Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Biblical View of Money, Part 1
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8-9
Code: 47-51

It's our privilege and joy this morning to embark upon a study that is going to take us through the eighth and ninth chapters of 2 Corinthians. This wonderful section of the epistle deals with the issue of Christian giving, how we are to give, how we are to invest our financial resources for eternal benefit. And we're going to be looking at a biblical model for Christian giving all the way through chapter 8 and chapter 9 as Paul instructs the Corinthian church in the matter of their own giving.

So, we're about to launch into this wonderful adventure into the land of giving, and one that's going to have profound effects on all of us as we learn from the Apostle Paul's inspired record how the church is to give.

Now I know that having said that, some of you are already wishing you had gone to visit Aunt Alice, or that you had volunteered for the nursery long ago, rather than have to sit and listen to the preacher talk about giving. Most of us, and I think it's fair to say that, most of us feel some guilt about our giving, or lack thereof. And certainly most of us feel some guilt about our spending. So the last thing we want to do is purposely go and listen to someone make us feel worse. And I'm not going to do that. I don't want to make you feel worse, I want to make you feel better. But the path to feeling better is going to be laid out right here in the Word of God.

I want to begin this morning with just an introductory message on the subject before we launch into these two chapters. I thought about writing a book on giving, in fact I've been thinking about it for a long time, but I've convinced myself no one would buy it because everybody already feels bad about what they don't give and bad about what they do spend and they're not going to buy a book that's going to make them feel worse, nor are they going to buy a book that's going to show them how to give away more of their money from which they are so reluctant to be separated.

And then I thought...Well, no, it's just a question of titles. I could write the book and title it, "God's guaranteed plan to make you really rich." And that would guarantee some significant sales, at least through the first printing. And that wouldn't be untrue, because giving is God's guaranteed plan to make you really rich.

Jesus said, "It is better to give than to receive." Better in every way. And actually, giving as God has commanded us is liberating, rewarding, joyous, and profoundly enriching. In fact, just a brief glance at chapters 8 and 9 will show us something about that. At the beginning of chapter 8 Paul commends

the churches of Macedonia. And he commends them because in verse 2 in a great ordeal of affliction they demonstrated an abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. All of that to say they were afflicted and they were profoundly poor, but they were generous in their giving. In fact, verse 3 says, "They gave according to their ability and beyond their ability and they gave of their own volition." They gave freely of their own choice, beyond their ability, out of their deep poverty they overflowed with liberality and in the midst of their real affliction their abundant giving brought them great joy.

Verse 4, an interesting thing, "They were begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints." In other words, they were pleading for an opportunity to give. They had found that giving was so rewarding, so blessed, so joyous, so enriching, so beneficial that they were begging for an opportunity to give. Now we would like to get all of you to that place where you will be pleading for somewhere to give your resources because you understand what benefit in time and eternity there is in such generosity.

Over in chapter 9 I would just draw your attention to another statement, and we'll be looking at these in the future. Verse 6, Paul lays down a principle, "He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also real bountifully." A simple principle there, you're not going to get a crop on anything more than the seed you sow. So whatever you sow determines your crop. That's all. If you sow a few seeds, you'll get a little crop. If you sow many seeds, you'll get a larger crop. That's the principle.

So verse 7 says, "You need to make a decision, purpose in your heart without being grudging or under coercion, you just decide in your heart what you're going to do based upon what kind of dividend you want to receive." And remember this, regarding whatever you sow, verse 8, God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed. Now there's the...there's the harvest on your sowing. Verse 7, you purpose what you're going to sow and you do it. Verse 8, God can make all grace abound so that you will always have all sufficiency for all things. In other words, God's going to give you an unlimited return. His capacity knows no limits. God who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

You know what happens when you sow seed? You get a crop. And out of that crop comes multiplied seed which you take and sow again and it keeps expanding. That's the principle.

