



Leon Chisholm

God Must Be Mean

Christians's attitude
towards wealth

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Dedication

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Introduction

TELLING THE TRUTH WITHOUT THE ICING

If the majority of the world's wealth was in the hands of God's "people" I am convinced that we would be living in a better world. Please note I did not say Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Rastafarians, or any other religious group. I am speaking about individuals who are truly devoted to the cause of God and the goodwill of mankind both of which cannot be separated. I am not speaking of individuals who are merely attached to a religion. This is not to say the groups aforementioned are simply attached to their religion. Yet as we all know many who claim to be followers of a religious body do not adhere to the principles as laid by these religious bodies. When I speak of God's "people" I refer to people who are true followers of their religious principles and are of great value to mankind. The value may be in different forms, being humanitarian for instance, or a philanthropist. Of even greater significance is being a good neighbor to each individual you come in contact with. However, being a good neighbor or philanthropist must be a collective definition of others, not yours. It means that although a person may not be a follower of your religious doctrines or dogmas they should be able to respect you

as an individual who possesses some value outside your religious circle.

The title of this book might seem blasphemous to some Christians and no doubt some may wonder if I am an atheist or insane or merely seeking attention even after reading the book. I firmly believe that I'm not an atheist and by God's grace I trust that I am still very sane. To the point of seeking attention, they would be right on that account. I am indeed seeking attention. However, I am more interested in my readers paying careful attention to the contents of this book because I am positive the things that will be discussed must have crossed their minds at some point or they may have wondered about them just a little. My intent in writing is not to spark controversy but really to challenge readers to re-examine some of the beliefs we have about wealth, beliefs that have been handed down to us. Beliefs, that lead more to our detriment than the abundant life that is promised by the scriptures of the Holy Bible. Beliefs, which might not be said out loud these days but are still strong themes in Christianity. Yet, they have very little or absolutely no biblical foundation to support them.

The title of this book “God Must Be Mean” are words that came to me one night while I was preparing a presentation for church the next day on the topic “We Reap What We Sow.” While preparing the presentation my mind was drawn to the fact that numerous Christians are poor, few are rich and even those in the middle class still struggle financially. Another idea that caught my attention at the same time is that the subject of money seems like a taboo subject in the church. Making money is simply not something that Christians readily discuss in church. Sometimes the impression is given that it is an unholy subject. Yet we all use it, and those that find themselves with some are never too happy to part with it. If you want a silent church one Sabbath or Sunday let the Pastor preach about returning tithes and offerings or giving away a portion of earnings to the very needy. I can guarantee that almost the entire church would instantaneously become extremely needy, with the shout of “hallelujah” and “Praise Lord” becoming few and very far between. Many myths exist in Christianity about prosperity and wealth. I am led to believe that it is some of these myths that have made so many Christians fall to the lower end of the social and financial ladder.

I know many will argue that money or material possession is not everything and that they are rich spiritually and I fully agree. Some

will even make a case for good health and numerous things that they claim to be the equivalent or even better than financial wealth, and to this, I would agree also. Many of these are very important and some are even more important than material wealth. My aim is not to highlight the importance of the abundance of material wealth in comparison to the high state of spiritual well-being or good sound health, no! I could never do that. Let's just pause for a while and examine most of the trends or facts of life as it relates to Christians' day-to-day experiences, to make my intent more transparent.

Do Christians visit the doctor less often than non-Christians? Do Christians partake more often in something as simple as basic exercise than non-Christians? Are Christians who make the case for spiritual richness bearing the fruits of what they preach about, that is, can we conclude after examination that the practice of good moral values among Christians is trending upwards? I have no doubt what an honest answer will be. I conclude that many Christians or persons who wear that title are not strong on morals and are not health conscious either. When you look around it will very apparent that much of the spiritual richness talk is just that, talk. I am not advocating seeking wealth at the expense of our spiritual growth or even our health. That would be just as dangerous, if not even more

dangerous. I aim to point out that spiritual growth, good health, and a good financial position or better yet material abundance are all components of an individual's happiness and to ignore one is to put a strain on the others. I will also put forward that the discipline that is required for spiritual growth or good health is the same discipline that is required for strengthening one's financial position.

Chapter 1

CHRISTIANS, LIARS OR JUST NAÏVE

Christianity has its early roots in Jerusalem as a branch of Judaism. For those who might question Christianity being a branch of Judaism, we'll do a little background. The founder of Christianity is Jesus who was a Jew, and as far as the records go he followed the religion of the Jews which was Judaism up to his death. Jesus' disciples worshipped alongside the Jews in the temple early in their ministry and used the same scriptures as the Jews. Added to this, both the Old and New Testament books are written by Jews except the books, "Luke" and "Acts of the Apostles" which were written by Doctor Luke. It means distinguishing Christianity from Judaism, in its early stages would be a difficult proposition. One could argue that Christianity was to redefine Judaism or to make it complete. I would not argue with such a position as Jesus once said:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. Matthew 5:17”

The followers of Christ were first called Christians in the city of Antioch, a city in Asia Minor now Turkey. Antioch had become the center for the followers of Christ after fleeing from Jerusalem as a result of persecution. The followers were not persecuted because of a new religion. They were persecuted because they were teaching that Jesus has risen from the dead. Paul the apostle was nearly killed by the Jews not because he advocated a new religion but because he dared to differ from aspects of Judaism in his teaching, as indicated by Acts 21 v 21-22. Therefore, it would be fair to conclude that Christianity is a branch of Judaism.

Looking at Christianity from as far back as memory will serve to present-day Christianity, some things will become apparent. In the Holy Bible in the book of Acts, chapter two, it is noted that the Christians sold their possessions and goods and gave to those who were in need:

“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Acts 3v 44-47

We will also notice that Paul on one of his missionary journeys collected goods for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

If we should use the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures, over two hundred verses refer to the poor or matters affecting the poor. This would lead one to think that high on the agenda of the early church and further back in Judaism, caring for those who are less fortunate or the poor and needy was a top priority. Christianity has come a long way from Jerusalem to Antioch, through Greek culture, through the Roman Empire, and to present-day Christianity. That is wide and varied, and sometimes mighty confusing. It now has numerous denominations, some of which could do with a little bit of

Godliness in them. Amazingly, one thing seems to remain.

Christianity has always had a lot of poor people or those who barely can get by. The question is, who should care for the poor and needy? I dare to think; that it is those who are in a position to do so. If this is true, why is the subject of accumulating abundance not very popular in church? Should the church leave the poor and needy to the care of the world?

“My father is rich in house and land he has the wealth of the whole world in His hands.” Now, this is one popular quotation that is often heard in church; it gives a sense of comfort to the less fortunate (financially) in this life. While the quotation is comforting, it is also a little bit ironic. Look at it this way, suppose my earthly father is a wealthy man and I am living in poverty, and I am a loyal son to him. Now if my father did not give me any wealth or at least teach me how I could attain some, what would people think of my father? I’m certain they would say he is a greedy man or selfish, and some would say it with some more colorful adjectives than I ever could. My position is this: God has all the wealth of the world in His hands and most of his followers are poor, and a number of those who seem not to follow him are doing better financially. Should we consider God to be a little mean? This is the essence of this book, is God being mean

to His followers, or are there principles that Christians are missing that result in their condition?

Let us dig a little deeper by asking another question. Are Christians liars or just naïve? Could it be that Christians don't tell the truth about how they feel about financial abundance? Could it be that they are naïve about the powers of financial abundance? Is it that we as Christians have been brainwashed into believing negative things about financial abundance and as a result, we conjure many negative thoughts toward the subject? How often do hear, Christians say, "It is better to be happy than to be rich.?" Others will say, "I don't want to be rich I just want to survive or have enough." Even worse is the belief that all rich people are guilty of something.

There are numerous other negative sentiments toward wealth, some of which are very true. But let's pay closer attention to the statements previously mentioned. I have known people with wealth, and persons in poverty and both experience happiness and unhappiness. Ask yourself which of the following states you would prefer to be in. First, you are unhappy, with ten bills to pay, a loan repayment due, and an empty cupboard, even though you just received your pay cheque a few days ago. In the second scenario, you are unhappy with

your bills paid, and investment increasing, with something to give to those who are in need. I have a feeling we would come up with the same answer. If happiness is just about denying yourself wealth, all poor people would be happy, and we know that is not the case. Secondly, for those who don't want to be rich and want to survive or have enough, I will ask this question, how much is enough? Would a hundred thousand in savings be enough? Would five hundred thousand dollars in savings be enough? Would a million dollars in savings be enough? How about ten million dollars in savings? Whatever figure an individual comes up with, propose a figure that doubles it, without taking any additional risk and see if the person would say, "I don't want that amount". I have never met a person who would prefer to take one thousand dollars when they could get two thousand dollars with the same level of effort. It is a human tendency or desire to want more. I strongly believe that desiring something and sitting down wishing for it, is far more dangerous than desiring abundance and planning logical legitimate steps toward attaining it. To the idea of the rich having a guilty conscience, I will say this, almost everyone is guilty about something so why not have the money too?

The wealth of the world indeed belongs to God. We all know God doesn't want or need material possessions. Therefore, he must have created it all for the people of the world, His creatures. We all know to some extent the dent that sin put in the master plan. Yet, God is the Alpha and the Omega, He knows the end from the beginning and His plans cannot fail. I do not doubt that God wants to distribute His wealth so we all can have an abundant life while we sojourn on earth. To whom do you believe God would be more likely to give His possessions? On first thought, I would say his followers. Yet, first thoughts are not always accurate. A better clue to finding the answer is where the bible points out that God allows His rain to fall upon the just and the unjust.

