



Money & Church

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**No one can serve two masters ...
You cannot serve both God and Money**

Matthew 6:24

Money & Church

Introduction

We are going to look at money and the church. Not the Biblical principles of saving, borrowing, lending, usury, etc. There is a lot of great information in the Bible about that, but the times we live in require a more urgent and specific message. Given the popularity of some preachers who promote a gospel that says if you give money to a church or preacher, God will make you rich and prosperous, we will focus on what the scriptures say about giving and faith. Churchgoers know all about passing the plate during church services, accompanied by a mini message about giving, but where is that in the Bible? Some churches use psychology and secular marketing to raise funds to grow the church as a business venture rather than focusing on saving lost souls from a Christless eternity and equipping the believers to do the work of the ministry. So, to start the study, we'll look at the roots of giving in the Old Testament with tithes and offerings, then contrast the difference between giving under Jewish law and giving in the dispensation of grace.

Abraham & Tithes

The word tithe means one-tenth, so giving a tithe or tithing means giving one-tenth of something. Tithing started with Abraham, who showed gratitude for a military victory by giving a tenth of the plunder from the battle to God. Abraham got involved in the war when his nephew Lot was taken captive as a prisoner of war, then he armed 318 of his trained servants and went to rescue him. Miraculously, Abraham, a shepherd, defeated the four kings with armies, and while returning from the battle, he met Melchizedek, the priest of the God Most High.

Without going into a detailed study about Melchizedek, we will take note of a few details about him. Melchizedek was the priest of God Most High, and his priesthood is eternal, indicating that he is part of the trinity of God (*Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:8-10, 6:20, 7:1-21*). In other words, Abraham had a personal visit from God in human form. As a result of his great victory and meeting with Melchizedek, Abraham gave a tenth of what he took from defeating the kings as an offering to God.

Genesis 14:18-20 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" ... Then Abram gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of everything.

After leaving Melchizedek, the King of Sodom, whom Abraham rescued in the battle, came to speak with Abraham. The Sodomite King proposed that he and Abraham divide the spoils from the victory, claiming all the people freed from captivity to be his slaves while suggesting that Abraham take the riches.

Isn't that like the Devil? Here's the Devil's deal for all the Pastors, churches, and ministries, I'll take the souls, and you take the money. Satan tried to set the same trap for Jesus by saying, I will give you all the kingdoms of this world if you bow and worship me. If Jesus had taken that bait, all of mankind would have been turned over to Satan and hopelessly lost forever (*Luke 4:5-8*).

However, some modern preachers have taken the Devil's bait, hook, line, and sinker. They covet great personal wealth for themselves and let Satan enslave the souls of the captives that should have been set free. Abraham didn't fall for that trick and would not take a single thing from an evil perverted king that could tarnish his reputation.

Genesis 14:21-24 *The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing . . .*

Abraham, the father of multitudes like the stars and sand in number, would fight for every single soul. Remember how he interceded pleading with God to spare the righteous in Sodom, pressing God for every soul, assuming there were 50 souls, then 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally down to 10 (*Gen 18:23-33*). The bottom line is that true men of God prioritize eternal souls over all else (*1 Tim 3:3,8; Titus 1:7, 11; 1 Pet 5:2*).

1 Peter 5:2-3 *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

1 Timothy 3:2-8 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ... He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. (Also, Titus 1:7, 11)

The next mention of tithes was with Jacob, who also vowed to give ten percent as a token of his gratitude (*Genesis 28:20-22*). Then some 430 years after Abraham, God spoke to Moses to put tithing into the law. Tithing for the Israelites was different than the way we think of it. The Israelites lived in an agricultural society; they did not have a banking system with credit cards, paper money, and a fiat currency based on nothing but trust like we have today. They used standards of weights and measures and traded precious metals, agricultural, and animal products at their face value by bartering and negotiating for goods and services. In short, they didn't pay tithes with a check, cash, or credit card at an ATM in the church lobby, and their perception of tithing was completely different than ours.

The Law of Moses

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the following generations of Jewish people, did not go to the synagogue every Sabbath to pay tithes. There were no special envelopes, passing a plate, a tithing sermonette, a prayer of blessing over the tithers, and woes, warnings, and curses over those who failed to pay up.

Many were farmers, raised cattle, worked in various trades, and were subject to rain, climate conditions, and the plowing, planting, and harvesting seasons to determine how much they produced by the end of the year. So, at harvest time, or whenever the flocks or herds gave birth or sheared the wool, they set aside 10 percent. They stored the tithes for one year and then took them to the Levitical priest or the temple in Jerusalem.

If they lived too far from the temple, they would store the tithes for three years and then sell them for silver. After they made the journey, they would bring the silver to the temple and use the tithe money to buy a sacrifice to offer to the Lord. They purchased whatever they chose for their tithe, it could have been a cow, a goat, sheep, grain, or whatever, and after the priest sacrificed the Lord's portion, **those who gave the sacrifice would eat their portion and share it with the Levites, foreigners, the fatherless, and widows.** In some cases, it was like a festive celebration, like a giant family cookout with plenty of food for the house of God.

*Deuteronomy 14:22-29 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce **each year**. Eat the tithe of your **grain, new wine and oil**, and the firstborn of your **herds and flocks** in the presence of the LORD your God **at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name**, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. But **if that place is too distant** and you have been blessed by the LORD your God **and cannot carry your tithe** (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), **then exchange your tithe for silver**, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your*

*God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and **your household shall eat** there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. And **do not neglect the Levites** living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. **At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.***

***Malachi 3:10** Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house ...*

Remembering the Poor

The heart of God for orphans and widows has not changed, and there isn't an Old Testament and a New Testament God because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In the New Testament, James said that true religion and undefiled is to visit (help) the orphans and widows in their troubles.