Verse 11, "You will be enriched in everything." The principle of giving then is simply this, you sow and you reap, and whatever you sow God multiplies and gives you back. The question is, how much do you want? How much do you want to sow with God? How much blessing do you want? How much do you want to invest in the greatest investment there is and that is to invest with the living God who always gets a full return on every investment? That's the heart of this study, to get to the place where

you line up pleading for an opportunity to give because you understand that this is going to bring in a harvest in time and eternity which will make you spiritually and even materially wealthy.

You say, "Even materially?" Sure. God is going to make bread for your food as well as spiritual fruit of righteousness. God is going to pour out blessing on you.

Now I don't want to cheat you out of those riches. I don't want to cheat you out of those blessings. And so to discharge my responsibility to God and to make sure I don't rob you, I am going to take you through this series.

Now most of us are aware, as we start this series, that there is a...there is sort of a difficulty today in our giving. And it really comes from two fronts...the world, first of all, sucks up so much of our money that we don't have the amount to give we should. It's the first time we've ever had advertising. And advertising is a scheme to separate you from your money.

Do you think television is for programs? Television isn't, it's for commercials, programs are simply to get you there to watch the commercial. The commercials aren't there to get you to watch the program, you certainly can figure that out. The programs are there which are forgettable so you'll watch the commercials which are not forgettable, like, "I love you, man." I'm not going any further with that than that. But you understand that the world...the world is coming after you and it comes after you to separate you from your money, it comes after you to get you to indulge yourself in every conceivable kind of thing. And that puts people in a very difficult position.

The world not only adds to advertising the tremendous power of media to capture you, but then they provide credit so you can buy things when you don't even have money and put yourself in a deeper and deeper hole, sinking more and more into debt which puts you in a position that limits your giving as well. In fact, it becomes so difficult for people in the world to even make their normal sort of budget because of the way they have overspent that somebody said you can easily figure the cost of your cost of living by just taking all your income and adding twenty percent. That's how most people live.

Financial problems are a major cause of divorce in eighty percent of couples who are divorced before the age of thirty. Before they can even start to get a life together, it's torn apart by financial problems.

Now we have far more money than our fathers did, far more money than our grandfathers did who, of course, were not the victims of this advertising barrage and the massive materialism of our contemporary time. One father expressed his deep concern about this when he said, "Look, I don't mind that my son is earning more than I did on my first job, what distresses me is that he's six and that's his allowance."

Fifty percent of your waking time, you're thinking about money. How to get it...how to spend it...how to save it...how to earn it...how to invest it...how to borrow it...or how to find it. Fifty percent of your waking time you're thinking about money. We are living in an indulgent, materialistic culture and that takes a toll on our giving.

But it's not just the external culture telling us to spend our money stupidly and foolishly, but we're even bombarded in the Christian world by other people who want to separate us from our money to build their empires. I had the opportunity this last week to be down in Charlotte, North Carolina, and somebody wanted to take me through Heritage USA, that place built by Jim and Tammy Bakker in their heyday. It's quite an astonishing thing to see, believe me.

We walked through all of that facility, all over those grounds, those huge high rise hotels which he triple sold, and that's, of course, what caused him to be put in prison. This huge massive hotel and shopping mall and it just goes on and on, villages and houses, and I suppose somewhere between two and three hundred million dollars would be conservative just for that facility, to say nothing of the millions and millions of dollars that kept pouring in to keep the whole thing on television, to keep the whole empire propped up until it finally crashed in a blaze of iniquity.

But walking through that and trying to conceive of how much of the money from Christian people had been poured into that thing, which by the way, now is operated by the Radisson(?) Hotel Corporation and owned by some Malaysians, trying to turn into a convention center. How much of kingdom resources were poured into there who could have been...which could have been poured into some kind of ministry with eternal dividends and not feeding a monster of empire building and iniquity.

We are all very sensitive, I hope, by now after having seen some of the scandals that have hit evangelicalism to be very alert to where we spend our money and not to send it in, you know, to buy people's wardrobes and fancy sets on television programs and help people build empires.

