

# DON'T BE AN IDIOT

## *A Meditation on the Effects of Money and Possessions*

I confess that "Don't Be an Idiot" is not the most spiritual title that I've ever come up with, but perhaps its bluntness will help to get the point across. Let me explain.

Some time ago, I was reading a book by Richard Foster, in which he briefly described Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* that sounded fascinating. In that novel, Prince Myshkin, the Christ-figure, is thrust into a culture obsessed with wealth and a number of other vices (Sound like any culture you're familiar with?). At one point, one of the characters comments, "Every one is possessed with such a greed nowadays, they are all so overwhelmed by the idea of money that they seem to have gone mad." Within this society, Prince Myshkin stands out like a sore thumb. Of the Prince, the narrator notes, "He did not care for pomp or wealth, nor even for public esteem, but cared only for the truth!"

In a personal letter, Dostoevsky himself said of the prince, "My intention [was] to portray a truly beautiful soul." Foster said, "(T)he prince has no pride, no greed, no malice, no envy, no vanity, and no fear. His behavior is so abnormal that the people do not know what to think of him. They trust him because of his innocence and simplicity, yet his lack of ulterior motives causes them to conclude that he is an idiot" (Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life*, p. 4).

Dostoevsky weaves the theme of money and other vices throughout the story, contrasting the spirit of the prince with all those around him. Of course, the real question posed throughout the novel is, "Who really is the idiot?" The real idiot is the one who lives for money, serves money and worships money. This greed is nothing new. It's prevalent in our culture, and it was prevalent in Jesus' day as well. This is why Jesus warned against greed, wealth and the selfish accumulation of things again and again. In fact, Jesus addressed the issue of money more than any other issue, except the kingdom of God. There are many reasons for this, but let's consider just two.

First, Jesus knows better than anyone else about the potentially destructive power of money and possessions. In Jesus' parable of the sower, the sower casts his seed, which represents the Word, on four different kinds of soils. This is the description of the seed sown among the thorns: "the cares of the world (worries of this life, NIV) and the deceitfulness of riches and *the desires for other things* enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful" (Mk. 4:19).

The Word of God is the vehicle means of grace through which many spiritual blessings come, including strength, renewed hope, a revived spirit, clear guidance and even the new birth. Do you see the implications of Mark 4:19? The desire for more stuff can suffocate your spiritual life and even damn your soul! Think about that. We're not talking about murder, adultery or crack cocaine. We're talking about the desire for a new pair of Nike shoes or a pair of designer jeans or the recently released video game. The desire for these piddling things can choke the Word, making it unfruitful.

Second, Jesus knows that money and possessions have an incredible impact for good or bad on our hearts. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Randy Alcorn writes, "By telling us that our hearts follow our treasure, Jesus is saying, 'Show me your checkbook, your VISA statement, and your receipts, and I'll show you where your heart is.'"

"Suppose you buy shares of General Motors. What happens? You suddenly develop interest in GM. You check the financial pages. You see a magazine article about GM and read every word, even though over a month ago you would have passed right over it.

"Suppose you're giving to help African children with AIDS. When you see an article on the subject, you're hooked. If you're sending money to plant churches in India and an earthquake hits India, you watch the news and fervently pray.

"As surely as the compass needle follows north, your heart will follow your treasure. Money leads; hearts follow.

"I've heard people say, 'I want more of a heart for missions.' I always respond, 'Jesus tells you exactly how to get it. Put your money in missions and in your church and the poor and your heart will follow.'"

Do you wish you cared more about eternal things? Then reallocate some of your money, maybe *most* of your money, from temporal things to eternal things. Watch what happensö (Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, p. 42). By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church/ **See “Permissions”** for reproduction authorization.

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