

Mammon's Heavy Burden

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Can you hear the groaning of the people as they labor under their heavy burdens? As the children of Israel under the taskmasters of Egypt, the people of God are bearing tremendous burdens, burdens that God never intended for them. In this day and hour He is calling His children to come out from the yoke of slavery they are burdened with, for the slavery they are under is a slavery of their own choosing.

Most Christians are familiar with Christ's words regarding serving God, or serving mammon. However, there is little understanding of what His words meant.

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

(NAS)

What is mammon? Some have defined it as avarice or greed. It is having any desire for material possessions that competes with a pursuit of Christ. Certainly no Christian would confess to being a slave of mammon. Such a confession would be a terrible self-indictment and a confession of great sin. Such a saint would be in great peril because Jesus said that the saint who tries to serve God and mammon will ultimately choose one over the other. Many will choose mammon, despising God.

I am convinced that the majority of the church has fallen into this trap and they are not even aware of it. We have so altered our definitions of discipleship and have neglected our Lord's directions concerning seeking first the kingdom of God and not loving the world, that we cannot even define what the pursuit of mammon is. However, a look at the word of God reveals some startling truths.

A clear clue that the church has compromised, trying to incorporate the pursuit of God with the pursuit of mammon, is the prevalence of the message of prosperity today. Turn on many of the religious programming channels today and you will find a plethora of preachers whose main message seems to be to teach Christians how to prosper financially and to be increased with the goods of this world. Of course, these ministers justify this preaching by stating that it is God's will for all of His children to prosper financially. They speak of the blessings of Abraham and of the blessings and curses of the Old Covenant. They will tell you that it is the prosperity of the

believer that will draw a lost world to Jesus. But if it is prosperity that draws the people, then they will be as compromised as the people they are attracted to. Who or what will they really be attracted to, God or mammon?

Jesus used no such allure of this world to attract people. In fact, everything about Jesus' life shied away from giving the appearance of worldly success. Born in a manger among the stable animals, wrapped in swaddling cloths, His life altogether began in obscurity and poverty. During His ministry He was never presented as one who had the world's goods, nor did He offer the world or the things that belong to it as an attractant to gain followers. Many churches and preachers today do this, but they have deviated from the pattern set forth by our Lord.

Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

(NAS)

Matt 8:20

And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

(NAS)

Mark 4:18-19

18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,

19 and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

(NAS)

Luke 12:15-34

15 And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive.

17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'

18 "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.

19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'"

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'

21 "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

22 And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on.

23 "For life is more than food, and the body than clothing.

24 "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds...

27 "Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these.

28 "But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe} you, O men of little faith!

29 "And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying.

30 "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things.

31 "But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you.

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.

33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys.

34 "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

(NAS)

Luke 14:33

"So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up

all his own possessions.
(NAS)

What is Jesus teaching in all of this? Must the saint take an oath of poverty? The issue is clearly an issue of the heart. What is the saint of God pursuing? Where are his desires? Is he content having food and covering, the necessities of life? Does he desire to accumulate the things of this world, laying up treasures on this earth that are temporal and have no eternal value, or is he laying up his treasure in heaven? Does a longing for the things of the world fill the saints heart? Don't answer too quickly.

You may think that you have no inordinate love of the things of this world. Certainly you do not crave the things of this world any more than your neighbor or other members of your church. But the scriptures clearly tell us that when we compare ourselves among ourselves that we are not wise (II Corinthians 10:12). Our standard is Jesus, not the society we live in.

It is undeniable that the western world has adopted a pursuit of materialism and a devotion to the god of mammon that is extraordinary. People spend their lives enslaved to the things they own. Not content to live according to their means they borrow on an expectation of tomorrow's earnings to finance their desires to gain the world's possessions today. Is your life standing in contrast to a materialistic society?

I too have gotten caught up in this pursuit and God in His mercy has brought me out by a great deliverance. More than once God has had to discipline me because I was pursuing the things of the world to my own detriment. I had adopted the mindset of much of the church that God wants us to be happy and to be increased with goods. The church in its quest for mammon teaches that God exists to help us achieve our dreams of worldly attainment. I wondered how much was enough. Could I not expect God to want to bless me by giving me the desires of my fleshly heart?

I have discerned since my youth that I have had a calling on my life to be a minister of God and years ago God impressed upon me the following verse.

Luke 16:11

"If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you?

(NAS)

I discerned that I would be disqualified from service as a minister in the kingdom of

God if I could not be first proven in my stewardship with unrighteous mammon. Nevertheless, I struggled greatly with this area of my life, but God in His mercy wanting me to be fit for service before Him brought some unusual and painful discipline to me to deliver me from this stronghold in my life. As difficult as the lessons have been, I have declared my praise and thanks to God for His discipline that I might find conformity to Him in this most necessary and vital area of my life.

