

WATCH YOUR WALLET IN CHURCH!

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For a few weeks ... I have been speaking about money ... prosperity ... wealth.

Is God a God of prosperity or poverty? What did God promise Ancient Israel if they obeyed? Abundance ... peace ... prosperity. What will the World Tomorrow be like? It will be characterised by prosperity.

Hopefully ... we've seen money of itself is not the problem. Abraham ... Isaac ... Jacob ... Job ... King David ... had lots of money ... and they were faithful to God. But as we saw last week ... money has a dark side. It can be seductive. People can become covetous ... greedy ... develop a love of money ... even if they don't have any!

A key verse ... which is often misquoted:

1 Timothy 6:9-10 (NKJV)

9 But 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. (This person is hungry for money)

10 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 pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The problem is the love of money ... hunger for money ... covetous.

Being covetous is a common human weakness ... whether unconverted or converted ... church leaders and members are not immune. Notice: they strayed from the Faith.

Colossians 3:5-7 (NKJV)

5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

Covetousness is IDOLATRY. Putting something ahead of God ... typically money ... wealth ... fame ... status.

Putting our trust in money ... putting our desire for “more” ahead of God ... a covetous person will rarely be satisfied ... content.

Where should our minds be? Verses 1 -2:

1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

2 Set your mind (your affection) on things above, not on things on the earth.

I suppose we all like to think that churches are “safe places”. Where everyone you bump into ... is a saint ... honest ... God-fearing ...motivated by love ... honourable.

We'd like to think ... in particular ... that church leaders ... ministers ... evangelists ... are men of integrity.

We might be cautious around the unconverted ... but it's not surprising if we're more relaxed and trusting around church people and church ministers.

But it's worth remembering that covetousness ... desire for money ... wealth ... and the power and prestige that come with it ...is common to many people. Ministers and church members are not immune.

Even Jesus had dishonesty among His own crusade team!

John 12:1-6 (NKJV)

1 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

3 Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said,

5 “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” (Approximately a year’s wages)

6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

Judas (who was an Apostle) didn’t care for the poor. He was stealing right under Jesus’ nose. He was covetous!

Human nature today is still the same. If there was a covetous person like Judas in Jesus’ crusade team ... there is every chance that there are such-like people in the church today.

There are plenty of warnings to us ... both in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Ezekiel 34:1-6 (NKJV)

1 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, “Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds:

‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!

Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? (Shepherds = pastors of God’s people)

3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. (They are not doing their jobs ... they are looking out for themselves)

4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but

with force and cruelty you have ruled them. (You haven’t done any of these things that a good shepherd would do. They have used force)

5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.”

Ezekiel 34:10 (NKJV)

10 **Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”**

The shepherds are devouring the sheep. They are greedy ... selfish ... abusive ... not looking after the flock.

They see the flock as a source of income ... to exploit.

This is “covetousness” among those in charge.

Not just ancient history ... Ezekiel was a prophet. (HWA wrote to WCG ministers in 1979 and used this chapter as a condemnation of the ministry of the WCG ... applying it specifically to them). It is still applicable today.

Jeremiah 6:10-11 (NKJV)

10 **To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them: They have no delight in it. (God’s warnings are rebuffed)**

11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord. I am weary of holding it in.

Jeremiah 6:13-15 (NKJV)

13 **“Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely.**

14 They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, (*superficially*) Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace.

15 **Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush.**

Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;

At the time I punish them.

They shall be cast down.” says the Lord.

Everyone was covetous ... from the prophet to the priest.

The priests and prophets ... the religious leaders ... were corrupt ... lying ... covetous ... dealing falsely. Looking after themselves ... providing for their own comforts.

Isaiah 56:9-12 (NKJV)

9 All you beasts of the field, come to devour, *(God's people)*

All you beasts in the forest.

10 **His watchmen are blind,**

They are all ignorant;

They are all dumb dogs,

They cannot bark;

Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

11 **Yes, they are greedy dogs**

Which never have enough. *(Covetousness coming in again)*

And they are shepherds

Who cannot understand;

They all look to their own way.

