

## Cash Values *Matthias Media*

### 1. MONEY AS GOD

One of the problems with discussing money is that everyone is waiting for the bottom line. We want someone to tell us exactly how much money a Christian should be allowed to have, and precisely how he or she should spend it. The Pharisee in all of us wants to fence the whole subject in with numbers and rules so that we can know exactly what God requires of us and what we're allowed to get away with. Should we buy a Ford or a BMW?

Unfortunately (no, fortunately!), this isn't how it works. "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees", says Jesus, "you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). In the Sermon on the Mount (where that quote comes from), Jesus goes on to explain how obedience must reach down to our attitudes. Christianity is a heart religion; it is about people whose hearts have been cleansed and changed by God's Spirit, and who now long to serve and please their Lord.

That is why in this study and in those that follow, you won't find many dollar signs. We won't be attempting to lay down precisely how much money Christians should earn or precisely how they should spend it. However, we will search the Scriptures for some key attitudes in relation to money, and these attitudes will need to be applied to our current behaviour.

### INVESTIGATE

*Read Matthew 6:19-21, 24.*

1. What alternatives are discussed in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think it means to 'serve money'?

3. What potentially negative influence does money (or treasure) have on us?

*Read Romans 1:21-25.*

4. What ought we be spurred to do as we regard God's good creation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How might the way we treat money (as part of God's creation) fit into this?

*Read Ephesians 5:5.*

6. Why is greed or 'covetousness' idolatry?

### An Alternative God

While the Bible gladly affirms that money and wealth are part of God's good creation, and that they come to us as his blessing, it also warns us with deadly earnestness of the dangers of money. Money, it seems, is an alternative god. We can be seduced by money into apostasy—that is, we can find ourselves serving Money rather than God. Money exerts a strange power over us. It ignites our greed. In our fallen world, it prompts us to forsake the Creator and to worship part of his creation instead. It is worthy of the title 'false god'.

For many Western Christians, this is something of a spiritual blind spot. There are some sins that we are very aware of—and sexual sins would be high on the list—but greed and financial idolatry do not often concern us as much. Ponder this: how many of Jesus' parables can you think of that are about sex? And how many can you think of that are about money or greed? The end result is that too many Western Christians are almost indistinguishable from their non-Christian neighbours when it

comes to the way they use their money. They buy the same consumer goods, live in the same well-appointed houses and go on the same expensive holidays. To all outward appearances, it would seem that whatever effect the gospel has had in their lives, it has not penetrated as far as their wallets.

There is a warning here for all of us. Money is seductive. It is dangerous. It can lure us away from a single-minded devotion to God.

Let's look at some of the many verses in Scripture that warn of the dangers of money.

### INVESTIGATE

7. After you have read each of the following verses, write down what they teach us about:

1. the danger of money,
2. the attitudes we should avoid,
3. the godly attitudes we should adopt (if any).

• *Deuteronomy 8:6-18*

• *Matthew 13:18-23*

• *Luke 12:16-31*

• *1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19*

• *Revelation 3:14-18*

### IMPLICATIONS

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- What key attitudes towards money have come out in this study?

- How are these attitudes going to be worked out in your own life: in general terms?

in relationship to a specific decision you are facing at present?

- In what areas are you tempted to be discontent?

- Read this quote. Do you think the author is right? What changes would such an attitude mean in your life?

*We must bring money back to its simple role as a material instrument. When money is no more than an object, when it has lost its seductiveness, its supreme value, its superhuman splendour, then we can use it like any other of our belongings, like any machine. Of course, even if this relieves our fears, we must always be vigilant and very attentive because the power is never totally eliminated. Now this profanation is first of all a result of a spiritual battle, but this must be translated into behaviour. There is one act par excellence which profanes money by going directly against the law of money, an act for which money is not made. This act is giving.<sup>1</sup>*

- What are some other ways that you could prevent money and possessions from becoming too important to you?

### GIVE THANKS AND PRAY

- Pray for an encouraging AGM hearing what God has been doing among us this past year
- Ask God to give you the wisdom to view money the way the Bible does so that you will not be seduced by it.
- Pray that we would have a growing spirit of 'gospel-shaped' generosity (2 Cor 8:8-9) as we follow and serve Jesus

Endnotes 1. J Ellul, Money and Power, Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1986, p. 110.