Because of the tremendous compromise that has entered the church today and the open, accepted, and blatant pursuit of mammon, I did not realize until recently how far I had drifted from Jesus' teachings regarding seeking the things of this world. The scriptures are actually very plain regarding what the saint's attitude should be towards the things of the world. Look at the clear teaching of the following verses.

I Timothy 6:6-11

6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.

7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

11 But flee from these things, you man of God;
(NAS)

Philippians 4:11-13

11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
(NAS)

Hebrews 13:5

Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

(NAS)

The trouble for many saints comes in trying to define what the love of money is, or what constitutes being rich, or desiring to be rich. These definitions can be as legion as the number of people one asks. Nelson Rockefeller, when he was reported to be making a million dollars a day, was asked how much money was enough and he responded, "Just a little bit more." Even so, many Christians never seem to get to the point where they feel that they actually are manifesting a love of money or are serving mammon. Even when both spouses are working and they have a first and second mortgage and have credit card debt and other forms of consumer debt, they do not consider themselves to be pursuing mammon. But have they met Paul's simple statement, "having food and covering with these we will be content"?

Admittedly, this is very difficult in our society. A love of all things of this world and the propriety and necessity of pursuing these things is thrust upon us by so many different sources. We are bombarded with advertisements. We are deluged with T.V. shows and even whole channels that are dedicated to achieving the perfect house and yard. Everything from make overs of existing homes to building the perfect dream home encourages people to focus on acquiring more and more. There are channels that do nothing but sell goods. On top of this there is the influence of family members and friends who tell us that we must acquire certain things and attain a certain standard of living to be respectable. But perhaps the most pervasive influence is simply the weight of societal influence. We look at all the neighborhoods that exist and all of the new automobiles that fill the driveways. We look at all of the goods that fill the houses of the people we know and we feel the pressure to conform and pursue the very same things.

The church has revealed that it has had little success in resisting all of this pressure and influence. The level of indebtedness among the saints of God is indistinguishable from those who are unbelievers. The time and effort spent, often with both spouses working and the children being placed in daycare and given to the tutelage of others, is also nearly identical. In fact, many churches offer the daycares that allow and encourage both mother and father to work. The church would do much better by teaching their members to be content with a greatly simplified lifestyle.

The burden on the saints of God is growing. More of their time is spent maintaining the many possessions they have acquired. Their debt is increasing requiring a greater percentage of their income to service the debt. What would have been unthinkable a few years ago is now commonplace with many lenders offering second mortgages for 125% of the appraised value of a home.

As the burdens have been increasing the saints of God have followed the world in seeking more ways to increase income. Taking a second job is commonplace as is going back to school to gain more marketable job skills to continue to keep the ravenous beast of mammon at bay. More and more saints are speculating in the stock market and looking to different investment options to get ahead.

All of this stands in stark contrast to our Lord's words to seek first the kingdom of God. There is in effect less and less time to even consider the kingdom of God. The saints are burdened with just keeping their heads above water as they have become immersed in the pursuit of this world.

Is Jesus concerned about the saints being so caught up in the world system? Consider the following verses.

Mark 10:17-22

17 And as He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and began asking Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

19 "You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."

21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

22 But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

(NAS)

II Timothy 2:4

4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.
(NAS)

Paul's words to Timothy could be said to apply specifically to those who are ministers, and this is true. He is telling Timothy that as a minister of God that his focus should be on pleasing the one he serves, Jesus Christ. He should therefore avoid any entanglement with the things of the world. How many of the ministers of God are entangled today? Yet Jesus, in His encounter with the young ruler who owned much property, demonstrated that He is concerned with the heart of anyone who would aspire to be His disciple, not just ministers.

Jesus pointed out the very thing that gripped this young man's heart. I have heard many sermons on this, but I ask you to respond soberly, how would you reply if Jesus laid the same command on you? Would you be willing to sell all and follow Jesus? Jesus didn't just ask the young man a hypothetical question, He actually asked him to go and do it. He was to sell everything and give it all away then follow Jesus.

Do you follow Jesus today because you have been taught that Jesus wants you to have all the things of the world and you can have Him too? What if He told you that it was one or the other? Indeed, Jesus has told us that we will all have to choose who we will serve. The sad thing today is that the church not only avoids the question of choosing, but they have actually developed a theology that says that God wants to help you pursue the mammon of the world. The salt has truly lost its savor for it has no distinctiveness from the world. It's taste is altogether the same.