Every one for his own gain, *(shameful)*

From his own territory.

12 “Come,” one says, “I will bring wine,

And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;

Tomorrow will be as today,

And much more abundant.”

Blind ... greedy and ... dumb dogs ... covetous ... looking after themselves.

Isaiah 56:11 (NET)

11 **The dogs have big appetites;**

they are never full.

They are shepherds who have no understanding;

they all go their own way,

each one looking for monetary gain. *(Hebrew: for monetary gain = profit or plunder ... obtained unjustly)*

Micah 3:9-12 (NKJV)

9 **Now hear this,**

You heads of the house of Jacob

And rulers of the house of Israel,

Who abhor justice

And pervert all equity,

10 **Who build up Zion with bloodshed**

And Jerusalem with iniquity:

11 **Her heads judge for a bribe,**

Her priests teach for pay,

And her prophets divine for money.

Yet they lean on the Lord, and say,

“Is not the Lord among us?

No harm can come upon us.” *(Still talking a good talk ... taking God’s name ... using the scriptures)*

12 Therefore because of you

Zion shall be plowed like a field,

Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,

And the mountain of the temple

Like the bare hills of the forest.

Verse 11 religious leaders ... ministers ... a big part of the problem ... who may “look the part” ... but are after money. Seduced by the dark side. Preachers because ... IT BRINGS IN AN INCOME!

BUT ... NOT PREACHING THE TRUTH!

Not every shepherd is dishonest. Not every church leader ... minister ... is motivated by greed ... or out to exploit ... out to take advantage of us. But ... some are.

So BE AWARE! Some religious leaders ... some churches ... want your money. You need to be alert.

Matthew 7:15 (NKJV)

15 **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.** *(Devouring ...hungry ... or in Greek = extortioners or robbers)*

Matthew 7:16-20 (NKJV)

16 **You will know them by their fruits.** Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?

17 Even so, **every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

20 **Therefore by their fruits you will know them.**

These are religious men ... preaching ... doing impressive works ... yet dangerous. They appear like sheep ... and are probably quite “successful”?

Luke 16:10-13 (NKJV)

10 **He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.**

11 **Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?** (*Can you handle money honestly ... or will you be lured to the dark side?*)

12 **And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?**

13 **“No servant can serve two masters;** for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon.**” (*You have to make a decision*)

Luke 16:14-15 (NKJV)

14 **Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money,** also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

15 And **He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.** For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

These were the religious leaders of the day. Admired ... looked up to ... respected ... seen as “men of God”. They quoted the Bible ... of course. They kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days. They looked the part ... Sabbath keeping men of God ... on the outside. But their hearts were corrupt ... and they exploited the people. God said they were an abomination.

Just because someone “looks the part” today doesn’t mean you’re always safe ... that you can trust them. Jesus said beware ... some come in sheep’s clothing.

Religion is a \$billion business. In the USA ... if everything is included ... religious hospitals ... religious charities ... faith-based schools and colleges ... add up everything ... then religion is bigger than Facebook ... Google and Apple combined ... approximately \$378 billion. If you break it down ... members donations to their churches are approximately \$74.5 billion per year!

Lots of money ... and lots of temptation. Many individual churches have millions of \$\$\$ available.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

1 **But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, (not a possibility ... but a definite!) who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them,** and bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 **And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

3 **By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words;** for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. *(Back to the hunger for money ... the greed ... potentially the status ... the prestige)*

(KJV) And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you. *(You’re a means of trading to them)*

(NET) in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words

How many follow them? Many! They don’t heed the warnings!

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NKJV)

1 **The elders who are among you I exhort,** *(addressed to the ministers)* I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain** but eagerly;

3 ***nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;***

4 **and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.**

(KJV) not for filthy lucre

(NET) not for shameful profit

There's a clear warning here. Applied back then ... and applicable today. Human nature still exists ... even in church ministers ... there's a dark side to money. Too often ... an opportunity is there to take advantage of the trust of members (and others).

Sometimes it's the desire for direct personal gain. Sometimes ... a desire to undertake a special project ... because the leader has a vanity project that requires money from members.