***James 1:27** Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit **orphans and widows in their trouble**, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

God designed the laws that Moses delivered to help the poor, widows, foreigners, orphans, and even to have regard for animals.

God cares about the land, requiring Israel to give a Sabbath rest to the land refraining from producing crops one year out of seven. God gave laws regarding the harvesting of crops requiring the farmers to leave the corners of the fields for the poor, and while gathering the harvest, whatever they dropped (gleanings), was left for the poor (*Lev 19:9-25*). Jesus and His disciples ate from the corners, and Boaz's intentionally dropped gleanings for Ruth (*Ruth 2:2-9, Matt 12:1*). Then at the harvest, they would give a tenth to God.

Deuteronomy 24:19-21 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. **Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow**, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. **Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow**. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. **Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow**.

The Money Changers

Also, those who had to travel long distances to pay tithes were put into vulnerable situations when they reached the temple in Jerusalem. They needed to purchase cattle, sheep, etc., for their tithes and offerings. Greedy merchants and money changers took advantage of the travelers and made the temple a place of business, like a flea market. When Jesus saw it, he was outraged and made a whip, overturned the money tables, and drove them out of the temple.

John 2:14-16 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!"

How many churches have the money changers tables in their lobby today? They have ATMs for tithes, teachings merchandise, tee shirts, books, wrist bands, coffee, and donuts, all for sale in the lobby. Outside they may be selling pumpkins or Christmas trees. The pre-service and mid-service announcements are commercials for online giving, the latest fund-raising activities, book store, café, exercise classes, child care, and whatever else they're pushing, along with the numerous church activities.

The Levites

Under the Old Testament law, there was only one tribe out of twelve that God called, chose, and set apart to be the priestly tribe. The Levites were set apart from all secular occupations to give total dedication to the work of the Lord. No other tribes were allowed to touch the holy things in the tabernacle or temple under the penalty of death. But the Levites forfeited the right to ancestral territories, lands, and material blessings that the other tribes inherited, and instead, God was their inheritance. The Levites were given temple service, tithes, and offerings as the provision for their food. Levites were freed from secular occupations to dedicate their lives in service to God and his people.

Aaron was the father of the high priestly line, representing the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament through all generations, as seen in the verse below.

Numbers 18:20-21 *The LORD said to Aaron, "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. 'I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.*

Correlating to the Levitical priest in the Old Testament, those who work full time in the gospel of Christ have a right to receive support for their work.

1 Corinthians 9:6-7 *Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Whoever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?*

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 *Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

Everyone God calls must be willing to forsake their earthly inheritance so they can lay up their treasures in heaven. God is the only inheritance and reward of his servants, not the houses, toys, or riches of this life.

As good soldiers of Christ, the marching orders may lead them into plenty or poverty, but they are content to serve God in any circumstance.

Luke 14:33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Philippians 3:7-8 (the apostle Paul speaking) But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Another point to make here is that Levites were required to pay tithes from the tithes. Tithing is not a pyramid scheme with one guy at the top keeping all the money for himself. Many ministries hoard all the money, and some "ministers" brag and flaunt their riches as a supposed sign of God's favor. It should go without saying how wrong that is, and may God have mercy on their souls.

Numbers 18:26-28, "When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up a heave

offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe." (Also Neh.10:38)

Freewill Offerings

The Israelites took up **freewill offerings** for different occasions. First, they took an offering to build the tabernacle, which was a very costly tent for worship, with gold, silver, and brass fixtures and furnishings. The purpose of this tent was for God to dwell with the Israelites as they travelled to the promised land. In a sense, even what Israel donated to God came from God.

*1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And **what do you have that you did not receive?** Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

God had so devastated the Egyptians with ten plagues that they were ready to give up anything to get Israel out of their land. And so, while leaving Egypt, Israel plundered the Egyptians (*Ex 12:35-36*) and later gave what they had taken to build the tabernacle. Everyone who gave did so from a willing heart (*Exodus 25:1-8, Ex 35:26-29*). There was no arm twisting, money pledges, car washes, or gimmicks. The people gave so generously that Moses had to stop them from giving anymore because they gave more than what was needed.

***Exodus 35:3** They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And **the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.** So, all the skilled craftsmen who were*

doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so, the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

King David

Another freewill offering happened because of the building project for the temple in Jerusalem, which came through King David's inspiration. David approached the prophet Nathan with his idea to seek God's approval for the project. It was a noble idea but never before in history did God ever ask anyone to construct a permanent stone building as a dwelling place for his presence.

1 Chronicles 17:4-6 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling place to another. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" '

Even though God never requested a house to be built for worship, he honored David's heart.

The temple in Jerusalem is the only building ever chosen and sanctified by God, where he put his name, and his eyes and heart are always on the temple (it was destroyed but will be rebuilt).

2 Chronicles 7:15-16 "Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. "For now, I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

But David was not the one to build a house for God, but he passed that project on to Solomon, his son. The people were willing and gave offerings for the project (*1 Chron 29:5-9*). However, David gave massive amounts of materials and wealth for abundant provision for every aspect of the temple.

1 Chronicles 22:14-16 "I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents (3,750 tons) of gold, a million talents (37,500 tons) of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workmen: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as men skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you."

