

The Love of Money is the Root of. . . *society*

(And how Christians are called to something different)

Part One

Scholars have proposed that money, possessions, and finances are among the leading causes of arguments and marriage failures in Western societies. Is this an accurate statement to make? Or, more specifically, what might it be about money that would lead some to make this proposition?

First, if we look at some Scripture references pertaining to money, we see some grave warnings about its power to corrupt.

Examples:

- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) – Kept back a portion of money being given, while trying to appear to be giving all.
- The rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) – Attempted to store up much in order to relax and live well for years.
- The rich young man (Mark 10:17-31) – Was unwilling to give up what he had in order to follow Jesus.
- The servant (Matthew 18:21-35) – Was forgiven a large debt, and was unwilling to forgive a small debt owed him.

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Paul, writing to Timothy, also warns about the love of money, saying that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” (1 Tim. 6:10)

Perhaps the strongest warning of all, however, is Jesus’ direct statement that “no one can serve two masters... you cannot serve God and money.” * This isn’t just an advisory to ensure that one loves God more than he loves what he owns. This is an either-or choice between two items that are mutually exclusive to each other.

*Greek mammon – involving money as well as material goods, possessions, etc.

Either-or? At this point one may think that cannot be, and name off many who appear to be very spiritual and very prosperous. I would respond that this may be for various reasons – it could be that they have been given much in order that they may give much – or it could also be that money is really the primary goal and appearing spiritual is only the means to get to the goal. We can’t pretend to know the motives of another – nor should we attempt to judge another in this way – but what we do clearly know from the Word of God is that loving God and loving money are mutually exclusive. It is not possible to serve both, to seek both, to crave both, to live for both... no, it cannot be. Only one can be master of anyone’s life, at the

exclusion of the other.

Our society, and beyond that, even our identity, is so firmly rooted in prosperity that we have allowed this saying to be diluted so that we allow a duopoly of God and money to control us. To the one who disputes this (and perhaps my own nature wants to dispute it more than any reader will), let's take a look at an oft-quoted passage from the Sermon on the Mount. I think that upon hearing the statement that one cannot serve both God and money, the natural inclination is to question it – both now as well as two millennia ago. That may be why Jesus immediately followed this radical statement with an explanation of what it looks like to love Him and not money. We'll look further at the next passage in the next installment; it is a passage that flies in the face of the "American Dream" and shakes the very foundation of what our society (and even the church) has set up as an example of security and responsibility. *Maybe I need it more than the reader – so please bear with me!*

Part Two

Perceived security is one of the foundations of our current economic system. We want to feel like what we have stored up will carry us through times that are less prosperous, so we have set up many different means of accumulating money and goods for the future. From savings plans to retirement accounts, we seem to have a plan for every phase of life. But while a reasonable amount of financial planning is certainly responsible, it is easy to put too much trust in our savings so that we are tempted to rely on it.

Jesus addressed this in what we refer to as the "Sermon on the Mount" after he made the statement that "You cannot serve God and money." The audience may have immediately began wondering how they would take care of themselves and their families if they did not have sums of money stored up – much like a modern-day audience would.

Perhaps sensing their thoughts, Jesus continues: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?"

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows

that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

I don't say this authoritatively, but it seems like the context of this passage would indicate that not only is it impossible to be devoted to God and to money, but also that being anxious about things of this world – even basic needs like food and clothing – is indicative a trust in money rather than in God.

Also, I don't say this to point fingers at the weaknesses of others. As much as I would like to think I have this down, the fact is that I still find myself basing future planning off of dollars and cents rather than trusting in God to provide for each day.

It's not by any means an easy issue to work out, but I believe it is nonetheless important due to the clear teaching that “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” With this in mind, it seems that it would follow that serving money (including trusting in it for provision for the future) may also be the basis for many other situations, including greed, control, marital issues, oppression, injustice, theft, and much more.

One may be tempted to take this passage and others pertaining to greed and love of money and demonstrate how many others fail – pointing the blame at oppressive regimes, greedy politicians, economic policies favoring the rich – and while these are by no means right, for most of us they are not our own sins but rather another's. And thus, aside from doing what is within our power to help make things right, continuing to focus on these wrongs of another may be indicative of a blindness to one's own weaknesses.

The next part of the sermon, however, speaks directly to this tendency. “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

Money... life demands it, but when allowed to grow out of proportion, it can easily become a monster that allows nothing else to share its place. Let this go out as a plea to keep it what it can rightfully be – a resource, and not what it often becomes – false security.