Many years ago Voltaire criticized Protestantism, he was a French atheist, and he criticized Protestantism, he said, "Protestantism has simply grown up to offer people a less expensive substitute for Catholicism." Because the Catholic Church was sucking money out of its people in huge amounts and he felt that Protestantism was just a cheap shortcut. I don't think if he were living today he would say that. Protestantism seems to me today to be much more expensive than Catholicism, and most Christian people, probably most of you are literally hammered from side to side in terms of things that you need to be giving to. Exploitation even gets into local churches. Not only is it extra-church or para-church, but even gets into local churches, streams of literature come into the church telling us how we can hire fund raisers and hire various organizations, guys who are very slick at this will come and go to you and hit you up this way and that way and raise money to get to you so that we can support the things that we want to do.

Others come along and say, "Well the real trick to this deal is to make everybody get on a tithing bandwagon. If we can just get everybody to give ten percent, we can use the Old Testament tithe, if everybody gives ten percent, we'll have plenty. And the truth is, that's probably accurate. Somebody figured out if the church in the United States, if everybody in the church, churches of America, was reduced to Welfare level income and gave ten percent, the church would suffer a three hundred percent increase in giving. People don't give what they ought to give. A lot of times they don't give what they ought to give because they don't love the Lord's Kingdom enough, sometimes because they're too deeply in debt, or they're spending it on themselves or they don't even understand what they are to give. We need to know some basic foundational truths from the Scripture about how we are to give. It is tithing? What is it?

And then the church also gets confused because sometimes the church sort of plays up to the wealthy people, you know. When the man comes in who has the gold ring on his finger, they say, "Sit over here...sit over here in the nice comfortable seat." And when the poor guy comes in, they say, "Get under my footstool, you don't smell very good." And James says that God doesn't tolerate that. God is no respecter of persons, we know. We can't show partiality to the rich. You know, you can't let the rich dictate your theology. You can't let the rich dictate your policy. Certainly there have been people in my life who have endeavored to do that, who have, you know, promised to do certain things financially if I'll adjust my theology, I don't adjust my theology for money or anything else for that matter. But sometimes that happens in the church and then you have in the church very often people who get caught away and they want to go borrow massive amounts of millions upon millions of dollars and bury the church in an almost unpayable debt for years to come which cripples the church's ability to do ministry.

The whole idea of dealing with money is problematic, both in the culture and in the church. And then you can add another deal, and that's the whole notion of retirement. I don't want to step on you too hard today, till we get those soft pews, but for just a moment...for just a moment, this whole idea of retirement, if I can comment on it, the desire to have a large stash of money early so that you can do nothing productive with your life for as long a time as possible really is the world's mentality. That's the world's philosophy that the goal of life is to get in a position to do nothing, but only what you want to do. And we all know that idleness is the devil's plaything, right?

I'm not saying you need to work all your life at the job you have but I am saying you need to work all your life at something. If God frees you from the need for gainful employment and gives you the time, then you ought to spend the rest of your life working for the Kingdom harder than you ever worked for the world. But vegetating has no virtue, becoming the couch potato, or doing what you want when you want all the time doesn't seem to serve holy purposes. But that kind of worldly philosophy that retirement is the goal of life instead of achievement has spilled over into the church and so people stockpile more and more and more and there are enough people telling them they need to stockpile

more because the more you stockpile the more people are getting rich on your stockpile. People make money on everything you store up and so they sell that to you and you have to be careful that you're not simply stockpiling what you ought to be investing in eternity.

