

We have an epidemic in our churches in America today. This epidemic has disguised itself as something good but it is quite the opposite. It is evil and destructive. The epidemic I'm referring to is worldly Christianity, where people are deceived into thinking that they can have all that this life offers as well as all that God offers. Paul in Colossians encourages the believer to, **"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."** Because as James puts it, **"Friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God?"** Christians are not to be drawn to the things of this world because those things will ultimately draw you away from Jesus.



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Though it may never be voiced, the line of thinking is that God's "blessings" will be bestowed on those who believe in him enough to deserve such blessings. It's the same line of thinking that would tell a

person to just come to Jesus and he will fix all your problems or whatever you claim in the name of Jesus will be done for you. None of this is biblical nowhere in the Bible does it say that it's God's job to keep you healthy, wealthy, wise, and happy. Rather throughout the Bible, we see that God comforts those who are going through a time of trouble. God gives peace to those living in chaos and God saves those who cannot save themselves, especially from their sinfulness. God knows that our greatest need isn't for us to have a big house or a nice car and nice clothing even if we feel those are immediate needs, God knows our greatest need is to be freed from the bondage of sin and then to abide and remain with Jesus.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God, conquering kings and nations tearing down walls, and bringing down Giants, but all of that was a part of God's redemptive work, not to bring prosperity or happiness to anyone. Yes, there were indeed times of God's blessings in the Old Testament, times when God poured out his blessing upon his people, times of prosperity, times of happiness and peace. Still, those were a result of God blessing his people for their obedience and not people naming and claiming that God would give them stuff. How dare we assume that we can claim something in the name of God and that it would happen, how dare we assume that God owes us our every wish and desire no matter how pure our motives may be. Rather what we see time and time again throughout scripture is God blessing people by meeting needs not wants, blessing people with spiritual blessings not necessarily worldly blessings. Look at Job in the Old Testament, God blessed him for his righteousness but we never see that Job claimed a blessing or demanded or even expected God to bless him. Look at King Solomon, God blessed him financially so that he could, in turn, build the Temple, God blessed his own work, not the works that Solomon set out to do for God. It's been said before that God isn't sitting up in heaven waiting for us to dream big dreams of what we can do for him, rather he is already working all around us and expects us to join

him in his work. The difference is that our dreams, wants, and desires are self-centered, not God-centered. This is why Paul says, **"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."**

When our minds are set on the things that are on the earth, our prayers will have a self-centered focus. From our self-centeredness, our prayers will be lined with wants and desires for the things of this world. These wants and desires can even seem spiritual; we can even pray for spiritual things with self-centered motives, this is why it is so important to set our mind on the things of God and allow His Holy Spirit to show us what we should be praying for. This is how Paul describes the Holy Spirit's involvement in our prayers in Romans 8:26 he says, **"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."** Because we can be self-centered in our prayers and do not know what to pray for as we ought, Paul says the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us.

The Apostle John writes, **"Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever."** (1John 2:15-17) The things we so eagerly desire in this life, the big house, the nice car, and top-of-the-line furnishings are not from God they are the things of this world that satan uses to keep us distracted from having a meaningful relationship with God. It's not that these objects are inherently evil in and of themselves but it is the craving for these things, it is the pride in our achievements and possessions that is wrong. And so it saddens me when I

see Christians posting on social media and misusing scripture to make God out to be some claw-grab game. Many misuse Jesus teaching on prayer to say if you ask enough times God will give you whatever you desire. This was not the point of Jesus' teaching, Jesus was asked by his disciples to teach them how to pray and he started with what we refer to as The Lord's Prayer.

In Luke 11:2-10 we read, **"When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.' "** Then Jesus said to them, **"Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."** The key to this whole passage is that Jesus tells us to pray for our needs, not our wants, to pray for God's kingdom, not ours, and to pray that our sins will be forgiven as we forgive others. Jesus didn't teach that if you just keep asking for a big house or a nice car and if you are persistent enough God will be forced to give it to you, rather Jesus taught us to be persistent in our prayers that are about the things that are above, not on things that are on earth and to be God-centered and not self-centered in our prayers.

Anything other than God-centered prayers are worldly prayers and they make for worldly Christians. This life we live is not meant to be our best life. This is why Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, goes on to say, **"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."** (Matthew 6:19-21) If God blesses you physically here on earth, great, then use it for his glory, but if not let us learn to follow Paul's example. In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul writes, **"I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength"** for this is true Christianity. Worldly Christianity says, "Live your best life now", true Christianity says, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have, for I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."

The whole idea of being a Christian or a Christ follower was defined by Jesus himself. Jesus made it very clear when he said, **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."** (Matthew 16:24) The Christian life is one of self-denial, that includes denying ourselves the things of this world, which suggests that if a person is chasing after the things of this world then they are not following after Jesus as he commanded. If you are a Christian who has fallen into the trap of "Worldly Christianity" then Jesus would tell you to repent, he would tell you that his grace is sufficient for you, and that he is all that you need. There's nothing wrong with having nice things but our focus and our prayers should not be in pursuing those things, our focus and our prayers should be in the pursuit of knowing God better.