

# Rigor and responsibility: a christian perspective

[Religion](#), [Christianity](#)



It used to be that the only major trap a man of God should be wary of is the trap of idolatry. The Bible is explicit about the terrible consequences in store for those who worship any likeness of any being, specifically sculptured image made of wood or stone. So through the centuries faithful believers made it a commitment to honor this command. In the early days of Christianity, it is easy to know if one is following the Way or being led astray. Fellowship, communion, and the forsaking the seven deadly sins: a) pride; b) lust; c) sloth; d) envy; e) anger; f) covetousness; and g) gluttony are a few of the easily understood standards.

But in the modern world it is more difficult to receive that assurance that one has arrived that one is truly pleasing God and not man. It is now easy for modern man to stay clear of idols. Gigantic representations of bulls, fertility goddesses no longer have that magnetic pull as seen in biblical times. But it would be equally foolish to think that Christian men and women had already banished the sin of idolatry once and for all. Idolatry in the modern age is more subtle and therefore requiring a heightened vigilance from those who claim to have been freed from this sin.

It can be argued that one of the idols of the 21st century is money. Even if there is no temple nor any statue ascribed to the god of money, there is more than enough evidence to show that man is a slave of money and intoxicated by things that money can buy. In the same way modern man is not only pressured by the seven deadly sins that were mentioned earlier. The challenge to walk in a manner pleasing to God has become more and more difficult in the time of great technological and economic breakthrough. One of the results of modern living is a consumerism mindset.

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Westerners and now even Orientals are drawn into this trap of spending and acquiring things. To put this discussion in context a case study is analyzed, looking into the dilemma faced by David Trapp's family. In the case study, David Trapp is a devout Christian, active in church and in the community. His desire to please God is seen in his decision to offer 15% of his time for pro bono work. He also allots time to teach adult education classes in his church. The problem started when his Uncle left him with an inheritance. It was a two acre property situated near a lake.

One could just imagine the spectacular beauty of such piece of real estate. If he decides to sell it Mr. Trapp would undoubtedly get a ton of money. If he chooses to develop it then the value will increase and would surely increase his net worth. Aside from the property his Uncle also left him a significant amount of cash. Most people in the same situation would have rejoiced by now, overwhelmed perhaps by the sudden change of fortune. But David Trapp was bothered by a conscience pricked by his Pastor's preaching and his particular interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

The question that has to be asked is this, how should a Christian walk in a world full of materialistic people and a world full of people needy and hurting? David Trapp does not want to build a second home in his inherited lake property. The consequence of such actions is deemed undesirable by David and these are: 1. A vacation home will be built in his property that will allow him and his family a place to relax and enjoy life. 2. The property will be developed so that he and his family do not only have a place to recharge but also a facility to enjoy water sports.

In David's mind these two changes is not in line with Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In addition his pastor is constantly reminding him of the parable of the rich young ruler whom Jesus challenged to give up all his possessions. Finally, the idea of the first century Christians, sharing everything is something that has added to the dilemma. The pressure is on David because deep down he also wanted the new house and indulging in aqua sports is not sin. He is also torn between two priorities.

He desperately wanted to please God - to be more socially responsible and be a more generous person - and at the same time he is obligated to make his family happy. His wife Nancy although supportive in his every move could not hide her displeasure upon knowing that David is planning to scrap the construction of the new lake house. To her mind there is nothing wrong with relaxation and pursuing happiness. Moreover, she finds it hard to accept that the future happiness and security of their children is not part of the equation.

Case Study There are two schools of thought regarding the issue.

The first one advocates a lifestyle that is simple, free from materialism and a heart that gives sacrificially to the poor and to good causes. Into this group belongs Pastor Nathan Ferguson, the local community spiritual leader and mentor to David Trapp. On the other hand there are those who believe in social responsibility and the need to help others but they will never think twice in going after more money and acquiring more properties to increase the value of their portfolio. Into this second group belongs Clea Parks a long time colleague of Mr. Trapp.