Now all these are factors that effect our giving. There's a place for saving. There's a place for wise planning. There's a place for meeting your needs. There's a place for responding to the culture around you and a measure of comfort is within the purposes of God. But we need to understand how we are to give, to what we are to give, where we are to give, how much we are to give, by what motives we are to give, and what's going to happen to us if we do, and what's going to happen if we don't. And those are the kinds of questions that we're going to have answered as we go through 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. We will answer those questions in our study we'll call, "The "Biblical Model for Believers' Giving...The Biblical Model for Believers' Giving." That's what we're going to study in these two chapters. And I want you to know I'm not seeking your money, I'm seeking your joy. I'm not seeking your riches, I'm seeking your blessing. And God has a lot to say about this issue.

Now before we look at our text, I want to give you some introductory material. We'll do that this morning and next Sunday morning. And I want to talk about several things. First of all, I want to talk about the morality of money...the morality of money. And then later in a few minutes, the love of money. And then we'll talk about the acquiring of money next week and the use of money. And that will give us a sort of a foundation on which we can build our biblical model for a believer's giving.

Let's talk about the morality of money. Money in itself is not good or bad. It's not righteous or evil. It is neutral. But money is a measure of morality. It definitely is. When we talk about money we're talking about life, we really are. Money is so central to our everyday living. As a medium of exchange it defines how we live. I can take your checkbook, if you write checks, and I can go through the register of your checks for a period of time and I can discern your priorities. I can see where your money goes and where your money goes is where your heart is. That's obvious.

Now those of you who don't use checks but use a credit card, I can look at the accounting for your credit card on the monthly statement and I can pretty well discern where your heart is, where you put your money demonstrates your morality. Money in itself is amoral, but money also is a barometer, it is a measure by which I can know what I need to know about the priorities of your life.

Some people say money corrupts. Well there are corrupt people and certainly money is a way in which they manifest their corruption. But there are also people with money who are not corrupt and money is a way in which they manifest their righteousness. And there are corrupt people who have no money, and there are people who have no money and are godly people. Money doesn't necessarily corrupt, it just shows up more visibly the corruption of the heart that possesses it. You take a corrupt person, give him a lot of money and he'll be able to spread his corruption further. It's not money that

is the problem, it's the heart that is the problem, but money measures that out.

Some people have said, "You know, money is so much the problem, you just need to get rid of all your money. It's wrong for a Christian to have more money than is necessary for bare necessities," they say. And they might advocate that you take the vow of poverty or that you take all your money, a group of Christians take all their money, throw it in a common pot, divide it up equally, and we'll have Christian communism. Well that kind of stuff is not in the Scripture. That's not what happened, for example, in Acts 2. In Acts 2 there were people who had money and had land and property and people who didn't. And when people who didn't had a need, sometimes they would sell what they owned to give money to those who had need. They never pooled it and divided it up equally. There are always going to be those who have and those who don't, and the folks in between.

The Bible doesn't forbid us from possessing money. Let me tell you what the Bible says about it. First of all, in Haggai, the prophet said in chapter 2 verse 8, "The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, declares the Lord of hosts." In other words, God says it's all Mine anyway. The earth is Mine, and all that is in it is Mine. Gold comes out of My earth, and so does silver, and so do trees that make paper that make bills and so does every other metal, whether it's nickel, or whether it's aluminum or whatever it is they make coins out of, it's all Mine, it all comes out of My earth and My creation. I own it all. And God, by the way, in Haggai 2, was talking about all the nations of the world. He wasn't just talking about Israel. In Deuteronomy 8:18 it says, "But you shall remember the Lord your God for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth."

Now remember, everything on the earth is God's...everything. Every natural component of the material world belongs to the Creator who made it and owns it. He brought it into existence and He is the one who will take it out of existence when He uncreates the universe. In the meantime, it is His.

Now He knows that it provides a tremendous treasure for man to use. And He goes a step further in Deuteronomy 8:18 and says, "I am going to give power to people to make wealth." So God has not only created the wealth in His creation, but He is the one who by virtue of how He has made you and me has given us the ability to gain wealth. He's made some of us capable mentally, some of us capable physically, some of us capable relationally at all different levels so that we can attain wealth. He has made the wealthy people able to attain wealth. He is the one who gave them the mental capacity.

