



# Managing GOD's Money

## Theme for August: Choices

*Life is about choices. Often unconsciously we choose between important matters such as working rather than loafing, eating instead of starving, sleeping rather than staying awake. Nobody tells us which to choose because these responses either are inherent or come by experience. Not so with other choices where ignorance and cowardice often hold us back.*

*This month we will look at some choices that result from inaction:*



*Heaven or Hell: Doing nothing is a powerful decision*  
*Truth or Tolerance: The high ground or the easy way out*  
*Success or Failure: How high must I reach*  
*Christianity or Religion: The Person or the rules*

## Topic for August 22-31: Christianity or Religion



Luke 5:29-31

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus warned the Pharisees continually to move away from following rules, look beyond the externals, and look to God.

Here we see Jesus feasting with *tax collectors and sinners*, a group the Pharisees despised, and the Pharisees thought they got Him. How could He associate with these sinners? Jesus reminded them He came to call sinners to repent. But they never got it, like many today.

Religion surrounded me as a youngster. I learned and practiced the rituals at home, church, and school. I fulfilled my duty weekly by going to church, but on other days, I did whatever pleased me. Why not? Everybody else did pleased them.

During those youthful years *growing up in the church*, I attended *confirmation* classes, learned how to take *Holy Communion*, studied the

denomination's rules, but I never met Messiah Jesus. However, I was an expert on how to dress on Sundays, and how to behave during church services—I was ultra religious.

Religion stresses human rules. It fosters an attitude focused on *doing* rather than *being*. It does not point people to Jesus; certainly, it led me away from Him.

Some people and organizations design religious rules with good intents. But usually there is a problem: These rules distract us from Messiah because they override or add to God's word. Several churches set rigid guidelines for adherents' dress and lifestyles that

doesn't matter to their walk with the Lord.

Then again, policing these rules is high on some religious leaders' agendas on Sundays. Mull over **James 1:26-27**—follow his advice and look after the eternal.

I preached at a church a couple years ago that epitomized religion. It was *pastor appreciation* Sunday. Just before my message a woman scantily dressed and ostensibly coming directly from her *night's work*, entered church. My wife suggested to my host that my wife ministers to this woman, but my host said they would *take care* of this woman.

After I finished speaking I asked about the lady and was told she had to leave because she dressed improperly. My wife and I were devastated. *Jesus visited your church and you threw him out because he interfered with your celebrations!* I said in a stern voice. *That's religion*, I remarked. The pastor assured me he had to ask her to leave because she was a distraction. He didn't get it.

Followers of Jesus should focus our energies on being like Him and stop timing sermons, policing how high hands are raised, and other insignificant matters.



### **Memory Verse**

#### **Colossians 2:8**

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

The believer's distinctive is his heart's wish to serve God through the Holy Spirit's power. It is not his ability to follow rules. God reminds us in **1 Samuel 16:6-7** man looks at outward appearances but He looks at the heart. As well, in **Matthew 23:25-26**, Jesus stressed the need to look after the heart:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

I had an even more absurd experience in a different church. I was invited to be an elder in an evangelical mainline church I attended. An elder suggested I pledge

allegiance to the denomination as I was not baptized in that denomination's church.

I refused emphatically, stating that my allegiance is to the Lord and His word, not to any denomination, which changes based on people in leadership. I was not surprised when a year later, the denomination implemented policies against God's chosen people Israel, and the moderator suggested *Jesus was not the only way to God ...* I left that church promptly.

We cannot gain our salvation by obeying religious laws and doing good deeds. First, we must believe in our Messiah Jesus. **Romans 10:9** tells us to *confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

After this He changes us from the inside so we exude His love, mercy, and grace. Neither religion, nor church membership can save us!. Only God's grace will save us from eternal destruction.

Apostle Paul's life is a fitting contrast between religion and Christianity. As Saul, he persecuted Christians zealously—that was religion. Later he believed in Messiah, rejected religion, and served Messiah Jesus. Read excerpts of his account in **Acts 22:3-8**:

"... I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death... "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' " Who are you, Lord?' I asked. " I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' ...

The rest of his life, Paul served the Person, Messiah Jesus: Boldly without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and pointed people to the Lord Jesus (**Acts 28:31**).

## Application



### Matthew 15:1-3

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition..."

**A**re you stuck in a denomination that has drifted away from God's laws? Have their rules superseded God's word? No law, guideline, or denomination's rule can give you eternal life with Jesus. Only God's grace saves. Grace is God's gift to us that we will never understand fully.

If you are in a church that has changed God's Word into their laws, ask God if you should stay to be one of His remnants to lead folks to Him. Don't act without consulting Jesus. The further away from the Gospel the church drifts the more frustrated you may become. However, God knows what is happening in the church and in your heart. He is faithful and will deliver you in His time. Stand firm; cling to Jesus and His Word (**Acts 17:11**); don't compromise His Word in the name of religion.

God has given us His Word that contains everything we need for *life and godliness* (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). It is the complete instruction manual for life. Jesus' teachings are not religious rules but the picture of lives controlled by the Holy Spirit. We do not need extra human rules to draw closer to our Lord and Savior.

This week, ask the Lord to show you areas of your life where you have given in to

religious practices. Ask Him also to lead you to His truth. Next, ask Him to break your heart and the church leadership's hearts with the things that break His heart so you and they may thirst continually after Him.

Our Lord wants each of us in a personal relationship with Him. If you drifted, His wish is that you return to Him and cherish a relationship with Him. He is waiting for you to walk away from religion. Apostle Peter tells us about Jesus' patience in **2 Peter 3:9**:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

When you set out to do God's work people will criticize you; they will dislike your dress, your company, and your methods. Rest assured, you are in good company; that's what they did to Messiah. Stay on the straight path; you will be vindicated:

....Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops (**Luke 12:1-3**).



# Daily Reflections



**August 22:**  
 Luke 5:29-31;  
 James 1:26-27

**August 23:**  
 Matthew  
 23:25-26;  
 Luke 12:1-3

**August 24-25:**  
 Acts 22:1-21;  
 17:21; 28:23-31

**August 26:**  
 2 Peter 3:3-9  
 Acts 17:11

**August 27-28:**  
 Romans 10:1-11;  
 Colossians  
 2:6-10

**August 29:**  
 2 Peter 1:3-15

**August 30-31:**  
 1 Samuel 16:1-7;  
 Matthew 15:1-9

Considering the month's theme, and the period's topic, daily reflect on verses on the left. These questions might help your reflections:

1. Who is talking to whom, about what, and in what context?
2. How do these verses apply to me today?
3. What lessons from these verses can I start today?

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