

Christ's Doctrine of Money

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ST. PAUL said: "The love of money is the root of all evil." This excludes the attitude of Jesus.

He did not condemn money as an economic factor. He emphasized the influence of the acquisition and distribution of wealth on the character of the individual. Gladstone once said that, "If you knew how a dollar would be made, how he gets it, spends it, keeps it, shares it, you know some of the most important things about him."

Jesus treats the problem from three viewpoints:

OUR OBLIGATION TO GOD.

Read Matt. 25: 14-30; Luke 19: 12-27; 12: 16-21, 14: 31-33, 18: 18-30. Jesus taught that the prime business of any man is to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." To work conscientiously and well, not primarily for personal gain, but for the sake of the work itself and its service to society, is to be about our Father's business.

Jesus nowhere condemns private property. He teaches that property is a trust from God. It is a gift in trust, for which we must give an account. Acquisition of property, like the desire to acquire knowledge, is a worthy ambition, provided it is under right direction and guided to right ends. When the possession of wealth becomes the end of all our effort, it dwarfs our life, and opens the door to a host of evils.

But God has given us wealth that we may use it, not tie it up in a napkin, bury it in a hole, or store it up in a barn. The merchant-man in the parable said, "Trade till I come." That means to use our wealth, not for the gain it brings us, but as stewards of our Master.

Jesus taught also, that by the right use of wealth, we increase it, "to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." True faithfulness consists in the proper use of wealth, as well as the right use of what God has given. The "Well done, good and faithful servant" comes after "Thou deliveredst unto me five talents; lo, I have gained other five."

Stewardship to God involves not only the responsibility to use and increase our wealth, but to *dedicate* it all to His service. This is the crux in Jesus' doctrine of stewardship. Jesus does not ask for a just and equitable distribution, or a fair share of our profits. He asks for all we have, and the service of the Kingdom. The evil is not in the increase of wealth as much as in the refusal to renounce all for His sake. Jesus said, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." He said to the rich young man, "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and come follow Me."

It is the "motif" of renunciation that determines our attitude to wealth. We should at all times view wealth as coming from God, held in trust for Him, and at His call handed back. If the thought of trusteeship fades, and we are excusing the unrighteous gain of money, then absolute renunciation is the only salvation.

Paul shows us that self-renunciation is not necessarily an indication of holiness. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing." The value is not in the act of renunciation, but in the true spirit of love for God and His Kingdom, that will sacrifice all for His sake. The right attitude of soul with regard to riches is better than the mere

renunciation of them. The latter may lead to a dangerous form of asceticism. Jesus offers us two alternatives—mastery for the sake of His Kingdom, and abandonment for His own sake.

RELATION TO OTHERS.

Read Matt. 6: 1-4, 9: 1-8; Mark, 12: 41-44.

Every man who holds wealth or power is a steward, not only to God, but also to society. Our responsibility to others in regard to wealth may be considered from two aspects. They are well expressed by the prophet, "Do Justice and love mercy."

Justice. The fulfilling of the true spirit of stewardship will help much to satisfy the demands of justice. Justice calls on every man to render such service as he is able to the community, and to draw out of it for himself no more than he needs.

Christianity advocates a democracy that implies the diffusion of education, political power, and wealth, among the common people. Autocracy and plutocracy in wealth, as well as in government, are passing away.

The great need of to-day is not more charity, but more sympathy and interest in human welfare, that give a good wage and create wholesome surroundings. The true democratic method of accumulating wealth, which implies a fair and just wage for labor to every man, will go a long way to solve the problem of distribution. An industrial democracy would be the realization of the social teachings of Jesus.

Mercy or Charity. We have not satisfied the demands of the teaching of Jesus when we have done justice. The work of Jesus on our behalf was not done to fulfil justice, but to manifest the Divine mercy in our helplessness. We have an obligation to the one that is helpless to help him. "From every man, according to his ability, to every man according to his need," is the law of benevolence.

The problem of charity is not circumscribed by schemes of relief, but is a part of the problem of redeeming and renewing human character. Wealth should contribute to economic justice and charity should provide for economic self-help. The method of Jesus was to help the helpless on their feet. "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." Peter expressed the true Christian attitude to the living. "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee; in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The highest aim of charity is to have a share in the making of a man.

Charity is the fulfilling of the vicarious spirit in relation to wealth. It is the losing of ourselves, that we may find ourselves in others. "For their sakes He became poor," was said of Jesus. Charity that is not a means to self-help impoverishes the community and dwarfs the personality of him who receives.

RELATION TO CHARACTER.

Read Luke 16: 1-12, 16: 19-31, 12: 16-21, 10: 30-37; Matt. 21: 12-16.

Jesus emphasized the fact that the things which a man possesses serve as a subtle test of character. We are entrusted with property, because it is an instrument to moral and spiritual discipline. Too often, wealth creates a shrivelled nature, a corroded conscience, a self-centred soul. Jesus saw the terrible dangers in the possession of wealth, and he said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God."

To Jesus, "Life is more than meat,

and body than raiment," and, "A man's life consists, not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He reversed the world's standard of value, when he taught that true wealth consists in character, not in material possessions.

What is the teaching of Jesus in regard to the relation of wealth to personal character?

Wealth is a gift from God to be used and increased according to the principles of true stewardship. To him that has the power to use and increase wealth, shall be given more. Acquisitiveness, if a root of many evils, is also a root of every form of productive industry. It is not a question of extirpating, but of controlling and dedicating it to the service of others. Communism says all property should be held in common—no private property. This is based on the principle that innocence is better than virtue, feeling from sin better than overcoming. Jesus taught virtue was preferable to innocence, and victory over temptation to escape from it. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Christ's cure for the evils of acquisitiveness was that property is a trust.

Wealth is not a possession to be held, but an *instrument of service* for others. Wealth is not ours in any sense. It is a gift to us, by the use of which we are to develop our personality. Jesus said, "If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches, and if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

Jesus reversed the measure of greatness and power. "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." Wealth is not an instrument of mastery over others, but of service on behalf of others. The Christian capitalist is the servant, not the master, of industry. "Neither be ye called masters, for one is your master, even Christ."

The sin of the rich fool rested in the fact that he kept all his wealth for himself, and was not rich toward God. Likewise, Dives was condemned because he lavished his wealth on himself, and neglected poor Lazarus. The Good Samaritan was praised because he used his possessions to help a man in need. A rich man may enter the Kingdom of Heaven only when he transmutes wealth into loving service.

Benevolence is measured by the *spirit* in which it is given, and the *object* for which it is given. Jesus condemned the charity given by the Pharisees because it was given with a selfish purpose. True benevolence seeks not to relieve our responsibility in respect to the needs of others. It seeks to place others on our basis of self-help and self-respect. The need of the poor is not simply relief under adverse circumstances, but courage to better his circumstances. Charity is personal, not institutional. We lose the best part of the benefit when we hand over our benevolence to some one else to dispense. Charity is fulfilled by the personal contagion of sympathy and love.

It is twice blessed—it blesses him that gives and him that takes. Charity in the form of alms-giving may be a virtue. Its value depends not on its munificence, but upon the spirit of sacrifice and conservation it reveals. Jesus said of the widow, "This poor widow has cast in more than they all," because she gave herself in the gift.

"For the gift without the giver is bare; Who gives himself with his aims feeds three—

Himself, his hungry neighbor, and Me."