

Intro:

“One of the ways a wise man can be identified is by the way he handles money. Wisdom is not discerned by the amount of money one possesses, but by one’s attitude toward money, by the way it is acquired, and by the way it is used. This message will explore the attitude of the wise toward wealth.”¹

Today we are going to discuss **Wisdom and Wealth**. We are going to take a negative view today.

Jesus teaching about money, referred to it in Luke 16.10 as “a very little thing”.

Lk 16.10 ¶ “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 KJV calls it, “that which is least.”

What Jesus said is reality.

What we think and feel is quite a different matter.

- Money is a major problem in most homes in our culture
- All of us face the temptation of spending more than we bring in ‘because we need it.’
- Most people in our society are concerned with acquiring more (and giving out less).

Proposition: God calls us to be wise (spiritually skillful) in our attitudes toward and our acquisition of money.

I. Things that are better than money (wealth)

A. Honesty and kindness are better than prosperity (Prov 19.22 cf. 18.23)

Pr 19.22 What is desirable in a man is his kindness,
And *it is* better to be a poor man than a liar.

¹ Title and many major points taken from Robert L. Deffinbaugh, *The Way of the Wise: Studies in the Book of Proverbs* (Biblical Studies Press, 1996), 55, www.bible.org (Title and this quote from same page.).

B. A good reputation is better than wealth (Prov 22.1)

Pr 22.1 A good name is to be more desired than great wealth,
Favor is better than silver and gold.

C. Godly character is more important than money (Prov 19.1, 16.8)

Pr 19.1 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity
Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.

Pr 16.8 Better is a little with righteousness
Than great income with injustice.

“It is more important to be righteous than to be rich.”²

D. A peaceful home, filled with love, is better than a bank account filled with money

1. Prov 15.17
2. Prov 17.1
3. Prov 15.27

Pr 15.17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is
Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.

Pr 17.1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it
Than a house full of feasting with strife.

Pr 15.27 He who profits illicitly troubles his own house,
But he who hates bribes will live.

E. Wisdom is better than wealth

1. Prov 8.10-11
2. Prov 16.16

Pr 8.10-11 “Take my instruction and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choicest gold.
¹¹ “For wisdom is better than jewels;
And all desirable things cannot compare with her.

Pr 26.16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
Than seven men who can give a discreet answer.

² Deffinbaugh, 55.

These passages inform our attitudes about money. You should put the same value on money and spiritual things that God does.

II. Things money cannot do

A. Money cannot provide us with security

1. Security cannot be bought (Prov 18.11)

Pr 18.11 A rich man's wealth is his strong city,
And like a high wall in his own imagination.

2. Wealth is temporary — it can evaporate in a moment (Prov 23.4-5)

Pr 23.4-5 Do not weary yourself to gain wealth,
Cease from your consideration of it.
5 When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.
For wealth certainly makes itself wings
Like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.

In my days in Real Estate, I knew many guys who were millionaires. Several times — just not the times that I knew them. Money takes wings and flies away.

Take Job for example...

I recall my dad talking about someone he knew who had a closet full of stock certificates... all worthless.

B. Money cannot buy wisdom

1. Fools can't obtain wisdom at any price (17.16)

Pr 17.16 Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy
wisdom,
When he has no sense?

2. However... truth is worth any price for a wise man

a. Prov 23.23

b. Compare Matt 13.46

Pr 23.23 Buy truth, and do not sell *it*,
Get wisdom and instruction and understanding.

Mt 13.46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went
and sold all that he had and bought it.

C. Money cannot provide us with friends or true fellowship

1. Brothers and friends Prov 19.7
2. Wives Prov 18.22
3. Wives Prov 19.14

Pr 19.7 All the brothers of a poor man hate him;
How much more do his friends abandon him!
He pursues *them with words, but* they are gone.

Pr 18.22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing
And obtains favor from the LORD.

Pr 19.14 House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers,
But a prudent wife is from the LORD.

Note that in pagan cultures, women are bought and sold. The culture of Judaism elevated women's status as does biblical Christianity.

D. Money will attract false 'friends'

- a. Prov 19.4
- b. Prov 19.6

Pr 19.4 Wealth adds many friends,
But a poor man is separated from his friend.

Pr 19.6 Many will seek the favor of a generous man,
And every man is a friend to him who gives gifts.

Money adds friends; poverty removes them.

E. Money cannot buy salvation

1. Prov 11.4
2. Prov 11.6
3. Prov 11.28

Pr 11.4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
But righteousness delivers from death.

Pr 11.6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them,
But the treacherous will be caught by *their own* greed.

Pr 11.28 He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the *green* leaf.

Wealth is a barrier to salvation in two ways:

First, it feeds pride and self-sufficiency.

Second, it insulates the ears from hearing the gospel (by limiting personal access).

