

Avoiding the Pitfall of Covetousness

By Senior Pastor Prince Guneratnam

When we talk about covetousness, it is in the context of riches, money or wealth. Covetousness or greed is the love of money. Paul said – covetousness is idolatry. When we love money, we worship it. Therefore we must be careful about the use and importance we place on money. God's Word has a lot to say about money.

In Matthew 6:19-21, 24, Jesus taught us:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Jesus teaches us three truths in this portion of scripture:

1. Money is uncertain

Firstly, thieves can get to it. If thieves don't get to it, blackmailers will; if blackmailers don't, kidnappers will. The possibility of losing it is there.

Secondly, moth and rust will get to it, particularly so was in the time of Jesus. The present-day implication for moth and rust is inflation. Inflation eats into your money. Today your dollar is no longer worth what it used to be.

2. It tells where your affection is

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” How and where you spend your money tells me where your heart is. If you spend selfishly on your own wants and desires, I will tell you that you love yourself more than anything else.

If you give your money to the house of God and for the furtherance of God's work then I will know where your heart is. This is systematic and faithful giving.

3. You can't serve God and mammon

What is wrong with money? Nothing. Money is necessary. It is useful and can be a blessing to the work of God. God blesses and He makes us wealthy. Money is important and is a means to further the Kingdom of God. Job was extraordinarily wealthy man, but Job feared God and eschewed evil. We can be both spiritual and wealthy. Abraham was a wealthy man too. He had great riches. He was called the father of faith.

What is wrong with dedicating ourselves to the cause of making money? Mammon or money will make you slave to its causes. The love of money made many evil. Take Lot's wife. Her love for the things of this world made her turn to have one last look and she was turned into a pillar of salt. Achan stole the Babylonian garments for the same reason. Elijah's servant coveted Naaman gifts. Judas fell because of thirty pieces of silver. Demas loved the world and forsook the ministry (2 Timothy 4:10).

When money becomes your god, it destroys you. It robs you of that which glorifies God. Money is not wrong; the love of money is!

The scripture says:

“Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierce themselves through many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9, 10).

That’s why Matthew 6:24 says we either serve God or mammon. When we run after money, it becomes an idol before us. The Bible points out that when Jesus was in the wilderness, Satan said to Him, “If you fall down and worship me, I will give you the kingdoms of the world.” Another translation says, “... I’ll make you wealthy.” But then you have to fall down and serve this world. And when you do, you are really serving the devil behind the things of this world. When a man falls down to an idol of wood, metal or any other, he is actually falling before that spirit behind that idol.

Notice Jesus’ answer: *“Thou shall worship the Lord thy God and serve Him only.”*

Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:21). In other words, you will obey the one you love. So if you love mammon, you will obey mammon. Your finances will dictate to you what you can do and what you can’t do. Mammon tells you how much to get involved (in the work of God). Mammon becomes your God and it will dictate to you the lifestyle you should follow. Why? There is a spirit behind it. You are a slave to the one you obey. Therefore, the love of money will dictate how we live, how we give and how we make ourselves available.

What is covetousness?

Covetousness, Paul says, is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). It is the greed for mammon, the greed for the things of this world. It is a love for things that will eventually control you. Moses told the children of Israel, *“They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know, to new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear”* (Deuteronomy 32:17).

1 Corinthians 6:9-12 says those who practice covetousness shall never inherit the Kingdom of God. Do you own money or does money own you?

These are three ways to find out. Ask yourself:

- a. Are you selfish with money?
- b. Are you a good steward?
- c. Do you lack in the diligence of giving?

There are some basic principles of Kingdom economics:

- a. All wealth belongs to God (Psalm 24:1; Psalm 50:12; Haggai 2:8).
- b. All we have is from God (even the sweat of our brow). Job said, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there.”*

- c. It's God or mammon that determines how you live and serve. You make the decision. The choice of who your master is determines how you live.

What can we do?

1 Timothy 6:11 says, "*O man of God, flee these things.*" How do I flee? There are four steps the Holy Spirit showed me:

- a. Giving breaks the hold of sin of the love of money.
- b. Give God what is rightfully His. Give God His portion, what He has instituted – your tithes and your offerings. (Malachi 3:8).
- c. Giving sets you free from the curse of poverty. The curse of poverty is the curse of withholding that which belongs to God. When you bring your tithes and offerings, God "*will pour out a blessing...*". God wants to bless you and prosper you (,) but you must understand the economics of God's Kingdom, i.e. give to God what belongs to Him; do not withhold the sacred portion.
- d. Finally, seek first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 36:34). This is God's basic principle. Many reverse this process and expect God to bless.

The blessing of God upon my life is a testimony of God's faithfulness. All that I am and have today is the result of my surrendering my life to God to serve Him. When God called me to the ministry, I was concerned about my marriage and the expenses involved. Nevertheless, I chose to obey God. When the time came for me to get married, He gave me a good wife and met all my expenses. When we were expecting our first child, I asked the specialist how much it would cost, and he said, "I understand that you are a pastor. It'll cost a prayer. If you will pray for me, that's how much it would cost you." When our second child was born, God spoke to a lady in our pioneering church and she took care of the medical expenses. All through our lives, God continued to be the Faithful Provider.

We used to stay behind the church. When the church needed more room, we decided to move out. We needed a house. God who provided the small things was the Provider for big things as well.

If you want to serve God effectively, you must understand Kingdom economics. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, you will never go wrong. Allow God's principles concerning money to guide your lifestyle. Be delivered from the spirit of covetousness. Serve Him, you will have His unfailing source of supply.

(All the Bible quotations are from the New King James Version).

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