“That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:45”

I know full well that someone will point out that the text has nothing to do with wealth, and that I am using the bible to say what I want it to say. I am not trying to read something into the text that is not there. My point is that the text suggests that God's favor does not only fall upon those who claim to be his children. In effect, I am

saying, that God is not biased as to who attains what. He laid everything before us with laws to govern them. Application of these laws tends to determine our success and failures more than divine intervention. He is concerned about our motives for attaining wealth but let's not fool ourselves to think that great intentions alone will be met with great rewards. Consider the following story from the Holy Bible.

This a story in Matthew chapter twenty-five that speaks about three servants who were put in charge of a varying number of talents which is a measure of gold or silver, by their Master. This is how the story unfolds:

“For [the kingdom of heaven is] as a man traveling into a far country, [who] called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several abilities; and straightway took his journey.

Interestingly it was the master who initiated the arrangement and gave the servants according to their abilities. It is not like giving someone a task to handle with no clue as to whether they can handle it or not. The servants must have proven themselves at some point in

the past for them to be given according to their abilities. It is of greater interest to examine the results.

“Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made [them] other five talents. And likewise he that [had received] two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.”

The servant with the five talents did what was expected of him, the same can be said of the servants with two. The servant with one did not do what was expected of him. Different moral lessons can be drawn from the actions of the servants, but one thing is very certain. The opportunities can be presented to different persons, yet their outlook is radically different.

After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, [thou] good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents:

behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done.... Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, [there] thou hast [that is] thine. His lord answered and said unto him, [Thou] wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and [then] at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give [it] unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:14-30

The master's response seems typical to all three servants. The two that did well were commended, and the one that didn't do well was chastised. I doubt anybody would complain about the master giving credit to those who did well, but we might take some issues with how he treats the other servant.

The third servant hid his talent to protect it. Which was a good intention, protecting what you have is important. However, the master was not too happy with this. He took the talent and gave it to the first servant and denounced the third servant as wicked and lazy. Should we condemn or treat as detestable, people who fail? Of course not, but the message should be clear that excuses for poor stewardship should not be tolerated. The master knew the servants' abilities and he also knew the risk involved in the business. If he wanted to hide his money then he could have done it himself or taken it to the money exchangers (the banking sector at the time). If the servant knew that the master was wicked; why take the money and allow the master to go away with the belief that profits would be made on his money while he was away? We might say he did have a choice, which could be true. Yet, which is more dangerous: telling a wicked master that you would not invest his money or accepting the money, letting him think you are going to invest but do nothing? Then remind him that he is wicked when he comes to collect. I want to think the second situation is far more dangerous but that is just me. It is clear that the master was upset by the servant's lack of effort which was compounded by the servant attacking the Master's character instead of owning up to his shortcomings. Most of us

would say he got his just reward, and I would agree but my reasons for doing so may differ from yours.

Jesus ended the story by saying *“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”* Matthew 13 v 12.

This seems paradoxical, to him, that has nothing even the little shall be taken away. In practical terms, one can take something from nothing. Thus, the statement must have meant something else. This is what I gather from the story. The servant did have something, he was given a talent, but he thought very little of what he had, and he did not see the potential of the gift he received. His focus was not on how much he might be able to make of the “little” but on how “little” his gift was. In his eyes, the one talent was nothing when compared with what was received by the other servants. He in turn chose safety over productivity. He may have had good intentions, but he was passive. Good intentions must be acted on or else very soon they become nothing. Another way of looking at it is like this; whenever we don’t build upon what we have it will amount to nothing in our eyes and be seen as a wasted opportunity in the eyes of others.

Every individual has something to create a fortune for themselves and others, we have powerful minds with the ability to think. The trouble is too many of us do not think. God will bless our efforts when we are diligent in our quests to achieve them. In this lies the reason why many Christians fail miserably as it relates to achieving abundance. We are not diligent in this regard and God will not bless our laziness, no he will not!!! God rewards honest efforts if we play our part well. We are the servants; God is the master. If we follow the example of the first two servants, our eyes will be open to more. Even better, God and our fellow humans can entrust us with more as we have proven ourselves as stewards who are worthy of abundance. If we follow the example of the third servant then our little, which we saw as nothing, will be taken away. This will not be done vindictively by God; it is simply a matter of what you refuse to use you will eventually lose.

Nature will take away what we have if we by our actions or inaction prove ourselves unworthy of it. Remember it was Christ who said, ‘if ye are faithful in little, then ye will be faithful in much.’ Most times, Christians do not demonstrate any financial will or savvy and then think God is keeping wealth from them to protect them spiritually.

That is utter nonsense and is a slap in the face of God. It's a thought designed by Satan to misrepresent God to the world.

Christians are naïve to think that God will richly bless them with abundance in material possessions due to strong “spiritual” efforts or what they claim to be spiritual efforts. We reap what we sow, if all our efforts are channeled to spiritual endeavors, it is only fair that we reap spiritual rewards. Could it be that we desire abundance but, in our quest, to appear holy, we speak negatively about it? Then at the same time, speak positively about spiritual desires with no real drive to attain them and thus, in the end, we are neither well off, spiritually nor financially. Another thing to consider, is where did the idea come from that we have to forsake spiritual things if we have abundance. Abraham the “friend” of God did not, Job the “patient one” did not. Then why should we? With God, all things are still possible. It is time Christians stop fooling themselves, or should I say ourselves, and search for the principles that lead to the abundant life that God promises us. That life includes good physical and mental health, financial abundance, and great family and social relationships, all of which are governed by the Holy Spirit working through us. These principles come from God himself. Many are laid out in the book of

Proverbs and other books of the Bible; we need to search the book, practice the principles and gain abundance in all endeavors.

Let`s be honest, principles take discipline and time, and we love instantaneous results. Thus, we would prefer to be obedient and just pray and God just makes things just happen for us. It doesn't work like that, and so to compensate for our indiscipline we fashion all types of negative attitudes toward wealth and abundance. That is more where the problem is, our indiscipline, and not God having problems with abundance.

Chapter 2

RICH PEOPLE, ARE THEY GREEDY?

One of the most common sentiments that are directed to the rich from the poor and middle class, is that they are greedy, always wanting more. Some even view rich persons as hoarding wealth, being selfish, or self-serving. No doubt these sentiments are true for many wealthy individuals, as many wealthy individuals contribute little or nothing to society outside of how they accumulate their wealth. Yet, something being true for some people does not make it true for all. I have never researched the contributions made to society by the rich versus the poor. I don't know who contributes more financially or otherwise. If such research should be done, it would have to look at the total contribution per person, not total contribution per group. Since there are more poor people than rich people, if we go by group, the poor would no doubt contribute more. Poor people could make larger contributions per person than the rich or vice versa but as I say I don't know or have the facts. I have not seen any data to support one claim or the other. What we will learn from observation, however, is that a number of the people who view rich people as

being greedy do so without much evidence or do so based on sentiments rather than evidence.

I was asked to make a presentation to a group of Social Studies students who were studying entrepreneurship once. They raised the point that rich business people are mean. I remember asking them if they got five hundred dollars; how much of it they would give away? Well, all of the students, that is a group of about fifteen to seventeen students, said they would not give away any of it as five hundred dollars was not enough to give away anything. Afterward, I asked them if a rich businessman earns a profit of a hundred million, how much he should give away to charity. Some replied ten million, others twenty million while others said half the amount. I then put forward a scenario to students where the rich businessman with a hundred million dollars and a student with five hundred dollars both give nothing away and asked whom they consider the unkind of the two. The students all declared that the businessman is the unkind of the two. These were the same students that would not give away a dollar from their five hundred dollars suggested that the businessman should give away up to fifty million dollars. I highlight this incident as it points to one of the major flaws of human beings. We tend to make great plans for things that we don't have or things we wish we

had. It is also true that we are expert players when we are sitting on the sideline watching the game. It should be less than surprising that the same flaws will show up when those with little, judge those who have a lot. Oftentimes the poor visualize all the great things they would do for humanity if they had wealth in abundance and judge the rich based on what they visualized. The man who can't find it to give out of the little he has will probably find it more difficult to give if he should accumulate abundance. The reason for saying this is simple; the problem most people have as it relates to giving is not poverty; the problem is generosity or the lack thereof.

The “Webster Concise English Dictionary” defines greed as, “wanting more than one needs are deserve”. It also defines greed as an “excessive desire for food or wealth”. Look around and silently identify some of the persons who you think want more than they deserve or more than they need. If you look long enough, you will see that greedy people come from all different social strata. Spend some time and scrutinize this whole matter of greed and greedy people. You might just find out that the rich seem to be greedier because it is easier to point fingers at a man who has ten million dollars and indicates by his actions that he deserves another ten than it is to point to a man who has two hundred dollars and thinks he

deserves five hundred dollars. Greed is not stronger with the rich than it is with the poor or vice versa. Wanting or desiring more undeservingly, from all indications, is quite present in all humans at some point. It is our responsibility to ensure that our desire for more is equally matched with systematic diligent efforts that add value to the life of others. A man deserves all that he is willing and able to diligently work for barring that not does not knowingly or intentionally bring ill to others. This should be the approach of all those who desire; that is, all of us. We should not sit and wish or cast a “wishful eye”, or channel our efforts into discriminating against those who have gained abundance through diligent effort. Casting a “wishful eye” I believe is one of the main fuels that ignite the flames of criticism and resentment toward those who have achieved abundance in their respective areas, especially financial abundance.

I would love my readers to take note of the world we are living in. Look at the methods that people use to accumulate wealth in this day and age. At the same time look at the methods of those that are poor and that the struggling middle class uses to survive. While the methods of execution may be different, we will come to realize that the intentions are just the same. Let’s look at this with an example. A number of poor people will criticize the person or persons who come

up with a regulated lottery scheme and get rich as a result. In their criticism, they will point out that the owners of the lottery get rich off other people's money. Now, most of the people I know that buy the lottery are poor people. These poor persons don't consider that if they strike it rich the owners of lottery schemes don't get any poorer but that they too would get rich off other people's money. Anyone who takes advantage of another person's innocence to get rich would be seen as greedy. However, many people do get rich based on the greed of the poor and I would ask, is there a difference between both parties? Who is greedier, the banker that gives a loan for a million dollars to an individual knowing the person would have difficulty in repaying it and holds the person's land for collateral or the man who borrows the loan to live in style like his neighbors, knowing fully well his chance of repaying is close to zero percent?

