

“The False God of Money”

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[Atlanta, Ga ]

For the last two Sundays we have given a series of messages on the false gods we worship. This afternoon we conclude this series with a discussion of the false god of

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10 Fosdick, *The Hope of the World*, p. 157 “No other nation can mean to us what our nation means. Here are the roots of our heritage.”

11 Joshua 24:15

12 King evokes John Oxenham’s hymn “In Christ There Is No East or West” (1908)

13 Acts 17:26

19 July 1953

money I consciously reserved this discussion for the last because the worship of the false god of money has had a much longer history and at many points is far more prevalent than the worship of other false gods. Every age has had those individuals who falsely elevated the economic means by which they lived to the status of ends for which they lived.

We have been attempting to stress throughout this series that a man's God is not his theory about God, picked up on the surface of his mind because he happens to live in the twentieth century, but a man's real God is that to which he gives his ultimate devotion, that unifying loyalty which draws his life together and gives it centrality and singleness of aim.

As soon as the matter is so stated, it becomes clear that millions today have made a god of money. Daily within our lives, altars smoke with sacrifices to this idol god. We attribute to the almighty dollar an omnipotence equal to that of the eternal God of the universe. We are always on the verge of rewriting the Scriptures to read, "Seek ye first money and its power and all these other things will be added unto you," or "Money is my light and my salvation, what shall I fear?"<sup>14</sup>

The temptation to worship this money god is one that faces us all. To resist it we need to take high ground. This god of money is forever standing before us saying, "Worship me, I'll be your god. I'll teach you how to get rich quick, I'll teach you the shrewd methods of exploitation, I'll show you how to get a Cadillac car or a Buick convertible with little effort. Just worship me." Oh how many have responded to the call of this god of money. Millions today are dutifully worshipping at the shrine of the god of money.

We do not have to look very far to see the tragic consequences which develop when men worship the almighty dollar. First it causes men to be more concerned about making a living than making a life. This is the danger forever threatening our capitalistic economy which places so much emphasis on the profit motive under more or less competitive conditions. There is the danger in such a system that men will become so involved in the money getting process that they will unconsciously forget to pursue those great eternal values which make life worth living. When men arrive at the point of making money a God they become more concerned with what they can get out of society than with what they can give to society in terms of service. How many individuals do we find entering important professions more concerned about the money they can make than the service they can render? How many young people do we find entering colleges and universities more concerned with gaining methods and techniques for making money than gaining methods and techniques for living a worth while life? When men bow down and worship at the shrine of money they are being deprived of their most precious endowment—the possibility of living life in its fullness and its endless beauty.

Another tragic attitude which the worship of money leads to is that of selfishness. The individual who really worships money will seek to get it at any cost. It might come through exploitation, cheating, or even robbery, the how is unimportant. The aim is to get rich. The person who accepts this philosophy has no concern for the

19 July 1953

welfare of others. Other people become mere depersonalized means by which he exploits his economic ends.

A third tragedy that results from the deification of money is that it causes men to surrender their ideals. Who can doubt that the mad desire of gaining money and the fear of losing it are our chief breeders of moral cowardice and corruption. When men worship money they will compromise with honour and principle, keep silent when they should speak out, and engage in sharp practices that are morally degrading and socially pernicious; for money, mothers will constrain their daughters into loveless marriages, for money, public officials will sanction crime, for money, men will live their lives in the deep valleys of racketeering and gambling, for money, there are those who will sell their bodies and corrupt their souls. What will men not do for money when it becomes an object of worship? "The love of money," as Paul said to Timothy, "is the root of all evil."<sup>15</sup>

Doubtless some one has been saying, but are you minimizing the importance of money? Are you saying that we must not pursue economic goals? To which I would answer, of course not. No one can really minimize the importance of money. Even if he minimizes money in theory, he cannot do it in fact, for it is necessary for survival itself. Without it men are deprived not only of luxuries, but also of necessities. So it would be sheer nonsense to attempt to minimize the importance of money. It is not the possession of money that I am condemning, rather it is the inordinate worship of it that I am condemning. Money in its proper place is a worthwhile and necessary instrument for a well rounded life, but when it is projected to the status of a god it becomes a power that corrupts and an instrument of exploitation. Man is more than a dog to be satisfied with a few economic bones. Man is a child of God born to have communion with that which transcends the material. Man cannot live by bread alone.<sup>16</sup>

So long as we worship this false god of money, we will not be true worshippers of the One eternal God. Would today there were another Elijah to summons the peoples of the earth to meet him on the crest of some Mount Carmel, confronting them there with the choice between their baals and the true God. For still that ancient word might well ring across this modern world: "How long go ye limping between two sides? If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him."<sup>17</sup> So today man does stand between the god of money and the eternal God of the universe. Choose which ye will serve.<sup>18</sup> Will you serve the transitory god of money which is here today and gone tomorrow or will you serve the eternal God of the universe who is the same yesterday, today and forever?<sup>19</sup> Will you serve the god who is with us only in moments of prosperity or will you serve the God who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death and causes us to fear no evil?<sup>20</sup> Will you

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10

<sup>16</sup> This phrase is found in both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, for example, see Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4

<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 18:21

<sup>18</sup> Joshua 24:15

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 23:4

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26 July–  
6 Sept 1953

serve the god whose power is limited to stacking up stocks and bonds or will you serve the God whose creative power stacked up the gigantic mountains as if to kiss the skies and set forth the stars to bedect the heavens like swinging lanterns of eternity Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve, the god of money or the eternal God of the universe

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TD CSKC Sermon file, folder 18, "False Gods We Worship "