

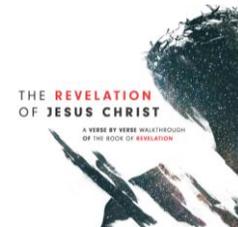
Title: Revelation, Part 25: How Much is Too Much?

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 18:1 – 19:5

Big Idea: 7 measures can help you gauge how materialism may have affected you.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 19:5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!"



We live in a world of lots of stuff, material things that beckon us to have them, eat them, experience them, buy them, collect them, store them, get more of them and on and on. It's called materialism. A question we must ask ourselves about our material things is how much is enough or "how much is too much?" which is the title of my message today.

To get us thinking about this, I did a bit of research to find out some famous birthday parties and how much people spent on them. I found three very interesting ones.

In 2013 Beyonce and her husband Jay-Z gave their daughter Blue Ivey a special birthday party when she turned 1. Every parent wants to celebrate that important milestone, right. They definitely didn't get the cake at Costco. The cake cost \$2000, there were \$95,000 worth of pink and white roses, and giveaway bags for attendees priced at \$30,000. They spend over \$200,000. However, they came down to earth by buying her this, a barbie. However, this one was a bit different. See the jewelry, real diamonds. That barbie cost \$80,000. I hope they didn't let her play with it.



Then there was Russian billionaire, Andrei Melnichenko, who spent 2 million on his birthday party which included Jennifer Lopez performing a 40-minute private concert for 60 guests in Britain.



The granddaddy of all the birthday parties was thrown by The Sultan of Brunei (a tiny nation in Indonesia). His 50th birthday party was in 1996. It lasted 2 weeks - The party included a polo match with Prince Charles, a Michael Jackson concert for 60,000 people in a custom-built stadium (he charged \$17 million) and a dinner for 3000 guests. If you were a guest, you left with a gold medal. The price, a paltry \$27.2 million at that time.

Now these are so obviously examples of extreme materialism, way over the top. But what about money and financial choices that aren't so cut and dry.



- A Kia SUV or a Land Rover SUV
- A Ford sedan or an Audi sedan
- A Chevy or a Tesla
- A Casio, an Applewatch, or a Rolex



- A 2-hour Duc d'Orleans site seeing tour of Sarnia complete with a buffet (ham sandwiches, potato chips, and pickle slices, I know we've taken the tour) or a Caribbean cruise on the world's largest cruise ship, the Symphony of the Seas.
- Wal-mart jeans with no holes in them or ripped jeans from Hudson Bay

Those choices are not so cut and dry, because there are people in our church that probably own all these kinds of cars and clothing and watches and take different kinds of vacations, etc. etc.

Where do you draw the line? How do you know if you have a healthy view and use of money? How much is too much? How much is enough? When does materialism start?

Billionaire John D Rockefeller was once asked the question in the early 1900's, "How much is enough?" His reply, "Just a little bit more." Well, that's definitely not the right answer.

We continue our series in Revelation today. The book tells us signs when the end times are getting closer and reminds us that Jesus wins and he will restore all things.

Today's, passage, Revelation 18, gives us some clues about how to best answer the question of *what is too much* because it deals with a significant sign that we are getting closer to the end times, a growing caustic, all-consuming materialism.

Big Idea:

7 measures can help you gauge how materialism may have affected you.

— 😡 😞 😐 😊 😄 +

Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent



So, here's how we're going to approach things. First, here's the big idea.

So, we're going to look at this passage and then I'm going to show you these seven measures of materialism along with these emojis. I'm going to encourage you to mentally evaluate yourself where you stand on each of these measures that can indicate materialism in your life.

If you want to get your Bibles out. We will be in Revelation 18.

Rev. 18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. ² With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

This vision is again a fast forward to the end times. This loud voice is meant to arrest our attention, like, "hey, listen up, don't fall for this."

What was Babylon to the NT Christian? The ancient city of Babylon is where some of the most influential empires of the ancient world ruled. It was truly a magnificent city. It was in what is now modern-day Iraq. One of those empires was the Babylonian empire and it was a world center of commerce and learning and at its peak had a population of 200,000, a huge number for a city that existed over a thousand years before Christ.



This is a picture of a reproduction of the entrance to the city called the **Ishtar gate**. This was built during Nehemiah's time. Through the leadership of the kings of this empire, the Jews experienced captivity and exile for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9.2). Prisoners of these deportations were probably led into the city through this processional walkway that led to the gate. There were menacing glances of images of lions on the walls that depicted pagan gods.

So in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, Babylon became a symbol for oppressive world powers and systems that persecuted the church, like Rome now did at the time Revelation was written.

So John sees this vision of Babylon (representing Rome and other anti-God world systems to come) as fallen in the end times. Here is what's left of Babylon.



She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. ³ For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

The utter destruction of these systems and nations and governments that are anti-Christian will be so complete that he describes them as places of such desolation that they are only haunts for demons and scavenger birds like vultures, a place unfit for humans to inhabit. A ghost town is all that will remain.

