

# OpenTheo

## God and Mammon (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In "God and Mammon (Part 2)" by Steve Gregg, the speaker emphasizes the need to devote everything in life to the Lord. Even if one is paralyzed and unable to work, they can still serve by teaching Bible studies without worrying about their future. Gregg warns against accumulating material possessions and stresses the importance of using resources to benefit the kingdom of God. Instead of focusing on houses and material possessions, Christians should make themselves available to serve and provide for others as Jesus did.

### **Transcript**

I can't see ever deciding I'm not going to be productive anymore. Because whatever I'm doing, even if I were working as a construction worker, I'd be doing it to the glory of God. I'd be doing it for the Lord.

I'd be there not just to be working, not just to have money. I'd be doing it because I believe God wanted me there. And the money that I earned, I'd use for the things I thought God wanted me to use it for.

Because everything about my life is devoted to the Lord, and that's just normal. That's not special. That's normal Christian life.

And it's the case that God might call a person who's been in some kind of a hard labor vocation in their youthful years, might call them into something that's a more relaxed kind of vocation later on, but still devoted to working for the kingdom of God till the day they die. Now, a guy like me, I can't imagine wanting to lay up treasures for the future, because I don't even lay them up for now. I figure you minister, and the labor is where it is hired.

God takes care of you. You work for God, He pays your bills. And He always has.

And it happens that the kind of work I do, old age isn't necessarily going to keep me from it. I could lose my strength. I could become an invalid.

I could be paralyzed from the neck down. Still teach Bible studies. So, I can't imagine ever wanting to retire or lay up something for retirement.

If God provides for me now, He'd do it later. But that's true. It's harder for people to realize, though, when they are earning a paycheck in the normal way, and they know that they're not going to be able to earn that same paycheck in the same way when they get older.

And then they get fearful or something, it may be, about the future. But I would just say, what Jesus teaches is you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness when you're young and when you're old. Same obligations, no matter what stage in your lifetime you're at, you seek first the kingdom of God and all the other things are added to you.

God takes care of you. So, you don't need to worry about the future. Though, like I say, it might be excusable since Jesus said, don't lay up for yourself, treasure on earth.

You say, well, I'm not laying up for me. I'm willing to die today, if the Lord wills. I'm laying up for the kingdom of God's sake.

I know that my wife and I, when the kids are grown and I retire, we're going to go out to Mauritania and we're going to be missionaries there. We don't want to burden the church or our children, so we're just going to put a little aside every month now for that. I mean, laying up treasures for the future can have advantage for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

It can, in a sense, not be a violation of what Jesus is saying here, it seems to me. But, he is certainly correcting the attitude that most people have, including most Christians, who are not, in their own minds, earning money for the kingdom of God when they're in a marriage. They're earning money for their lifestyle.

They're earning money for their comfort, for their luxuries, for their toys. And that is very much a violation of what Jesus said to do. Now, there's a guy like that in Luke chapter 12, I'd like you to look at.

Luke chapter 12, Jesus told a story about someone like that. Verse 15, Jesus said to them, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. Then he spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? Now, that's a good question. What should you do when you don't have room to store all the things God's given you? What should you do? You've got more than you can contain. Maybe share some of it? Never crossed his mind.

So, he said, I'll do this. I'll pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years.

Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided? So, Jesus said, is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Now, notice. Lays up treasure for himself. That's the emphasis.

It's very similar to lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth. But he doesn't emphasize the on earth part here. It's just the for yourself part that he emphasizes.

This person's soul was unprepared to meet his maker, because his treasures were all for himself. He laid up treasures selfishly, and he didn't have anything in his account before God. Now, how could he have been rich toward God? Well, he had all his goods he could have given to the poor.

Then, even if his soul was required of him that day, he would be going to a place where he had riches awaiting him, treasures awaiting him. And so, I think that there's an important part of what Jesus is saying here has to do with laying stress on for yourselves. Whether you have a little bit in the bank, a lot in the bank, or nothing in the bank, I don't think it makes any difference as long as everything you have is for God, is really the Lord's and not your own.

It's not for you. If you own one car, two cars, or ten cars, if they really are the Lord's in the sense that they're really being used by God, then I could find no fault. Now, if you've got ten cars and nine of them sit while you drive one at a time, and the reason you've got ten of them is because you want to show off how many cars you have, I hardly see how that could be anything but for yourself.