One classic Bible story that is often used to warn us against the dangers of riches appears in Luke chapter 16 of the Holy Bible, reading from verse nineteen. It tells of the rich man dressed in expensive clothes every day and living in great luxury and Lazarus who was covered in sores, who incidentally lived in the vicinity of the rich man's gate. The story states that the rich man died and was taken to Hades where he was in great pain. Lazarus according to the

story also died and was found in Abraham's bosom or side. The rich man cried out to Abraham, who reminded him that throughout his lifetime he had enjoyed all the good things and Lazarus had all the bad things. Abraham further states that Lazarus was now enjoying himself. He wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to warn the others so they would not end up where he is, but his request was denied. After considering this story, I must admit that the danger of riches is not the central theme, though greed by itself forms a portion of the story's theme. The danger of riches is not the central focus.

The story tells the tale of two different types of people; one that had plenty, and the other who had virtually nothing. It contrasts the different situations that we as humans might find ourselves in. Lazarus was in a state of want and hence was brought to the rich man's door; the rich had plenty and thus many options were available to him. It provided the rich with an opportunity to share the blessings he had received from God. This I am convinced is the central theme of the story; the willingness to care for those who are less fortunate, the willingness to give with no expectation of a return at some point. The rich man and Lazarus highlight both extremes of total abundance and dire poverty. The wide financial gap between the two brings to

focus something else; responsibility. Lazarus didn't have and searched to fulfill his needs, thus he finds himself at the door of the rich man. The rich man was in a position to fulfill Lazarus' needs without sacrifice; obviously, he did not. He missed an opportunity to be grateful to God by sharing his blessings. I do believe that uncaring and selfish labels could be placed on this man. Yet we all know we don't have to be rich for those labels to accurately fit any of us.

Now the problem of greed, selfishness, or being uncaring is a universal problem, it affects humans regardless of their social or financial status. We all need to examine our motives and be careful how we judge others. We can hide our true selves by trying to criticize others but it does not help us to solve our problems. While all sorts of blame are cast on those who have by those who don't, the time of those who don't have would be spent more valuably if they examined themselves. However, the writer of the Spider-Man comics uses a phrase that is useful, "with great power comes great responsibility:" For those who are wealthy I will rephrase the statement, "with wealth and power comes to the tremendous responsibility of displaying to the world your gift of caring and kindness." You are accountable to God and to the world in such an exercise.

Chapter 3

THE SPIRIT OF GIVING AND WEALTH SEEKERS

“It is better to give than to receive”. Maybe you have heard or used this statement from time to time. I truly believe in this statement and I have my reasons for doing so. Both giving and receiving tend to conjure a lot of emotions; positive and negative emotions. One thing I have noticed about myself and others is that receiving, tends to carry more negative emotions and for longer periods than giving.

If you should give someone a special gift or do something special for someone, there are some negative thoughts that might tend to follow. Will the person think I am being genuine or just showing off? Will the person think I want something in return or I was pitying him or her? Will the person take care of the gift knowing that it means something to me now that he or she is in possession of it? These are all negative thoughts or feelings but they have a tendency not to stay with us long when we give the gift genuinely. At the opposite end of the scale, if someone should give us a gift or do something special for us, the negative emotions attached to it have a way of not going away easily and surfacing now and then. First, we start wondering if we need to do something in return. We also feel guilty if the person

asks us to do something for them and we cannot do it, it is as if we let them down. We may sometimes feel like we are ungrateful if we can't find a way to show our appreciation in a noticeable manner. We tend to judge the person more critically and the slightest of mishaps can be seen as the giver imposing himself on the receiver. These thoughts and feelings tend not to go away for years.

I focus on the matter of giving first because many times both poor and rich are judged based on what they give. Those who are able to give away little or nothing will be labeled meanwhile those who give away plenty will be labeled as kind. There is something a whole lot more important than the quantity that a person may give. That to which I refer is the spirit in which something is given. Certainly, the spirit in which we give is always more important than the gift. In the book of Exodus when the children of Israel were asked to bring gifts for the building of the sacred tent, God told Moses specifically that all who wished to give were free to do so. God wanted no one to be coerced into giving neither physically nor emotionally. In the same way, those who are in possession of wealth should not be coerced emotionally into giving. In this case, giving becomes worse than not giving. Speaking of coercion I want to state that this book is not written to coerce Christians to start seeking wealth and find some

reasons to explain why they are doing so. Any Christian might choose to live as wealthy, poor, or in between. The choice is theirs. However, if they choose to seek financial abundance while they are on their pilgrim's journey, there is no Godly reason why they can't do so.

I know some might reach for their bibles and find those texts that seem to be warning against riches following the above statement. Bible texts like “store up not treasures on earth where rust and moth doth corrupt...” While it is true that we will be taking no wealth from this life to the next life, it is also true that we will not be taking poverty as well. Christ wants us to build sound characters in this life, characters based on his principles. Wealth or poverty has nothing to do with building sound character. Character building has to do more with our attitude toward our fellow human beings regardless of whatever station we are in life. It also has to do with what we deem to be important. If the rich value wealth above people's well-being, then they are very wrong and this regrettably sometimes is the case. On the flip side, if the poor value survival or just getting by above people this too is very wrong and this sadly at times is the case. Whether we are poor or rich, if we live not according to the

principles of Christ we will be found wanting. Being poor will guarantee us no favors with God.

The same spirit that should characterize our giving should also characterize our seeking of wealth. We should do so if we wish to. We need not make up reasons that sound good to others for wanting wealth. I remember doing a presentation at church one night I boldly stated that I wanted to be rich. I probably shocked some of the believers when I said my aim in getting rich is not to help the church. It might come as a shock to you that my aim is not to help the church and that I state it openly. Well, I meant it then, and I mean it now. I am not one who will attempt to bribe God in my cause of wealth creation by promising all the glorious things I will do for his work. God knows my willingness to contribute to his work and he knows just how much I will do if he blesses me with much. Presently, there is a willingness in my heart to, and I do help whomever I can as well as the work of Christ. If I don't consider myself as one who makes a valuable contribution to the cause of God or humanity now, I will not be a valuable contributor with more wealth. As was stated before the spirit in which you give is more important than the quantity that you give. God can and will multiply our gifts so they can do his work no

matter how small. There is no need to bribe Him with our glorious intentions. We must do good with what we have presently.

I am not one of those people who believes that one should try to get rich in order to try to help other people!!! No, I believe that any person who aims to get rich should do so by helping other people. My idea of wealth and getting wealth is doing so by adding value to the life of others. True wealth must be attained and maintained by adding or making quality improvements in the lives of others. I will not and cannot support any form of wealth creation that destroys the lives of other people. For example, when a company makes a product and warns that it is dangerous to your health and then still distributes it while making huge profits, such a company should not mention the word morals at all. To me that is ungodliness and a Christian or anyone else for that matter should not follow such a path. There are those who profit from taking risks due to the economic policies of a particular country. Take for example a cash-strapped government floating a bond at a high percentage yield and all the buyer has to do is wait until the maturity date. This is not my idea of wealth creation either because no real value is added. However, I would not fault the buyer for profiting in this situation. He sees something that is a good deal and gladly takes the opportunity. I, however, would blame the

system that allows this to happen because when it does this allows those with wealth to profit greatly and makes it more difficult for those who are just trying to find their way economically.

I admire the billionaire Bill Gates not because he is super rich but because he became super rich by adding value to the lives of millions of people. No one will question the value of Microsoft to the world. There are numerous others that get rich by adding value to the lives of many people. Once this is done and we don't knowingly add hurt to people then we should sleep comfortably knowing our conscience is clear.

As Christians, if our aim is to be wealthy; we should do so by giving valuable service for the gains that we desire to have. The idea of abundance should bring us pleasure and whatever you do with your gains should give the same pleasure. Furthermore, if it pushes us away from God then it is not worth attaining. Wealth when used for the purpose it is designed for; brings us into a better relationship with God and not the other way around. It is designed to help people but the person who seeks it must first have the desire to help people before attaining wealth. I say this because wealth does not make us any kinder it simply amplifies the person that we are. You might

have heard the saying “money changes people,” but I don’t believe it is true. I would say though that money has a way of displaying to the world the type of person you are. It does the same thing to people that power does. It shows you up for who you really are or what you are really made of. If you are worried about your character, then not reaching for wealth when it is something you desire will not solve the problem. It might not show you up to the world but the problem will not be fixed by staying poor. Make certain if you choose not to accumulate wealth it is a state you desire to live in and not one that you try to hide in. It would be worse for you to live like that.

Chapter 4

PASTORS, ARE THEY FOR REAL?

I would love to begin this chapter by stating that the call to be a minister of the gospel is one of the greatest honors that could be afforded to man. I have even had thoughts of being a Pastor and I still don't know if I will not be a minister of the gospel one day, as sharing the gospel of Christ is the responsibility of all those who have called upon his name. I have the greatest respect for the office of a Pastor and have no intention of trying to devalue its role in the work of God. On the contrary, my aim is to challenge Pastors with the hope that it may deepen their roles or make them become the multifaceted leaders that our God wants them to be.

At the time of writing, the world is still feeling the effects of the recession of 2008, and even though Christians are pilgrims on earth, we do suffer from what is happening here. My immediate contention is that Pastors who are the leaders of God's flock on earth seem almost oblivious to what is happening to those under their care. People are suffering, and Christians are suffering. Can Pastors and by extension church leaders not do something more than pray or encourage the brethren to be faithful or say God will provide? I dare

not underestimate the power of prayer, nor the essential need for faith as without faith it is impossible to please God. However, let us be reminded that faith without works is dead. Furthermore, we can pray as long as we like and as earnestly as we imagine but without any effort on our part, we will end up dead, and I mean that literally. I am not of the view that Pastors in general are deceptive. I do believe that too many are not introspective and not enough work on their part is done in the comparative analysis as it relates to their religious philosophies and their congregation's social needs.

