ also in the following text:

Matthew 16: 21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.
22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"
23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."
24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In this last text, it is very interesting to note that the Lord Jesus Christ was not telling His disciples to deny themselves because He wanted dominion over their lives, but He was telling them this because He, the Christ, was the only way for them to become free and find true newness of life.

That is, the disciples had nothing to offer Christ for the salvation of their souls. There was nothing in themselves, nor in the whole world, that could be given in exchange for the salvation of their souls, showing us once more that salvation and the newness of life according to the will of God cannot be purchased with earthly resources, but only be received through the love and grace of the Lord.

By instructing His disciples on how they could find life according to God's eternal purpose, the Lord Jesus Christ was not asking for people's lives as the resource, wealth, or price to obtain salvation. On the contrary, He was teaching people how vital it is to give up their lives apart from God to receive, by grace, the newness of life offered by God or the life bestowed in Spirit and Truth.

The Lord did not tell people to trade their old lives with God in exchange for a new one. Instead, He said that those who want to follow Him need to deny their lives in their old condition so that they can receive the new one.

Therefore, **nothing on Earth can be given in exchange for the newness of life in Christ, not even the very life of the individual who wants the novelty of life in God.**

Or yet, **the newness of life in Christ is a gift given wholly or entirely through the generosity of the Heavenly Father!**

No one has merit to receive the newness of life in Christ. No one can give anything in return for it. The novelty of life in the Lord is granted as a gift from God to those who believe in Him and receive the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus as an expression of the Lord's generosity.

*Romans 3: 23 ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is
in Christ Jesus, ...*

*John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him,
and the world did not know Him.*

11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

*12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become
children of God, to those who believe in His name:*

*13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the
will of man, but of God.*

*14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld
His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace
and truth.*

*15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of
whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He
was before me.'"*

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

In the face of all this, we can see then that one of the essential aspects of understanding the theme of generosity is the understanding that we have nothing to offer God in exchange for salvation, not even ourselves. And heavenly salvation was already provided by God in Christ Jesus long before we were even born. It was already appointed by the Lord from or even before the foundation of the world.

In other words, grace, goodness, salvation, generosity, and so many other gifts from God are offered to us long before we have even done something good towards God, but because God loved us first.

*Romans 5: 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that
while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

1 John 4: 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

1 John 3: 1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

And if not even our life is a bargaining chip to obtain the gift of salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, how much less, then, are not the other things or the riches of the world?

For this reason, **the Gospel of God is the Gospel that announces that an eternal, priceless, and immeasurable price has already been paid or that a superior and perfect sacrifice has been made once and for all so that the liberation and salvation of people could be carried out precisely by the generosity, grace, and goodness of God.**

The Gospel of God is the offer that announces and offers itself without the need for a set of useless rituals and offerings that try to achieve what they cannot achieve. And generosity itself is an aspect of the essence of the Gospel that, in turn, also has as its essence the righteousness already manifested in Christ Jesus through the grace of God towards all human beings.

Hebrews 7: 18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

...

22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. 23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing.

24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

Titus 2: 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ...

And if anyone still thinks that human works or riches are necessary to reach the righteousness and grace of God, we recall here once again that not even the broad system of sacrifices and offerings of the Law of Moses practiced for thousands of years could obtain the grace of God, a system that only led to the demonstration of what from the beginning was already announced by God about it. That is, the Lord's announcement that human offerings could not and never can acquire the eternal gift of God in Jesus Christ, one of the central reasons why this ancient system was also revoked. (According to Hebrews 7: 18 and 19 and 10: 1, and also widely discussed in the themes The Gospel of the Righteousness of God and The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

And if thousands of years of sacrifices, offerings, and tithes could not produce redemption and salvation of people from the yoke of sin, for it is not by these things that the favor of God and His righteousness are obtained, it is not now, after grace has already been revealed, that someone can do it through one's human riches or money, no matter how much one tries to sophisticate one's sacrifices, offerings, or tithes and adds the most varied promises to these “destructive practices.”

Therefore, **for those who want to exercise generosity and experience the condition that it is more blessed to give than to receive, it is crucial to understand the basic and fundamental aspects of God's generosity so as never to incline again or fall back into the sacrificial systems that seek “to purchase the generosity of God toward them,” and which, thus, oppose or resist the grace of the Lord.**

When a person becomes dissociated from the fundamental principles of God's grace and generosity, one does not understand that carrying out God's will is the result of knowing God and His goodness, it is the fruit of first receiving the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's life. And because of this, one is subject to mistakenly thinking that the accomplishment of the Lord's will could result from the efforts of the flesh to fulfill this will.

Once again: How much did a newborn pay to be born? What is the amount someone paid to receive the breath of life given by God? How much did anyone in the world pay for the Son of God to come into the world in the flesh and die on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice for him or her?

And if the Lord bestowed all natural life out of generosity and without demanding natural payments for it, why would God demand material and human things for spiritual life that cannot be purchased with a price or earthly things?

Given this, Paul still exhorts us that the kind of thinking that wants to associate price or human works with the grace of God is foolishness and vile fascination or enchantment.

*Galatians 3: 1 **O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?***

*2 **This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?***

*3 **Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?***

4 Have you suffered so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain?
5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Concluding, then, this topic, we highlight that the generosity of a Christian is a consequence of the life of Christ in this Christian. It is the fruit of the love of God, the heavenly kingdom in one's heart, and of listening to God's voice and instruction, and not the so-called generous sacrifices offered to try "to buy" God's favor.

John 6: 63 **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."**

Jeremiah 7: 22 **"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices."**

23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'

24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."

Hebrews 10: 5 **Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me."**

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure."

7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.'

God wants people to be generous from the eternal source of generosity and to bear witness to others what they first received from Him, through His grace, so that the Lord's generous glory may be known so that others too may come to know that they can receive it and how can they receive it.

It is the wisdom and heavenly understanding of the generosity that they first received in their lives by the grace of the Lord that God wants His children to make known among people, peoples, and nations.

To be generous according to God's generosity is to give and share as God shares, that is, by grace and not by price. And for those who do this, it can also be said that *it is more blessed to give than to receive*.

God wants people to be generous because they have received God's love and because they see in Him a holy, righteous, or upright way. God wants people to be generous because they are pleased with God, the Eternal

Creator of their lives, and because they love and appreciate His Eternal and unfathomable glory.

God wants people to live and walk in the truth because it is the truth. God wants people to live and walk in goodness because they choose what is right to be followed in life. The way in which they will also reap according to the righteousness that is in the Lord.