But, I mean, there is such a thing as accumulation of things for the benefit of the kingdom of God and to allow them to be made available for God, just like the houses of some of Jesus' friends served as available places for him and his disciples to lodge. Now, verse 22, the lamp of the body is the eye. Matthew 6, 22.

If, therefore, your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? Now, that is a very perplexing statement.

For one thing, it can't be understood literally, because the eye, I mean, if you said the eye was the window of the body, even that wouldn't be true. It may be the window of the mind. Some people call the eye the window of the soul or something like that.

But even that is figurative. The eye is not a lamp. The eye is not even a window.

And how is it that having a bad eye is going to make your body full of darkness? As near as I can tell, my body is full of darkness anyway, just because the skin covers it all and doesn't let any light in. So everything in there is in the dark. He's obviously not saying that if you open your eyes, you're going to let light into your body and illuminate the insides of you there.

He's got something figurative in mind, but the question is what? What is it talking about? First of all, I think it will help to note that when he says, if your eye is evil or bad, he's actually using a Hebrew idiom that his disciples would have understood, but which we might not immediately. We think of someone having a bad eye, we might talk about them needing surgery, cataract surgery or something like that. Or an evil eye.

When you talk about someone having an evil eye, we sometimes might mean that they have a tendency to have a malicious glare or something, or a malicious gaze, or maybe even a lustful one. I don't think that in our society we have a real clear picture of what an evil eye is, but the Hebrews did. It was used in the Old Testament and even used elsewhere by Jesus in a very clear context that makes it clear what an evil eye meant to the Jewish hearer.

Look at Proverbs 23. Proverbs 23, 6. The new King James says, Do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies. But a miser is not really what it says.

In the Hebrew it says, Do not eat the bread of one who has an evil eye. Now the reason the King James translators translated that a miser is because they knew that that's what the Hebrew expression an evil eye means. It means a miser.

It means someone who's greedy. Having an evil eye means being greedy. Now, look at Proverbs chapter 28, and here we'll see it fairly clearly as well.

Proverbs 28 and 22. This time they haven't re-translated it as a miser. They've got it as it stands in the original, an evil eye.

Proverbs 28, 22 says, A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, and does not consider that poverty will come upon him. Well that pretty much tells us what an evil eye is. A man with an evil eye hastens after riches.

He's a miser. Now, consider Matthew chapter 20, where Jesus tells a parable about people who were hired to work in a vineyard, some early in the day, and then others at various points later on as the day progressed, so that by the end of the day, some had worked all day, and some only a few hours, and some only even one hour. Yet they all got the same pay, and the ones who worked the longest complained.

Even though they got the very pay they were offered when they were hired, they complained because others got the same pay who didn't work as long. And they were answered by the owner of the vineyard who said in verse 13, he answered one of them

and said, Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way.

I wish to give this last man the same as to you. Now verse 15, Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things, or is your eye evil because I am good? Now, why do you say, is your eye evil? What's that got to do with the story? It was a Hebraism. It meant, are you greedy? Are you coveting? So, Jesus even used that Hebraism elsewhere in a parable, in a very clear context, that used the regular Hebrew meaning of the expression, an evil eye meant a greedy miser, a covetous person.

Now, that helps us a little, when we come back to Matthew 6.23, if your eye is evil, is really the expression, it means if you're a miser. Now that agrees well, that agrees well with the context, does it not? He's been saying, don't lay up treasures for yourself on earth, where your treasures, your heart will be. So, I think we're pretty safe in assuming that verse 23 is talking about being greedy or covetous.

And especially by the fact that the next verse after it confirms that. No one can serve two masters. You can't serve God and mammon or money.

So, the whole context from verse 19 through verse 24 is about money and greed and covetousness. So, I think that the evil eye, referred to in verse 23, is simply an attitude of greed. Now, verse 22 says, the lamp of the body is the eye.

That can mean a number of things, but I think what it means is, it is using the image of a lamp, as in Psalm 119, your word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path. A lamp is that which gives direction. A lamp is that which shows the way.

Your eye sets your course. And not your literal eye. Just like greed isn't really a literal bad eye.

It's just a figure of speech the Jews used. So, also, the eye is the lamp of the body. He's not talking about your actual eyeballs.

He's saying, essentially, what you set your sights on, value-wise. What you set your sights on is that which you desire. In other words, what you're setting your heart on.

What you're setting your affections on. They are like a lamp to your feet. They will guide you.

What you set your affections on will guide your behavior. Your values, in other words, will direct your behavior. And if you've got good values, if your eye is good, you'll be led all the time in the paths of light.