In the book of Acts, we see spontaneous free will offerings given by new converts who saw the needs of the Jerusalem believers.

Jerusalem had been packed with travelers from around the world for the feast of Pentecost. When thousands of people came to faith in Christ, they stayed in Jerusalem, creating needs for the massive congregation. Many sold homes or possessions and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.

*Acts 4:33-37 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. **There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.** Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called **Barnabas** (which means *Son of Encouragement*), **sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.***

The Apostle Paul had no problems collecting a free-will offering from different congregations to give to the poor saints in Jerusalem without taking anything for himself.

*2 Corinthians 8:1 (Paul speaking) And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given **the Macedonian churches.** Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and **their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.** For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. **Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.** And they did not do as we expected, **but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.***

We only give back to God what we have received from God. But the greatest freewill offering of all time was given by God when he gave his Son for us all, and with Christ, he freely gave us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

Romans 8:32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

***2 Peter 1:3-4** as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

New Testament Tithing Curse?

Moving to the New Testament, we will use the favorite verse of most modern preachers on tithing, and ironically it is from the Old Testament.

***Malachi 3:8-10** "Will a man rob God? Yet **you rob me**. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. **You are under a curse** the whole nation of you because **you are robbing me**. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, **that there may be food in my house**. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

What's baffling about them using that verse is that it pronounces curses on the people for not paying tithes. It's astonishing how many Pastors are willing to put a curse on their congregations in attempts to guilt them into giving money or more money. That mentality only undermines the work of the cross because Jesus died to redeem us from the curse of the law with its condemnation and guilt.

Galatians 3:11-14 *But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Religious Leaders

First, tithing is not for the church, but for Jews who live under Old Testament law. Nowhere in the New Testament do you see Jesus, the apostles, or anyone else receiving or giving tithes. The only time Jesus spoke about tithing was when he confronted the Pharisees who trusted in themselves that they were righteous under the law. The comments Jesus gave were critical of tithing as a method of obtaining righteousness and used it as an example to condemn the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Matthew 23:23 *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law justice, mercy*

and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Here is another verse where Jesus condemns the self-righteous pride of those who think they are righteous by their works, like fasting and giving tithes.

Luke 18:9-12 *To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men robbers, evildoers, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

Discipleship Giving

Another comment that Jesus made puts the righteousness of the Pharisees into perspective. We live by a higher law than the law delivered by Moses, which is the law of the Spirit. Jesus said if we want to be his disciple, we must be willing to give up everything, and it may be that the Holy Spirit may lead us to give up ALL that we have for the gospel.

Matthew 5:20 *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (giving a tenth), you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Luke 14:33 *In the same way, any of you who does not give up EVERYTHING he has cannot be my disciple.*

Jesus wants total dedication in every area of our lives, not just ten percent of our money. Notice what Jesus said to a rich young ruler who asked him what he was lacking in his life.

***Matthew 19:21-26** Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

After hearing the conversation with the rich man, Peter and the other disciples who had already left their fishing businesses, tax accounting firms, houses, and families to follow Jesus questioned what was in it for them?

***Matthew 19:27** Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*

What people give up to follow Jesus does not even remotely compare to the rewards he will give them for their service, both in this life and the next.

Matthew 19:28-29 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold (100 times more), and inherit eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

Jesus will not ask everyone to sell everything to follow him, but if he asks you, you better do it. Unlike the legalistic Pharisees, God understands our histories, resources, attitudes, and motives as different needs arise before us, whether we give or not or how much. God is concerned with the heart, not the wallet. The wallet is an easy fix for God, but the heart is up to us.

2 Corinthians 8:12-15 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

Mark 12:41-44 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and ***watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.*** Many rich people threw in large amounts. ***But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.*** Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ***"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything all she had to live on."***

No Temple in Jerusalem

The most popular tithe passage from Malachi quotes God as saying you are robbing me, and some would have you believe that is a felony or an unpardonable sin. The reason God gives for tithing is “that there may be food in my house.” We saw earlier that Old Testament tithing was supposed to provide food for the Levites, widows, orphans, and foreigners. In regards to the poor, Jesus said, the poor you have with you always (*Matt 26:11*).

We have, and will always be obligated to help the poor, and that is never going away. But the Levites and the Levitical priesthood ceased to exist after 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed the temple and scattered the Jews. Technically, with no temple or priesthood, there is no Biblical way to pay tithes according to the law of Moses. We are now operating in the ministry of the Spirit, with Jesus as our eternal High Priest, our bodies are the temple of God, and our giving should be by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 4:14-15 ... ***since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the***

Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet was without sin

Hebrews 7:21-25 ... but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

Peter's Building Project

Like in a vision, Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, and they saw Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus, surrounded by a bright light. Then Peter had a brilliant idea, let's start a building project with three buildings, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Maybe, as the owner of a commercial fishing business, his corporate mind kicked into gear and took off.

Yes, we can take pledges for donations, advertise on social media, mail flyers to the area, go on radio and television, and build a world crusade center. While his unfiltered thoughts flowed through his moving mouth, in mid-sentence, God the Father spoke from heaven and shot down all his big ideas.

*Matthew 17:4-5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." **While he was still speaking**, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "**This is My beloved Son ... Hear Him!**"*

For religious people, the first step to starting a church is getting a building, step two is getting a larger building, and step three is getting a mega building. They think the building is the key to success, so they incur huge expenses and debts, and in many cases, the only reason the church exists is to pay the bills of the building.