*3 John 1: 4 **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.***

Therefore, when the Scriptures teach us that the grace of God is the way for the gifts of the heavenly kingdom to be granted by the Lord to people, they are also teaching that the Lord's generosity or goodness is the supreme model or the way for the children of God to be likewise generous and to announce the riches of the heavenly kingdom to the world.

*Ephesians 5: 1 **Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.**
2 **And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.***

C. Precautions in the Practice of Generosity

God loves people. And for this reason, through His grace, kindness, and generosity, He offers to take care of them and guide them along the way of eternal life and according to the heavenly will, and not along the path of separation from fellowship with the Creator.

And even when some restrictions come from God to people who fear Him or when He does not give them everything they ask or desire, the Lord does it because He loves, protects, and grants them what is for their good. In several situations, even when there is a “seeming lack of generosity on God's part,” it can still be the act of God's generosity toward people so that they find repentance from the ways of deceit or greed and so that they return to the path of truth and life according to the heavenly kingdom, as exemplified below:

James 4: 2 ***You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.***

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Psalms 25: 8 ***Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.***

Great is God's longing to be generous to all, and there are no limits to God's resources to exercise generosity with abundance, as seen more objectively in the previous topic.

Nevertheless, even though God is willing to favor all and His generosity is offered to all people in general, many people in the world often find themselves in situations where even God's generosity needs to be severely restricted towards them.

Although it is God's longing to be abundantly generous to everyone, people countless times put themselves in situations that may hinder the manifestation of the Lord's generosity towards them.

For example, if an individual does not want God's generosity or resists it, God does not force that person to receive His generosity, the riches of the heavenly kingdom, or the newness of life that He offers according to the heavenly will, just as the Lord may withhold His gifts when a person insists on wanting to obtain generosity by attempting to purchase it through human works or worldly riches.

A person who says that one does not need anything from God or, on the other hand, says that one needs to earn God's favor and be worthy of receiving it through one's

efforts or sacrifices, thinks that one is rich and wealthy to the point of being able to “buy and bargain” with God. However, acting like this, one puts oneself in a position of pride, blindness, poverty, and nakedness before God. And even if one thinks one is not, one is unhappy and miserable in the eyes of the Lord for resisting His eternal generosity.

Revelation 3: 17 **"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing;' and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."**

The Lord, of course, exhorts people who are contrary to His generosity to come to repentance, for the very gift of Heaven that can lead a person to repentance is the goodness of the Lord. However, if an individual insists on not accepting the offer of heavenly life generously offered by God, the Lord will also not grant it to this person to the extent that He could because of the very choice that this particular individual has made.

Therefore, knowing the restrictive characteristics of God's generosity, in addition to learning about the giving characteristics of this same generosity, is also a crucial point for the Christian so that one oneself does not fall into a restrictive position before God, as well as for a Christian to be aware of how one also should proceed in the practice of generosity towards other people.

Thus, concerning the matter that God also calls His children to be generous or to practice generosity as He does, it also implies that Christians should carry out generosity by being attentive to people's postures regarding the acts of generosity offered to them.

Since God bestows or withholds various aspects of His gifts according to people's attitude towards His generosity, also God's children should follow the Lord's model of conduct and continually seek wisdom from God regarding being generous to others or regarding withholding what they could share with others.

Considering that the children of God are His fellow workers to make known the manifold wisdom of the Lord in the world, this also implies making known how the wisdom of God works both in the distribution of gifts and in the precautions and restrictions regarding the granting of gifts or riches.

Since the Lord announces the sharing of various gifts to people through people, God's stewards need God's wisdom to also work in line with God's direction. That is, if God would not give something directly to someone, a steward of God should not be unfaithful to God and give it anyway to one's fellow men.

Before the Lord, for example, even the parents are not always the ones who should determine all the gifts to be given to their children but should seek God's favor and counsel to do so. Parents are God's stewards regarding their children, and the Lord alone fully knows what is good for them. Parents are God's servants toward their children, not direct servants of their children. They are also not the “god” of their

children to determine what they should or should not have. Parents are fellow workers with God in their children's education, who are, above all, an inheritance of the Lord Himself.

So, if a child of God is called to be an imitator of God, one also needs to know that God gives for what is good according to His righteousness, but God may also withhold His generosity for what is good according to His righteousness.

God instructs by sharing, but also by not sharing and even resisting those who resist Him.

*James 4: 6 **But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."***

Many people put themselves in a position of resistance to God's generosity and gifts. And the steward of God towards people, and not a direct servant of people, needs to understand how the Lord wants him or her to act also towards others so that one does not find oneself in a position contrary to what God wants to be done.

*1 Corinthians 4: 1 **Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***

*2 **Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.***

The riches or mysteries to be distributed according to God's generosity are not the private property of the stewards themselves, but of the Lord of the storeroom. For this reason, it is required that the steward is faithful to God, for there are people who, when receiving the gifts of God, trample them underfoot and even turn against the stewards of the Lord.

In this way, **the Lord explicitly exhorts His children not to be generous with those who are like greedy dogs, who put on sheep's clothes to hide their condition of wolves, who are evil workers and false teachers, and who seek to extort people's riches and lives**, as already explained in previous chapters and regarding which we recall some texts below:

*Matthew 7: 15 **"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves."***

*Philippians 3: 2 **Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation (or false circumcision)!***

*Matthew 7: 6 **"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."***

It is highly necessary for a Christian to be aware that in the world, there are people who want to exploit the benevolence and generosity of God and the children of God for their evil purposes. And this, just because they see that God is good and want to obtain the Lord's gifts to increase their selfish interests and profit from what they think they can attain from or through these gifts.

Matthew 20: 15(b) "Or is your eye evil because I am good?"

In the world, there is a diversity of those individuals who, upon seeing a person with a generous heart, are already alert to approach this person to take advantage abusively of the benefits that one distributes. For this reason, regarding God's generosity, a steward needs to be aware of the fact that God is generous for what is good but not for evil, never making Himself an accomplice of what is evil and perverse.

In other words, what we are seeking to say from these last paragraphs is that **a Christian needs to seek the Lord's direction also for the practice of good and generosity, under the risk that if one does not do so, one may contribute "generously" with what is evil.**

So, a crucial point to note here is that even the doing of a good work is not superior to God or His specific direction.

That is, the desire to do good works or an act of generosity is not superior to the need to consult God's instruction to know what to do and how to do it, including in the practice of good or generosity.

