

The Money Prayer

What you do if you really were a rich man or woman? How would you use your money? What lifestyle would you adopt? To put it another way what would you do if you acquired \$1,000,000? Or, let's suppose you are just a normal person, with a middle class lifestyle, how would you use another \$10,000 or \$100,000? Would you use the money the way that consumerism demands, to invest in "treasures on earth," or would you invest your "treasure in heaven"?

From another perspective could you, whatever your economic status, pray these two requests from Proverbs 30:7-9?

Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is needful for me.

Think with me for a moment about what this prayer implies. The first petition is a request for integrity linked to a prayer about money. How antithetical this is to the world of Mammon, where lying, deceit, deception, and manipulation are often the normal way to do business. The Bible, on the other hand, demands economic integrity. Proverbs 11:1 says: "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight." Ezekiel 22:12 says about the leaders of Israel: "In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take interest and profit and make gain of your neighbors by extortion; but me you have forgotten, declares the Lord God."

Second, consider what the prayer asks of God regarding money: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is needful for me." This request assumes that God is his provider and protector; not Mammon or consumerism. The request asks only for what is needful and this is important. How different this expectation is from what consumerism promises us. This request assumes a freedom from the love of money and a heart of contentment and gratitude. Again, how very different from the consumer economy in which we live.

Third, look at the rationale that the prayer provides for the petition about money at the end of this passage, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." This is quite important. Every economic class faces both similar and different temptations. All of us are tempted to love money more than God. All of us are tempted by corruption and deceit in our financial operations.

All of us tempted to develop a victim mentality or a sense of entitlement that believes everyone owes us something. This could our parents or an employer or the government -- even God. But, the temptations of the rich and poor are also distinct. For the poor, according to this Proverb, the temptation is to become bitter and cynical which leads to criminal activity in order to secure a livelihood. For the rich the temptation is to become "satisfied" or "full" as the Bible calls it and "forget" God. There is something about a life of pleasure, ease, and luxury that can blind and deafen us spiritually. Riches can buy us a little bit of heaven on earth. With money we can reconstruct our own private Eden, what Jesus called "treasures on earth" and we become content with this. In fact, studies that usually the more money we make the less generous and kind we become.

Let me conclude with this quote about wealth by the theologian, Richard Foster:

Wealth is a dangerous thing. The entire biblical tradition underscores that truth...God calls some to increase their income in order to use it for the good of all...We are dealing with dynamite. Wealth is not for the spiritual neophytes; they will be destroyed by it. Only the person who has clean hands and a pure heart can every hope to handle this "filthy lucre" without contamination. Gluttony, pride, greed, an avarice can slip in unawares. This path is fraught with great frustrations and temptations, and those who walk it face perplexing decisions and tragic moral choices that most people will never have to consider... The most subtle and dangerous aspect of the ministry of money is the false sense of power it gives. We begin to feel in control. Others begin to seek us out, not because of who we are, but because of what we have. They begin to look at us in spiritually destructive ways. In an important sense, money is power, and we have the power to determine the future of this or that project or cause, and they know it. And, most destructive of all, we know it. Spiritual pride rears its ugly head as the thought seeps in that we are in charge, we call the shots. The degenerative slide continues until a new pseudo-savior has been born.