



"And now I am no more in the world,  
but these are in the world..." (John 17:11).

Use this recent news story to help your students see the relevance  
of this week's lesson from the Standard Lesson Commentary®  
or Standard Lesson Quarterly®.

### **A SUBTLE DICTATORSHIP**

During Pope Francis' recent visit to America, he cautioned Catholic Church leaders against living luxuriously, separating themselves from the poor to whom they are supposed to minister. He also called capitalism "a subtle dictatorship that condemns and enslaves men and women."

This comment produced sharply differing reactions in the American press. One writer said the pope is right: greed has hijacked capitalism. Others argued that other economic systems show no greater success in easing poverty than does capitalism.

### **A WOULD-BE DICTATOR?**

Money and Christianity have always existed in a state of tension. Simon the sorcerer thought he could use his money to control the Spirit. Through the centuries, many have used their wealth to gain power in the church or have used their position in the church to gain wealth. Some Christian leaders have even proclaimed a "health and wealth gospel," preaching that God wants all true believers to be rich. Simon's spirit still lives!

1. Do you agree or disagree with the pope's comment about capitalism? Why? Is money an evil, or does it have the power to do good—or both? Give reasons for, and examples of, your answer.
2. Why do you think Simon's request to buy the ability to impart spiritual gifts to others was condemned so harshly? In your judgment, do Simon's actions call into question the genuineness of his conversion? Explain.
3. Because of this account, the word *simony* became a part of the English language. Simony means to buy or sell a church office or to allow money to give a church member special status. What abuses have you seen in the church that you believe fit that definition?

—Charles R. Boatman

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