Fellowship with God and the instruction of the Lord are not replaceable by any good, wealth, or "good attitude," whatever they may be. Whether a Christian yearns to do good or one yearns to abstain from evil, in both situations, one equally needs the guidance of Christ, who clearly said: *without Me you can do nothing.*

God, and only God, is God! And not even the desire to do good should be "god" in a Christian's life or a motive to replace the fact that God is the source of every good and perfect gift, and that God is also righteous to withhold His generosity so as not to grant what should not be given inappropriately to some people.

As already mentioned above, a Christian even runs the risk of suffering opposition for giving good things to people that the Lord does not want them to receive.

Matthew 7: 6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

Galatians 2: 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),

5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.
6 But from those who seemed to be something (whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man (or does not accept the appearance of men)), for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

2 Corinthians 11: 19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!

20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

God does not trust His resources in the hand of a Christian so that one uses them to “sponsor,” “support,” “connive,” or “finance” evil workers who build evil works, even if these evil workers claim to be doing their works “in the name of God.”

God does not want His children to be generous with evil or with what will be lost in time by evil workers.

Jeremiah 17: 11 "As a partridge that broods but does not hatch, So is he who gets riches, but not by right; It will leave him in the midst of his days, And at his end he will be a fool."

As also mentioned earlier, covetousness is equated in the Scriptures with idolatry. And the Lord does not want a Christian to be a sponsor, helper, or financier of the practice of idolatry. Instead, the Lord instructs Christians to distance themselves from it and as well from fellowship with those who insist on practicing covetousness or idolatry despite the Heavenly Gospel having already been offered to them according to the grace of God.

2 Corinthians 6: 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."

18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

Furthermore, many covetous people are cunning. They present themselves as generous to obtain the sympathy and adherence of people, but they are not indeed, for they are idolaters of riches or themselves. And even when misers give something, it is to get more or to publicize their generosity to attract people's attention to themselves.

Attitudes rebuked by the Lord Jesus Christ in His words recorded, for example, in chapter 6 of the book of Matthew.

The person moved by greed does not truly give anything. And the generosity one wants to show is accompanied by traps to try to imprison the inattentive, those who do not walk in sobriety or according to the discernment granted by the Lord.

*Romans 16: 17 **Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.***

18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

The greedy person does not “give given,” but exchanges, trades, or bargains favors. The covetous gives to try to make others subject to oneself. And sometimes, the greedy one even gives large sums, but at the price that those one claims to want to help become subject to oneself.

Greedy people sometimes give, but only if they can gain control over those to whom they claim to give. They give so that others will render obedience and service to them. And when others no longer serve them, the misers turn their backs on them and discard them.

Similarly, the greedy discard those who begin to be more costly to them than profitable. When there is nothing left to exploit from their peers, the avaricious cast the exploited out into neglect.

Therefore, **giving aiming at dominating others is not generosity but greed. It is an attempt at wicked dominion and vile oppression.**

In addition to the above, the greedy person also likes to be very generous with the resources of others. So, the greedy ones first take other people's resources, and then they say they give them to those in need.

The greedy person likes to put in the singular the different donations from different people that one passes on, announcing them well linked to one's own person, image, and one's own name.

Greedy people misappropriate the offerings of others, of which, at best, they should be mere passers-on, and present them as if they were their offerings and as if they were giving them to others. For this reason, misers like to use expressions similar to “I am the one who gave,” “I am the one who did it,” “it is I who granted it,” or “it is me who contributed,” using, however, the resources of others and the most varied lies to promote their self-exaltations.

Some greedy people even surrender to their illusions so much that they may even reach the absurdity of believing that they have actually been generous, even when they have exploited, hurt, and oppressed others in the name of their generosity. But in the end, they themselves become subject to their own deception.

And the Lord warned us several times that wolves would come who would not spare the flock that would pay attention to them. Before the slaughter, the cattle breeder

feeds the cattle to slaughter them later for one's profit. So are many misers, but doing so even with those they call brethren and friends.

Isaiah 32: 5 **The foolish person will no longer be called generous, Nor the miser said to be bountiful;**
6 For the foolish person will speak foolishness, And his heart will work iniquity: To practice ungodliness, To utter error against the LORD, To keep the hungry unsatisfied, And he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.
7 Also the schemes of the schemer are evil; He devises wicked plans To destroy the poor with lying words, Even when the needy speaks justice.

Greedy people are also not shy about taking other people's work without wages to fuel their greed, despising the severe or harsh warning that the Lord makes regarding those who adopt such practices.

Jeremiah 22: 13 **"Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness And his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor's service without wages And gives him nothing for his work,**
 ...
17 Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, For shedding innocent blood, And practicing oppression and violence."

As if this were not enough, the Lord Jesus Christ explicitly declared that sad facts like the ones described above would happen on a large scale and that many would even present themselves saying they were coming in "His Name" practicing exactly these vile conducts.

Matthew 24: 25 **"See, I have told you beforehand."**

And the Scriptures also warn that many of the greedy people who will try to restrict people's freedom to plunder their goods and life will be false apostles, false prophets, false pastors and priests, false teachers, false preachers, false spiritual fathers (or mothers), evil workers, and "mentors or tutors" who work to form their own followers so that they serve them. And although they use parts of the Scriptures, these are the ones who never teach people to be truly direct disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, for they want to keep them subject to themselves and their visions and missions.

2 Corinthians 11: 13 **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**
14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Still regarding the last aspect mentioned in the previous paragraph, we have also seen previously that the Christian is called to be a disciple exclusively of Christ and of no “apostle,” “prophet,” “teacher,” “guide,” “priest,” “pastor x or y,” or any institution or group that presents itself or advocates capable of making others their followers. And this also applies very markedly to the ways a Christian is called to act in generosity.

A Christian is called to be edified on the only foundation for which one is called by God, namely, Christ, who likewise was the unique foundation of the apostles and prophets faithful to the Lord.

Therefore, no Christian is called to be edified on apostles, prophets, or any other ministers, servants, or ministries as if these could be an acceptable foundation before the Lord for others, for surely the building not built exclusively on Christ will collapse together with the apostles, prophets, and ministers who edified upon themselves or other mere men or women.

And all supposed “generosity” toward these works will collapse with them when the light of the Lord will expose their weaknesses and iniquities.

Several times and with many tears, Paul warned Christians that evil and greedy days and people would try to approach and deceive people who would present themselves willing to serve the Lord. And what Paul announced is very sad indeed, but even so, many people continue to choose these paths where they seek to exploit in a harmful way those regarding whom they say they want their good.

Acts 20: 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

Returning to the characteristics of the greedy person, we may see that when such an individual is generous, one is generous to oneself, to one's work, and to the territory one dominates. When the miser demonstrates generosity, one does so to instigate others to follow one's example, but everything is turned to one's “principality” that one wants to build and command.