Here's where he introduces one of the signs of the end times, an intoxication with stuff, things, an extreme materialism. World and business leaders will buy into this philosophy of materialism, power, oppression, and greed. The excessive luxuries here don't just refer to a mere accumulation of wealth but on an obsession with it.

This materialistic, consumption based, extravagant culture was and will be a boon to business as you might image. Many did and will grow rich from it. The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

Then he tells us how followers of Christ must respond to this overwhelming materialism.

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

He’s not saying that believers are to move to monasteries and withdraw from commerce. But the word *share* gives us a clue. It’s the word *koinonia*, the word for fellowship, a deep connection with something or someone. To come out of her means don’t become so comfortable with a materialistic world that you buy into it, that you embrace it for the consequences are bad, that he describes as plagues.

We are called to be holy, which means set apart from, or different. It’s not retiring from the world, but living differently within the world.

5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

The story of the tower of Babel in the bible tells of how the people in the world at that time strayed so far from God after the flood that they thought they could build a tower to heaven. John is making an illusion to that here with their sins piled up to heaven.

In this vision, John writes to warn Christians to not get sucked into these world systems with their

- idolatry,
- sexual immorality,
- self-sufficiency,
- complacency,
- reliance on luxury and wealth,
- and injustice.

We are to separate ourselves from that. But the question is, how do we do that?

John wrote in the gospel of John that we are to be in the world but not be of the world.

John 15:18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Again, because we don’t fit into the world’s system, he is not implying we withdraw from economic life around us. We aren’t called to go off grid and live in deeper Yukon or not shop at stores at the mall because commerce is a part of the world’s system.

What he means is that when we refuse to compromise our convictions, sometimes the price may hit our pocketbooks. It did in Rome when Christians who refused to practice worship of the emperors were kept from shopping at some places and were prohibited from getting some jobs simply because they were Christians.

8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

The Christians and Jews knew the history of Babylon that at one time it actually fell to its enemies in only one day.

He now gives three groups who have profited the most from the materialism of Babylon/Rome/future materialistic systems:

- kings of other lands who gained power and wealth;
- merchants who shared the worldwide markets she created;

- and the seamen who carried her cargo over all the world. ¹

All three of these groups, as they saw and will see the downfall of the world's commercial systems, lament, are sorrowful, not for Rome, but for themselves. They are sorry at the loss they will experience with its downfall.

⁹ “When the kings of the earth ... ¹⁰ ... they will stand far off and cry:” ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’ ¹¹ “The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—

These merchants who had gotten caught up in materialism were grieving for lost markets and lost money.

He then lists non-essentials that only the rich could afford.

¹² cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; ¹³ cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

All of these things are for self-enrichment. John's vision is based on what he saw in the Roman world but also visualizes how self-indulgence and materialism will increase in future times.

The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

Realize that then and even today, these extravagant items and the profits that came from them were made off the backs of those who toiled to make them or mine them or grow them.

- Not only did and do these systems traffic in luxuries but in humans as well. Notice he said the *bodies and souls of men*.
- The Roman world had anywhere from 10-60 million slaves.
- The poor and the prisoners and Christians were picked for gladiator shows to entertain the public.
- Today, there is exploitation of poor workers in poor countries.
- Human trafficking is growing and is a 32 billion dollar business affecting mostly young women and girls.

John is saying that what we will see as we approach the end times is gross consumption, excessive luxury, and exploitation, kinda what we see today.

But as Jesus return approaches, they will all fall.

14 “They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’

Remember this picture of Babylon? This is what is left. Ruins. No one at the time would have ever conceived that only this remained of Babylon. So, it's not a stretch to envision the world's great cities to one day be like that as the end times approach.



But, it's not all gloom and doom. The following verses show the total opposite perspective.

²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.”

¹ Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 296). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Those rejoicing aren't denying the reality of economic collapse in the final days. But, because they know that God is still in control, that he will win, they can rejoice that the perfect judge will mete out perfect judgement against those who resisted and rejected God and killed and exploited his people.

So, because these kinds of events will come, how can we so position ourselves so that, although we acknowledge the difficulty of perhaps not having enough money or losing money in a future collapsing economy or being excluded from some jobs because of our Christian beliefs, we aren't gloom and doom, for God will judge the wicked as vindication of the righteous.

World systems that that are based on pleasure, materialism, exploitation, and self-interest will experience a great and sudden crash in the end times.

Materialism is a killer. We live in a world of materialism. The power and prevalence of materialism will only increase as we approach the end times. So how do we "come away" from it as John writes in this vision?

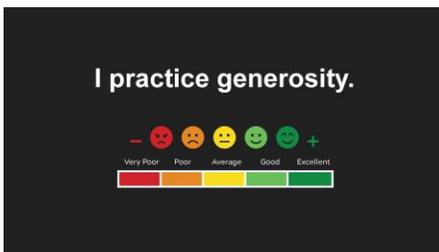
Remember the [Big Idea? 7 measures can help you gauge how materialism may have affected you.](#)

These 7 measures will help you personally self-evaluate the degree materialism has a foothold in your life. I'm going to show you these measures or benchmarks and in your mind, evaluate yourself. You don't have to write these down because after the service is over as you leave, ushers at the back will hand out this **card** with these 7 measures on it.