Historically, there were no Christian church buildings until around 326 A.D., when the Roman Emperor Constantine mingled government, pagan religion, and Christianity and anointed himself as the head of the church and state. The Romans Christianized pagan temples, holidays, and statues, or more aptly stated, he ruled over the paganization of Christianity. Then they started building enormous cathedrals to display the wealth and power of the church and state.

Before that time, the Christians were persecuted and met in houses, fields, catacombs, or wherever they could find shelter from being attacked, which is still the case in many countries.

Acts 7:48-49 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?"

1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

Obedient Giving

We have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. If we truly belong to Jesus, he owns our body, soul, spirit, house, car, gifts, talents, and everything in our bank accounts, 401K, and savings. God does not need our money, but what he wants is our **obedience by faith**, which may be tested by money, even if that costs us everything. (*Acts 6:7, Romans 1:5, 16:26*)

Luke 14:33 "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake ALL that he has cannot be My disciple.

God is not impressed with what you give in disobedience. God gave a commandment to King Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites with their flocks and herds. But Saul kept the best of the sheep and cattle for himself and let the enemy king live.

And when asked, Saul said that he had obeyed the Lord by destroying the enemies and blamed his men for keeping anything alive. The man of God Samuel answered him that partial obedience is disobedience, rebellion, and witchcraft.

*1 Samuel 15:22-23 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices (your tithes and offerings) as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? **To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft), and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.**"*

Another example is Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple who sold a house and brought an offering to the apostles but lied, saying they gave everything when they held back some money. It was their money to do with as they pleased, but they lied about it.

In today's terms, that would be like selling a house for \$300,000 and giving \$250,000 to the church but saying you gave it all. Today they would be held up as heroes, with a plaque and their picture in the lobby, and they would be recognized and applauded, regardless of the lie. Peter identified the source of the lie as coming from Satan, the father of lies.

*Acts 5:1-5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property ... **kept back part of the money for himself ... Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit ...***

... *What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."* **When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died.** And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

Paul states that doing the will of God has greater significance than all the sacrifices and offerings (money) you can give to God.

Hebrews 10:5-7 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am it is written about me in the scroll I have come to do your will, O God.'"

Jesus Living by Faith

You may be thinking, if Jesus did not have a church building and did not pass the plate or receive tithes, how did he support himself and his ministry? The answer is that Jesus and his disciples lived by faith. Jesus taught us by his example how to live by faith and not worry about what we will eat, what we will wear, and where we will sleep. Jesus received money, meals, and places to stay by faith.

Jesus did not restrict his ministry to the four walls of the temple building or a single synagogue. Jesus moved about continuously, and as he walked or crisscrossed the Sea of Galilee by boat, he taught, healed, and changed lives spontaneously without a building or designated meeting places or meeting times.

Jesus ministered at a well, a funeral, synagogues, the temple, in homes, on hillsides, on the water's edge, in the middle of the sea, and walking from town to town. Everywhere Jesus went, he had teachable moments, healing campaigns, meals, miracles, and answered questions. Jesus had no mortgage, utility bills, salaries to pay, musicians, no debts, and institutional backing, but he lived and ministered by faith.

Jesus died naked on the cross with no earthly possessions. Jesus loved souls, not money. Everywhere we go as believers, there are opportunities to touch lives for Jesus, gas stations, grocery stores, work, etc. We also do not need a building, musicians, or institutional backing to touch souls.

Most people associate the word church with buildings, which is incorrect. The word church comes from pagan roots, not from the original scriptures. The original Greek word is ekklesia meaning a religious congregation or meeting, with a heavy emphasis on the people, whether many or few and NOT buildings or institutions.

The following are some verses showing how and where the people who followed Jesus congregated to experience Jesus' teaching, healing, and miracles outside of the walls of a building.

Luke 5:3. Jesus preached from a boat, then performed the miracle of the great catch of fish

Luke 5:3. *at the water's edge Jesus preaches to crowds from a boat, then goes to deep water and performed the miracle of the great catch of fish.*

Matthew 5. *with multitudes on a hillside, Jesus Preached the sermon on the mount.*

Matthew 24. *with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, Jesus Prophesied about end times.*

Matthew 26:6. *they congregated at Simon the lepers' house, they ate, and Jesus taught and healed the sick.*

Matthew 8:14. *they congregated at Peter's house, Jesus heals and teaches the disciples*

Luke 19:5 *Jesus and followers congregate at Zacchaeus house for a day*

Luke 14:1 *they congregate at a Pharisees house, and Jesus taught the crowd*

Matthew 9:9-10 *Matthew leaves his profession as a tax collector and follows Jesus. Then Jesus and followers congregate at Matthews house for a meal and teaching*

Luke 11:37 *at another Pharisees' house they congregate for a meal and Jesus condemns all the Pharisees'*

Luke 10:38-40 The followers of Jesus congregated at Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' house, for a meal and teaching

Mark 14:12-14 The 12 apostles congregated in an upper room of a house for the Passover meal, best known as the last supper.

12 Disciples sent out by Faith:

Jesus sent his disciples on missions so they could learn to live and minister by faith and take note of the instructions he gave them when he sent them out by faith.

Matthew 10:5-11 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.** "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave.

70 Disciples sent out by Faith:

Jesus set the example of faith, then sent the 12 apostles out by faith, and later reinforced the same pattern of faith by sending out another 70 disciples by faith. This pattern of trusting God is not always easy, but the challenge serves to strengthen and increase our faith, and provide testimonies for the glory of God.