Covetous individuals do not give liberally or truly. Instead, they always have a subjective plan of benefit that might come to them from something they claim to have shared. When they give something, they do it for the projection of their own name, to achieve people's esteem, for their own enrichment, and so on.

The greedy are like the king who uses one hand to give to the people but uses the other hand to take back what he gave using heavy taxes and tributes so that the

resources offered return to him in broader measures and to the detriment of the people who are increasingly burdened with more oppressions and burdens.

*2 Timothy 3: 13 **But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.***

And going a step further, **in addition to all the damage listed above that the covetous individuals may cause to those who follow them, their greed, when their wickedness is revealed, may still do far more significant harm to people than the goods taken from them. It may cause them deep pain and shame in their hearts when they come to face or realize the deceit they have submitted to.**

What was not the pain that invaded Eve's heart after the devil deceived her about the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

How severe is not the pain that seeks to reach the heart of the one who placed one's trust in men and women who finally showed interest only in themselves to the point of exploiting and deceiving those who trusted in them?

What shame did not come over Adam and over everyone who found oneself involved in a plot that exploited one's life and robbed one of goods, riches, time of life, and hopes?

Extensive and severe are the consequences that the covetous may cause through their distorted attitudes and idolatries.

*Isaiah 3: 12 **"As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, And destroy the way of your paths."***

*2 Peter 2: 2 **And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.***

On the other hand, **even in the face of such severe pain and affliction that covetousness and the covetous person may cause, the Lord continually makes His sovereign and heavenly generosity stand out**, as is also shown in the following text concerning the action that sin exerted on human beings:

*Romans 5: 20 **Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,***
21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God's generosity is powerful to help the most imprisoned and deceived of human beings.

And God's generosity is also mighty to forgive eternally even those who have been condemned by rulers to death for their crimes or for having let themselves be involved in the crimes of others and so becoming their accomplices, an aspect that we recall in the following text:

*Luke 23: 39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."
 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?
 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."
 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."
 43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

No matter what the need of their souls is, the solution for human beings always lies in God's generosity to them, not being a matter of merit or price to be paid, but a matter of faith and trust (giving the credit of trust to God) and of accepting it as the Lord offers it.

Romans 5: 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*John 1: 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Thus, for a Christian to learn also to be generous or to exercise the practice of generosity, this process inevitably goes through the understanding of God's generosity towards one's life. And this, so that the Christian, as a consequence of the Lord's generosity, may be rich in faith towards God and not towards that and those who oppose the Lord.

Yes, even to practice generosity, the Christian needs God's generous grace, mercy, and instruction. Aspects granted to a Christian by abiding in Christ in such a way that Christ also abides in the Christian.

John 15: 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Given this, also at this point, we see that a Christian is not called to serve riches nor the generosity that riches supposedly allow to be exercised. Instead, a Christian is called to serve God directly all the time and to be

faithful to Him in everything the Lord guides this Christian, as we recall once again in the text below:

- 1 Corinthians 4: 1 **Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***
*2 **Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.***
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Finally, concerning this topic, a Christian who wants to be generous according to the example of how God works in generosity could also observe the following points described by Paul in the last text above:

- ⇒ 1) **Before people on Earth, a Christian is called to be a minister of Christ, that is, a servant of Christ and not of men. Before God, the Christian is called to be faithful to God, which includes being faithful to the instructions that God gives this Christian to follow.**
- ⇒ 2) **Before people on Earth, a Christian is a steward of the mysteries of God. A Christian is not a source of God's manifold wisdom and gifts. A Christian is called to be a fellow worker with God in announcing the mysteries the Lord wants to make known. One is called to be a beacon or a light pointing to God as the source of the heavenly mysteries and to the One who is the only way people can approach the source of generosity, namely: The Lord Jesus Christ.**

Before God, the Christian learns to be generous according to the will of the Lord. And before human beings, the Christian is faithful to God to announce or share God's generosity as God has instructed to share it.

In all generations, the grace, goodness, or generosity of the Lord continually bestows the freedom of God upon the soul that receives it, but this also that one may continually and voluntarily choose to live and walk under the guidance of Him in whom one finds the eternal example of generosity.

- Titus 2: 11 **For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,***
*12 **teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,***
*13 **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,***
*14 **who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.***
-

In this way, **all the considerations of the Scriptures about the precautions with carrying out generosity are not to discourage those who want to practice it. On the contrary, they exalt and extol how noble and sublime its practice is, having the Christian still available in the Lord, all the provision**

of the Holy Spirit to also in this area be guided in truth and the profitable and righteous wisdom.

Philippians 2: 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,
15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,
16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

1 Corinthians 12: 4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.
6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.
7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ...

D. Appropriate Seeds for the Practice of Generosity

And finally, still on the theme of generosity and bearing in mind the considerations about the need for sobriety from above and heavenly discernment on the receiving and the practice of generosity, we would like to extend ourselves a little further to meditate on the very generosity or the practice of this virtue.

Thus, an initial aspect to be remembered and highlighted once again to practice generosity is that God Himself enriches people who trust in the heavenly grace or generosity to also practice generosity, according to the text that follows below:

*2 Corinthians 9: 8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***

*9 **As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."***

*10 **Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,***

*11 **while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (or generosity), which causes thanksgiving through us to God.***

More broadly, we can verify that the context of the words recorded above by Paul has its more specific starting point at the beginning of chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians, making the same subject run until the end of chapter 9.

This entire text in reference is really rich in terms of the points we are approaching in this chapter, but we will let the reading of the complete text up to the reader, starting to use some of its parts below.

The subject appointed above is opened by Paul by a reference related to the aid that a group of people did to other people in another city. The fellow believers of faith in Christ from a specific region made a provision to help brothers and sisters of faith with material needs in another town or place.

Paul also calls this help an opportunity of God's grace granted to those who were willing to help their fellow believers in Christ in another region in need of basic material resources for their lives, as described in part below:

*2 Corinthians 8: 1 **Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:***

*2 **that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality (or generosity).***

*3 **For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,***

*4 **imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.***

Thus, being able to help other fellow believers is a grace of God given to Christians, which also reminds us that ***it is more blessed to give than to receive***, for if someone has something to give, it is because one has already received it before from the Lord.

Furthermore, there is much to learn from each of the parts of the entire text of 2 Corinthians in reference.

For example, the Christians of Macedonia were not rich in possessions and yet they helped others, showing us that generosity is not a privilege of the rich or those who are affluent with material resources.

There are people with very few resources who are much more generous than many who give only from the large surplus of their wealth.

