

LESSON 11



CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IN EARNING A LIVING

Scripture Texts: *Luke 12:13-48; 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12; James 4:13-17; 1 Timothy 6:6-11; Proverbs 11:1; 20:6*

Christianity deals with the money problem in a most fundamental and searching way. Jesus had a deep concern about what money can do to the soul of man. Jesus taught much about prayer, and He spoke much about money also.

Our lesson today is the first of two lessons on economic relationships. It deals with the application of Christian principles to the earning and the possessing of money under the guidance of God's Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE: *Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good. Proverbs 20:23*

A Fundamental Principle

Throughout the twelfth chapter of Luke, Jesus was speaking about deep spiritual issues. He dealt with practical, earthly matters, but He very seriously pointed out their heavenly implications. It is not difficult to understand His annoyance when, right in the midst of His serious message about the eternal matters of the soul, He was interrupted by a person who had a grievance against his brother because of disappointment over an inheritance. The grievance appears to have been real and justified. The man had evidently been cheated in the division of property. Jesus was annoyed by the interruption and refused to interfere for the simple reason that He was talking about matters much more important than the division of earthly goods. In fact, this whole lesson shows the immense contrast that exists between the value of things temporal and the value of things eternal.

Jesus had just been speaking about courts. The reference to courts of law must have suggested to the man in the crowd that this Jesus, with His wisdom and moral influence, might be able to settle his grievance. Jesus was annoyed, as His answer discloses. He who at the end of time is to judge men and angels, made it plain that during His earthly ministry He was not appointed by God to judge anyone.

Jesus did not believe or teach that the primary duty of Christianity was to establish economic justice. Earnest as He was to bring about economic justice and to encourage fair and honest dealing among men, He realized that this sort of thing follows the changing of men's hearts. He knew that the secret lies not in making the brother divide, but in making over the brother's heart until he is willing to divide.

When a man puts things first, then he does not possess these things—they possess him. If the preaching of the Gospel can endanger your work or business, you are in the wrong line of work.

Not Rich Toward God

After the interruption, Jesus spoke about a certain rich man in Luke 12:16-21. Unlike the one who had wrongfully appropriated some of the inheritance, this man was probably a self-made man—what we would call a

successful businessman. As a shortage of funds causes people to do wrong to obtain what they want, so a surplus of funds causes problems to arise. He began to wonder what to do with his excess. Should he hoard it or should he distribute his goods to help others? There were poverty and needs all about him. What a blessing he could have been to himself and to others if he had been willing to share. He decided to hoard, that he would attempt to feed his soul on material things.

All men should make their decisions realizing that they face death and the judgment. This unwise man also faced death and the judgment. God called him a fool. Are we not foolish who lay up much of this world's goods, but are not rich toward God? The trouble with this man was not that he laid up treasure, but that he laid it up for himself. He exalted the needs of his body and neglected the needs of his soul. God asked him, ". . . whose shall those things be . . ." not the things "which thou hast possessed" but the things "which thou hast provided?"

Christians Work for a Living

In James 4:13-17 we are taught a great truth, to consider the Lord's will in the matter of getting gain. Christ said in John 5:17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." In 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10 Paul told us how some of the Christians in Thessalonica had slowed down so far as profitable work was concerned. These disciples were saying, "What's the use of working? The Lord will come soon, and the world will be destroyed; let us give ourselves to prayer and watchfulness." Paul had taught them to look for the return of the Lord, but in the meantime he believed that they should stick to their daily work and shun no responsibility. Paul knew that there were loafers in Thessalonica, people who were using the great hope of Christ's Second Coming as an excuse for being lazy and shiftless. Christians should work as if Christ was not coming for a long while and, on the other hand, as if He was coming back the next hour. Paul set a good example to these people and to us by working with his hands. He was impressed with the dignity of labor.

Useful employment does something very essential to the enrichment of men's hearts and minds. Here in verse 7, Paul referred to idle people as disorderly. He also told them if they did not work, they should not eat. Could anything be plainer or more just than that? Paul represents the man who works both with his hands and with his head. He was a tentmaker. At the same time he was one of the great intellectuals of history.

Christian Principles in Modern Life

We live in a society in which economics plays an important part. Money has a significance in modern life that it did not have in earlier times. In the past, most people raised their own food and made their own clothes. Today men work for wages and salaries. Without money to buy food, we would starve to death. Today we purchase almost everything we use. We need money because of the economic significance of this present age.

Can Christian principles be applied to this modern situation? Well, if they cannot, there is no hope for any of us. First Timothy 6:10 tells us, "For the love of money is the root of all evil . . ." The danger is not in having money, but in coveting it. It is an impossibility to covet money and not err from the faith. When we begin to covet money, we will be tempted to shade the balance and to give a man less than we have agreed to give. This includes a day's work as well as in a business transaction. We should give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. A Christian will, at all times, honor his word to his fellowman. He will never give a second thought about taking advantage of anyone. He will be honest in all his dealings.

This kind of living will cause Christians to be taken advantage of by others. The perfect and infallible principles of Jesus Christ are the only things that will work in a world threatened with war and amid industrial conditions that fill with bewilderment the wise of this world. Paul was a workman; Paul was a thinker; Paul was a great Christian; and Paul was happy. We can find our happiness in this modern world only if we put first things first. Money is never under any circumstances the first thing. We must possess money without having it possess us.

JUST A THOUGHT

**If you would like to leave footprints in the sand of time,
you had better wear work shoes.**

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
It is revised and posted here with written permission from
(c) Bible Paths Publication, PO Box 299, Keithville, LA 71047