From experience and research, two major themes underscore how Pastors relate to the whole issue of wealth. I label these themes: “wealth by the bribery of salvation” and “wealth is not important to Christians.” Of course, there are some exceptions but they are few and far between, and those exceptions are viewed as suspect by the other members of the clergy; that is, they are often seen as seeking vanity. Let us examine the philosophy of wealth by the bribery of salvation first.

Matthew 6 v 33 says “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

This is a statement that I truly believe in. What I don't believe is that "all things" will be added instantaneously and by merely accepting Jesus as your personal savior. Presently, there are too many Pastors spreading the idea that accepting God, and accepting salvation guarantees financial blessings. People are being told to buy this oil, buy this rag, call this number, contribute to this ministry, and this will secure their financial well-being. This is what I referred to as wealth by the bribery of salvation. Accepting salvation is being used as a means of getting people to think they can bribe God into giving them wealth. I have no doubt that a lot of financial blessings are gained from this philosophy but these blessings are heading toward the sellers of the oils and rags more than the buyers.

The perception is that you can merely walk into a church buy a rag and zap!!! Your financial life takes off like a rocket in an upward direction this is not only incredulous but equally insulting to God and divine principles. The Holy Bible as well as nature gives no support to this kind of thinking. Let us examine this issue.

I am a lover of fruits, and pineapple is one of my favorites. I thoroughly enjoy the taste of fully ripened, sweet pineapples. Yet the taste only comes after many variables. It will take pineapple months

before it is ready to be eaten. Even when it is ready; we have to be aware of the rodents that enjoy the taste as much as we do and no doubt believe they should be the first to reap of what they did not plant. Cutting the fruit from the stalk puts us face to face with sharp, pointed, spiked leaves. The peeling of the fruit is not the most enjoyable task either. After all the challenges, the sweetness of the fruit makes us forget all the struggles and relish them even more. From the planting to the eating of the pineapple, parallels all things in nature to a lesser or greater degree, it also parallels the lives of us mortals. We grow, we struggle, we overcome, or we can remain the same, meander aimlessly through life and descend into an abyss of contempt.

Wealth, like the journey of the pineapple, requires time and overcoming obstacles. To amass instantaneous wealth whether you are Christian or non-Christian is a fantasy. It is an even more dangerous fantasy when it is put forward as a divine principle or right of the child of God. For Christian leaders to profit from such an idea is nothing but a scheme! Yes, your eyes are not fooling you; it's a scheme and nothing more. It is a scheme that leads many unsuspecting people to believe God has failed them or to think they are doing something wrong when they are not getting the financial

blessings after buying the “rag” or the “oil” that should have transcended or ushered them into continuous prosperity. Let’s be serious, when were the blessings of God ever for sale? Are the things of God ever for the highest bidder? We all know God does not operate like that He is a God of principle. We all can benefit and live a full life if we follow His principles, not some whimsical idea concocted by some religious leaders. It appears that some religious leaders` keys to financial blessings are through the purchasing of their ungodly philosophies packaged as divine principles and wrapped with a godly bow. Can we get more than what we put in initially? Certainly, nature does teach multiplication and reaping more than what is sown. This is evident with each seed a farmer plants that eventually bear fruits. However, to reap the benefits, initiative, effort, patience, and endurance must be displayed by the farmer.

If one should doubt that wealth or financial abundance is not lavished upon on God’s children without effort just look within the pages of the Holy Bible. I will share a familiar story, the Israelites’ journey to Canaan. The Israelites were promised a land flowing with milk and honey as well as vineyards they did not plant.

“And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which [are] in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” Exodus 3V7-8

Even though disobedience was responsible for them taking forty years to get it, they still had numerous obstacles to overcome, in the forty days it took them to reach the borders of Canaan. Firstly, there was the obstacle of walking miles with children and livestock, while being pursued by a less-than-friendly Egyptian army. The fearful experience when they were cornered at the Red Sea.

But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses [and] chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they

said unto Moses, Because [there were] no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? where fore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? [Is] not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For [it had been] better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. Exodus 14 v 9-12

Then there was no water for three days in the desert of Shur, and when they did find water at Marah it was bitter.

“So Moses brought ...and they went out into the wilderness of Shur, and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they [were] bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. Exodus 15 v 23

This was followed by the *small* matter of no food.

“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said... for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Exodus 16 v 2-3.

Another water problem faced them at Rephidim along with the attack of the Amalekites.

“And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin...and [there was] no water for the people to drink. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink... thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?.... Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” Exodus 17v 1-3, 8

The challenge of moving on when the ten spies returned with a bad report from the land of Canaan*

And they went and came to Moses... all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said ... surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this [is] the fruit of it. Nevertheless, the people [be] strong that dwell in the land, and the cities [are] walled, [and] very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. ... We are not able to go up against the people; for they [are] stronger than we. ... And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, [which come] of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.
Numbers 13 v 28 - 33

All of the things mentioned no doubt taxed the Israelites on all fronts; spiritually - believing God's words, physically - hunger, thirst, and fighting, and emotionally – fear of recapture; death by hunger; and fearing the presence of God, especially at Mount Sinai. This paints a convincing picture that God made the provisions but we must put in some effort before receiving them. We must pay the price for our successes or our failures. I say successes and failures as both require a price, and I dare say both carry a similar degree of difficulty. The difference is the time when you have to face those difficulties. Too often we have to pay for our failures in our latter years when the body is failing in accordance with nature, thus giving a double blow.

Many have bought into the idea of miraculous intervention in all aspects of their life. Thus, the idea of instant wealth is very appealing but those who are waiting will have a very long wait if they do nothing to improve their financial status except buy a “miracle oil” or a “miracle rag.” God is still a God of miracles but most if not all miracles in the Bible were preceded by an act of faith by some or a group of persons and by an act of faith I don't mean “pray without ceasing”. The idea of instant wealth by merely accepting salvation or “buying” salvation in the case of the oils or rags is a scheme by some

religious leaders and a myth on the part of others. God is a God of blessings. He blesses and multiplies our efforts, not our wishes.

We will now examine the other side of the philosophy that “wealth is not important to Christians”. This is the marketing of the idea, whether intentionally or unintentionally that wealth or material possession is not important to the Christian. This I believe is just as dangerous if not more than, “wealth by the bribery of salvation.”

Most times it would appear that our preachers are of the view that Christians should just have enough to get by. One quote I often hear is that your bread and water will be sure. The continuous repetition of this statement tends to make concrete the notion that mere survival is what is promised to God’s children. The reason this notion of just getting by or survival is negative is that actions follow thoughts.

Nothing that is done merely for the sake of completing a task is ever done to the best of one’s ability. In the same way, when something is done simply for getting by it will not be done with passion or enthusiasm. If actions are not backed by enthusiasm or passion then results are always mediocre at best if not an absolute failure. A Christian that lacks passion or enthusiasm condemns himself or herself to failure or stagnation and thus makes a poor Christian. In reality, where failure is given permanent residency, hope and faith

must vacate and nothing of worth can be achieved without these two essential qualities. When individuals condemn themselves to live a life of just “getting by” they are not expressing faith in the promises of abundant life which God promises. Abundant life can only be truly experienced if our health, wealth, and soul are in good standing with God. In other words, all aspects of our life must be in harmony with God, and being poor does not harmonize with our God of abundance.

Everybody knows that money or material possession is not the answer to all the world’s problems, yet I am sure many would agree that when it is used properly it helps to alleviate some of these problems. To think that material possession is not or should not be important to Christians, borders on the lines of the ridiculous. My church for example has an annual campaign called “Ingathering” where money is collected to fund various humanitarian programs that the church may undertake. One thing I am sure of; is that the more money that is collected the more lives are touched by the churches’ efforts. If there is a low intake it lowers the churches’ ability to fund all the programs. This tells me that money is important to God’s work on earth. I was at a gospel crusade in 2011 that almost came to a premature end as there was not enough money to fund it. I could not imagine the Pastor telling the congregation that money is not

important to the Christian walk, and then following that asked “please dig deep in your pockets for an offering to contribute to the finishing of the Gospel.” I doubt he would get much from the congregation if he reasoned along such lines. This is another pointer that shows the importance of wealth to the things that pertain to God. Pick ten Christians from any denomination and ask them if money is important to them. I am sure you would have at least five of them saying things like “not really”, “it’s not such a big deal”, or “I just want to have enough to take care of my needs.” Now let the employers of these ten Christians promise them a raise and see how many would refuse. The expected result from the preceding scenario further highlights the importance of money or material possession to Christians. One thing is for certain; money, or the lack thereof, impacts our lives whether or not we think money or wealth is important. Those who have plenty of it can afford to live a little more comfortably than those who don’t. That is as transparent as pure water.

The Pastors who advocate that wealth is unimportant to the Christian walk for some reason don’t seem to be selling their fancy houses or cars and buying cheaper ones while giving the balance of the money to the poor. I am not suggesting that they should, not in the least!

However, the tone of a sermon should be matched by the essence of the preacher's life. What I see in practice is a lot of Pastors almost brainwashing members who are mostly poor to freely give of the little they have towards every fancy scheme that they dream up. Well of course the request comes with the assurance that they will receive many folds. I should make mention that when the many folds do not unfold; it is something that the members did not do correctly that is preventing the blessings. I am positive that God blesses the efforts of those who give; my view is that when, how much, and to whom we give should be each man's prerogative. It should not be as a result of induced guilt from the clergy which tends to happen every so often. What further compounds the problem is that it is often the clergy who claims that wealth is not important.