III. Things to think about “Big Money”

If you ever have watched the Pat Sajak’s program, *Wheel of Fortune*, you will have heard the contestant’s calling for “Big Money”.

A. Lotteries

A few excerpts from a column³ by pastor Kelly Boggs of McMinnville, Oregon:

“The marketing directors of America’s state-run lotteries all deserve generous compensation packages. They have done their job so well that most low-to-middle-income American’s now believe they have a better chance of accumulating \$500,000 by winning a lottery than by saving and investing.”

“The sobering reality is a person has a better chance of being murdered en route to purchase a lottery ticket than he or she does of winning a multi-million-dollar prize. In spite of this fact, many hard-working Americans are willing to trust their financial futures to a game of chance rather than wise investing.”

“State-run lotteries, and those who market them, have so persistently presented the myth of lottery success that many working-class Americans are now banking their financial futures on a fantasy. As a result, the truth of sound financial planning is being buried under so many ‘Lotto’ tickets.”

B. Investment schemes / multi-level marketing

A cautionary tale of how bunkum artists exploit true believers.

When swindler Clyde D. Hood went prospecting for investors, he boasted that he had something fancy that Wall Streeters didn’t: a

³ Kelly Boggs, “FIRST-PERSON: Lotteries, lies & economic daydreaming,” Baptist Press, Dec 6, 2002

hot line to the divine. Hood, whose pedigree included work as a pool hall manager, claimed the “Supreme Commander” had ordered him to launch a “Christian program” to help “the little people.” While he didn’t mention the pool hall, he said he’d made a pile turning big profits for corporate clients trading something called “foreign bank debentures” offshore.

Every hundred bucks invested with Hood’s Omega Trust & Trading would generate a 51-fold return in 275 days. Roll the stake over and your \$100 would beget \$225,000 (the arithmetic was off a bit). This joint venture of God and mammon began in 1994 and went on for six years before secular authorities rose up and smote it. By that point Hood and his Omega cronies in Mattoon, Ill. had relieved their believers — 10,000 victims from as far afield as Australia and China — of \$20 million.

It’s an old and sad story: Investors let down their guard when they get a pitch from a self-proclaimed fellow follower of God. With help from the Internet, religious-based scams hauled in \$1 billion last year, estimates Joseph Borg, president of the North American Securities Administrators Association.

In 1983 churchgoing farmers in Washington State lost \$60 million to a commodities trading scam perpetrated by one Kenneth Oxborrow, who touted his Christian bona fides and displayed a crucifix on his office wall. More recently the Baptist Foundation of Arizona collapsed amid state allegations of fraud involving a real estate scheme that ensnared 13,000 people and bagged \$590 million. Its auditor, Arthur Andersen, took a pre-Enron public pasting from this mess.

The Omega case came to its inglorious conclusion in January when Hood, 68, was sentenced to 14 years on federal charges of fraud and money laundering. Pleading guilty to, or convicted on, similar charges was a passel of 18 henchmen from Mattoon (pop. 18,500), a farm and factory town.

His pals weren’t creepy grifter types with slicked-back hair and pencil-thin moustaches but righteous citizens all — including a former police officer, a deputy sheriff, a lawyer, a minister. They got a piece of the action for running Hood’s database and manning his

phone lines, where they kept track of victims sedated by down-home talk about Jesus and those miraculous bank debentures.

Where did the Omega bunch park its ill-gotten gains? Not in those wonderful debentures, which didn't exist. Hood and his pals put the money into hard assets, at least giving his victims something to turn to for partial repayment: a dozen local businesses, including a sawmill (timber acreage attached), a construction company, a computer services outfit and the Blue Bird Diner. He paid \$420,000 to buy the prefab structure of the now-shuttered Blue Bird through a fake owner and five banks. The final payment to its Florida manufacturer was a hand-delivered \$121,000 — in \$20 bills.

Beefy, crewcut and folksy, Hood was a “lot smarter than we took him for, but not as smart as he thought he was,” says Esteban Sanchez, the assistant U.S. attorney who put the scamster behind bars. Careful not to live large, Hood tooled around Mattoon in a 1999 Lincoln but kept his 11 antique autos (a 1907 two-cylinder Metz with a buggy top, for instance) under wraps.

Hood was a master at soothing anxious investors. He taped messages for the investor service phone line that promised “... everything is going fine.” As the years wore on with no payoff, he inveighed against mysterious “enemies.” He begged for daily prayers to help “in this battle against Satan and his disciples.” Meanwhile, he said, “Keep the Lord’s warehouse full.”⁴

There are *all kinds of schemes* like this. People make all kinds of promises — they are appealing to what they know lurks in the human nature.

⁴ “That Old Time Religion” forbes.com (Accessed 5/23/02)