

Secularism: Making Friends with This Age **By Pastor Lee Stisser**

“²⁴If I have put my trust in gold or called pure gold my confidence, ²⁵if I rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, ²⁶if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, ²⁷and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my hand threw them a kiss of homage, ²⁸then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.” Job 31:24-28

The Christian church has always been faced with problems that arise because the church, as our Savior put it, is “in the world but not of the world.” A large part of problems in the Christian Church today is secularism. Secularism is the way of looking at our world and dealing with the concerns of life without regard for **spiritual strength**, **spiritual power**, or **spiritual presence**. Jesus warns in Mark 4:19 that in making friends with secularism: “...the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for *things* enter in and choke the Word, (and so secularism) proves unfruitful.”

The growing influence of secularism in the church has causes me great concern. Today, many credible sources warn of the dangers of secularism creeping into the church. I don’t want this to happen to us. I don’t want us to also make friends with this world.

I. The Secularization of Christians

Our text is taken from a point near the end of Job’s long speech of defense for his past life. Job was both a wealthy man and an intellectual. One by one all of his possessions were taken from him until he was left sick on a dung heap. Three friends came to “comfort” him. Each in his own way sought to help Job discover what great sin he had committed that caused God to punish him and leave him in this sorry condition. Their intentions were meant well, but the fatal point in their approach, as Job so eloquently pointed out to them, was that he was guilty of no such sin. As he reviewed his life before them, he told them that he had not been unfaithful to God. He had not made money his god, nor had he bragged about his wealth.

There is always the temptation to become secular when one deals with secular things. In these words of Job we see that a person can become secular first of all through wealth. Wealth can function in a variety of ways to lead us away from God, to lead us to deny God His rightful place and purpose in our lives. If I come to feel that I cannot live without a certain standard of living, if luxuries have become necessities for me, then I have become secular. Then I am far removed from the psalmist who cried, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you” Psalm 73:25.

Certainly God commends thrift and the saving of money, but when that rainy day comes, if one has only his money for security, it is a dreary day, indeed. One of the ironies of life in America is that there are so many people who put their complete trust in the power of money. No matter what one tries to save – liquid assets, stocks, bonds, real estate, jewelry, rare paintings, sculpture – a downturn in the economy can wipe out all that has been saved. Look at Job, a wealthy, landowner, wiped out financially almost in a day!

Through Job’s friends, we see at least three basic temptations that beset Christians as they begin to enjoy the advantages of material success:

- 1) the temptation to convert wealth from a means to an end to be possessed for its own sake,
- 2) the temptation to put our trust in the protection of wealth, and

3) the temptation to find in the size of our possessions our importance and satisfaction. Job tells us that to yield to these temptations is to be guilty of denying God. If money is our confidence, then we have no confidence in God.

II. Christianizing the Secular

How can we rescue ourselves from the dangers of secularism? Christianizing the secular begins by rediscovering the mysteries of God. Sometimes God Himself brings us back to a sharp awareness of Him through disasters and calamities. Sometimes it happens in other ways. However it happens, though, we begin by learning all over again that we cannot live without God.

To learn that we cannot live without God leads inevitably to Christ, for it is in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that we find the fulfillment of our lives. He came because we cannot live without God; He died and rose again that we might live with God. Thus, when we try to squeeze God out of our lives by putting our wealth before Him, it is through the Son of God, and His Holy Spirit, that we rediscover our dependence on God.

We are called to rule over the secular. Proverbs 3:9-10, “⁹Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; ¹⁰then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” But we are also called to use the secular for serving others. For Christ commanded us to love mankind with our substance and with our lives. Thus we discover the appropriate role for money: to use it for the **purposes of God**, and to **devote it to His ministry**. So wealth is not evil – *the love of it is*.

We don't like to talk in church about **giving generously** for God's ministry, because too often, we don't think of giving that way. Too often Christians think of giving in secular terms – whether they approve or disapprove of how it's being used in “my” church. But we should not be afraid to talk about it. The more we **TRUST in God for His providence**, the more we trust that **He knows** what He is doing, and that no matter how we might stumble, He will ensure that things will be accomplished for **our good** and for **His glory**.

If we consult God, if we act as we believe God would have us act, then we will find God working in and through our labors. We will resolve the problem of the secular, for we will have Christianized it.

So after hearing this lesson from Job, let us challenge ourselves. When we miss worship, let's not neglect our joyful giving, but rather keep our promise to God and make up our offering for those Sundays we are not present in worship, that we may continue the regular and joyful habit of giving to our Lord's ministry.

Let us therefore joyfully and confidently involve ourselves in the affairs of life; let us gather to ourselves the wealth of the earth; but let us also devote our energies and abilities, our wealth and our resources to the cause of God, knowing that He – for whom we live – will preserve us not only now but eternally.