Luke 10:4-8, 17 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' . . . The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

They went out by faith; they took nothing with them. They did not hold fundraisers, sell books or tee shirts, did no car washes to support the trip, made no withdrawals from their banks, had no credit card or checkbook, and had no reservations for a hotel or a place to stay. They did not even take their wallets or a change of clothes, but they did have faith in the word that Jesus spoke to them. And they returned to Jesus with glowing testimonies of healing and provision (*Luke 22:35*). As we just read, Jesus said, freely you have received, freely give. And this was before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church quickly grew to thousands. Jesus commanded them to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth (*Mark 16:15-16*), but they were building a megachurch in Jerusalem. Maybe Peter was tempted to start a building fund again, but God pushed them out of the nest by allowing great persecution against the church, which scattered them to the ends of the earth whether they wanted to go or not.

Matthew 10:5-11. Upon entering a town or village, seek out a worthy person and stay at that house until you leave.

Luke 10:4-8 & 17. When you find a house, stay there, and eat & drink what they give you.

Acts 2:1-4. The church was born in a house. One hundred and twenty people were praying in the upper room of the house when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues.

Acts 2:5-47. With 3,000 new converts and a growing community, various disciples would meet daily in the temple or from house to house to study the scriptures and have meals together.

Acts 3:1-26 & Acts 4:1-4. Peter and John went up together into the temple to pray and spontaneously decided to stop to pray for a beggar who could not walk. After they prayed, he was healed and went walking, leaping, and praising God. The commotion he made drew a crowd to see what happened, so Peter preached, and 5,000 converted to Christ.

Acts 5:12-42. Many signs and wonders followed the Apostles, and multitudes came to Christ, but the Apostles were imprisoned, beaten, and released with a warning not to preach in Jesus' name. The Apostles and followers of Jesus went daily in and around the temple and in every house to have fellowship, and they continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:1-3. *Saul (A.K.A, Paul) was persecuting the church, entering all the houses of the believers in Jesus in attempts to disrupt and destroy their faith and meeting places.*

Acts 9:43. *Ten years after Pentecost, Peter was in Joppa at a house owned by Simon the tanner when servants from a Gentile (non-Jewish) Roman Centurion named Cornelius came for him.*

Acts 9:43 & 10:1-48 & 11:1-18, *Peter entered Cornelius's house to find people who had assembled to hear from God by Peter's words. Everyone in the house comes to faith in Christ, taking water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit. Cornelius's house was the first Gentile church. Peter stays a few days before reporting to the elders in Jerusalem about how God has accepted gentiles into the faith.*

Romans 16:5, *Paul sends greetings by letter, saying to greet Priscilla and Aquila and greet the congregation (church) that meets in their house.*

Colossians 4:15, *Paul sent greetings by letter saying to greet Nymphas and the congregation (church) that meets in his house.*

Philemon 1:2, *Paul sending greetings by letter, saying to greet Apphia our sister & Archippus and the congregation (church) that meets in your house.*

Paul's Sacrificial Life

After Paul's conversion to Christ, he embarked on several missionary trips to spread the gospel to the world. Paul had no home, no salary, no paid staff, no musicians, no insurance, and no guarantees of anything other than persecution, beatings, and imprisonment wherever he went. However, the fruit of his ministry speaks for itself. Regarding money sent to Paul, there is one thing you knew for sure, whether anyone gave or not, he was still going to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ with every fiber of his being, regardless of his safety or provisions. Whenever Paul defended his ministry, he avoided mentioning any accomplishments but spoke of his sufferings for Christ.

***2 Corinthians 6:4-11** Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; **poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.** We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you.*

***2 Corinthians 11:23-28** Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I*

*have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; **I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.** Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

Paul's life of Faith

After the Apostle Paul's conversion to Christ, they sent him to take the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). When we follow his travels, we see the same pattern of doing the ministry by faith as given by Jesus to the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples that Jesus sent out. Paul went out by faith and stayed with people who opened their homes. Sometimes they held meetings out of that home, synagogues, or even rented rooms. At times Paul received offerings, and other times he worked as a tentmaker to provide for his needs (*1 Cor 9:6*).

***Acts 9:19.** Saul (A.K.A. Paul) goes to Damascus and stays certain days with disciples.*

Acts 16:14-15. Paul and Silas travel to Thyatira. Lydia and her family convert to faith in Christ, and Paul and Silas stay at her house.

Acts 16:40. After Paul and Silas got released from jail, they met the brethren at Lydia's house.

Acts 18:1-3 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, ... with his wife Priscilla ... So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation, they were tentmakers.

Acts 19:9-10. Paul went to Corinth, rented a lecture hall, stayed for two years, and taught his disciples daily

Acts 20:4-6. Paul and eight co-workers stay with believers in Troas for seven days.

Acts 20:17-35. Paul reminds Ephesians that he taught them publicly & house to house.

Acts 21:3-6. Paul and co-workers went to Tyre, found some disciples there, and stayed with them for seven days.

Acts 21:7. Paul and co-workers went to Ptolemais, found some disciples there, and stayed with them for a day.

Acts 21:8-10. Paul and co-workers went to Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the Evangelist.

Acts 21:16. Paul and co-workers in Jerusalem stay at the home of Mnason,

Acts 27:3. While under custody in Sidon, Paul met with his friends who cared for and provided for his needs.

Acts 28:13-15. Paul in Puteoli finds some brothers and stays a week with them and meets with some brothers who had traveled to see him.

Freely Received, Freely Give

Above all, Paul never wanted the gospel message tainted by money, but He had no problem whatsoever, taking up a collection for the poor. In his letters, we see he actively involved the churches in supporting each other financially as the needs became critical.

