

SERVING GOD OR MAMMON?

August 21, 2025

Mammon: (root word in various languages) = money, wealth, material possessions

In Biblical culture mammon is seen as an idol, greed, a lust for gain or excess and materialism. Some scholars even speak of it as a demonic entity. Jesus spoke of mammon as if it was a god or a master.

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted* to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.**

- Luke 16:13 NIV * devoted Greek = antecho: to be devoted, hold firmly to, pay attention to

** serve in Greek = doulos: to serve as a slave

Note: Jesus used hate as a term of priority and comparison rather than as emotional hatred

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. - Romans 6:16 NIV (slaves = doulos)

Serving Mammon:

Pharisees: They had just heard Jesus say that one cannot serve God and mammon.

The Pharisees, who **loved money**, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your **hearts**. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.' - Luke 16:14-15 NIV

(Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart) - 1 Samuel 16:7

Jesus showed love, care and compassion for those who were poor, abused, oppressed or neglected. Widows in Jesus' day had little or no power in courts of law and were taken advantage of by Jewish legal experts such as a scribe or Pharisee. As an executor of wills, they would find ways to cheat the poor widows out of their houses and other assets. Jesus warned his disciples:

Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely. - Luke 20:46-47 NIV

- Their attachment to earthly possessions contrasted sharply with Jesus' emphasis on **seeking true spiritual riches**. - Luke 16:11
- **Hypocrisy in Tithing:** In Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for meticulously tithing even the smallest herbs while neglecting "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness". This demonstrates a focus on outward religious observance to maintain appearances while disregarding the underlying principles of God's law.
- **Greed and Self-Indulgence:** Jesus accused the Pharisees of being inwardly **full of "greed and self-indulgence,"** despite cleaning the outside of their cups and dishes, according to Matthew 23:25 and Luke 11:3. This shows a focus on outward righteousness masking inner corruption.

Just this week I heard a lady named Suzanne who worked at a large international Christian media ministry for four years. A few years ago she took a call from an elderly lady who wanted to give \$90,000 dollars to the ministry, because she had heard an emotional message about sowing a seed for the 100 fold return. That money was all she had to live on. Suzanne was concerned about whether this was a good decision for her but it was approved by higher ups. Suzanne, who took the original call, was also the one who took the call from the older lady when she reported that the big harvest never came in. Suzanne was heart broken when the head of the Canadian branch office of this USA based ministry refused to give the older lady her money back, even though this was all the money she had to live on. Ironically, the head of this ministry is described by Forbes magazine as being personally worth 1.2 billion dollars. Such ministers live isolated in their mansions and massive estates, where they do not have much contact with ordinary people. (Sounds like many of the world's political leaders too.) Jesus is angry with such persons who seek to live like kings while most of those who financially support them live simpler and honest lives of sacrifice and hard work. There is nothing new under the sun.

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