



# Attitudes towards wealth

## Eduqas A level R.S. G1A Christianity Theme 3A

### Key Concepts:

- Four Bible passages play a role in shaping Christian attitudes towards wealth:

(i) In Mark 10:17-25 Jesus calls his followers to sell all they have and then follow him. This demonstrates how much more important the building of the 'Kingdom of God' was for Jesus compared to building one's own personal, material security.

(ii) In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus tells his followers to put the **Kingdom of God** first and then basic material needs will be given as well. This shows that Christian priorities are to be different than secular ones.

(iii) In Luke 12:33-34 Jesus teaches that selling one's possessions in order to give to the poor produces 'an unending **treasure in heaven**.' He appears to be making complete material divestment a criterion of the Christian life, yet he did not require this of everyone (i.e. **Zacchaeus** in Luke 19:8-9).

(iv) I Timothy 6:10 says that the 'love of money is the root of all kinds of evil'. This is not saying that money itself is evil, but that greed is. This saying was popular in the ancient world; it was also said by the Cynic **Diogenes** of Sinope.

- Stewardship** ('administration' or 'management') refers to the Christian concept that all humans have the task of managing God's world well.
- Principles that underlie stewardship include the world having been given to humans by God (**Psalm 8**), the goodness of the material world (Genesis 1:31) and the God-given responsibility to give to the poor and oppressed

(Proverbs 14:31). Many Christians **tithe** (give 10% away) as a part of their stewardship.

- This concept is applied in the Bible to nations as well as individuals; **private ownership** and business relationships are assumed (Leviticus 19:35).
- Asceticism** means '**discipline**' and is the idea that one will need to forego certain pleasures in order to achieve a certain aim such as a physical, moral or intellectual goal.
- Many Christians have insisted that there is no way that one can attain the goals for Christian living set by Christ unless one is disciplined in foregoing pleasures; Christians have often therefore advocated **fasting**, prayer, a simple lifestyle and even celibacy as ascetic practices.
- Examples of asceticism include **monasteries**, fasting at **Lent**, pilgrimage and even the extreme practice of **self-flagellation**.
- The Prosperity Gospel is the twentieth century teaching arising out of some **charismatic churches** that God does not want Christians to live ascetic lives, but to prosper financially (James 4:3). After all, God loves beautiful and costly things (such as **Solomon's Temple**).
- This idea is attached to the concept of 'Word-Faith': one is to make a verbal declaration that they have health and/or wealth (even though this may not presently be the case); this faith unleashes God's blessings.
- Both the prosperity Gospel and the 'Word-Faith' concept are tied to the asking of **financial pledges** by preachers of the prosperity Gospel. Believers are urged to give money they do not have as a part of showing that they have faith in God and will therefore gain material prosperity.

### Key arguments/ debates:

Wealth is sometimes a sign that one has been blessed by God i.e. promises to the Patriarchs and to Israel. Yet, God never promised prosperity to all individual Israelites or Christians if they were faithful. In fact, suffering pervades accounts of God's followers (i.e. Job, Jesus).

The ascetic ideal assumes that the world will have a negative influence on the Christian - but could this view actually detract from a healthy enjoyment of the world that God has made? Jesus did practice asceticism, though nothing like John the Baptist.

### Key questions:

- What are the Biblical promises made to those who are faithful in following God?
- How can the word 'blessing' be interpreted?
- Is the world 'good' or 'bad'?
- Is there a single Christian ideal when it comes to giving or spiritual disciplines?

### Key words:

Kingdom of God | treasure in heaven | Zacchaeus | Diogenes | stewardship | private ownership | tithe | Psalm 8 | asceticism | discipline | fasting | monasteries | Lent | self-flagellation | charismatic churches | Solomon's Temple | financial pledges | Oral Roberts

### Key quotes:

"...the love of money is the mother city of all evils." (Diogenes, 4th c. BCE)

"You should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays." (the Didache, 1st c. CE)

"God wants you well. God wants you prosperous." (Oral Roberts)