2 Corinthians 9:1-9-15, "As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever." (See also: John 13:29, Matt.25:33-40, Gal.2:9-10, Rom.15:26, 1Tim.5:16, Acts 6:1, Jas 2:5,14-17, Prov.28:27, etc.)

Paul would never allow money to be a cause for offense or a stumbling block. But he had strong convictions that he had scriptural grounds to receive money from the churches for his support, especially churches he started or had labored to help.

Paul would have never accepted money if it would compromise the gospel or bring reproach to the name of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:6-13-14, Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel!" (Also, 1 Tim.5:17,18)

1 Corinthians 9:11-12 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:14-15 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast.

1 Corinthians 9:18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

2 Corinthians 11:7-9 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to

serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.

Another thing that we will point out is that none of the apostles or disciples who followed Jesus did it for the money, and they all paid the ultimate price to follow Jesus. They crucified Peter upside down, Nero had Paul martyred, and all the other apostles experienced cruel deaths as martyrs with one exception. They tried to execute the Apostle John by throwing him into a vat of boiling oil, but he miraculously came out unharmed. So, they sent him to die on the barren island of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation. The early church endured indescribable tortures and deprivations. However, the persecution against them was like pouring gas on the fire of the Holy Ghost, which only resulted in the gospel exploding like wildfire across the whole earth (*Acts 17:5,6*).

Contrast the testimonies and lifestyles of the apostles with us today, especially in America. We are wealthy by the world's standards, we live like kings (*1 Corinthians 4:8*), and we have had probably the most prosperous and comfortable lives of anyone in history. The greatest threat to the modern churches (in America) has not been persecution but compromise, greed, pride, and sin. However, the clouds of persecution are on the horizon, and we may have our time to be tested in the fire soon (*1 Corinthians 3:12-15*).

False Prophets

Contrast the life and message of Jesus and his followers in the Bible with what we see and hear from the megachurch ministers and prosperity preachers today. We should be careful about giving money to anyone that does not have a godly character with good motives, or we could be supporting false prophets and partake in their sins. We are at the end of the end times, and the fulfillment of the prophecies about false apostles, false prophets, and spiritual deceptions is increasing, so we must always be alert.

1 Timothy 4:1-2, In later times, they abandon faith, listen to deceiving spirits and demonic teachings by hypocrites

2 Corinthians 11:4, fake apostles preach another Jesus, another spirit, a different gospel, (prosperity, self-help, etc.)

2 Corinthians 11:13 -15, false apostles, deceitful workmen, Satan's servants mask as servants of righteousness, enslave, exploit, take advantage, push themselves

The fastest way to find a false prophet is to follow the money. False prophets are all about the money and all about themselves. Many ministries build a personality cult of a charismatic minister, who peddles teachings for profit, enticing people with the hope of success and riches.

Jesus and Paul warned that these fake ministers would enter the flock dressed as sheep but are wolves who draw disciples to themselves and will not spare the flock from exploitation and destruction (*Acts 20:29-30*). Peter mentions that there were false prophets in Israel (400 false to 1 true), and there will be false teachers in the church, showing that deceivers and frauds never change or go away.

Notice that Peter says they will exploit you, and being experts in greed, they produce greed, worldly-mindedness, immoral and ungodly behavior in their followers.

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Acts 20:29-30 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

2 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also **false prophets** among the people, just as there will be **false teachers** among you. They will secretly introduce **destructive heresies**, even **denying the sovereign Lord** who bought them **bringing swift destruction** on themselves. Many will follow **their shameful ways** and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. **In their greed these teachers will exploit you** with stories they have made up. **Their condemnation** has long been hanging over them, and **their destruction** has not been sleeping.

2 Peter 2:12-15 *But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish. They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to **carouse in broad daylight**. They are blots and blemishes, **reveling in their pleasures** while they feast with you. With eyes **full of adultery**, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; **they are experts in greed** an accursed brood!*

Balaam - Money & Sex

Peter mentions a false prophet named Balaam of Beor. And although Balaam had died centuries before Peter was born, he typified an evil spirit that continues to influence false prophets today, who love the wages of wickedness.

2 Peter 2:15 *They have left the straightway and wandered off to follow the way of **Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.***

The prophet Balaam appears in twelve chapters of the Bible, he is mentioned by name 59 times, and his story serves as a warning for us. Balaam was not from Israel, but he did hear from God, and he also had 100 percent accuracy in his seven prophecies recorded in the Bible (*Numbers 22-24*). And, as the previous verse mentions, he loved money.

Numbers 24:13 *'Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the*

command of the LORD and I must say only what the LORD says'?

The first thing Balaam said was that he could only speak the word of God, which he did accurately. And secondly, he wanted a palace filled with silver and gold. So, you might be thinking, how was he a false prophet if he spoke the word of God accurately? After blessing Israel with his prophecies, he later brought a curse on them. How? He consulted and advised Israel's enemy on how to corrupt and destroy Israel. He was not a false prophet because of what he prophesied but was a false prophet because of the lifestyle he promoted. Balaam peddled influence and compromise, making sin acceptable and widespread.

Balaam instructed the king of Moab to send Moabite women to seduce the men of Israel to commit sexual immorality, leading them to worship pagan sex gods. Many fake apostate churches today do the same thing by openly accepting and even promoting every kind of sexual sin and deviancy, and they will also incur the same condemnation.

