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### **FILTHY LUCRE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MONEY**

Several years ago I was researching the factors that might contribute to the event of salvation. I was amazed to find that the only thing that seemed to have influenced the lives of those who had become Christians was the Grace of God. None of the forty plus factors I investigated was positively correlated statistically. In contrast there was one factor that had a high negative correlation. That factor was to have been raised in a home where money had been a god. If money was worshiped or highly valued, salvation seldom occurred in the children raised in that environment. No wonder Jesus was so adamant when he said, *“No servant can serve 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 money”* (Luke 16:13 NIV).

Since that time I have become increasingly aware of the role that money, and especially greed, plays in the lives of people. Even though most of us have been raised in a materialistic society where the acquisition of material possessions is the primary concern, it

takes only a little reflection to recognize the truth that our society is excessively materialistic. I intend, therefore, to look at the psychology of money with you, and help you to understand that there are ways to deal with this sickness that afflicts our society.

A drive that arises out of man's biological nature is for food, drink and protection from the elements. Since he cannot produce everything he needs, he must be able to exchange the things he can produce in excess for those things that others produce. To facilitate this exchange, he has developed a medium of exchange called money. Money symbolizes a means of obtaining the things that we need to sustain life. In the past, money was made of precious metals, today it is made of things that have only symbolic value. To obtain it, spend it and share it wisely, persons must know how to manage it.

The beliefs held by a person about money can be either normal or neurotic. Normal beliefs about money are:

1. A normal person believes he must make money as best he can, and as much as he can, but in the process will not sacrifice health, love, hobbies, recreation, or contentment to this end.
2. He regards money as a means to an end. That end is the things he needs and desires.
3. He does not allow himself to be taken advantage of in money matters and will do his best to avoid it.
4. He receives unjustified demands for money and wards them off in a matter of fact way.

5. He says, "I cannot afford it," in a matter of fact way.
6. He sees money not just as a possession to be hoarded and kept as a symbol of personal worth, but takes for granted the spending and giving of money.

On the other hand the neurotic have different beliefs:

1. She sees money as the center of life. Everything else: health, hobbies, love, recreation, family, and contentment are subordinated to the urge to possess it.
2. She considers money as an end *per se*.
3. She fears being taken advantage of in money matters. This fear is out of proportion to the threat.
4. She receives demands or requests for money with indignation, fury or excitement.
5. She utters the statement "I cannot afford it" even when she can.
6. She views the possession of money as her reason for being. Its accumulation is her primary goal in life.

If we reflect on these observations, it is clear that if one obeys Jesus' instruction to make friends of money and not an idol, then the attitudes that one holds about making money will be normal. If one loves God with all of his being, then he will not allow money to become an end in itself. In a like manner, God gives wisdom helping a Christian respond to unjustified requests in a matter of fact way, and he will not use the phrase, "I cannot afford it" as a neurotic mechanism to punish himself. Finally, the Christian cannot allow the possession and hoarding of money to become a primary goal of his life because his primary goal is to glorify God. He knows he cannot love God and money.

The attitudes a Christian holds about money have to be learned. Usually they are learned from parents who teach them by word and deed. They usually teach the child to earn money, requiring him to diligently apply himself to a job and bring it to fruition. They teach him how to spend it wisely by giving small allowances and then helping him to shop for his desires. They teach the child to give cheerfully by being cheerful givers themselves.

Money elicits emotions. The only pleasant emotion arising from it is joy. In contrast, it can stimulate a wide range of unpleasant ones. Envy (jealousy) is aroused by other people having material possessions desired by the observer. Fear is elicited by the threat of losing money by carelessness or poor investments or purchases. Fear arises out of inadequate income because of a lack of work or of inadequate skills to earn it. The most paralyzing and pervasive fear comes in old age when it is difficult or impossible to work and there is little income to meet the person's needs. Sorrow comes when one loses money no matter how it is lost. Anger can come when one is swindled, cheated or robbed. Finally, shame can occur when a person realizes that they have spent or invested unwisely, or have been the victim of some swindle or confidence scheme.

The Christian approach to the management of money is not that of the world. It has a totally different fundamental premise on which all other premises stand. The Christian's basic premise is that nothing, not even money, belongs to man. Instead, it belongs to its creator, God. Andrew Murray and Malcolm MacGregor have both emphasized God's ownership of money, an emphasis that has its origin in scripture. (Ps. 24:1, 50:10, 11, Hag.

2:8, Matt. 6:30, Acts 4:34). Money is a gift to man, a gift that usually is given in abundance or in his obedience to God's commandment to love Him with all his being. If man loves Him, he will be a wise steward of God's money and will give freely as He has commanded. John Wesley summed up the biblical instructions by saying that "we should make all we can, save all we can, and give all we can."

Part of our discipleship of our children is the management of money. It is necessary that they be taught to earn money by diligent work and prudent investments. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of carefully planning and executing their instruction in money management.

Frugality or careful spending needs to be taught early in life. Because the child is inherently selfish and wants almost anything that she sees, it is necessary that she be taught to inhibit most of these extensive desires. She must learn what her real needs are and what luxuries are.

Money should never be linked to love. It often is linked when people do not know how to love unconditionally, and instead give their children everything they want to show their love.

The commandment not to covet is absolute. This is not to say that we should not desire the things our neighbor owns if we need them, but we should not desire the things that he personally owns. Covetousness gives rise to crime, since to get that which is owned by our neighbors must usually be gotten by stealth or force.

Another principle that all have to learn is that we should not desire things that we cannot afford. The world recognizes man's proclivity to do this and describes it in such aphorisms as "He has champagne tastes and a beer pocketbook." One unbridled common trap that people fall into is the overuse of charge accounts and credit cards. Many end up deeply in debt. Bankruptcy often follows and the person's poor credit follows them through the rest of their life. It is, therefore, essential that the child learn that all good things come from God and he must learn to inhibit his excessive wants. He must learn that he cannot covet. Teaching a child to buy only what he can afford is a must.

Another principle that one must always emphasize is that essentials must be bought before money is spent on other things. Food, clothing, housing, heat, electricity, telephone, transportation, health care and education are to be carefully considered and budgeted before recreation, entertainment, refreshments and other things that are luxuries. The purchase of these essentials requires careful shopping. It is necessary that we consider quality, quantity and price when making any purchase. A high price does not necessarily insure high quality, and low prices are not always indicative of low quality. A name brand is not always better than a house brand.

Finally, all must learn that we have to save regularly to meet anticipated needs. Having reserves in savings is a necessary part of living. Doing so allows one to pay cash for man's necessary purchases. Appliances, automobiles, and housing maintenance often require large outlays of money that can only be borrowed at high rates of interest. To pay cash for

them saves the interest. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of saving but the reader is advised to utilize good financial advice to learn how to save.

A few words about giving – the Bible makes it plain that giving is part of our money management. God expects us to give back to Him some of what He has given us. He expects us to tithe. We should make every effort to do this even if it means sacrifice. I would like to say, though, that we should give only to those things that make a difference in His Kingdom. We want to support His work. This includes feeding His sheep with His Word, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, and clothing the naked. We want the Good News to be proclaimed to all people. The latter includes evangelizing the lost even when they are in a land far away. We have a mandate to carry the truth to the ends of the earth. If the institutions that are mandated to do this do not do so effectively we should not support them. All of us should consider the use of our giving carefully and give where it will have the greatest effect.

There is so much more that I could say about money, but I have tried to summarize the basic points relating to the psychology of money. These points are derived from biblical instruction about the subject. God says manage your money wisely and He will bless you.