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# Gleanings

## Commerce or Christ?



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Christmas is an interesting time of the year—all the food, parties, celebrations, family gatherings, and, of course, the gifts. Retailers build their annual plans around the Christmas season and readily acknowledge the critical role that Christmas plays in their success each year. Without a strong Christmas selling season, many, if not most, retailers would struggle financially. Given the critical importance for the retailers, it is no wonder that the focus of Christmas has moved from celebrating Christ to celebrating commerce. How did this change happen?

In chapter one of her book *Socially Responsible Investing*, Amy Domini outlines the evolution of the symbols of society as expressed by architecture. These symbols are seen in the major buildings or monuments built by society. Prior to the 1600s, the buildings and monuments were tributes to God, such as cathedrals. The message was that God existed and was a very relevant part of society. Then from 1600 to 1900, the great monuments—parliament and the great palaces—were built to honor government and the importance of social structure. During the past 100 years, the great buildings have been corporate headquarters honoring the impact of commerce toward improving the standard of living. (Source: [http://www.amydomini.com/sri\\_excerpt](http://www.amydomini.com/sri_excerpt))

Amy's analysis is interesting and posits a plausible explanation for the transition of human focus from Christ to commerce—to more money and a higher standard of living. Another way to look at this evolution is that we have moved from worshipping Christ to worshipping money.

In his gospel record, the first-century physician Luke quoted Jesus: "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). Hence the worship of God and money are mutually exclusive. Please note that I did not say that God and money are mutually exclusive, but rather the *worship* of God and money are mutually exclusive.

Most of us do not consider ourselves to be worshippers of money. Instead we claim to be worshippers of God. But if Amy Domini is correct and the signs and symbols of the culture reveal what people really value and therefore worship, do the signs confirm that we are worshippers of money?

Consider the following signs:

**Sign #1:** Success is denominated in terms of money. When the label "successful" is applied to a person, we are commonly referring to his or her financial success. Unless the person is an outright criminal like Bernie Madoff, the level of success that one enjoys is directly proportional to one's financial fortune.

**Sign #2:** Americans live as consumers not stewards. This is so obvious to the workplace that business pundits have labeled Americans as "consumers." Furthermore, our economy is built on consumption; hence, when personal consumption drops, so does the economy.

**Sign #3:** An entitlement mentality has emerged in America regarding the right to a certain standard of living, disaster aide, health care, and financial safety. Most people expect the government to care for them if something goes wrong and when they get old. There is no compelling reason to responsibly save money or to help each other.

**Sign #4:** Almost everyone chooses their work based on money. People, as a general rule, accept jobs and leave jobs to make more money. Any other factors that might be considered are secondary.

**Sign #5:** Money, for the most part, dictates where people choose to live. Most people determine the largest mortgage they qualify for and shop for a home that will match that mortgage. Because of this, many people live "house poor," meaning that they cannot adequately furnish, decorate and/or maintain their homes. Furthermore, because people live on the edge financially, when economic stress comes they often lose their homes through foreclosure.

As I consider these signs, I am persuaded that money is very important to people—far more important than



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God. Having been active in Christianity for more than fifty years, my anecdotal observation is that God is important to people for a few hours each week on Sunday, but the rest of the time most people focus on money. Money defines who we are—how we view and use money, our social standing, our public policy, where we work, and how we live. Where is God in all of this?

As noted above, one of the rules of God's universe is that people cannot worship both God and money—a choice has to be made. Sadly, few seem to understand this reality—many professing Christians display the signs noted above, which means that they are trying to worship God *and* money.

Let us be clear: when we break God's rules, there will be consequences. Note the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" [NIV]. It is deception to think that we can sow seeds of rebellion by violating God's laws and not have consequences. Yet, this is what we are doing. We think that we can worship God and money, but God has said that we can't.

The popular paradigm of present day Christianity focuses on getting people to make a decision for Christ, as if one decision is all that we need to make. This implies that all other decisions can be made without Christ. When you read the New Testament, it is abundantly clear the apostle Paul viewed Christ and his teachings as the basis for making all decisions (e.g., Colossians 2).

About a year ago, I heard a speaker say that he was not trying to get people to make *a* decision for Christ, rather he was trying to get them to make *every* decision for Christ. This is the biblical perspective.

I think the signs of the times are clear. The professing Christian community, particularly in North America, has abandoned the worship of Christ and chosen to worship commerce (i.e., money). This choice will have undesirable consequences. Perhaps the current economic calamity is part of the consequences.

Hosea 13:2 reads: "Now they [the Israelites] sin more and more; they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen . . ." (NIV). Note that the craftsmen (i.e., the workplace) simply accommodated the wishes of the people. The real driver in a culture is the worldview of the people. The workplace and public policy of a culture merely reflect the people's worldview. If the people choose to worship God, then the workplace and public policy will worship God. And if the people choose to worship money, the workplace and public policy will also worship money.

Choosing to worship money instead of God will lead to judgment (see Deuteronomy 28). But if people repent and worship the one true God, then there will be blessings. So the choice is ours—commerce (i.e., money) or Christ—what will it be?

Know this: because of the sin of man, the default answer is commerce. So if you want to change, truly change, you have to proactively engage in rejecting the worship of money and choose Christ. To work out the details of what this means in your life, I suggest that you find a godly person who truly worships Christ not commerce and submit to that person. Allow that person to disciple you and help you become a true worshipper of Christ. The transformation in you may be very difficult, but it is the only way to lasting success in God's universe—eternal success, that is worth all the pain and struggle it may cost. What a gift to give to yourself, your family, your fellow Christians, your co-workers, and your community!

Merry Christmas!

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