If your eye is greedy, however, if you're setting your desires and your affections on that which is materialistic and self-serving and so forth, then your whole life, symbolically

referred to as your body, will be filled with darkness. Your whole life will be affected, in other words, positively or negatively, by what you set your sights on, what you set your eye upon. Now, do you recall that when John was listing the things that he said were the things of the world, the lust of the world, the lust of the eyes was one of the things he mentioned.

It's in 1 John 2, verses 15 through 17. 1 John 2, 15 through 17. John says, Do not love the world or the things that are in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Now, he talks about three things. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. When I say to you, the lust of the eyes, what comes to mind? What particular kind of desire is it that comes to your mind? With many, possibly because we have almost transformed in our modern English the word lust into a distinctly sexual kind of thing.

Some might remember Jesus said if a man looks at a woman to lust after he's committed adultery with her, they might think lust of the eye is looking at the opposite sex with a sexually impure thought or motivation. And that that's the lust of the eyes. But that's not the lust of the eyes.

That's part of the lust of the flesh. Sexual desire is part of the lust of the flesh. And when you look at a woman to lust after her, that's just part of your sexual desire going berserk.

It's just not being governed right. That's under the whole rubric of lust of the flesh. Lust of the eyes is something else.

Almost all Bible scholars would agree on this because of their knowledge of the way the words were used in biblical times. The lust of the eyes refers to greed. Just like an evil eye refers to being a miser.

The lust of the eyes is the things your eyes desire. The thing you set your eyes on which in that case is your possessions. The three things that really stumble people are the lust of the flesh which is sensuality, the lust of the eyes which is greed to possess things that aren't theirs or even things that can lawfully be theirs but they idolize them too much, and pride.

All those three things. As far as I can tell almost every sin falls into one of those three categories. I've thought many times trying to find out if there is one that doesn't.

I haven't really been able to figure one out yet. It seems to me like all sin falls into the area of either sensual lust or greed or pride, self-serving pride. In any case, it only

confirms that what you set your eyes upon is what you treasure, essentially.

What's in your heart. It has to do with the inclination of your heart. It's like a lamp guides a person in a dark room or on a dark trail, a lamp into their feet.

So your eye, what you set your eye on, your values will guide your life in general. And just like a good lamp will make your house light but one that fails will keep it in the dark, so a good set of values, a good eye will make your whole life full of light. You'll walk in the light if your values are correct.

But if you are greedy, if your values are valuing the things of the world, if you're trying to serve mammon and pursue after that, then your whole body is going to be full of darkness. You'll be walking in darkness and you won't know where you're going. And it will affect every aspect of your life.

What I understand to be saying essentially here in his very Hebrew figurative sense is that the values you choose for your life will determine your entire life, everything about it for good or for ill. To be walking in the light or walking in darkness in all respects will be governed by the first choice you make of what do you set your eyes on, what is your heart set on. And he says in verse 24, No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon. Now, we should run into this a lot. Jesus uses a lot of Hebrew expressions.

He speaks like a Jew for some reason instead of like an American. But Jesus spoke like a Jew. And in Jewish speech, whenever you spoke of showing preference to one thing over another, you'd speak of loving the one and hating the other.

When Jesus said you have to hate your father and your mother and your wife and your children to follow him, he simply meant you have to love him more than you love them. When it says that Jacob loved Rachel and hated Leah, actually it doesn't say that. It says Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

In Genesis it says that. But the very next verse, that's Genesis 29 verse 30, Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. But the next verse, verse 31, says when God saw that Leah was hated, she wasn't hated in the sense we think of that word.

She was loved less than Rachel. To love one and hate the other is a Hebraism that just means to prefer one over the other. When God said in Malachi chapter 1 verse 2, Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated, I think that we need to understand that not as starkly and absolutely as the words in English would be usually intended to convey.

But God showed favoritism over Esau. He showed favoritism to Jacob over Esau. That's what he's saying.

I love Jacob, hate Esau. Here when Jesus says, if a man tries to serve two masters, he'll hate the one and love the other. That's not literally true.

You can, I mean, to a degree you can serve two masters, assuming they aren't requiring a totally different thing of you from each other. You could work, for example, mornings at McDonald's and afternoons at Wendy's. You know, I mean conceivably have two bosses, serve two masters.

And basically if you have no objection to hamburger flipping, you could work three or four different masters if you had the time and hamburger flip all you wanted. However, if you're going to work for a publisher of Bibles or a Bible society or something like that and their whole goal was to get the Bible to all the world, and then you're going to work for another company that was dedicated to stamping out the Bible and their whole goal was to eliminate Bibles from the world like some organizations like to do, that would be such a conflict of interest. You obviously couldn't do both.