***Numbers 25:1-2** While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods.*

The Israelites defiled themselves, and the wrath of God broke out in a plague upon them. Phinehas, son of Aaron, stopped the plague by putting a spear through an Israelite man and a Moabite woman, who were blatantly and defiantly sinning before the elders of Israel.

That day 24,000 people died of a plague. Who knows, maybe it was sexually transmitted venereal disease? That incident left a long-lasting scar on the children of Israel. Later, God told Moses to take vengeance on the Moabites and Balaam.

Numbers 31:7, 8** They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba the five kings of Midian. **They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.

Balaam was served justice at the end of a sword. But notice how Jesus had revealed Himself to the church in Pergamum, where they had a modern Balaam teaching in their church. Jesus was holding a sharp two-edged sword!

Revelation 2:12-16** "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: **These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.** I know where you live where Satan has his throne. ... Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who **hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.** ... **'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Jesus was talking to the church about teachers who were like Balaam, they were still around then, and they are around today. Jesus still has the same judgment for Balaam in the church, a sharp double-edged sword (*Heb 4:12,13*).

There are teachers out there that preach from the Bible and sound religious from the pulpit. But they love money and will accept, allow, and promote any variation of sexual immorality or lifestyle in their church, so long as it fills the seats and they get a palace of silver and gold like Balaam. There is no shortage of examples of mega ministries that have disgraced the name of Christ by living a double life and tolerating sin in the church. Peter describes the fate of Balaam and of those who have his spirit of greed, love of money, and immorality.

2 Peter 2:17 These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. **Blackest darkness is reserved for them.** For they mouth empty, boastful words and, **by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people** who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while **they themselves are slaves of depravity** for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

Jude 1:10-12 Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals these are the very things that destroy them. **Woe to them!** They have taken the way of Cain; **they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error;** they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, **without fruit and uprooted twice dead.** They are wild waves of the sea,

foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Gehazi's Leprosy of Greed

Next, we'll look at Gehazi, the servant of Elisha who was next in line to carry the mantle of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. One day a leper named Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, came to Elisha to be healed of his leprosy. Elisha told him to go to the river and dip seven times to receive a miraculous healing. Naaman obeyed the word of the Lord from Elisha and dipped in the river, and he got healed, then he went back to Elisha, wanting to give him a gift to show his gratitude. Elisha refused to receive gold, silver, clothing, or any gifts but said to go in peace. Then Naaman left to return to Syria. However, Gehazi saw an opportunity to gain riches and ran after Naaman and money.

2 Kings 5:20, 21 Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him." So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

Gehazi chose to serve money instead of God. Gehazi had the great privilege of being the understudy of Elisha, and everyone in the school of the prophets would have given anything to have that privilege. Instead of following in the footsteps of Elijah and Elisha, he chose to chase after money (*Matthew 6:24*).

To top it off, Gehazi had to make up a story and lie and deceive to get the money.

2 Kings 5:22-24 "Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, 'Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. **Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.**'" "By all means, take two talents," said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and **then tied up the two talents of silver** (150 pounds of silver) **in two bags, with two sets of clothing.** He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. When Gehazi came to the hill, **he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house.** He sent the men away and they left.

Unfortunately for Gehazi, the Lord revealed everything he had done to Elisha, and he waited for Gehazi to return. When Gehazi entered the room, Elisha gave him a word from the Lord.

2 Kings 5:25, 26 Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha. "**Where have you been, Gehazi?**" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered. But Elisha said to him, "**Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? *Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?***"

God sees what is in our hearts, all of our motives and desires, and when Gehazi had a lust for clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, and so forth, God revealed it to Elisha. And the question Elisha asked is even more relevant today than it was then, **is it the time to take money or run after the things of this world?** There is no time to be anchored to this earth by temporary things because Jesus is returning soon to take us to our eternal treasures in the heavens. Judgment came swiftly to Gehazi.

2 Kings 5:27 Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.

The logical consequence of taking money from someone with leprosy is that you might get infected with their leprosy. Gehazi loved money so much that it blinded him from the danger of leprosy, and the infection that first ate at his soul later rotted his flesh. We need to be careful not to catch someone else's leprosy, be selective about who and what we listen to, and distance ourselves from the spiritual leper colonies or churches that preach greed. The spiritual lepers like Gehazi are the religious leaders that love the world and are enemies of the cross of Christ (*Philippians 3:18,19*).

Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, so there have always been spiritual leaders who have sold their souls to the Devil for money. But there is no healing or forgiveness for spiritual leprosy in Hell, now is the time for repentance before entering eternity.

James 5:1-5 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ***Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.***

Ps 109:6-19 He (Judas) loved to pronounce a curse may it come on him; he found no pleasure in blessing may it be far from him. ***He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil. May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him.***

The next time we see Gehazi, he is with the King of Israel and telling stories about all the miracles that Elisha did. Gehazi had become a picture of apostasy, full of leprosy, speaking about past revivals, but he was spiritually dead. Gehazi could not work a physical job (impaired by leprosy) because up to that time, his bread and butter came from being a religious leader in the ministry. Sadly, now he was making merchandise of his past association with Elisha making friends with the world, and they welcomed him into their eternal habitations.

2 Kings 8:4-5 The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, "***Tell me***

about all the great things Elisha has done." Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life."

Luke 16:1-9-14 *I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings ... "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."*

Having seen how the love of money can lead to destruction, we should take heed to avoid any prophets or teachers who preach covetousness and greed. If you hear prosperity preachers say you have to give to get, or they say the more you give, the bigger your blessing, just run. Get out as fast as you can, or you might catch Gehazi's leprosy! Jesus sees through the spiritual deprivation of those that run after money and advises them on what to do, and it can be summed up with one word, repent.