The generosity described at the beginning of the text of 2 Corinthians 8 was directed towards giving help or assistance to fellow believers of faith in Christ who were more in need than those who helped them. However, the group that helped others also had asset restrictions.

Another central aspect to be highlighted in the referenced text is that **the practice of generosity is not limited to cash donations and is often not even linked to the financial aspects, as many people who preach about generosity nowadays perversely want to imply**. Assistance can often be given to other Christians by sending them provisions of what they most need, for it may even happen that the provisions they need are not even available for purchase in the region where they live.

And yet another consideration refers to the fact that **the abundance of generosity is not only linked to material things**, as also Paul records in the same referenced text and which we exemplify below:

- 2 Corinthians 8: 7 **But as you abound in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us, see that you abound in this grace also.***
- 8 **I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.***
- 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.***
-

In speaking about the generous Christians he mentions in his letter, Paul highlights the abundance or riches they manifested in faith, word, knowledge, all care, and love towards him and other fellow believers.

All these abundant manifestations of spiritual gifts are also manifestations of the generosity of what they allowed God to work in them.

Paul does not place the manifestation of material help as the only form of generosity, but one of them. Paul rejoiced that those fellow believers were generous to others in everything they received from God, such as faithfulness to their very faith received from Heaven, which encouraged others also to be strengthened in the same faith in Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself shared God's greatest riches with people not when He gave them material goods, but when He gave Himself in love and as the provision for the forgiveness of the sins of human beings, doing so when He was devoid of material goods and when He became poor on the cross of Calvary on which He was crucified.

Christ provided us with the riches of eternal salvation in Him when He came into the world in the flesh and was a servant among the people to the point of being killed on the cross of Calvary without natural goods and riches. In His greatest state of material poverty, the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated God's greatest act of generosity towards human beings. And it was also where God Himself, in Christ, gave Himself in generosity for the lives of all people.

In Christ, all areas that a Christian allows God's abundance to manifest itself for generosity are seen by the Lord with great joy. Thus, a Christian may grow in generosity in several areas as the Lord grants this Christian more of His grace.

Following this, the text of 2 Corinthians 8 and part of 9 continues to describe several details about the conduct that people should observe even in their purpose of assisting fellow believers of faith in need.

Nevertheless, from chapter 9, verse 6, Paul, more specifically, uses the example of assisting the saints to expand the explanation of the theme on generosity in general and in all areas.

Let us observe, then, these verses and review some that have already been cited earlier:

*2 Corinthians 9: 6 **But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.***
*7 **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.***
*8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***
*9 **As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."***
*10 **Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,***
*11 **while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (or generosity), which causes thanksgiving through us to God.***

Thus, in the very rich words just cited, we can observe several aspects already mentioned in this chapter, such as:

- ⇒ 1) Generosity begins with God;
- ⇒ 2) The supply for generosity comes from God. It is the Lord who gives the seed to sow. And it is also the Lord who provides bread for the sower's food.
- ⇒ 3) The Lord is perfectly able to supply Christians with an abundant sufficiency for every good work. It is God who enriches people to all generosity;

- ⇒ 4) The practice of generosity has as its main objective that God and His wisdom come to be known to the people to whom the generosity was directed;
- ⇒ 5) The grace of being able to practice generosity aims at exalting God as the giving and merciful Lord who offers His goodness to all people.

And here again, it is possible to observe in the last verses that the central focus of the generous sowing is not the material goods sown.

That is, **the kingdom of God is within the Christian, and it is the seed that comes out of the heart that brings heavenly blessings to people.**

The text in reference declares that God “*will increase the fruits of your righteousness.*”

Now, if something is multiplied or if something is reaped according to the kind of its seed, this is because something similar to what was harvested was sown.

Thus, **if righteousness is to be multiplied and the fruit of your righteousness is to be reaped or increased, it is because righteousness was sown.**

Therefore, **in the eyes of the Lord, what is given in the material is not the sowing of the kingdom of God in itself, even though the kingdom of God uses what is given in the material to express and confirm the sowing according to the heavenly kingdom. However, the attitude of generosity and the purpose with which generosity is practiced are the seeds to be multiplied by the Lord.**

In the present theme, we have already seen several times the text of Proverbs that declares that “the generous soul will prosper,” and not necessarily the material things that were given by a person.

Material things have a due use and contribution, but even so, they remain in the material sphere.

Nevertheless, **a Christian manifests the working of the heavenly kingdom from the presence of this kingdom in one's heart. And it is primarily the multiplication of what has been accomplished in conformity with the kingdom of God that a Christian should aim to have multiplied.**

If a person's donation of material goods is not made from the kingdom of God in one's heart, this donation is not sowing according to the heavenly kingdom. (A point covered more extensively in the theme The Gospel of the Kingdom of God).

1 Corinthians 13: 3 **And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.**

Given this, we can see that in verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 9, Paul writes that whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully, but in verse 9, he also explains what kind of seed is sown and what type of result is harvested.

Paul declares that the sowing of God's righteousness results in the harvest of the multiplication of resources for sowing and the increase of the fruits of righteousness. And Paul does not necessarily refer at first to the increase of material things sown or given.

The one who sows the righteousness of God reaps the increase of seeds of righteousness, or even the planting area (sowing area), and the multiplication of the fruits of the righteousness of God that one sows by one's actions of generosity.

If the seeds were the very objects, material wealth, and money given, God would be obliged to multiply the material seeds even of those who would be making donations to increase their personal domains under greed and perverse intentions. If God had promised to multiply material seeds to everyone who sows much, He would have been obliged to multiply the fruits of unrighteousness. God would be obliged to multiply the seeds of the covetous persons.

Therefore, the seed that is being considered by Paul in the text of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 in no way expresses or refers to money or any other material thing.

The seed for sowing according to the heavenly kingdom accepted by the Lord is the practice of sowing the seed that originates in the heavenly kingdom and that, in several situations, may also lead to some material sowing.

*Galatians 6: 7 **Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.***

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

As for the main seeds that are sown, the Lord views them according to the source of motivation and the attitude with which one sows spiritual and material seeds, not the material seeds themselves.

Thus, if someone has given material resources because God first moved one's heart with compassion, it is first the compassion that was sown that will be multiplied. If someone gave out of mercy, it is the mercy that will be multiplied to this individual, to the point of increasing the seeds of mercy or compassion and even increasing the sowing (planting area) to reach, exercise, or sow even more mercy.

The increase of the seeds of righteousness and the sowing (planting area) to sow righteousness is for God's righteousness to be sown even more in generosity, compassion, and mercy.