Imagine a teacher telling students that good grades are not important and then telling them to study hard for the coming test. The students would start wondering if the teacher is going insane. Why would Pastors tell their congregation that wealth is of no great significance and then encourage them to work hard? What could be the reason, since material possession is not important? It is common for church members to be warned about excess especially excess money. The idea silently expressed is that excess wealth corrupts the soul, and

people with plenty of money or possessions are seen as suspect and a little less spiritual. I don't know how people arrive at this conclusion but I cannot support such a view. I cannot share that view because of all the corrupt persons who have substantial material possession that I know, I can identify a person who has very little who is also corrupt.

It does not make good sense to say something is unimportant that touches so many aspects of our lives. It is hypocritical, Pastors to tell your congregation not to place great emphasis on wealth, then chide them ever so often for not contributing their money to funding various church programs. It is de-motivating to tell someone or give the impression that something is not important then turn around and tell the same person to work hard for that very thing. The Bible warns about the deceitfulness of riches, and there are many to be aware of. There is not much warning about poverty. This does not mean poverty is good. I believe the reason for warning against riches and not poverty is this: in order to deceive, you must hide something from view. Riches or the appearance of riches allows one to do so easily. With poverty everything is in plain sight hence there is no need for a warning. Take a look at the different places in the world

that are ravaged by poverty, do really need to be told of the dangers of finding ourselves in such conditions?

A number of Pastors and by extension churches hit out against the accumulation of wealth, yet aim to fund programs that require great wealth. They then set out to garner the money for their respective programs by soliciting. I am sure the time spent motivating their members to go out and solicit could be used to teach them how to create wealth for themselves to fund their own programs. Christians should not be left at the mercy of the unconverted to fund their programs. Pastors and churches need to help their congregation to create wealth along with health and spiritual empowerment so they can live prosperous lives. If Christians are shifting from a position where they are lacking in many things they would be more in a position to focus on giving. I do not propose that more wealth will make us kinder, I am simply saying those who are kind with wealth will be able to contribute even more. This is why Christians must be encouraged to have an abundance mindset. Pastors and churches can aid this process by relieving members of many of the misconceptions about wealth. This would allow Christians to contribute a whole lot more to society.

Chapter 5

DOES BEING POOR MEAN BEING NEARER TO GOD?

I am almost sure you would have heard the phrase “the danger of riches”. On the other hand, I doubt you would be familiar with the phrase “danger of poverty.” To be honest, I am not sure if there is such a term. I probably just coined it without realizing it. Yet for the number of times Christians are warned about the danger of riches, one cannot help but wonder or some no doubt are led to believe that poverty is an easy path to eternal bliss. In all honesty, Christianity does serve up a great dosage of verbal and emotional poison to those of their lot who openly seek material wealth or possession. On the contrary, there doesn't seem to be anyone addressing the dangers of being poor with such vigor. This leads to an obvious question: does being poor mean closer to God? The question is not merely asking if God is more in touch with some people because they are poor. The intent is to ascertain whether or not a poor person is better aligned for the influence of divine power on his or her life than someone who is wealthy. Whereas I have never heard Christians saying being poor makes one be more in touch with God, though their actions towards money certainly imply it.

A song was done in Jamaica in the nineties with the words “to be poor is a crime”. In part, I have to agree with the song because when you look at some of the conditions people live in it really seems like a criminal offense. It is not a criminal offense like stealing where you intend to do wrong but more like manslaughter in that the system crushes them unintentionally or they crush themselves through ignorance or neglect. I can’t help but think Christians become victims of their own thought processes. Just look at some of the hymns in Christianity. For example; a hymn with words like: “I’d rather have Jesus than silver and gold ...I’d rather have Jesus than houses or land.” Paints the idea that there’s an option between God and riches, and that choosing one means letting go of the other. It would appear that acquiring riches is too much of a hassle and draws people away from their spiritual life. Many will remind you not to focus on the riches of the earth but rather store up treasures in heaven where rot or moth does not corrupt or thieves do not break in and steal. A point to note is this, the spirit should be the driving force in everything we do. Therefore, our spiritual lives should not be separate from everything else. It is how I abide by the Holy Spirit that will determine how I treat my brothers and sisters. In the same way, it is the Holy Spirit that determines how I deal with my

financial affairs. This does not mean you ignore your finances and pray; it means that you deal with diligence as a faithful steward following the principles of God.

Storing up treasures in heaven does not mean you walk with your head in the sky and treat everything that does not carry the label God with contempt. It is the good things you do on earth that allow you to store things in heaven. For example, I am sure no one will argue too much with a person that focuses on taking good care of their health. In fact, the denomination that I am part of places a high emphasis on healthy living. Health is treated as something good, something godly. We all know the pain associated with illness and would not discourage anyone who wants to take good care of their health. We would not consider doing things to improve our health ungodly, yet many have a tendency of labeling persons who seek to improve their finances as ungodly. Many pains are associated with living in want and these include physical as well as emotional pains. It is only fair that people should seek to avoid such pains just like in the case of their health.

Jesus, while on earth took great pleasure in relieving the suffering of the poor but at no point did he applaud them for being poor. The poor

were closer to Jesus not out of a sense better spiritual virtue but more out of a sense of want. Of course, it can be argued that he had more poor followers than wealthy. Yet since there are usually more poor people, than wealthy people then the law of averages would dictate that he would have more poor followers.

There are number of scriptural references that are being used in defense of Christians taking a vow of poverty. Let us examine two of the most popular ones. The first is “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven. The second is “the love of money is the root of all evil”. Let us scrutinize the former first and after we analyze the latter.

The statement “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven” is found in verse twenty four of Matthew chapter nineteen as well as verse twenty five of Mark chapter ten and Luke chapter eighteen of the Holy Bible. The statement follows an engagement with a rich young ruler who wanted to follow Jesus but decided not to after being told to sell all his possessions. While there is one school of thought that the Greek word translated camel could have been mistaken for the word

meaning rope, which would made the task of the camel passing through less incredible, I will examine the statement as we know it.

In practical terms, it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (sewing needle). Most would agree that Christ was not saying rich people will not make it to heaven. If this was the case some of our biblical heroes such as Abraham, David, Job as well as others would not be saved. It could be that he used exaggeration to show how difficult the task is. While both of these seem quite likely, I believe otherwise. I believe the statement means exactly what was said, that it is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven.

This would mean that it is impossible for rich men to enter heaven. However, my interpretation is based on the fact that Jesus was not talking about just any rich men. If you read the story it is clear that the rich young ruler would not give up his wealth for God. He went away sorrowful when he heard to inherit eternal life he would have to give up his riches. He would not exchange eternal life for his wealth, in such a case his wealth would made it impossible for him to inherit eternal life. When you read the story in the gospel of Mark, Jesus before making the statement about the camel also said how hard it is

for them that trust in riches to inherit eternal life. This statement is left out in Luke`s and Matthew`s gospel account. Interestingly, it is also left out by most when these passages are used to warn against acquiring riches. This statement gives greater emphasis and sheds greater light on what Christ meant. It is impossible for rich men to enter heaven but not just any rich men; it is the rich men that trust in their riches. Anything that we value more than our eternal salvation will make it impossible for us to enter heaven, not just wealth or riches. I can almost hear someone asking if this was about rich men that trust in riches why were the disciples so surprised by Christ`s statement. The reason is this; the disciples were a part of a society that believed much gain is godliness and to hear Christ suggesting in such terms the impossibility of trusting in riches and making it to heaven came as a shocker to them. It is something that Paul alluded to in 1 Timothy 6 verse 5 where he stated that some supposed that gain is godliness. No doubt, some disciples had or harbored thoughts of much wealth when Christ would establish the earthly kingdom that they were expecting.

Let me reemphasize the central issue that Christ was addressing here was not the young man`s wealth or whether he needed to swap his wealth for salvation. It was more about what he was willing to give

up for eternal life. The rich young ruler was very sure that he had kept all the commandments as a faithful Jew. Yet, the question he asked Jesus could only mean one of two things either he was recommending himself as one ready for eternal life or there was something missing in his life. Whatever the reason, he asked the important question. “What should I do to inherit eternal life? He received an answer that he was not pleased with. As result he turned away sadly. In this particular case, the issue of what the individual needed to let go of was his wealth. This was not a mere physical letting go. It involved even a greater mental attachment, that bonded him with his possessions so tightly that that he would not part with it even at the expense of eternal life.

I believe the most popular scripture or part of a scripture used as rebuke against the acquisition of wealth is found in verse ten of 1 Timothy chapter six in the King James Version of the Bible. “The love of money is the root of all evil.”

I know various versions of the Bible translate the verse in 1 Timothy 6 verse 10 as “the love of money is the root of some kinds of evil” or “the love of money is the root of most kinds of evil.” Which translation is correct is not really my chief concern. My concern is

that this verse as quoted from the King James Version of the Bible is often seen as one of the sternest rebuke for those who seek to be wealthy. No truth will lose anything by close examination; in fact, close examination tends to give clearer insight into the validity of an idea, concept or belief. In short, close examination tends to make truth more relevant and fallacy irrelevant. With that said; let us explore this verse a little.

“The love of money is the root of all evil.” Evil has some of the following synonyms: wickedness, sin, immorality, iniquity. All these synonyms for evil can be referred to as sin. This would mean that all sins that have ever been committed started with the love of money at its foundation. I invite you to seriously think of all the wrong things you have ever done to see if money or the love of it was the primary motivation behind your actions. If you are like me in any way, I believe you will not see money behind all your wrong actions. Therefore we will have concluded that the verse under examination cannot be seen as how it has been interpreted over the years by many.

The economic experts will tell you that money is a medium for the exchange of value or a store of value or gains. If we look at the verse from an economic perspective we could re interpret the verse as, “the

love of gain is the root of all evil”. Looking at the verse in this light would broaden the scope of the verse and highlight another fault with the original interpretation. For instance, the person who would chastise those who seek wealth and would not frown upon someone who wishes to pursue higher levels of education would be standing on a shaky platform of criticism. This would ring true as both the love of money and the love of education would be seen as the root of all evil. An individual would have to be aware of both if the text is seen in such simple terms. However, there is more to this than meets the eyes. Let’s keep reading.