We all need to be alert. People will be after your money. The Bible says so. And it will sometimes be for wrong purposes.

One thing to watch out for is manipulation ... so they can get money off you by dishonest means.

Historically ... it was common to use fear ... or pressure ... or intimidation. How selfish to keep you own money ... think of the needs of others ... especially of "God's Work" ... you need to sacrifice ... you need to put God first ... (with your wallet) ...or you'll be cursed by God and probably burn in hell.

In the last few years ... a very popular alternative message has evolved. We have moved from "the stick" over the head ... to "the carrot". The best way to receive God's blessings (of prosperity) is to give ME ... GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE ... your money! Then! Watch how God opens the windows of heaven. That's playing on people's covetousness.

Acts 20:16-21 (NKJV)

16 For **Paul** had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

17 From Miletus he **sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.**

18 And when they had come to him, **he said to them: (The ministers) "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,**

19 **serving the Lord with all humility,** with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

20 how **I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,**

21 **testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Acts 20:25-28 (NKJV)

25 "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

26 **Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.**

27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

28 **Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**

Acts 20:29-38 (NKJV)

29 **For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**

30 **Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.**

(How would Paul know that? From reading the scriptures in the OT ... in Ezekiel 34 etc)

31 **Therefore watch,** and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. (Key point!)**

34 **Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.**

35 **I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. (Talking specifically about finances)** **And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** ”

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Paul coveted no one's silver. This is an example and a warning! He supported himself.

“More blessed to give” is focused on the elders. That's their duty! Not vice-versa!

Paul knew human nature.

Titus 1:5-9 (NKJV)

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.

7 **For a bishop must be blameless**, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, **not greedy for money**, *(protection against the dark side)*

8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,

9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Titus 1:10-11 (NKJV)

10 **For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,**

11 **whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.** (KJV: *Filthy Lucre*)

Philippians 2:19-24 (NKJV)

19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.

21 **For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.**

22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.

24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

Philippians 2:21 (AMP)

21 **For the others (*Ministers?*) all seek [to advance] their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (the Messiah).**

It was hard to find genuine ministers. A number are merely hirelings ... only in it for the money.

John 10:10-13 (NKJV)

10 **The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.**

11 **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

12 **But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.**

13 **The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.**

Hirelings don't care about others ... the sheep. They are only in it for the money.

Many of us will know that in WCG days ... many ministers stayed around ... happy to preach heresy ... to preach what Pasadena wanted ... to keep their pay checks ... company cars ... home ... at least until an

alternative came along (and even then only preferred an alternative ... where money and position could be maintained).

No doubt ... quite a number compromised with the truth for financial reasons. The dark side of money.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-5 (NKJV)

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.

GWT Verse 5 “As you know, we never used flattery or schemes to make money. God is our witness!”

1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 (NKJV)

6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. *(They were gentle ... not harsh)*

1 Thessalonians 2:8-10 (NKJV)

8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

9 For you remember, brethren, our labour and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. *(They paid their own way)*

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

Paul could have made demands on them ... “a workman worthy of his hire ...”. But ... he set an example.

Other ministers/evangelists/apostles ... made demands. They exploited and took advantage of the brethren ... were covetous ... pursued dishonest gain.

Not everyone is dishonest. Hopefully it's a minority? But we need to be aware and alert if ministers ... evangelists ... churches or church leaders ... seek to manipulate us.

If anybody wants to voluntarily support any particular ministry ... that's absolutely fine. If they believe it's a good place ... doing a good work ... and they're happy to support it ... that's a personal choice.

But it should be a choice you're happy to make ... after you have examined the fruits. Not under pressure ... or threat ... or intimidation ... or someone piling guilt on you for being allegedly selfish.

Unfortunately ... if you look around many churches ... TV evangelists ... even Church of God groups ... you'll see quite a lot of manipulation.

We can't always judge motives ... but we can perhaps judge methods. And some of these methods to get money are just plain wrong.

Next week ... we'll look at some of the ways church members are manipulated ... as various churches seek to get their unfair share of the \$74.5 billion that members are donating.