

10B MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS

The practice of engineering is totally involved with the development, maintenance, and correction of physical things (“artifacts”), yet the Christian life arises in the spiritual realm. We live in a physical world, yet believers are clearly not philosophical materialists. We know that there’s a spiritual realm as well as a physical. The spiritual realm of concern to us should encompass the Lord Himself, The Kingdom of God (wherever Christ rules), and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Colossians 3 tells us that if we’ve been risen with Christ we are to “seek the things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” We are to set our affections on these things, not the things of the earth. Does that mean constantly thinking about angels, clouds, and heavenly buildings? The verses which follow help us understand what these things from above would be: the values of God’s Kingdom, including compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, and peace.

Word pictures in Scripture from the Earth

When God describes His actions and character He often uses word-pictures from nature/the earth. We are familiar with references to trees, water, wind, planted seeds, birds, vine and branches, body, lions, serpents, and childbirth. Similarly, God also uses man-made things to describe spiritual realities: towers, fortress, shield, sword, temple, chariot, ox-yoke, walls, lamp, building, clothes, jewels, doors, cups, keys, nets, and pits.

Is it wrong, then, to enjoy material things (iPads, smart phones, guitars, stamp collections)? What if they’re “natural” things, like forests, gardens, animals, or even children? We’re told in I John 4 not to love the things of this world. In the rest of the passage we find out what the world’s things are: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

When God gives good things we can and should thank Him as Provider. [1]

Erwin Lutzer [2] tells the story of a new young pastor from a very strict church up in northern Canada. The pastor lived some miles away from the church and figured that it might be faster in the dead of winter to skate to church along the frozen creek instead of tackling the roads. “Yes, you could do that,” said the Head Deacon, “as long as you don’t enjoy yourself.”

To see the whole material world as evil is to return to the heresy of Gnosticism. To accumulate more and more is to fall into consumer materialism and covetousness. To be able to see all possessions as really God’s possessions and to be able to find ultimate meaning and joy in the Lord Himself even if He takes things away is to find a Biblical balance.

References

1. Wittmer, M., *Becoming Worldly Saints*, Zondervan, 2015.
2. Overheard on Lutzer, E., “Running to Win” radio broadcast.