It is typical for Christians and non-Christians to draw Bible verses out of their immediate context, with little regard for who the text was addressed to and why, in order to support an established position. It is even more common to quote only the verse or a portion of the verse that supports their point of view. In this particular case, only a portion of the verse is always quoted. The second portion that speaks to covetousness which would add more light to the text is usually left off when the verse is quoted. Here is the entire verse in detail as taken from the King James Version “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

I am far from being an expert in the English Language but I have learnt that a colon stands between an introductory statement and an immediate amplification. Amplification could mean intensification or clarification. Now the verse under examination has an introductory portion that says: for the love of money is the root of all evil. This is followed by the immediate amplification that says: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. The question that needs to be answered is whether the amplification portion is an intensification of the introductory statement or clarification of the introductory statement. I am of the view that the latter is the case. My reason for believing that it is a clarification of the introductory statement is this. When both statements are placed on their own “for the love of money is the root of all evil” is a stronger statement than “which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Since the introductory statement is stronger than the latter portion of the verse, then one could safely conclude that what follows the colon in this case is really clarification of the introductory statement. With this in mind, I will state what I interpret the verse to be saying. First let’s read the verse once more in full. “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some

coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” The author is saying the love of money or gain, born out of or motivated by covetousness, is the root of all evil pertaining to the gaining of money. As a result of this love of money which motivated covetousness, some erred from the faith and hurt themselves repeatedly.

Further to my argument let’s highlight in this verse the word love. Most times when we say we love something, what we actually mean is that we like it. By this we are saying we enjoy it or the use of it or the pleasure that it brings. Love on the other hand indicates some form of devotion. Someone enjoying the wonderful benefits of having a lot of money would be someone that likes money. If this person creates legitimate means of acquiring the money should this be seen as covetousness? This is not viewed in the same light as someone who is devoted to money as this would indicate a love for money. For such a person, money would take priority over most if not everything and this is where the danger would be in ones relationship with wealth or possession. Where we covet it, in so doing we become a slave to it rather than it being our slave.

One of the major differences between the rich and the poor in this life is that the rich focus on things of greater value. They first focus on acquiring income generating assets while the poor first focuses on luxury items. The poor most times work hard and are heavily indebted which I believe is a result, in most cases, of covetousness. The poor often times are easier to be tempted to get in debt than the rich, and this because they are not in control of their emotions. They are more easily tempted by money and usually are pierced with many sorrows as the Bible indicated. The evil is not having plenty of money to spend as you wish. The evil is becoming a slave to money. An example of this is a case where you buy everything on credit and find yourself in a debt trap, living from pay check to pay check with no control over your economic life. With all things considered it should be strikingly apparent that being poor does not put anyone in a closer standing with God. Neither does being rich push you far away from God. God reaches and appeals to all on the same level.

Chapter 6

FORGET THE EVENT, FOCUS ON THE PRINCIPLE

One of the things that always seems to plague humanity is that we pay more attention to events than principles, which ought to be learnt from events. For example, each year black history month comes around and there is a lot of emphasis on the fact that Negroes were once enslaved. Whereas this is good, the negative thing about the whole celebration of black history month is that little emphasis is placed on the present struggle refuting any form of slavery, whether by physical bonds or circumstances. It is quite interesting that so many countries that have gained independence are up to their necks in debts to the very countries they gained independence from or another country that was once a colonial master. As you would imagine, the same focus often punctuates Christian views and how they look at the events in the Bible.

There are some biblical characters whose fall from grace or chastisement could be directly linked to wealth or was influenced by

wealth. This list includes Jacob, Solomon, Achan, the Rich Young ruler, the Rich man that neglected Lazarus, and others. All of these biblical characters fell prey to one aspect of what the Bible refers to as the “deceitfulness of riches” in Matthew chapter thirteen and Mark chapter four. These biblical characters were overcome by either greed or self-centeredness.

When one looks at the life of Jacob in Genesis the first book of the Holy Bible it paints a gloomy picture of what happens to us when we allow greed to take over. He forces his brother into selling him his birthright and then stole his blessings. Even after making a covenant with God, he still did not see it as deceitful to tamper with his uncle's animals to enrich himself. Due to his actions he did not get see his mother or father again. The lesson to be learnt from this event is not that one should not seek to enrich themselves. Greed or trickery should not form a part of our character.

Solomon in Proverbs asked not to be given riches or poverty. His reasoning was that he did not want to be full and deny God, or be poor and steal from his neighbor and by so doing take the Lord's name in vain. Solomon was warning about the two extremes of wealth and poverty. Solomon, the wisest man's downfall was as a

result of marrying strange women as stated in the bible. However, his reason for marrying strange women was not just that he loved strange women. It was also a means of creating political alliances with other countries. Such alliances would ensure that money poured into the coffers of his Kingdom. Added to this Solomon taxed the people heavily to satisfy his fancies. He had gotten so used to his affluence that he stepped outside the guidance of God and started operating on his own. Here again the principal is, you cannot be in close relationships with people who do not share your faith without them having some influence on your life. Furthermore, God's designs will ensure our prosperity if they are followed but we are bound to run into problems when we operate on our own.

All the Biblical characters that fall victim to one aspect of the "deceitfulness of riches," had the choice of making correct decisions; however, they were overpowered by their desire for gain. The essential message is don't let your desire for wealth or anything else overpower your sense of honesty and good judgment.

Let's examine the other aspect of "deceitfulness of riches" which has to do with self-deception. In this case, the deception is created by the individual to convince himself that he is rich. This individual will

appear rich to many and feel rich simply by the facade that is created. A common example is someone who is a high income earner with high expenses, who also buys numerous luxury items on credit. Such an individual no doubt feels well off. Yet, in reality he is just one pay check away from disaster. While there is a lot of money coming in there is also a lot going out and too often more is going out than what is coming in. Most times this is as a result of the “keeping up with the Jones’ syndrome” This is what I believe to be one aspect of the “deceitfulness of riches”, people creating an appearance to feel something they are not. As a result, they do what the rich do, go where the rich go, buy what the rich buy. This they do in an attempt to be seen as rich, to feel rich, to look rich. Too often, they continue to feed this hollow image they have created without realizing that poverty and riches are creations of thought. The recession in 2008 had many persons that we believed to be rich, scampering around as the bottom of their bucket of deception fell out. Many realized then that they were living on make believe when the next pay cheque didn’t come to cover their expenses or the next deal did not materialize. The Bible tells us to shun the appearance of evil. Creating an impression of richness is one such evil

Finally there are those who will balance the books well, and are earning far more than they are spending. Yet, instead of this leading to them to living productive lives, they start hoarding what they have due to insecurity. They create a lot of wealth to make up for something they are insecure about. Sometimes, it's living in want, for some, it is the fear of getting old with no one to care for them, for others it is losing all the work so they work even harder. Whatever the reason, money can cover one's insecurity it is just another deception created by the mind. If you feel worthless deep in your heart with one thousand dollars to your name then you will still feel worthless with ten million to your name.

The Bible is full of stories or events with underlying principles that most times are missed or ignored because we are caught in the euphoria of the stories or events themselves. Each law or command from God has coded within it a principle that was designed to benefit humanity. Let's look at tithing and the principle to be garnered from it.

Many within the Christian world subscribe to this principle of tithing; that of returning one tenth of their earnings to God. This they do as they acknowledge God as the supreme owner of everything, and God

requires that this be done in faithfulness to him. God also promises to reward our faithfulness by adopting this procedure and any deviation from it is considered to be robbing God as stated in Malachi chapter three. The principle I believe that is often overlooked when we deal with tithing is this. When you can faithfully remove one tenth of your earnings and still live on nine tenths, you are teaching yourself that you don't have to spend every single dollar you earn. This also means another portion of the nine tenths can be removed to create other streams of income for you. In reality, you are teaching your brain that whatever you are earning is more than enough to create a better future for yourself and your dependents. In Malachi chapter four after the promise of opening the windows of heaven and pouring out a blessing, the author says the Lord will rebuke the devourer so he cannot destroy the fruit of your ground. This is suggesting that blessing is not manna falling from the sky but God taking and multiplying your investment. Therefore an investment must be made and since one tenth already belongs to the Lord then the investment must come from the remaining nine tenths of your possessions. I am sure if more Christians were approaching their finances from this view point rather than awaiting a blessing they would be experiencing the blessing which they await.

Earlier, we looked at Solomon the wisest and richest man ever. In the book of Chronicles, he was promised and received wisdom and great riches. For some reason in Christianity it would appear many are led to believe that God simply opened a treasure house and told Solomon to simply walk right in. If this were so, it would defy the very laws of God's Kingdom, for instance the laws of sowing and reaping. Solomon did not get a free ticket to wealth as some might believe. Solomon's wealth came through the exercising of this wisdom under the guidance of God's wisdom. If one should examine the book of Proverbs, which was written before his fall from grace, it will show pearls of wisdom about how one should order one's own life especially one's finances. An example of how one should order their life is related in Proverbs chapter 6 verse 6 -8:

*“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:
Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the
summer, [and] gathereth her food in the harvest.*

We all have watched ants going about their business and there are a few things we can draw from them. The first is that they are always on the move. If you should rub your finger across their trail they will find it back because some how they possess perseverance. The

second thing is as the scripture says they provide their meat in the summer, the ants always bear in mind that there are difficult times ahead. They prepare for the future reality before it hits them in the face. The third thing we can learn from them is team work, if the crumb of bread is too large six or seven ants will take it, the ants believe in working with and for each other. The fourth thing we can learn from the ants is that they are relentless no matter how large the food particle they will keep going until it is finished. The final thing we can gather from the ants is that they are always on the alert. As soon as the rain is about to descend they disappear and they are always out to meet the sunshine. If we adopt the principles by which the ants operate they would serve us very well.

