

## Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

### The Sin of Distrust In God: The Love of Money

*“But store 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 [literally, be a slave to] two masters. 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 both God and mammon” (Matthew 6:20,21,24).*

It’s all too easy to succumb to “slavery” to things of this earth, especially when money is involved. If your heart yearns for the prestige, sense of success, and ability to buy what you long for which material prosperity offers, then you’re *enslaved by it*. Our Lord follows up His discourse on serving either God or “mammon” (a comprehensive term for all kinds of material possessions) with this warning: *don’t be worried or anxious* about the things of this world (see Matthew 6:25-32).

His directives against worry are necessary because they concern sins you may be committing against the very character of God. And, as if to put an exclamation point on the issue, Jesus then commands,

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).*

This whole passage in Matthew chapter 6 is one of the clearest distinctions our Lord Jesus makes between the preeminence of His Kingdom and His righteous-

ness in your life, and the distractions and worldly priorities that sidetrack His relational focus and purpose for your life. You can be sure with our Lord that there’s no gray area in this matter!

The epistles offer precise explanation of how *your heart* controls both what you value and how you respond to what you put first in your life. In these verses you discover that money *in itself* isn’t the issue our Lord is addressing. Rather, it’s the *love* of money—literally, being determined to keep what you have and accumulate more, for whatever motives—and the painful consequences this evil pursuit inevitably produces:

*“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people have wandered from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1Timothy 6:10).*

*“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).*

We’ve met so many who’ve shipwrecked their faith by doggedly pursuing wealth or by never being satisfied with what they do have. Again, when your heart is set on accumulating more money, it’s because of what it *represents* to you and others around you rather than the currency and stocks themselves. When the things of this world are worth more to you than the treasures in heaven that come from walking in the will of our Father, then you’re evidencing this:

- **the sin of distrust in our heavenly Father to provide what He knows you need.**
- **the sin of refusing to diligently do your part in His kingdom as He calls for.**

When you distrust your Father's loving concern for you as His child, you are doubting His very nature and bringing His character into disrepute. And when you resist doing His will in serving His Kingdom purposes, you're evidencing *how little love* you really have in your heart for the King of the Kingdom.

Unlike sins you commit against other people, these sins are against God Himself—and require repentance on your part so your love and trust can be restored. You can't *go on sinning* and expect that in your unrepentance Christ will intercede on your behalf! That's *presumption*, as John makes clear (1John 3:6-9).

Don't take this admonition lightly. Centuries before Christ's incarnation Eli understood the severity of intentional sin by those who represent Him yet bring down His Name: "*If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?*" (1Samuel 2:25).

Recent generations within Christendom have unwittingly sown seeds of worldly pursuit and covetousness into their children and grandchildren as they've indulged their love of money and trust in it for all their needs. But not only have they diminished and even snuffed out their own pursuit of God's will and trust in Him; they've also rolemodeled for their progeny the priority to acquire and accumulate all that the world has to offer. And "enough" is never enough.

There's also a bitter connection between being driven from within to pursue money and the ongoing epidemic of divorce in the past few generations. That sorry consequence isn't about to end, as today's crop of children insolently demands (and generally receives) whatever gadget or brand-name clothes or things the world touts and they love.

What you *didn't* instill in your children's character has opened the door for worldly patterns to become more deeply rooted, and these become the model for *their* children. The addiction to ME gratification leads to greater resistance to change and wider disregard for the needs of others. Is that the legacy you intended for them?

When a previous generation puts more trust in their own ability to prosper materially than they do in their heavenly Father to meet their needs, then their children and grandchildren will run all the faster down the pathway of self-sufficiency and self-gratification. By disregarding Father's will that you walk according to His Kingdom purposes, you've already sent the message to the next generations that He is of little importance or relevance to their lives.

What isn't readily apparent to the older generation is the aftereffect of what they *didn't* accomplish for our Father's glory when they forsook seeking first our Lord's Kingdom and His righteous way of living. Since they failed to instill this quest in their children, it's impossible to evaluate what our Lord *could* have achieved through these generations if they *had* wholeheartedly sought and lived by Kingdom purposes and stored up for themselves treasures in heaven. How He might have shown Himself mighty on behalf of this nation *if* one generation had put the interests of His Kingdom first...

***"You adulterous people,  
don't you know that friendship with  
the world is hatred toward God?  
Anyone who chooses to be a friend of  
the world becomes an enemy of God"***  
(James 4:4).