Revelation 3:17-19, *You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can*

see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent!

Money and the End Times

Many godly pastors, teachers, and preachers share a solid, balanced view of money, and there is nothing wrong or sinful about being blessed by God with riches, even more so when you use your resources to be a blessing to others.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

But we are in the end times, and we know as we draw near to the coming of the Lord, there will be catastrophic financial upheavals and a complete takeover of all financial resources by the antichrist government in a global (digital) currency. All opposition to the antichrist's global empire will suffer sanctions and revocation of access to banks, money, credit, and the ability to make purchases, sell assets, or even stay alive. That global financial control will not come into full power until after the rapture. However, we are currently in the initial stages and development of that system with the onset of digital currencies and cashless societies, social scoring, ESG scores, and other globalist agendas that are rapidly being implemented and continuously moving forward day by day.

It is crucial to cultivate the right financial mindset for the end times because the world can change in one day, as it did at Pearl Harbor, 911, or Noah's flood. By the way, Noah moved with fear for 100 years as he prepared the ark before the flood. But Noah's neighbors, friends, and the rest of the world paid no attention to the warnings. They lived their everyday life occupying their time with eating, drinking, weddings, gardening and business as usual until the day disaster hit.

***Matthew 24:37-39** "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, **until the day that Noah entered the ark,** "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

We are living in the end times, and at any time, Jesus will return and snatch away his bride. **Every earthly thing that the bride owns will be left behind.** And for all those who remain during the great tribulation, all their wealth will be useless, their silver and gold cannot save them, they cannot eat their gold, and they cannot buy or sell unless they have the mark of the beast.

***Ezekiel 7:19-21** They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be an unclean thing. Their silver and gold will not be able to save them in the day of the LORD's wrath. They will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it, for it has made them stumble into sin. They were proud of their beautiful jewelry and used it to make their*

detestable idols and vile images. Therefore, I will turn these into an unclean thing for them. I will hand it all over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked of the earth, and they will defile it.

Zephaniah 1:18 *Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth."*

Revelation 13:1-17 *He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.*

So, we should not put our hope in uncertain riches because the value of money can crash and become worthless overnight. Besides hyperinflation, access to our bank accounts, savings, debit cards, and credit cards can be denied and terminated immediately. That's when believers must trust God to meet all their needs. Jesus counsels the church to buy gold tried in the fire, symbolic of having a tested and proven faith.

Revelation 3:16-18 *"So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white*

garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

***1 Peter 1: 6-9** In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come **so that your faith of greater worth than gold**, which perishes even though **refined by fire may be proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

True riches are the spiritual riches that come from trusting God in every situation. The rich have the money to pay their bills or buy whatever they want, and they don't need faith because they have money. However, the poor who struggle financially and are under pressure turn to God for help and rely on him in times of need, and God provides miraculously, time and time again. The poor are humble and see the hand of God providing in every situation.

***James 2:5** Hearken, my beloved brethren, **Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith**, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*

***Psalm 37:25** I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.*

Jesus understands the poor and persecuted and how outwardly they physically have to endure poverty and affliction. He also knows that inwardly, those problems and challenges are working to build faith and something eternal in their lives, making them rich in their relationship with God.

Revelation 2:9-10, I (Jesus) know your afflictions and your poverty yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you; the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life, (an eternal crown for martyrs).

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Summary

Here is a summary of some of the things we have looked at:

- The church is not under the law of Moses, like animal sacrifices and tithing
- The church is under the Law of Spirit, a higher law and willing to surrender ALL to Jesus

- The church is not a building, but is a group of people The church resources should be used to spread the gospel and help the poor
- The ministry of Jesus, and the Apostles functioned by faith, their needs were met daily as needed
- Those laboring in the gospel receive support from others, and can also work with their own hands
- True servants of God do not minister for the money, they will not let money be a cause of offense
- True servants are willing to suffer any affliction, any deprivation, and even martyrdom for the gospel
- False teachers love money, want to be rich, and will deceive, defile and destroy others to be rich
- False teachers lose their true calling, become like spiritual lepers, and suffer immediate and eternal consequences
- The poor will reap eternal benefits from a life of dependance on God, and they are rich in faith
- In the end times, believers can't allow money and material possessions to be an anchor binding them to the earth, so there will be nothing holding them back when Jesus comes in the clouds to take them to heaven at the rapture.

We need to seek first King Jesus and his kingdom, and keep our eyes fixed on him, He is returning soon!

Mathew 6:31-33** So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But

seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,

Call to Action

We are in the end times; our world is changing quickly to line up with Bible prophecy. Jesus said the signs of his return would be like birth pangs, growing in intensity and frequency and globally. All those signs happen at once, and we can see them happening in real-time with wars, food shortages, pandemics, shutdowns, and natural disasters, all leading to a one-world government ruled by the antichrist. Also, there will be a great falling away from Christ, with churches becoming perverted, politically woke, and government-controlled. Eventually, all true believers will have to come out of the dead institutional denominations and fake churches. Thank God we have a blessed hope that Jesus will rapture the church before wrath and judgment hit the earth!

While we have time and freedom, we should study the scriptures, share the gospel, and learn to live by faith. This book is part of a series of basic teachings that all Christians should know and teach. We call it the "toolbox series" because each study is a tool for you to share your faith with others. For free resources and study materials, visit our website at Ears2Hear.online.

The Tool Box Series

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