Solomon also gives another important principle to operate by in Proverbs twenty two verse twenty nine:

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

This, verse I believe, holds one of the keys to success in life. Whatever we do, we must do so with diligence in this life to ensure our success. Diligence for me is working with intelligence and perseverance. One should not only be able to stick to his task but

must govern his behavior with intelligence. The truth is, there is no real virtue in working hard or holding on if it does not bring you closer to accomplishing the task you set out to accomplish. For me, Solomon is saying let your efforts be firm and consistent, stick to your goals but you must be able to assess and make sense of what you are doing. You must be able to see if your efforts are taking you any closer to your goal. Plus, there is no need to drive yourself into the wall to feel like you are doing something when there is a legitimate and efficient way around the wall. It is important to use everything to your advantage while at the same time respecting the rights of others.

I have simply touched on some principles that are apparent in the Bible if we take the time to look. There are numerous others. We will learn so much more from the word of God if we approach it with an open mind and not preconceived notions. Let examine our bible with the mentality that there is a gem of wisdom in every situation or event, in every success or defeat. It will greatly benefit us if we do.

Chapter 7

WHEN GOD BECOMES THE PERFECT EXCUSE

In the book of Joshua the story is told of Joshua sending his army out to battle against Ai. His army was driven back while losing thirty six men in the process[#]. Joshua immediately proceeded to blame God for the defeat. Joshua even forgot that he had not consulted God before going into battle which was customary for him to do. God then let Joshua know that Israel was the cause of Israel's problems, they had sinned. This story highlights one of the most common trends of humanity. That is, looking to blame someone for our problems rather than examining the extent to which we contribute to our own demise. When it comes to the financial life of Christians this trend is more than less the same.

Christians have a way of neglecting the basics as it relates to their finances and then portraying this as God holding back something from them. Even more dangerous is that we have been indoctrinated and socialized into accepting so little that the mere thought of abundance seems sinful. I will share an experience of how socialization can be such a hindrance to our pursuit of what we desire in life.

I went to visit a friend of mine once who was a pineapple farmer. He had some pineapples he was going to give to me. While at his home, he gave me a pineapple to peel and eat while we were having a conversation. About five or six of us were at the house. After peeling the pineapple I offered slices of the pineapple to the others and everybody promptly refused. They said that they eat pineapples everyday so I should go ahead and eat that by myself. Now here was my dilemma, I had never eaten an entire pineapple by myself as where I grew up pineapples are rare. Whenever my family got a pineapple everybody would only be able to get a slice. I had forced myself that day to eat the pineapple while looking for somebody to offer a slice to the entire time. Thankfully, a little boy accepted a couple slices and removed some of my guilt. Even a day after I could not believe I almost ate a whole pineapple. I relate the story to my wife who could not understand my guilt.

As is my experience, socialization and indoctrination have so many tight bonds that they believe them to be the will of God. One reason for this is that many grew up with scarcity so the idea of one person having plenty was labeled as selfishness. This was even worse when they were a part of a large poor family. In these large families, one individual getting a luxury item means someone else was being

deprived of a basic item. Thus, they would grow up with statements like “*we can’t afford, don’t be selfish you are not the only one in this family, money don’t grow on trees.*” Now long after their situation changes most of their mental approach has not changed. As result, all their efforts are geared towards scarcity without them realizing their life is not shaped by their efforts only but their mental outlook as well.

It is frightening when an individual is doing the wrong thing and believes it to be the will of God. When people believe that God supports what they are doing it is difficult to change their mind set. It would be a breath of financial fresh air if Christians and the church would include the teaching of financial independence in church just as they would include health as being important to the Christian walk. I believe that every church and its Pastor should see and include the teaching of finances as an important part of the lessons they pass on to their congregation. Some might see this as making people less dependent on God and I can understand that point of view. Yet, I am strongly of the view that we should not worship God out of a sense of obligation due to what he provides for us. We should give him honor for one primary thing, His sacrifice on our behalf that guarantees our salvation. That is, He would still be

worthy of our praises even if all of us were near starving from time to time and lived perpetually in great want. God does hold us at ransom, in that he blesses us based primarily on the fact that we call upon his name. His blessings are there for all to enjoy. Those who violate the principles that govern the things that are to bless them will fail many times to receive His blessings.

Many Christians behave as if they are to live a life of scarcity as this is validation of their Christianity and hence, their ticket to the New Jerusalem. There is a song with the words: *I satisfy with just a cottage below, a little silver, and a little gold, but in that land where the ransomed will shine, I want a gold one that silver lined.* This song writer no doubt shares the sentiments of numerous Christians. We will take the little now as there is so much more in store. My question is, if the song writer is satisfied with his little cottage why does he want a gold one with silver lining in the land where the ransomed will shine? Could it be that he would really want these things now but thinks attaining them in this life is too much a hassle? Could it be that he prefers God just handing it to him in reward for his spiritual faithfulness instead of working to get them? Here, God becomes the excuse for not attaining what we really desire in this life.

Often, we hear talk about all the wonderful promises and the things we will inherit when we go to heaven or the New Jerusalem or the new Eden. It is often preached as if all these wonderful things will be the reward for our faithfulness. I am here to tell you that these wonderful things will not be the reward of our faithfulness. They will be given to us as result of Jesus' faithfulness that is what will save us. These blessings that will be on offer are not because of what we would have done but what Christ has done for us. If we remember wonderful blessings were all prepared for Adam and Eve if they were created. They were like God's gifts to them and it was before they proved their faithfulness. They lost these blessings due to their violation of God's law. In the very same way we miss out on the blessings of God due to our violation of the laws that are set to govern them. Whenever this happens many hide behind the "God excuse", that is, wanting to live just as their Saviour while he was on earth. Now anybody can take a vow of poverty if he wants to and that is the person's choice. Yet, to pass this off as something that God requires of his followers is a little less than genuine. Jesus and his disciples, as well as other characters, are painted as very poor people. To paint most Bible characters as poor people is not very factual. This can be easily proven with comparison of biblical stories with

present realities, as well as closer examination of some of the biblical evidence from which these conclusions are drawn.

In the book of Genesis, when Jacob was returning from his uncle Laban, he offered his bother Esau a gift. Now, I am going to represent this gift in a table form using the lowest modern prices I can think of for each item.

Animals	Number	Est. Price	Total Est. Price
Ewe Goats	200	3000	600000
He Goats	20	6000	120000
Ewe Sheep	200	3000	600000
Ram	20	6000	120000
Donkeys	20	10000	200000
Cows/Kine	40	20000	800000
Bulls	10	50000	500000
Colts/Foals	10	15000	150000
Camels and colts	30	25000	750000
Total			3840000

Based on rough calculation Jacob would have offered Esau, three million eight hundred and forty thousand Jamaican dollars for a gift, this is the equivalent of forty-four thousand six hundred and fifty-one American dollars (exchange rate J\$86 – US\$1). I don't know too many Christians that can offer that kind of money to save their lives,

and I mean this literally. Solomon had four thousand stalls for his horses. Now if each stall contains one horse and we use the price for a colt in the above table his horses alone would value sixty million Jamaican dollars or approximately seven hundred thousand American dollars using the same rate. Since Solomon was the richest man ever I will not discuss any more of his wealth. Even though prices might differ drastically with time the point still remains that some biblical characters were very wealthy.

Let's look at Jesus and his disciples. The idea is always sold and most times bought readily that Jesus and his disciples were poor people. Yet, not much evidence from the bible is used to substantiate this theory. There are few statements in the bible from which the idea of Jesus and his followers being poor is drawn. One such statement is; "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." This was in response to a scribe who wanted to follow him. Jesus probably due to his ministry did not have a permanent dwelling and thus his statement could be taken as was said. However, does this provide substantial evidence that he was poor or that his ministry suffered from a lack of funding? I believe Jesus was simply communicating the point that his ministry was about serving and the willingness to serve at whatever the cost. For him it means no steady dwelling place with his constant travelling. I believe in His statement, Jesus merely leveled with the scribe so that he would know from the beginning that leaving his privileged position would not guarantee him anything in terms of worldly possession. This was not because they were poor but gaining worldly possessions was just not his mission. Closely following the

statement made to the scribe, Jesus told another man who wanted to follow him but asked to bury his father first to; “let the dead bury their own dead,” I don’t imagine anyone would believe Jesus to be so callous as to not want a person to bury his own father. No he was not, Jesus simply deflected the excuse that the man was giving about burying his father who apparently was not dead yet. He just made it clear to the man, the expediency of his ministry just as he made it clear to the scribe what he was getting into.

Nazareth was poor a place as research has shown over time. Being a carpenter was also a job for the person who did not own farm land, persons who would be poorer than peasants. Thus, saying Jesus grew up poor is a reasonable assumption. This should not be taken to mean that he surrounded himself with only poor people. I would love you to ponder these questions. Who cared for Peter’s, Andrew’s, James’ and John’s families when they left their fishing business to follow Christ? If they were living from hand to mouth as many would assume, how long could their families survive without their primary bread winners? Matthew was a tax collector. Did he dispense with all his wealth? According to John’s gospel, Judas was a thief. If Jesus and His disciples had little money how could his behavior go unnoticed for so long? When we seriously consider these questions, it will become apparent that Jesus and his followers are not as poor as they are made out to be.

Let us examine some incidents that might give some more clues to the financial status of Jesus and his followers.

Mary a follower of Christ anointed his feet with a box of spikenard. Which his disciples estimate could have been sold for three hundred pence. A penny was wage for a day's labor. It meant Mary had enough money in her possession to buy a gift that would be worth almost ten months of a man's wages. Mary does not seem very poor to me. Jesus often dined at Mary's and Martha's house. I can't see Jesus dining without his disciples. This would mean Mary and Martha would really have to provide a lot of food whenever Jesus came by. It would take some amount of financial resource to provide for at least thirteen men, maybe a lot more. Knowing how Jesus always cared about the poor, I could hardly think Jesus would put His friends under such financial strain if he knew that they could hardly afford it.

