

03-11-12

Series: God's Economy

# God's Economy (4)

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Matthew 6:19-24

(Continuation from 03-04-12)

## The Doctrine of God's Economy

In the present passage Jesus looks at materialism—particularly in regard to luxuries—from the three perspectives of **treasure**, **vision**, and **master**.

### A Single Treasure ([Matthew 6:19-21](#))

**Lay up** (*thēsauroizō*) and **treasures** (*thēsauros*) come from the same basic Greek term, which is also the source of our English *thesaurus*, a treasury of words. A literal translation of this phrase would therefore be, “**do not treasure up treasures for yourselves.**”

The Greek also carries the connotation of stacking or laying out horizontally, as one stacks coins. In the context of this passage the idea is that of stockpiling or hoarding, and therefore pictures wealth that is not being used. The money or other wealth is simply stored for safekeeping; it is kept for the keeping's sake to make a show of wealth or to create an environment of lazy overindulgence (cf. [Luke 12:16-21](#)).

It is clear from this passage, as well as from many others in Scripture, that Jesus is not advocating poverty as a means to spirituality. In all of His many different instructions, He only once told a person to “**sell your possessions and give to the poor**” ([Matthew 19:21](#)). In that particular case, the young man's wealth was his idol, and therefore a special barrier between him and the lordship of Jesus Christ. It provided an excellent opportunity to test whether or not that man was fully committed to turning over the control of his life to Christ. His response proved that he was not. The problem was not in the wealth itself, but the man's unwillingness to part with it. The Lord did not specifically require His disciples to give up all their money and other possessions to follow Him, although it may be that some of them voluntarily did so. He did require obedience to His commands no matter what that cost. The price was too high for the wealthy young ruler, to whom possessions were the first priority.

Both testaments recognize the right to material possessions, including money, land, animals, houses, clothing, and every other thing that is honestly acquired. God has made many promises of material blessing to those who belong to and are faithful to Him. The foundational truth that underlies the commandments not to steal or covet is the right of personal property. Stealing and coveting are wrong because what is stolen or coveted rightfully belongs to someone else.

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Ananias and Sapphira did not forfeit their lives because they kept back some of the proceeds from the sale of their property, but because they lied to the Holy Spirit ([Acts 5:3](#)). Holding back some of the money was selfish, especially if they had other assets on which to live, but they had a right to keep it, as Peter makes plain: **“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?”** ([Acts 5:4](#))

God expects, in fact commands, His people to be generous. But He also expects, and even commands, them not only to be thankful for but to enjoy the blessings He gives—including the material blessings. The Lord **“richly supplies us with all things to enjoy”** ([1 Timothy 6:17](#)). That verse is specifically directed to **“those who are rich in this present world”** and yet it does not command, or even suggest, that they divest themselves of their wealth, but rather warns them not to be conceited about it or to trust in it.

Abraham was extremely rich for his day, a person who vied in wealth, influence, and military power with many of the kings in Canaan. When we first meet **Job** he is vastly wealthy, and when we leave him—after the testing that cost him everything he possessed outside of his own life—God has made him wealthier still, in flocks and herds, in sons and daughters, and in a healthy long life. ([Job 42:12-17](#))

The Bible gives considerable counsel for working hard and following good business practices (cf. [Matthew 25:27](#)). The ant is shown as a model of the good worker, who **“prepares her food in the summer, and gathers her provision in the harvest”** ([Proverbs 6:6-8](#)).

We are told that **“in all labor there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty”** ([Proverbs 14:23](#)). And we are also told in the book of **Proverbs** ([Proverbs 24:3-4](#); [Proverbs 28:19](#)): Paul tells us that parents are responsible for saving up for their children ([2 Corinthians 12:14](#)). Paul also tells us that **“if anyone will not work, neither let him eat”** ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)).