He is the one who creates the circumstances of life. You're born into a certain family and that family is poor, and so that creates a certain legacy for you. You're born into a certain family and it's rich, that creates a different legacy, but it's all in the providences of God...where you're born, to what family, and what environment.

If you were born, for example, in India, you might be born at the upper caste of Brahman, you might be born into wealth. But the chances are you wouldn't be. You would be born into the category known as the untouchables, from which you can never rise, which you can never escape because of the karma that is built into the fabric of Indian worship and you would be stuck there all your life. Well God is in control of all of those circumstances. God is still in charge. And God has ordained that the poor you will always have with you but there is going to be a distribution of wealth, the great resources that God put in the earth. He knew they would go somewhere to someone, that's a part of it. I believe God has created the human being unique so that he can do marvelous things. Some can make music and by it they can gain wealth. Some can paint great pictures and by it they gain wealth. Some have minds that are mathematically capable so that they can invent things and scientifically capable so that they can discover things and accumulate wealth. Some are tremendous at moving groups of people so they can build great corporations and empires. Those are all things within the framework of God's creative purpose as He takes what is His and distributes it among human kind according to their several and different abilities by virtue of His creation and His providence. But it's all His.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 the question is asked, "And what do you have that you did not receive?" And the answer is nothing. It's all God's. God distributes it. And God distributes it to whomever He will, however He desires. And that distribution is within the framework of His creative purpose and His providence. And that, in a nutshell, if you will, is why I do not accept a communistic or a highly socialistic approach to mankind's life because I do not believe God ever intended everybody to be the same and possess the same. I believe God has designed people very unique. Everyone is an individual and the distribution of wealth in the providence of God and the purposes of God is scattered across humanity and by virtue of the unique ways in which God has made men...anymore than God wanted a brown world where all the flowers were one color.

So God has given this power to get wealth and all that comes is really His...everything is His...everything is His...all of it is His and He has distributed it, and listen to this, He has distributed it as a stewardship. It then becomes a test of one's morality. In itself it's not moral and what you do with it determines that. I have in my hand a few dollars, that's all I got today. My wife gave me five last week and wondered where I blew that. So this week she gave me four and if I'm not careful next week it will be three. So I have these dollars. In a very real sense, these dollars have no morality at all. But what I do with them could have significant moral implications, right? What I purchase with them, what I do with them.

That's how it is. Everything we possess is given to us from God and acts as a barometer on our moral life, our spiritual life. Now sadly, God's gifts then are intended for man's good. God wants man to use them in ways that are good, noble, beneficial for humanity, not just always giving it all to missionaries and all to gospel preaching. The Lord knows there needs to be food and clothing and the joys of life, things that we can appreciate and enjoy in His beautiful, beautiful creation. God wants

them to be used for good and for His glory. But man takes what he has and generally perverts it into evil. Generally speaking money goes into evil, the vast majority of it.

Certainly that is true on the part of unbelievers that the discretionary money apart from what they eat and use just for the matter of clothing and housing gets diverted into things which have no eternal value at all. And that's sad. That's a terrible waste of God's resources. We expect a certain amount of that in the world. What we don't expect is that in the church among God's people who know better. We expect, for example, that the world will take the benefits of what God has created in nature and they'll invent bombs and weapons with it. We kind of expect that. Or they'll take God's wonderful gift of food and they'll come up with something that turns into gluttony and then we'll have to have an entire culture built around diet plans to deal with it.

Man has a way of twisting and turning and perverting. He'll get money which God wanted him to have to enjoy and it could be used to enjoy a wonderful trip and a wonderful time to see some of the beauty of God's creation, but some people will spend it on pornographic material. I mean, the perversions are all around. It's just that in the church we would expect that isn't going to happen. Man has a way of twisting all of goods...all of God's good gifts.

