

Money and Might

By Dennis Knight

Money buys subsistence, and a little extra buys a better life. It represents the fruits of our labor, or the fruits of our ancestors' labor. It is widely but unevenly distributed, sometimes by merit, mostly by whim. It is often squandered but mostly it is exchanged for goods and services to sustain us and grow our families. We share with others according to our ability and heart, donate to causes we believe in, give to our institutions of worship, support our schools and government, and try to save some for a rainy day. Few of us think we ever have enough of it.

We often hear that money is the root of all evil, but there is something important left out when that sentiment is expressed in its commonly used form. The exact phrase is in the Bible, at Timothy 6:10, "*For the desire of money is the root of all evils.*"

I wanted to understand the quotation in full context, and in looking it up, I have been taken by the depth of Saint Paul's writing to Timothy. In a few lines he captures it all:

For we brought nothing into this world: and certainly we can carry nothing out. But having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content. For they that will become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.

This reading suggests a threshold, a transcendent moment when the dollar becomes almighty and the acquisition and preservation of money becomes the meaning and centerpiece of a life.

The prisons and country clubs of America are populated by those sinners, and if those in the former have met destruction in this life, then to those who became rich in the snare of the devil, Saint Paul promises perdition. There is simple justice in that, and I could end my piece right here.

But there is a larger evil rooted in the desire of money that directly affects our republic. It is in how the concentrated power of the filthy rich can corrupt a democracy. It is the manipulation of a government by the wealthy for the preservation and growth of their lucre and little more.

Over time, that power has crammed a high court with judges who now ascribe freedom of speech to inhuman corporate entities, to use and abuse indiscriminately, and uphold it as a right at least as vigorously as it would defend the rights of a single student jailed for protesting a war that makes the wealthy wealthier.

The unbridled power of wealth associates itself with a cadre of political clowns who mock the idea of equity in taxation as a redistribution of wealth, and it has steered our government into gridlock to selfishly secure the status quo. It may not happen in my lifetime, but I believe, and I think St. Paul would agree, that the day will come when the idea of a trickle down economy finally gives way to a system of trickle up, and the filthy rich will finally take a bath.