

Living Free from All Excess (like John Wesley)

CONTRIBUTION

In a book called *Radical* by David Platt, he recounts the life of John Wesley and a story about a purchase he made for his apartment. [p126]

"[Wesley] had just finished buying some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a Winter day and he noticed that she had only a thin linen gown to wear for protection against the cold. He reached into his pocket to give her some money for a coat, and found he had little left. It struck him that the Lord was not pleased with how he had spent his money. He asked himself: 'Will Thy Master say, "Well done, good and faithful steward?" Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money that might have screened this poor creature from the cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?' "

[Charles Edward White, "Four Lessons on Money from One of the World's Richest Preachers," *Christian History* 7, no. 19 (1998): 24.]

Does this say that buying pictures for your house is evil? Absolutely not! But this event in John Wesley's life showed him his perspective on his possessions. What he learned long ago is the same truth for us today. Most everything in our American lives are, in fact, luxuries, not necessities. The American culture and the American dream have taught us for decades to lie to ourselves into believing that most of what we have are needs--as if we deserve them or have the right to keep them. [p126-7]

What if we--as Christians in a wealthy nation--started to put caps and limits on our lifestyles? I'm not talking about giving God the leftovers. I'm talking about living a life that is free from all excess. This is exactly what John Wesley did.... [p128]

"He identified a modest level of expenses that he was going to live on every year. The first year his income surpassed that level by a small amount, and he gave that excess away. The next year his income increased, but he kept his standard of living the same, so he had more to give away. This continued year after year. At one point, Wesley was making the equivalent of about \$160,00 a year in today's terms, but he was living as if he were making \$20,000 a year. As a result, he had the equivalent of more than \$140,000 to give away that year." [p128]

John Calvin understood this also. Here is what he said in his commentary about giving our excess, the things that truly not necessities:

"[God] has enjoined upon us frugality and temperance, and has forbidden, that any one should go to excess, taking advantage of his abundance. Let those, then, that have riches...consider that their abundance was not intended to be laid out in intemperance or excess, but in relieving the necessities of the brethren."

[John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2003), 1:297.]

In another place, Calvin once said that half of the church's funds should be allotted specifically to the poor. Half! [p128-129]

We might give John Wesley and John Calvin a bad rap when it comes to some of the things they believed, but when it comes to giving to God, they properly understood God's will and instruction for our giving.

Luke 12:48 says, "Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more."

2Cor 8:14-15 says, "At the present time your surplus is [available] for their need, so that their abundance may also become [available] for your need, that there may be equality. As it has been written: The person who gathered much did not have too much, and the person who gathered little did not have too little."

1John 3:17 says, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him—how can God's love reside in him?"