Now let me remind you of a principle in 1 Timothy 6:17. The passage, talking about material wealth, talking about money, and it says this, "God gives us richly all things to enjoy." I think that's so practical. God gives us richly all things to enjoy. God wants you to just enjoy them. It's not wrong when you get a new couch. It's not wrong when you get a new car. It's not wrong when you take a vacation and when you go to visit with friends you love on the east coast, or go and spend a little time to watch the leaves turn in the Carolinas or you go up to the mountains to ski and enjoy your children in the beauty of God's wonderful creation. Why do you think He made a world like this? He wanted us to enjoy it. It's not wrong when you enjoy the beautiful color expressed in new clothes that you purchase. It's not in itself wrong. God has given us richness to be able to enjoy the things that He's put in His world. He's not a cosmic killjoy, He's not trying to rain on your parade. He's not a brow-beating ogre who wants to cause you nothing but pain and misery. He's given you all of this ability to make wealth. He's given you all of the circumstance so that you have these things. And He knows that there is in His world a tremendous, tremendous opportunity to enjoy what He's made. And He expects you to enjoy that. And in the enjoying of it thank Him for it.

I can do that, can't you? I can thank God for the wonders and the beauty that I see. I can thank God for a comfortable chair and a comfortable place to study and do my work. I can thank God for the wonder of His creation for a little granddaughter in a pretty dress. I can thank God for any of that. I can thank God that...that I was able to save some money in order to provide an education for my children for His provision there. I don't have to take the vow of poverty. I can richly enjoy all things that He's given me.

I remember God decided to give Job a whole lot. And then Job got real spiritual and God gave him even more. And God gave Abraham a lot and Isaac and Jacob. In fact, God gave Israel riches. In Isaiah 2 in verse 7, it says of Israel, "Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures." Why did God do that? Because that's God's nature. God is a God of generosity. God is a God of giving. God is not selfish. And He wants you to use the money to enjoy what He's made and enjoy what He's provided as long as you give Him the glory and as long as you don't become indulgent and self-centered.

I mean, if I were an executive in a corporation and I were handling company funds like some of you handle God's funds, you'd be in jail for embezzlement. We're responsible. I mean, if your employer comes to you and says, "Here's a thousand dollars, I want you to use it wisely to benefit the company," I think if somebody did that in your company to you, you'd probably be pretty careful about how you spent that thousand because you know the future implications of it. If you did something stupid with it, it could cost you your job. If you did something wise with it, it could lead to a promotion. We would be very careful with an earthly employer, but how do we deal with God?

You see, that's how...that's how you view the morality of this whole thing. How do I view this? Some people say, "Well, if I just had more I'd give more." No, I've heard that, you always hear them say, "If I had a million dollars I'd give it over here and I'd give...if I could just win the lottery. Oh man, if I could just win the lottery." The question is not...what would you do with a million bucks?...the question is what are you doing with this four you've got in your pocket? What are you doing with the ten? What are you doing with the twenty? Or the sixty? That's the issue. Because Ecclesiastes 5:10 and 11 says, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. When good things increase, those who consume them increase." Another way to say that is, the only advantage to money is to watch it slip through your fingers. The more you get, the more that goes.

So it isn't a question of if you had more you'd give more. No, that's not the issue. Jesus said it this way, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much." The issue is simply that. If you're not faithful with a little, you wouldn't be faithful with more. If you're faithful with little, then God will give you more because He knows you can handle it and you'd be faithful with it. It's not a question of having more, it's a question of what are you doing with what you have.

Now I realize some of you are in the pit of debt and you're going to have to get out over the long haul. And that's a tragedy of its own character. But you have to recognize that as a major spiritual problem and begin to deal with it. Riches can significantly obstruct spirituality and they certainly do demonstrate where you are in your spiritual life. So the morality of money is something to consider. It is a barometer of your moral life, your spiritual life.