You couldn't serve both masters. But furthermore, even if you're working at Wendy's and McDonald's, though there might not be regarded to be a moral conflict there, there would be nonetheless a competition conflict that would probably arise. Your boss at McDonald's would probably not appreciate you working at Wendy's and vice versa.

And the reason is because they're in competition with each other. And you're going to have to pick one over the other. You can't... You don't have to hate Wendy's and love McDonald's or hate McDonald's and love Wendy's, but you have to take a pick.

One is going to have to be preferred over the other. And when Jesus said you're going to love the one and hate the other, he just means you're going to have to make a choice. You're going to have to defer to one and prefer it over the other one.

That's just a Hebraism. Now, you don't have to hate money, for example, in order to love God. You can serve God and you can still have a reasonably positive attitude about money.

Money is not itself bad. Money is good. Ask any missionary.

They'd like to have more of it. Ask any poor person. They'd like to have more of it too.

And it's not just greed. It's concern for the survival of their children and their health and things like that. I mean, decent things can be done with money.

Money is not evil. The Bible nowhere says it is. But what is evil is idolatry and money is so easily made an idol of.

But you're going to have to decide whether you're going to serve God or serve money. If you serve God, you don't have to hate money. And likewise, people who serve money



don't necessarily have to hate God.

Jesus is using that language of Hebraisms. But what he is saying is you're going to have to prefer one over the other. You're not going to be able to pursue both.

You're going to have to make a choice between the two. And the one reason is there is a conflict of interest there. The world and money and so forth, if they are your master, that means that concern for the interests of money are going to be your concerns in all of your daily duties.

You're not going to make any decision about a career except as it affects how it's going to affect your prosperity. You're not going to make any purchase except as it affects your finances. You're not going to invest anything or give anything except as it concerns your enrichment.

You're serving money. That's what you're living for. That's your master, money.

And if that's the case, you can't serve God. You can't do both because God's got claims on your money, too. God's got claims on your actions, too.

And He'll often urge you to do things that would be not in the interest of keeping your money, not in the interest of personal enrichment. The disciples, for example, probably would have made more money if they'd stayed fishing than following Jesus. But they had to make a choice.

He said, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. Well, what do you want? You want to be fishers of fish? There's coins involved in that. Some of the fish even have coins in their mouths.

But if you fish for men, there's not much profit in that on earth, but there is in heaven. And so they have to make a choice. Are they going to serve mammon as they had been? Are they going to serve money? Was their business going to be their life? Or is following Jesus going to be their life? Now, if you choose to follow Jesus, that doesn't mean you can't work at a business.

It doesn't mean you can't earn money. You don't have to hate money. You don't have to say, I don't want anything to do with money.

Don't give me any money. I won't earn money. It's evil.

No, that's not what Jesus is saying when He says you're going to hate the one and love the other. It just means you're going to have to make the choice between the two, period. You can't work two jobs where the employers are in competition with each other.

Where both employers are going to want to claim on all your hours. By the way, he is speaking of slaves. I gave the example of working mornings for Wendy's and afternoons

for McDonald's or whatever.

That's a luxury we have. We aren't slaves. We can be employed wherever we want, part-time, full-time, whatever we want to do.

He's talking about a slave who didn't have any choice. He was owned and therefore 24 hours a day he served the one guy who owned him. He couldn't be owned by two because you only get 24 hours a day.

You don't get 48. You can't serve one master 24 hours a day and then serve the interest of a totally different master 24 hours a day, too. There just aren't enough hours in the day.

Someone is going to have a claim on all your time. It's either going to be God or it's going to be material interests. It might not be cash money.

You might not be interested in having a big bank account, but to acquire things is all the same. It's the same as acquiring money. And so Jesus is telling his disciples, basically, that they're going to have to change their whole value, the way they evaluate money, and it's going to have to be not worth much to them.

Money is going to have to be something that they can take or leave as the will of God dictates, as God wishes. And, of course, that's what the gospel teaches us. Now, I would go on into worry because that, too, has to do with the way we feel about material things.

He says worry about food and clothing and so forth, but when he gets into verse 25, he actually is focusing on our attitudes toward things, just as before, but he's working at a different angle. He's talking about anxiety and worry, and that, I think, we need to take a whole session on, which means we have no further to go until next session on this, so we'll close now even though it's a bit early.