If, on the other hand, a person sows help toward other people to multiply one's own material seeds and to feed one's avarice or greed, thinking that God multiplies the material seed sown, this person has sown according to the flesh, and according to the flesh one will reap. This individual may even materially enrich, but whose wealth is accompanied by fascinations, thorns, and crazy lusts.

Moved by the flesh, a person may even sow a word of the Scriptures of God in the lives of others that even contributes to their coming to know God, but even so, the one who sowed it with fleshly intent will have nothing more than a “fleshly” harvest for oneself.

Considering that the kingdom of God does not come with a visible appearance or observation, the seeds of the kingdom and its harvests also do not come with a visible appearance, although they may have a great influence on people's lives and result in external changes arising from inner changes and inner prosperity of the soul and spirit of those who believe in the Lord.

Nevertheless, given that the seed and the sowing (plantation area) operate so that the “fruit of righteousness” is multiplied, and not necessarily the fruit of material things, for each seed generates according to its kind, this point may also bring forth again a question about the harvest of the provision and natural supply for the sower.

And as to the natural or material provision or supply for the sower, we can notice in the same text in reference that **God grants seeds to sow, but God also gives bread to the sower.** A point that brings us back to what we have already seen throughout the present theme regarding the verses of the Scriptures in which the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness or to work for the food that does not perish, granting us God's promise that He will also give natural supplies to those who trust in Him as to the instructions on how to handle natural riches.

In the text of 2 Corinthians 9, **the seeds of the practice of God's will that each individual is called to carry out are the seeds of heavenly righteousness to be sown and multiplied, and the bread that God also gives to His loved ones is their natural or material supply.**

Here, then, **it is crucial to highlight that the seeds and the sower's supply are very distinct aspects and with very different measures. God may greatly multiply the seed and the sowing area for the sowing of righteousness, and yet multiply the personal supply of the sowers in a different measure if this is more suitable for their lives and to the accomplishment of the work to which they are called.**

The Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh into the world and sowed the righteousness of God first in many cities, towns, and villages without ever becoming materially rich, finally sowing the powerful seeds of the righteousness of God upon all humankind when He was crucified on the cross of the Calvary and at the time of His poorest material condition on Earth.

*Isaiah 53: 5 **But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.***

*6 **All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***

*7 **He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.***

- 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.*
- 9 And they made His grave with the wicked; But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.*
- 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.*
- 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.*
- 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

John the Baptist, Paul, and many others also did not accumulate great material riches but were sowers of countless seeds of God's righteousness by complying with the Lord's will to which they were called. They, like many others, though they had enough natural provision for what they were called by the Lord but not in high measures, sowed the seeds of God's will and riches towards human beings abundantly.

Thus, a person sows righteousness when one does what the Lord has called one to do and according to the instructions God gives him or her. And if one sows what God gives to sow, God is mighty to increase the seeds and the planting area of the seeds of His righteousness, as well as providing everything necessary in the aspects of material supply for the sower who cooperates with God.

When, for instance, a father or a mother teaches their children in the way they should go, which is fellowship with Christ Jesus, when a person carries out the profession that God has entrusted to him or her according to the righteousness of the Lord and for the benefit of people, when a person shares the testimony about Jesus Christ that one sanctified as the Lord in one's heart, or when a person prays for people all over the world and for rulers or people in eminence to rule for the benefit of their people, they are sowing the righteousness of God, having the promise of God that they will also receive from the Lord the way of material supply as long as they remain firmly in the heavenly will.

As we have already mentioned several times in this theme, **material provision is not the primary objective of the Christian, but a consequence of God's promise and generosity to those who have the Lord, His kingdom, and His righteousness as the treasure of their trust and their hearts.**

A person may have an abundance of resources and even share a significant part of one's assets with others, but if one does not sow help to others by the direction of the Spirit of the Lord and does not heed the voice of God to live and walk according to the will of the heavenly kingdom and the righteousness of the Lord, one keeps oneself apart from sowing in righteousness and in the Spirit of the Lord. And consequently, one does not

place oneself in a position to reap the multiplication of the fruits of these aspects of the heavenly riches.

In the case of the specific example of the text of chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, we can observe that Paul mentions that the sincere love and compassion of assisting fellow believers of faith in Christ were the aspects counted as seeds. And the material assistance, in this specific case, was the means by which the sowing of love and mercy could be carried out.

In this way, there are many and varied situations for which God calls people to exercise love and mercy towards others, such as praying for them, offering a word of comfort, supporting them in different ways in some tasks, and helping people in need of mercy who do not even have material needs, as is the example of Paul when he was called by God to go to Macedonia because there was a man who cried out to the Lord for help. And this man was the keeper who looked after the prison in which Paul and Silas were imprisoned and who came to receive Christ Jesus as his Lord (according to Acts 16: 9 to 40).

On the other hand, again, one may ask what about the material supply when it is needed to execute compassion and mercy?

And again, when also an abundant material provision is needed to exercise in this way the sowing of God's righteousness, the Lord is mighty to provide all that is needed, both in abundance of heavenly gifts and in abundance of natural riches that are necessary, as also exposed in the same text of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

*2 Corinthians 9: 8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***

...
*11 **while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (or generosity), which causes thanksgiving through us to God.***

In view of this, we have already seen that generosity is a condition of the heart that may also be expressed using the giving or sharing of material goods, but this is not always the case or is not always necessary, depending on what is being shared through generosity.

So, when there are material needs to be shared and when there is genuine motivation before the Lord to do so according to the righteousness of the Lord, God can show Himself mighty also to grant all that is necessary to materialize the motivation according to the need of the one to whom the generosity is intended.

*Philippians 2: 13 ... **for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.***

Humanity subject to sin needed righteousness and salvation coming from the heavenly kingdom, not merely material riches. Therefore, Christ

came into the world to reveal and offer eternal salvation through God's grace, goodness, or generosity. Christ humbled Himself and became poor to generously give His life on the cross of Calvary in favor of all people. (As can be seen in Philippians 2: 5 till 11 and 2 Corinthians 8: 9).

The act of generosity was first in the heart of Christ and was materialized with the surrendering of His body and blood under the greatest shame to which the Lord could come to be exposed.

The Lord Jesus Christ was raised to shame on the cross before all men because there was in His heart the generosity to give His life to provide the way of salvation and eternal life for all human beings, the newness of life that is granted to all who believe in Him and receive Him as Lord in their hearts.

Hebrews 12: 2 ... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame (or ignominy), and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Ignominy is being publicly exposed to shame.