Let me talk for a brief few moments on the love of money, the second point...and I'm just going to introduce this and we'll finish it next time. The love of money...this is how we regard money. And when I say the love of money, I don't mean you take out money and say, "Oh, money, money, I love you," you know. It's not an emotional, it's not...it's not an emotional thing, you...the love of money simply means an inordinate attachment to it. It simply means that you are driven to attain it. First Timothy 6:10, "The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil." The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.

You know, you're around money all the time so it's easy to love it. I mean, it's there all the time. It is a powerful and constant part of our lives. We're never away from money matters. And it's so easy to become completely enamored with money.

What do you mean by that? Well, take it in the language of 1 Timothy 6:17, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world," it's find to be rich, "But instruct them not to be conceited." And that is proud about their station in life, proud about their possession. "Or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches but on God." You know you love money when you pursue money, not God. When you can't say, as Psalm 42 said this morning, "As the deer pants after the waterbrook, so pants my soul after Thee, O God." But in all honesty you'd have to say...As the deer pants after the waterbrook, so pants my soul after money.

Is that what drives you? That's really what drives people in the world. One of my friends was a part of our church for a number of years before he moved back east as a general manager of one of the Major League baseball teams. He had been the GM of that team for several years. And recently he was saying that he had quite an interesting conversation with his first baseman, he had gone four days without a hit and he obviously wasn't putting out the effort. So he went to this young man and he said to him, "Look...he said...what's wrong, four days you haven't had a hit. You're not putting out the effort."

To which the young man replied, "Well what do you expect, I'm only making $600 thousand a year."

My friend replied to him, "You've got a problem, friend, you need Jesus, come with me." Took him in the office, sat him down, opened the Bible and explained some things to him.

Now what kind of an athlete would a young man be who is motivated only by the dollar sign? He'll never be what he could be. It's wrong to be motivated by money, it's counterproductive to be motivated by money. You should be motivated by the desire to be the best you can be and when money comes, it comes. That's the issue. Even among a secular people there ought to be a love...if you're a baseball player, there ought to be a love of the game. There ought to be something inside of you that says, "I'm not going to take this ability that I have and settle for less than the maximum

expression of that ability." And if I'm working in an office, I'm not going to be concerned about what my pay is, I'm going to be concerned about what my effort is. I'm not going to be concerned about how much they pay me, I'm going to be concerned about how effectively and efficiently and carefully and excellently I work.

But some people just pursue the money. And they fix their hope on that. It can even happen to Christians. If you derive your sense of security from money, that's idolatry. If you pursue money instead of excellency before God, instead of like it says in Colossians and Ephesians, working, doing not eye service but working as unto the Lord. If you do anything other than work to honor the Lord, if you just work for the buck, that's idolatry. That's the love of money. And you can love it and have a lot of it and you can love it and have none of it. But when you derive your sense of security from your money rather than from your God, that's idolatry. When you derive your sense of satisfaction from money rather than God, that's idolatry. When you derive your personal joy from your possessions rather than your relationship to God, that's idolatry. And you don't want to pursue that.

Godliness is characterized by a pursuit of God, not of money and being content with what you have. Paul said again to Timothy, "You brought nothing into the world, you certainly can't carry anything out, you never saw a hearse pulling a U-Haul, nothing goes. You have what you have and you leave it all here and the only thing that's going to be there to welcome you is what you sowed in heaven."

If you love money, you'll find all kinds of problems. First Timothy 6:9 says, "They that will be rich...you just pursue money, pursue money, pursue money...fall into temptation and a snare into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition or loss." That's some serious language. I mean, serious language...temptation, snare, foolish, hurtful lusts, drown you in destruction and loss. Jesus said you can't serve God and money.

On the other hand, Jesus said, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else shall be added." Just pour your life into the things that honor God, work to the glory of Christ whatever you do and let the money come from God as He purposes to give it. Let him decide whether you should have a million or not. That's up to Him. You just give your best. Set your heart on glorifying God and if He makes you rich, that's His choice. And most really rich people would tell you it's a lot harder than being poor. Don't set your heart on money.