It is a church that has embraced a love and veneration of material success that has become conformed to our Lord's description of the Laodicean church.

Revelation 3:14-19

14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot.

16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

17 "Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

19 "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.

(NAS)

The church is increased with material possessions today, but they have a terrible burden to go with it. They have become slaves to their possessions. But much worse than this is the fact that Jesus has been removed from being the central focus of their lives. For much of the church Jesus is just a small part of their life. He is contained within a predetermined compartment of their existence, but He is not the saint's whole life.

The world system of mammon is beginning to show signs of stress. The world's stock markets are becoming more and more precarious. There is a great unsettledness in the world's financial systems. The burden of individual, corporate, and government debt has ballooned to levels that are truly historic. When the balloon pops, and it will, much of the church will discover that it has no firm foundation to stand on. They have built their houses on sand and those who have embraced the world system of debt and materialism will fall when it falls.

What is the saint of God to do? Seek God diligently. Ask Him to open your eyes to the truth. Ask Him to deliver you from the spirit of compromise that has invaded the church. Ask Him to bring you out as He brought the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt. Be willing to make drastic changes to your mode of living. Trying to keep up with the Joneses will be shown to be catastrophic when the Joneses are revealed to have built their house upon the sand.

Above all, make your first pursuit Jesus Christ, His kingdom, and His righteousness. If He truly is your life then the things of this earth will pale beside Him. You will not mind being looked at as a nut because you don't pursue all the things the world is pursuing. You will have become salt that truly is salty. Others will be made thirsty as they wonder what it is that enables you to live a contented life apart from all of the rush of the world to acquire more and more goods.

Let me end with an amazing account from the book of Jeremiah about a family that lived such a separate life, shunning the pursuit of the world at a time when Judah and Jerusalem were fully caught up in the pursuit of materialism.

Jeremiah 35:1-10, 18, 19

1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying,

2 "Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink."

3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites,

4 and I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the doorkeeper.

5 Then I set before the men of the house of the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Drink wine!"

6 But they said, "We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever.

7 'And you shall not build a house, and you shall not sow seed, and you shall not plant a vineyard or own one; but in tents you shall dwell all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.'

8 "And we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters,

9 nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; and we do not have vineyard or field or seed.

10 "We have only dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us...

18 Then Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father, kept all his commands, and done according to all that he commanded you;

19 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me always.'"

This family was unusual in all of Israel and they gained the approval of God. They were given a promise that is rare in scripture, that they would never lack a man to stand before God, forever. What an awesome promise! How they must have impressed God.

In a day when the children of God had embraced great idolatry and they had given themselves over to the pursuit of the world this family stood out in that they had taken very certain steps to insure that they would keep the favor of God and not fall into the pattern of the world. They had chosen for themselves the priestly inheritance. They lived for God and not for the things of the world. They would not drink wine, representing the pursuit of pleasure. They would not buy land or build houses, representing a pursuit of the world, and they would not sow seed, or plant a vineyard which was symbolic of working to gain the things of the world. They lived as pilgrims and aliens in the land, knowing that they had no permanent dwelling here, but their hope was in heaven.

This family truly stood out from the generation they lived in. It is more than symbolic that the generation they lived among was taken away into bondage to Babylon. They were already in bondage to the things of the world and God simply let them reap the rewards of their bondage. But in a day of great judgment, this family found favor with God and received a great promise of preservation from Him.

We once again live in a generation that is enslaved to the things of the world and the judgment of God is about to fall. There will be a remnant, however, that will find favor with Him. They will be preserved when God shakes all things that can be shaken. Because they have built upon the Rock, they will not be moved.

The word of God that is ringing out strongly in this hour is:

Revelation 18:4-8

4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues;

5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

7 "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to

the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.'

8 "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

(NAS)

The church today is living sensuously, pursuing the things of the world and inviting all the influence of the world into their homes. God is calling His people to come out of this harlot church so that they will not participate in her sins. What is preached as acceptable and even desirable in the church today is an abomination to God. If His children wish to not partake of the plagues unleashed against her then they need to quickly come out of her.

I am convinced that one of these plagues is a plague of darkness so that the church cannot even see how wretched and poor and blind and naked she has become. Instead they believe they are rich, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing. If you have ears to hear what God is saying then repent and come out of her. Begin to seek first the kingdom of God, making no compromise with the mammon of this world. Jesus has told us to count the cost of following Him. Our reward is not of this earth, but it is certainly worth giving all for. As the missionary Jim Elliott stated, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Let us press on toward God seeking to be good stewards of all that he has entrusted to us that at His appearing we might not be ashamed.