Yes, in His position as the Son of Man, Christ was despised even because He stopped giving people material bread. He was also despised because He did not accept being the earthly king of the people who had been waiting for His coming into the world for centuries. Instead, the Lord Jesus sowed the righteousness of God. He sowed the superior righteousness that paid the required price to free people from eternal condemnation because of their sins and the yoke of the Law of Moses. And because of this offer of the seeds of righteousness, He was rejected and exposed to ignominy.

Nevertheless, **after the resurrection, God increased the sowing area of the Lord Jesus Christ beyond the Jews of Jerusalem and extended it to all Jews, but also, simultaneously, to all Gentiles to the ends of the Earth.**

Romans 1: 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

The Lord Jesus Christ allowed the Heavenly Father to sow Him and He sowed Himself as the seed of God's bountiful righteousness. And as a result, Christ saw the sowing increase and the fruits of His righteousness multiplied in millions and millions of hearts that received Him and continue to receive Him as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Revelation 7: 9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and

tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
 10 *and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*
 11 *All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,*
 12 *saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

In the condition of the Son of Man, Christ was the grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died to bear much fruit. And the more the Lord Jesus sowed the goodness and righteousness of God, the more God increased His sowing and multiplied and continues to multiply the fruits of His righteousness.

Isaiah 9: 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Thus, symbolically or more generally, we could perhaps say that:

- ⇒ 1) **The seed is God's righteousness, love, compassion, mercy, longsuffering, kindness, and so on.**
- ⇒ 2) **Generosity is the means of manifesting or sowing these seeds.**
- ⇒ 3) **The material accompaniments to exercise generosity are packages, means, or helping tools to deliver or sow the seeds.**

Making, then, a comparison of what was exposed in the last paragraph with what was presented by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, we would have something similar to:

- ⇒ 1) The seed of God's righteousness in that context was the love for God and the love for the fellow believers from another city or region who had difficulties with basic material needs;
- ⇒ 2) Generosity was manifested by the testimony of faith in God and a life of fidelity to the Lord in situations similar to the fellow believers from another region, also added by the desire or compassion to assist them;
- ⇒ 3) The goods given were the helping instrument to sow love, encouragement, and assistance to those needy brothers and sisters.

And although the text of 2 Corinthians does not mention this, we understand that God could have directly provided the supply of the fellow believers in need of assistance, but, perhaps, the need to see that other Christians cared about them was

more necessary in that specific situation so that God's love for their lives was even more broadly manifested.

Given this, **we can note, from another perspective, that spiritual riches are always incomparably superior to material ones, but also that their evidence through material actions often contributes to people recognizing them more firmly in their hearts.**

In other words, and as already mentioned above, generosity can be expressed in various ways or means, such as a prayer for those who need it, even if they do not know they need it, loving attention, help with material supplies, assistance in helping with a task, teaching, sharing a word of God, and also material help or even money, when this is the case. However, even so, **what is aimed to be sown are the characteristics of the kingdom of God so that people raise their eyes of understanding and faith towards the Lord.**

*1 Corinthians 4: 1 **Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***

*2 Corinthians 9: 8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***

*9 **As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."***

*10 **Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,***

*11 **while you are enriched in everything for all liberality (or generosity), which causes thanksgiving through us to God.***

*12 **For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,***

*13 **while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,***

*14 **and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.***

*15 **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!***

*Romans 12: 4 **For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,***

*5 **so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.***

*6 **Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, ...;***

Although generosity is often expressed in material acts, God declares that the seeds sown to be multiplied and whose fruits last forever are not

grounded and focused on earthly aspects but on the righteousness that lasts forever.

Thus, the one who is generous in sharing the heavenly seeds, sometimes doing so also through the giving of material goods, is promised even more of the heavenly aspects, accompanied by an appropriate material provision which does not necessarily need to grow in the same proportion of the growth of the heavenly seeds and the sowing area to sow them.

Luke 6: 36 "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Matthew 5: 7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5: 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Additionally, in the text of 2 Corinthians 9, verse 9, we also see the expression "dispersed abroad to the needy," showing us that God gives what is really necessary to the needy, confirming His actions in line with His eternal righteousness.

From another point of view, we can see that in the world, there are people who are holders of abundant material possessions, but who, at the same time, are extremely poor in the righteousness of the Lord, not needing, therefore, an increase in earthly resources, but eternal salvation reaching their souls.

In this way, when people begin to come to Christ Jesus only for earthly bread or material provisions, they should again remember the following words of the Lord:

John 6: 26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Yet from another angle, we may also remember that **if nothing in the world can acquire heavenly salvation, all people before the Gospel of God are poor, miserable, and in need of God's righteousness and grace. And always the aspects of the heavenly kingdom will be the main seeds to be announced**

and given in generosity to those who accept to receive them, although sometimes the instrument to present them is through material gestures and actions.

Moreover, sowing the seeds of the kingdom of God may often even face severe opposition, for they are primarily spiritual actions and go beyond the apparent and material sowing that the world practices. However, they are actions whose harvests result in eternal fruits.

Thus, sowing the righteousness of God by faith in a world broadly seeded with many seeds of unrighteousness may often appear to be an action with no hope of reaping. However, the Scriptures declare that darkness does not prevail against light nor unrighteousness against God's righteousness.

*Psalms 126: 5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.
6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.*

Matthew 5: 4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Psalms 106: 3 Blessed are those who keep justice, And he who does righteousness at all times!

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Matthew 5: 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

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*Luke 18: 7 "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?
8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"*

Therefore, may the Lord, also in this present generation, grant us to sow according to His righteousness to see abundant fruits of heavenly righteousness in our hearts and on the people on Earth who so much need it, for the more Christians sow in righteousness and the Spirit of the Lord, and the less they sow in unrighteousness and the flesh, they may see even more the fruits of God's righteousness manifested to them and the world.

Finally, still looking at the topic of generosity from some angles of sowing and the sowers, we would like to highlight once again that **the Lord grants the soil, the seeds, and gives strength or provision to the sowers, but it is also up to the sowers to be zealous about sowing.**

That is, **Christians should awaken much more to their cooperative participation in what happens in their own generations, as well as what they will let sown for the next ones.**

The Lord's will is that those who claim to serve Him express generosity and sow the seeds of righteousness to be partakers of the Lord's promise that righteousness and praise will spring up before all nations.

Isaiah 61: 11 **For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.**

Hosea 10: 12 **Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.**

Proverbs 11: 18 **The wicked man does deceptive work, But he who sows righteousness will have a sure reward.**

Titus 3: 14 **And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.**

Therefore, speaking of Christ, announcing Him by personal testimony, and demonstrating love for Him by serving people in the different facets of the heavenly will according to what each Christian is called by the Lord to accomplish is also the sowing of righteousness. It is a work of sowing not to be done out of law or obligation but out of love for the Heavenly Father.