Another glimpse into the finances of Jesus and his disciples is seen in the feeding of the five thousand. When Jesus told one of his disciples to give the people something, he asked if he should go and buy two hundred penny worth of bread. I believe it would be safe to assume that they had more than two hundred pennies in the treasury. Remembering that a penny was one day's wages, over two hundred pennies would not make the group rich but it would not make them as poor as they are often made out to be.

When we examine the Bible it is safe to conclude that there was a balance of poor and rich people as well as middle class. It is abundantly clear that God did not place any restrictions on who wants to be rich or poor. It means that Christians who choose not to acquire wealth must do so for their own personal reasons and not be fooled into believing or trying to fool others that this is done in the

name of righteousness. God is not shackling us in our pursuit of earthly possessions. God requires that His holy principles should govern our actions in pursuit of earthly possession. We know all we will possess in this life materially shall vanish. This is not reason enough to not seek them. If this were true then we could treat planet earth any old way since we will inherit a new one.

God, I believe wants us to be productive in all aspects of our life and this includes finances. Too many Christians suffer too much as a result of not taking care of their finances. The pain of not providing for the children, not being able to properly care for the elderly, the anxiety of wondering about the next meal will come from is not God's ideal life for his children. Just like as we are to take of our bodies as it is the temple of God we are expected to be good stewards of his other resources. To think God wants us to be poor is just an excuse for either accepting our failures or providing a cushion for our lazy minds or bodies. God wants us to give others wonderful reasons for lifting up his name not reasons for doubting his goodness to us. We must ensure we represent our God in the truest form.

Break the Mirror or Wash your face

David in the Bible once stated that he has never seen the righteous forsaken or God's seed begging bread. Now I have seen Christians beg, borrow and sometimes even steal. Should I believe that such Christians are not God's seed? Which is better, actively pursuing wealth, begging, borrowing or stealing? Which of the four seems more like God?

It is so ironic that churches and many persons in general demonize those who set their sights on gaining much wealth yet have no problem when such an individual contributes to their various charitable projects. It does not matter to me one way or another if the project is a worthy cause, if you think a person is greedy in going after wealth you should not be taking his money. Many Christians will comfort themselves when taking money from the so called greedy rich people by saying it is the "Lord's money" "everything belongs to the Lord". However, when the individuals were actively seeking the money, it had the Devil's stamp all over it. If such behaviours are not hypocritical, I am absolutely sure I have no idea what that word hypocritical means. It is time many Christians pull out the "mirror of justice" and see in their reflection if they have treated the seekers of wealth fairly. The reflection might just be that of the seeker. If it turns out that the mirror reflects the fact that you have been unfair then it is high time to make a change. You could of course choose to demonize the writer of this book but we both know that is not a smart choice.

In reality, men are equal in only two places, in the Biology book and at the foot of the cross. Outside of these two places, we are Negroes, Caucasians or Mongolians, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, religious or atheist. These are not merely groups that differentiate our make up as human beings: these are groups that determine how we are treated as human beings in the real world. In Christianity the message is one of equality but we all know that message is more in theory than what is practiced. Even the memories of the dead are treated differently.

I doubt there is anyone who would deny that humans are not treated equally. I seriously doubt there is anyone within the universe who would deny that poor people are often treated poorly, especially those who are very poor. Saying they are treated poorly is a clever use of euphemism, as most times they are treated with utter contempt. For instance, the dispensation of justice most times comes down to affordability, that is, who can afford the best lawyer. We know from experience that the poor cannot. Justice, education, relationships and numerous other things are not weighted favorably for the poor. Why would God subject anyone to the treatment that is meted out to the poor? If being poor was God's wish for his children why not subject all of his followers to poverty? If being poor is not God's wish then why would anyone subject themselves to being poor, knowing full well how poor people are treated? The answer is not pleasant; many are brainwashed into being poor by their beliefs while others don't have the discipline to accumulate riches.

For Christians to hold up being poor as some sort of virtue is more a case of ignorance than a commitment to God's ideal. What virtue

could there be in setting yourself up to be treated with contempt, To suffer injustice, the shame that sometimes comes with having to beg, watching your loved ones living in great need with nothing to help them. It is virtuous to suffer for God yet suffering for God should not be confused with acting foolishly and expecting God's favors. For example, no sane person would hear bullets firing outside and simply walk out of their house to rebuke the gunmen in Jesus' name. They would take cover and pray for their and others' safety. I dare to think the same approach should be taken in other aspects of our lives. We should seek God's protection or blessings but act sensibly. Persons should not take a vow of poverty and then ask God to save them from the treatment that is often meted out to the poor. To do so would be like jumping off a cliff and asking God to protect your feet from the stones below similar to the second temptation that the devil brought to Jesus. If you remember he was sternly rebuked. Poverty needs to be sternly rebuked as well. Living poor, rich or middle class is not divinely decided. It is a human's choice or a number of good or bad choices either way.

Christians' ought to be leaders of society not just in spiritual matters. It should extend beyond spiritual matters as the church is not only a spiritual entity. In order to lead then we must be people of great influence. Where I come from, people are not greatly influenced by people who are at the mercy of others. Too often, the church is at the mercy of society, especially when it comes to funding their various programs. I am not suggesting that the church operates in a vacuum and doesn't take anything from outsiders. Far from it, what I am

suggesting is that the church focuses on creating value that others will gladly exchange their money for. Let it be that if someone contributes something to the church it is voluntary benevolence and not upon request. There will be instances that the church will request something of outsiders, but these cases should be the rare exception not the norm.

A good illustration of creating value for money of which I speak is the annual show put on by Shaggy and Friends Foundation for the Bustamante Children's Hospital in Jamaica. The tickets are priced way above what one would pay to go a top class show. However, what Shaggy does is to ensure that a high quality show is put together in a near perfect atmosphere. This allows the patrons to easily part with their cash, one for the children and two for the service they receive. Not every Christian organization has the pull factor of a Shaggy who is an international recording artiste. Yet every Christian organization should be focused on creating value for every dollar they seek and creating value with every dollar they receive. In a capsule: Christians should be leaders in creating value for the world. Thus, it is imperative that we seek to be leaders in all fields. We are on our way in health, education and numerous other aspects. It is our finances that seem to be lagging behind.

We are not lagging behind in our finances due to the fact that it gets little emphasis. A mirror does not lie: it will show up our positives and negatives equally. The Christian mirror will show in numerous cases that the non-Christians have proven to be better stewards of money than the Christians. If this is what your mirror shows, breaking the mirror will not help, no, not at all. By breaking the

mirror you might just cut your hand, compounding your problems. Fixing the problem is the way to go but you already know this. I am just encouraging you as I encourage myself to do the smart thing.

Epilogue

We live in a world where shifting the blame is common: everybody loves to blame someone else. The devil is responsible for every sin we have ever committed. He is the perfect alibi. When we are through blaming the devil, the rest of our problems or ill fortunes are as a result of divine providence. We are just the victims of the great controversy between good and evil: we are mere lambs to the slaughter. Our habit of blaming everyone and everything for our problem is the root cause of many more problems. Whether we choose to believe it or not, we set up our successes or failures based on what we continue to plant in our minds. Our minds can be a fertile spot or it can be a minefield. The great industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, once stated “what your mind can conceive you can achieve”. It is not God that limits us in most instances, it is the poor thoughts that we continue foster that keeps us trapped.

God is quite generous to the world and his followers. He gives us a world of resources and a greater resource called the power of thought to do positive things with these resources. It is the improper use or lack of positive thinking that creates the impression that God is holding back things from his followers. Too often Christians sow the seed of doubt and scarcity in their subconscious mind and reap the rewards of such thoughts in abundance. It would be alright if such Christians do it just to themselves as anyone can live how they choose. It becomes a problem when they seek to sow the same seeds in the lives of unsuspecting individuals.

I have read Napoleon Hill's "Law of Success" that deals with the seven basic fears. I have also read Robert T. Kiyosaki's first book "Rich Dad Poor Dad" which dealt with fears and desires. These two books, along with my experience in life and the greatest book I have ever read, the book of Proverbs in the Holy Bible, have given me a clear picture of humanity's two greatest problems, fear and desire. Fear and desire are strong factors in determining our success or lack thereof, much more than what God wants for us. Fear, many times prevents us from doing that which we know in our hearts to be right. It keeps us from breaking the proverbial shell and living our dreams or at least reaching for them. I remember my great friend and colleague, Sean Graham telling a female student once that being shy is not cute when attending High School and are above the age of fifteen or sixteen. He said it really holds you back instead of pushing you forward. Shyness is a cute little word for fear, and living in fear is not of God: our God gives us power to overcome all fears. Living out your potential is God's ideal for us not hiding from what we can accomplish. Therefore, if you have the capabilities to live in abundance then feel free to do so and get off the guilt trip.

Desires are great motivators; they can build you up as well as tear you down. Everything starts with desire. It is uncontrolled desires that we label appropriately as greed. Greed has created many atrocities in our world, especially when it comes to money or possessions. Many are overtaken by greed in their quest for material possessions. That is undeniable. Does that mean you should not actively seek material possessions? I believe not! There are millions of motor vehicle accidents in the world on a daily basis. However,

this does not stop people from driving in a car. Certainly not! We learn to control our individual situation as best we can as it relates to our desires so that our actions can benefit mankind instead of bringing harm.

God has given so much, let us display to the world that we are good stewards by harnessing the powers of God's wonderful gifts, one of which is money or possessions and play our part in shaping a better world for our brothers and sisters. Let us show the world that God is generous to his followers. If we have not made a start, now is the best time. For those who have made a start, keep up the good work. Thanks for sharing your time with me.

Blessed love.