Three Rules for Managing Money

John Wesley said, “Money is an excellent gift of God if it is used excellently, answering the noblest needs of humanity.” To Wesley, you see, money was not the enemy. The enemy is my own sinful nature. Therefore, in order to arrive at a balanced view of money, I must ask myself frugality’s simple questions:

1. What is money for? Money is for exchange. Money is for goods and services that may, without corrupting my spirit, add education, comfort and beauty to my life and to the lives of those I love. Furthermore, money is for the good of humanity and the expansion of the kingdom.

Money is never to be used for the purchase of status. Neither is it to be used for the demonstration of power. James, in his epistle, talks about the way we treat the wealthy in church. (See James 2:1?9.) Money often speaks in church, and it does not always say, “Praise the Lord.”

2. Who’s in charge here? Am I controlling money, or is it controlling me? When ethical decisions are based on the bottom line of finances, money is in control. Are we making our decisions according to God or mammon?
Man cannot serve two masters at one time. He will always love one and hate the other. Financial expediency corrupts faith like demonic rust and eats away at character, destroying submission to authority, humility, obedience, holiness and patience.

Money must never control us. We must control it. I do not believe there is some mystical, evil power inherent in the dollar bill. What I do believe is that there is a weakness in my own flesh. Therefore, I must humble myself under the hand of God. I must show mammon who is in charge here. It is the

Lord Jesus Christ—not mammon.

3. Will I let character set the limits? Am I willing for God to limit aspects of my life through a commitment to frugal living? In other words, when there is not sufficient money for me to pursue a certain course of action, am I willing to believe that it is not God's will for me to do it now?

We easily confess that the positive abundance of funds can be used by God to affirm a course of action. If that is true, the contrary may also be true. From time to time God may pull tight the purse strings in order to stop me from a course that is not in His will. Therefore, lack of funds may be a way that God can use my commitment to frugal, modest living to keep me from continuing in a path that is wrong for me.

Frugality is the willingness to endure limits on myself. A grave danger inherent in the American credit system is that it allows me to consume at a level of superficial prosperity, which is not based on any real wealth. Sooner or later, of course, the piper must be paid. Bankruptcy in America comes dressed in a tuxedo, not in rags. Fooled by their own mirage of wealth, Americans are amazed when financial disaster hits them.

We must again master the primeval art of waiting on things until we can pay for them. Credit can be a good thing, but its misuse destroys character. It creates a mirage of prosperity, becoming a self-made sword of Damocles.

Cars, houses, furniture and clothing dangle dangerously above the heads of the indebted. If they have no real wealth, sooner or later the whole bundle will fall.

The Place of Prosperity

If I live a frugal life with a balanced view of money, what about prosperity in my life? I think the church has often failed to communicate a balanced view of prosperity.

On the one hand there are the hyperspiritual who say money is altogether evil. Get it away from you. Give it away. Do not have anything to do with it. It is nasty, dirty and filthy, and it has a spirit in it that will get you.

Then let there come a need to pay for something in the church, and they will ask folks to give money. You see, having told them how bad it is, they now ask God to give the congregation enough of it to support the church.

On the other hand, others say that God is a God of riches. God wants to bless you, they reason, and if you are right with God, you are going to be rich. Therefore, if you are not rich, it must be because you are not right with God.

Stranded in between these two extremes is the great body of people who are living day-to-day on the money that they can earn, while trying to provide for their families and improve their lives. What can we say to them?

There is nothing inherently evil about needing or having the finances to get by in this life. John Wesley had a magnificent equation for this. He said to earn all you can. Earn it righteously. Earn it in a way that brings no shame to people and no shame to God. Earn all you can.

Second, save all you can. Now, saving all the money you can does not mean hoarding it. It means setting limits on my lifestyle in order that more might be made available to the kingdom of God and not go up in the smoke of mere consumerism. Saving all you can is crucial to frugality.

Earn all you can. Save all you can. Then Wesley adds the missing element: Give all you can. Frugality saves to give. Greed gives to get. Frugality plots and plans, schemes and denies self, and sacrifices in order to give more next year than this year.

I want to suggest that you have a family meeting. Ask yourselves: “What can we do to give more than we gave last year? Is there any way we can live a more modest life, something we can do without, some excess we can lay aside in order that we may make a greater investment in the kingdom of God than we have ever made?”

Frugality is the strength of character that will set us free from the terrible grip of mammon.

The prosperity of God is a great blessing—dangerous, but great. If greatly used, prosperity can do much good. Hoarded or squandered, it corrupts character and destroys families.

Work hard, serve folks joyfully, save frugally and give generously.

Mark Rutland is the president of Southeastern College in Lakeland, Florida, and the founder and president of Global Servants (), a missions ministry to national pastors and leaders. He is an international conference speaker and evangelist, and the author of many books.

This article was adapted from Mark Rutland’s book, Character Matters. Find more articles for men at .