As we got ready to leave Jerusalem in 1994 to carry the prophetic message of

the Hebraic foundations back to the United States, we were warned by Israeli friends who loved Messiah Jesus:

**“You’re going back to the hardest place on earth for this message to be received. Christians there don’t need God and they don’t need each other.”**

Eighteen years of being back in this country have proved these words all too true. It’s rare to find Christians who live in childlike, trusting dependence on their heavenly Father. Keep in mind that *praying to Him* and truly *needing Him to answer* are not synonymous! Many pray, but so few depend on Him to respond.

Many Christian parents we encounter have taught their children to be friends with the world and to hate God. That may seem pretty harsh, but when from God’s perspective we *commit adultery* with the world by adopting its goals and values, we’re profaning Him by desiring the values and goals that are the passion of the ungodly. We can recognize this “love affair” with the world by churching parents who describe their grown children through the lens of their worldly success: *“My son’s a surgeon;” “My daughter travels all over the world on business;” “My grandkids are so busy with sports, and they’re all on good teams.”*

It’s no surprise that people whose lives were consumed with acquiring money and what it could buy don’t describe either their own lives or those of their children and grandchildren by their love for the Lord or their service in His Kingdom. The words of Jesus reveal just how insidiously distracting are worry and the pursuit of money and what it can buy: *“But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19).

Jesus offers a sharp warning to those who are bent on self-gratification and pleasure-seeking, who focus their discretionary time and resources on their own pursuits rather than on Father’s will and purposes. In His parable about a rich landowner He speaks directly to us today about the consequences for people who choose the world’s way of loving riches:

*“And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God’”* (Luke 12:19-21).

Many among the older generation who loved money and the ease they hoped to gain from it are finding themselves embroiled in relational chaos with their grown children and their grandchildren. The standard the seniors set for their kids to pursue material security no matter what the cost has reaped multiple divorces and grandkids who are insolent toward authorities.

On the other hand, young parents who have chosen to follow our Lord Jesus and obey His commands are often encountering tension as they try to raise their kids to honor and love Jesus as Lord: the grandparents are still engrossed in a pleasure-bent lifestyle, and criticize their adult children for the way they’re raising their youngsters! How little we hear about grandparents coming alongside the next generation to help them raise kids who serve their Lord and to seek His Kingdom and His righteous character.

Our Lord isn’t sitting idly by watching all this happen. His Word clearly warns of

the consequences of claiming to belong to Him yet pursuing a life of sin. The love of money truly is a root of all kinds of evil. Over the years we've seen the devastating effect that loving the power and purchasing ability of money has had on young and old alike. Yet through repentance our merciful Father *can* transform these individuals, couples and families *if* they wholeheartedly humble themselves to seek a restored relationship with Him. A good first step is to test themselves: How much are they clinging to their desire for money and the lifestyle it provides?

### The Test of "*Come, Follow Me!*"

If you feel financially secure and our Lord Jesus said to you, "*Give your wealth away to the poor and come follow Me,*" would you? How does this question make you feel? Nervous? Defensive? Dubious? Our Lord has given this challenge before (Luke 18:22). Today He's still seeking hearts that are willing to be *stewards* on His behalf of all that they have rather than *owners* who satisfy themselves. Giving up ownership comes from the heart, and He may not call for any material change at all in your life. Or, He may call you to give it all to Him. Is your response like the rich young man: "*When he heard this, he became very sad, because he had great wealth*" (Luke 18:23)?

### The Test of Alternative Use of Money

We each have a choice in how we use our finances. If you're in a position to spend without concerning yourself whether it's God's will, or if you have no other pressing purpose for those funds, then the world considers you comfortable. But that also may mean you have little or no need for God in other areas of your life. *Self-suf-*

iciency lies behind this warning: "*Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*" (Luke 18:25).

The wealthy can be so used to meeting their own needs that they have no sense of the childlike dependence our Father calls for in His children. The temptation to pride themselves that "the work of their hands" has brought about their material success can be a very real barrier in their relationship with Him.

On the other hand, when it's important to you to weigh His will in your major expenditures *and* to consider your other needs so you use the funds wisely, you're much more likely to view yourself as a steward of His resources rather than an owner. You're also more likely to gratefully consider yourself a child who fully depends on your Father—something essential to Kingdom living: "*I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 18:3).

### Conclusion

Christendom overflows with those who are friends of the world and fervently pursuing the treasures of this earth. They've forsaken eternal joy for the transitory pleasures of now. But they sit in the crosshair of the point Jesus makes: "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26).

Now contrast those whose hearts, actions and words show they're seeking the Master's Kingdom first. There's nothing on earth that they fear losing. Doing our Lord's will—first, last, and foremost—fills their motives. They know that to belong to our Lord Jesus means you *can't* serve two masters.

**So, who are you serving?**