Clea Parks offered an opposing view to that of Pastor Ferguson and she remarked that Christians can be sometimes be so impractical in their quest for perfectionism and she cautions against falling into the legalistic trap. David is squeezed between two positions and opinions. Analysis Building a house near a lake and enjoying quality time with family and friends while frolicking in the water does not violate the Ten Commandments. Taking pleasure in ones possessions is not morally wrong; nowhere in the Bible can one see a command that it is wrong to be happy. The Old Testament is full of stories telling of God's desire to bless his people.

In fact the basic incentive that God gave for his people to follow his commands is blessing. There will be a plentiful harvest, the land will be protected against famine, and the devourer will be rebuked. So how is it morally wrong to be rich and live a blessed life? When King David volunteered to build God's temple he offered his possessions and part of it is in gold bullions. Looking at King David's possession, David Trapp's fortune pales in comparison. Now, what about the parable of the rich young ruler, the Sermon on the Mount, and the practice of first century Christians where sharing is the norm?

With regards to the rich young ruler commanded to sell his possessions to be given to the poor, there is no evidence to suggest that Jesus asked all his disciples to do the same and make it standard operating procedure for all followers. Peter, James, and John left their jobs to follow him but they did not sell their possessions. In fact after the Crucifixion Peter went back to his former trade and resumed his work. One can even argue here that the rich

young ruler was not specifically commanded to give all to the poor. The rich young ruler could keep half and still be rich enough.

The issue here is not the selling of worldly possessions but the ruler loves money more than God. So if David Trapp is secure in the belief that God is his priority then there should be no need to feel bothered by having possessions. With regards to the Sermon on the Mount, there is no conflict between owning property and the need to bless the less fortunate. David can still do all these things even if he spends parts of the year in his vacation home. He has already proven his heart of gold by creating initiatives to help those who could not help themselves.

With regards to the example set by the first century Christians - of sharing and taking care of the poor and widows, again there is no conflict. David can still share his blessings and give to the poor without having to sacrifice his property. One has to look at the big picture why David could not just simply give up the property. First of all the land was inherited from his Uncle. He was chosen as the steward of the property. There are members of the Trapp clan who are well aware of the inheritance, selling it may cause them to stumble.

Moreover, judging from their work schedule and their volunteer work, the Trapp family needed the lake house to make them better stewards and channels of blessings. Burning out in the work of God's vineyard is more destructive. They can give all but if they burn out by doing so then there will be less people that can be touched through their ministry. Concerning the issue of materialism and consumerism, the Trapp family can still pursue their

dream of having a place of rest and recreation without succumbing to vanity and pride.

The house can be made from used lumber and through extra effort the family can source out cheaper building materials e. g. electrical and insulation. The family can have that house and the trade-off can be not buying an expensive SUV or not purchasing top of the line water sport equipment. On the issue of responsible use of resources, the family can use sustainable energy practices such as the installation of solar panels in their second home. Conclusion Selling everything and opting to live like a monk is an overly simplistic solution to the problem of materialism and neglect of the poor.

As pointed out earlier an ancient king learned how to be rich and yet honoring God in such a way that the name King David inspires millions of people even after thousands of years had passed. It is easier to be poor and living like a hermit and then become a burden to society than someone leading the way in changing the present situation. David Trapp and his family can choose to give up their material wealth but they will also become ineffective channels of blessings. There is an opportunity to multiply their wealth so that they can become great channels of blessings. The story of the rich young ruler can be easily taken out of context.

The command of Jesus was specific for he only knows what is in the heart of man. It would be unwise to volunteer selling everything without getting a specific command from God. It is foolish to withhold blessing for the poor yet at the same time it is foolish to give away properties and possession without

having a clear understanding of the real purpose and wisdom of such a move. It can be easily argued that God wanted his people blessed and receiving blessing that overflows having no room to store everything. From this position of overflowing blessing does God command to give to others.

To send portions to them who are weak, to share the booty to those who were unable to fight. It is clear that God commanded his children to help the poor but nowhere in the Bible is it a standard operating procedure to make ones self poor in order to help others. In fact God wants his children to be helping from a platform of success. The Bible also says that the righteous will not beg for bread and the more equally important phrase that the righteous will give an inheritance to his children's children. Looking at the big picture and looking at the Bible as a whole one can find no reason why David could not accept that he is a blessed man.