The sowing that is done out of obligation that constrains is not generous sowing. However, the sowing that is done out of love for God, the truth, and fellow people according to heavenly love is an expression of the generosity of a heart that is in the kingdom of God or in whom the kingdom of God is found.

Romans 10: 4 **For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

Romans 6: 13(b) **... but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.**
14 **For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.**

We also remember here that **the focus of the sowing of God's righteousness is not money itself, nor is it for the multiplication of money or material**

abundance, but it is done in generosity to water the thirsty and feed the hungry who are thirsty and hungry for the newness of life coming from God, also manifested, when it is the case, by granting material aid.

The practice of generosity is giving and spreading the seeds of the heavenly kingdom motivated by love for God and one's fellow men as the Lord directs a Christian to do so, and not for financial desire or the desire to get rich in the world, for the latter, as we have seen in previous chapters, expresses the love of money which stands in opposition to the love of God's righteousness.

And in a very practical way, a good start to begin the sowing of God's righteousness, and which can be practiced by poor or rich, without any distinction, is the sowing done, firstly, in prayer before the Eternal Lord.

It is before the Lord, in prayer, that, first of all, the sowing and reaping of God's righteousness in favor of other people is carried out.

- 1 Timothy 2: 1* **Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,**
2 for kings and all who are in authority (or eminence), that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.
3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,
4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

- Matthew 9: 37* **Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.**
38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."
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Praying to God, first of all, on behalf of all people so that they may know the true righteousness of God that is in Christ Jesus and that they may know that He alone is the Mediator between God and human beings, and also pray for the conditions of the civil life of people on Earth so that they are not prevented from living a godly life towards the Lord, is indeed also the performance of an act of generosity of inestimable value in favor of all people.

And then, together with prayer, a Christian can sow love by doing all things in one's life as for the Lord, thus being the salt of the Earth and the light of the world to the praise of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Heavenly Father.

Yet regarding the more specific actions of proclaiming the Gospel of God, since the Christian serves the Lord and not riches, one can also extend one's generosity by speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel to others or even cooperating so that the Gospel of Christ is generously announced to those who have not yet heard of Him, even supporting others to do so as we saw in the text of 3 John, verses 4 to 8.

After praying for the manifestation of God's righteousness on behalf of people on Earth, the generous spread of the Gospel of Christ is the greatest gift from God that a Christian can announce to humankind, for the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all people of all peoples on Earth, for also in it is found the revelation of God's saving righteousness.

We understand that it is worth highlighting here that cooperating with the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ is not a Christian hiring a spiritual leader for oneself to guide one's life and supposedly teach him or her the word, even paying for this service through offerings and tithes. This does not refer to generosity but to hiring a service to be served and refers to the practice of a conduct that can never perfect the person's relationship with Christ, for this relationship, feeding on the Lord, or abiding in the true vine cannot be outsourced.

The search for contracting a service to be served spiritually by others inevitably represents a high risk for a person to become subject again to the search for spiritual coverage and the supposed spiritual mediation with God made by people. And this was the basis of the request of the ancient Hebrew people in the desert and which ended up culminating in the Law of Moses, but through which no one can be saved, being instead subject to the curse and unrighteousness that the works of human righteousness produce.

One of the characteristics of generosity is the gift offered for the benefit of others. It is a gift given freely to benefit others. It is a gift moved by the love of God. However, under the concept of the old law or similar to it, the pursuit of the practice of works is always focused on the one who performs them, leading people to do something for others always with the intention of benefiting themselves and not as a result and understanding of acting according to the love of God.

In this way, **no one should feel coerced into being generous because one is constrained by others to do so with the most diverse appeals or even because one oneself needs something. A Christian is called to exercise generosity from one's heart because God gives the joy to do it, guides a Christian in how to do it, and gives His children the strength and seeds to do it.**

Romans 14: 17 ...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 9: 7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

In the text of the book of Acts that narrates that Stephen was stoned because of the testimony he gave about Christ and the Gospel of God that he announced, we find that Stephen, because he was full of the Holy Spirit, continued to sow benefits to those who

threw stones at him even if he would not reap the result personally in his earthly life. Stephen generously sowed the word of forgiveness of sins to those who furiously attacked him. And Saul, also called Paul and later became an apostle of Christ, was among those regarding whom the prayer to the Heavenly Father for forgiveness was sown.

Stephen generously sowed the righteousness of God, the Gospel of forgiveness that is mighty to save the vilest sinner. And as a reward, generously given to him by God and not by men, he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, the living and eternal righteousness of God, standing at the right hand of the Heavenly Father to receive him eternally into the heavenly glory.

Thus, God is generous and a giver, and those who mirror and strengthen themselves in Him also end up being generous, for they have the life of God in their hearts. The generosity of a heart begins with receiving the precious gift of God, which is Christ Jesus, which also works in the heart of a Christian so that one also may be very fruitful in generosity.

The source of generosity is in the true vine, it is in Christ. And the main thing about generosity, both to receive and exercise it, is for the Christian to be and remain in Christ and have Christ in one's heart.

And to the heart that abides in Christ, the Lord Himself teaches it so that it may be transformed into a wisely and soberly generous heart.

*2 Corinthians 3: 18 **But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.***

*Ephesians 2: 4 **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,***
*5 **even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),***
*6 **and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,***
*7 **that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***
*8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,***
*9 **not of works, lest anyone should boast.***
*10 **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.***

In conclusion, then, as well as in all the other chapters and topics of the present theme and the other themes of the Systemic Teaching about Christian Life, we highlight once again that **it is through Christ, in Christ, and for the glory of Christ that we are enriched in everything by the Lord also for generosity, for it is also through the Lord Jesus Christ that God's generosity towards all people was announced, manifested, and is available to be received by all those who believe in Him and receive Him in their hearts.**

Ultimately, the essential seeds of generosity to be received into the heart and announced to others is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Foundation to be laid in the heart, and from whom all instruction and direction for the relationship with the other riches and generosity result. (Aspect covered even more broadly by the theme The Gospel of the Glory of God and the Glory of Christ).

Romans 11: 33 **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?"

35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

John 1: 11 **He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.**

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'"

16 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

1 Corinthians 1: 30 **But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,**

31 that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."

Bibliography

Note on Biblical Texts referenced:

- 1) The biblical texts without explicit indications of reference were drawn from NKJV Bible, as indicated below.
- 2) Highlights in the biblical texts, such as underline, bold, or similar were added by the author of this study.

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