So, I'm going to show you the measure along with emojis that reflect a range of choices. You think about where you'd evaluate yourself and mentally circle the emoji that would reflect your answer. Then I will give you verses that relate to that measure.

1. I practice generosity.

Grade yourself.



Would others consider you a generous person if they somehow knew how you gave?

Generosity is not a raw amount, but a relative amount, relative to what you make. In God's eyes a person making six figures who gives a \$1,000 to the

church, say, may be much less generous than someone who works as wait staff at a restaurant and gives, say \$10.

Jesus talked about that when he went into the temple and watched what people gave. They had these metal trumpet shaped offering receptacles and the rich would make a big deal about all their giving as it clanked when they threw it into those receptacles. But Jesus noticed a poor widow who put in two coins, the smallest denomination at the time, two leptas, like 2 pennies.

Luke 21:1 As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

I practice generosity.

Materialism Self-Evaluation

- I practice generosity.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I enjoy what I have but I'm not enmeshed in it.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I am thankful for and satisfied with what I do have.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I resist impulse spending.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I have a budget including thoughtful earning, spending, saving, and giving.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I pray before I make large purchases (or before I buy on credit.)
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +
- I trust God that He will meet my needs.
 - Very Poor Poor Average Good Excellent +

• Practical steps I will take to address my areas of weakness:



2. I enjoy what I have but I'm not enmeshed in it.

Evaluate.



God blesses and rewards His faithful followers. He gave us our physical senses and our minds so that we can enjoy his creation, what He gives us, and the fruit of our labors.

1 Timothy 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

It's not that God is frowning on us and saying, "Don't you dare enjoy yourself on your vacation. Don't you dare enjoy that piece of apple pie."

I enjoy what I have but I'm not enmeshed in it.

But this next measure relates to how much we have.

3. I am thankful for and satisfied with what I do have.

Evaluate



I'm not constantly looking for more or envying you because you have more or something better than me, you have the 1-year-old car, and I have the 10-year-old clunker because I can't afford a newer one.

A qualifier: dissatisfaction is not always wrong. If you are stuck in your income bracket and struggling to make ends meet, your dissatisfaction can motivate you to, say, get a second job, start a business, get a new degree. So every feeling of dissatisfaction is not necessarily sinful. But there is clearly line we do cross.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

I am thankful for and satisfied with what I do have

4. I resist impulse spending.

Grade yourself.



Do I stop and think before I spend something on this shiny new thing? Is my spending mindless. Do I just have to buy this thing?

Proverbs 25:28 A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls. (NLT)

I resist impulse spending.

5. I have a budget that includes thoughtful earning, spending, saving, and giving.

Grade yourself.



Money is meant to be earned, spent, saved, and given. You need a plan that reflects all of those. I love what one person called **80-10-10 plan**. Give 10% Save 10% And live on the rest.

Proverbs 13:11 ...he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.

Luke 14:28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?"

2 Corinthians 9.7...God loves a cheerful giver.

I have a budget that includes thoughtful earning, spending, saving, and giving.

6. I pray before I make large purchases (or before I buy on credit).

Grade yourself.



I have no problem with credit cards. They are convenient and you get points. We use them. But if you are using them, make sure you have the money to pay it off at the end of the month. Credit cards can give the illusion that I have all this money since I can buy stuff with this plastic card, when in reality, you may not have the money to pay it off and if you don't pay it off, in the long run it's costing you more because you are paying high interest on it.

If you have a lot of credit card debt, develop a plan to chip away at that debt. Commit that to prayer and pray before you make a large purchase, even if you can pay cash for it. When you pray in these kinds of situations, God will give you wisdom.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

I pray before I make large purchases (or before I buy on credit).

7. I trust God, that He will meet my needs.

Grade yourself.



There is man's side and God's side in this. We have the responsibility to manage well what God gives us, spend wisely, save regularly, and give generously. The writer of proverbs writes about a necessary heart disposition we must commit to...

Proverbs 3:9 Honor the LORD with your wealth,

The writer of Hebrews shows us another heart disposition we must choose.

Hebrews 13.5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

When he writes that God will not forsake us, it means that he will take care of your needs.

I recognize that some of you may be struggling with making ends meet. God may use the church to help meet those needs. We want to help. We give away thousands of dollars each year to individuals that need financial help, and we also give to organizations that help the needy and the poor. If you are in trouble financially, we want to help. We can put you with someone to help you figure out a way out. We have a benevolence fund to help with essential needs like food. You need to let us know, however, if you need help. Mail the office at office@westparkchurch.ca and one of our staff will get back to you.

So, seven measures. How did you measure up?

If you were to flag your best one, which one would it be?
How about the one needing the most work?

After you get this card in a few minutes when we finish, I hope you'll spend some time to self-evaluate and make changes that God prompts you to make because materialism is truly and ultimately nothing but a killer.