For money Achan brought defeat on Israel's army and death to himself and his family. For money Balaam sinned and tried to curse God's own people. For money Delilah betrayed Samson, and caused the slaughter of thousands. For money Ananias and Sapphira became the first hypocrites in the church and God executed them there. And for money Judas sold Jesus. Not very good company, is it? Money lovers aren't a very nice crowd. And when you start to pursue money, you're going to forget God.

Solomon was the author of most of the Proverbs. I'll close with this. But chapter 30 was written by a different person. It was written by Agur, A-g-u-r, and Agur wrote it when he was watching Solomon. Proverbs 30 is very interesting. Solomon was really, really rich...I mean, rich beyond description, rich beyond belief. But he got trapped in his riches and he wanted more and he wanted more and he wanted more and he kept marrying foreign wives. Did you ever wonder why? You say, "You know, this is ridiculous...nine hundred women? I mean, really most of us have one wife and it's plenty for us to cope with. And even if a guy had a major lust problem, thirty or forty might do. What in the world? Hundreds upon hundreds upon..."

Look, you missed the whole point. It had nothing to do with some physical desire. He married them because they brought with them a portion of their national treasuries. It was the money, not the girl. I bet it got to the point where he never even checked out what she looked like, when you start getting up in the multiples of hundreds...who cares? She's bringing part of the country's treasury. He was building a political empire. And what he wanted was not the women, he wanted more and more treasury. And when you look at hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of wives, you get a little idea of how greedy the man was.

And so, in his greed he brought all these wives in with all their treasure and they brought something else besides their money. What else did they bring? They brought their gods and they led Israel into idolatry and Solomon fouled up his own life and split the Kingdom.

Now Agur was watching that happen and as he was watching that happen he prayed the prayer in Proverbs 30 verse 8, this was his prayer. He saw what riches did to Solomon, so he said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is my portion." God, I don't want anymore than You want me to have. You determine it and You give me what You want me to have. I don't want to love money, I don't want to become greedy. Why? Says Agur, "Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord? Or, lest I be in want and steal and profane the name of my God." If I have too much, I won't need You. If I don't have enough, I'll steal. So, God, You give me my portion. Don't give me too much so that I worship my wealth instead of You and become self-sufficient. And don't give me too little so I steal and dishonor Your name. In either case, love of money can set God aside.

So what we want to do is...I'll give my life to Christ, I'll serve God with all my heart. I'll work as hard as I can. And I'll let God give me what He chooses to give me. And if He gives me more than I need, then I'll have to be a steward of that.

I remember a few years ago I told the elders I didn't want a pay increase, and for a number of years they didn't give it to me. And finally one time we had a meeting and I said, "Please, I don't want...you take good care of me, don't give me anymore money because I don't need it." And one very wise elder said, "That's precisely why we want to give it to you because we want to see what you do with

the money you don't need." That's fair. That's a test, isn't it?

So what God chooses to give you, you become a steward of. But you don't love it. In either case, you love God, serve God, honor God, glorify God and let Him give you what He chooses and you use it to express your love for Him.

Well, that's a start. And we'll finish up this introductory message next time. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the fact that the Word of God which reveals Your own mind to us and those things which You require of us is so clear on these matters, and it starts in the heart, it starts with the attitude. We have to realize that there is a morality which money manifests and there is a love of money which causes us to forget You. Lord, help us to deal with the heart attitude as we start out to build a foundation for Christian giving. We thank You, Lord, that Your Spirit leads us and guides us in this through the Word. And as we study this tremendous section and all of the truths that are herein, we pray that You might free us so that we become like the Macedonians and are pleading for opportunities to give because we understand the eternal blessing and the temporal joy that comes in response. Thank You, Lord, for showing us the path to real riches through our own giving and we are so anxious to walk that path as You instruct us in the days ahead that our Savior may be glorified, whose name we bear and whom we serve and in whose name we pray. Amen.

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