

Review

R. Paul Stevens and Clive Lim. *Money Matters, Faith, Life and Wealth*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2021. ISBN 978-08028-7751-2

by Ron J. Sing, BA Economics

Money matters. As Christ-followers, the way we honour God with the use of money and thinking as a Christian about finance is culturally counterintuitive. Adopting a heavenly perspective about money brings challenges when living in the modern world economy of today. In *Money Matters*, Stevens and Lim shepherd us in the study of money. In ten chapters, they unpack personal, historical, theological and practical perspectives to help us integrate our earthly wealth with a Kingdom of God worldview. The result: God gets the glory.

Money is not neutral

In the first two chapters, Clive and Paul share their unique personal lives while living in the East (Lim in Singapore) versus living in the West (Stevens in Canada). Despite personal and cultural differences regarding money, they found money to be robust and necessary and certainly not neutral. Personal family finances shaped their views on money, as it does with us all. Although both authors experienced opposing relationships with money, they felt its gravitational pull working on their hearts. Money is not neutral. It is a powerful force. It grabs our hearts for attention.

Money is a spiritual matter

Holy money is the focus of the next chapter and lays the foundation for money's historical context. Money began as a unit of value for measurement in the ancient world, connected to religious temples. "It was sacred and set apart. The earliest banks were temples. In early Sumerian cities in ancient Mesopotamia [holy money] was the centre of political and religious life." (30) Other evidence of holy money can be found in the Jerusalem temple and the Hebrew community. "The most holy place in Solomon's Temple was lined with cedar from Lebanon and covered with six hundred talents of gold." (34) Money's sacred history has roots in the temple's management, helping communities distribute and regulate food and goods for the benefit of residents in times of plenty and famine.

Giving to God and Caesar

In chapters four and five, *Money Matters* begins to unpack the teachings of Jesus for our daily lives. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus introduces the integration of worldly or secular things. Specifically, he invites us to decide to “[r]ender unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s.” (42) This dualism has been a constant struggle for the church for several centuries. How do disciples of Christ deal with these often opposing views? R.T. Frances suggests that “this is not a rigid division of life unto the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular,’ but rather a recognition that the ‘secular’ finds its proper place within the overriding claim of the ‘sacred.’” (53) “In this case money can be a sacrament, a gift, and a grace.” (53)

Money and the Capitalist Economy

Stevens and Lim grapple with the shrewdness of capitalism that exists all around us. Corporations and owners who profit use these contributions for the kingdom of God. How is this possible? It is only possible through the grace of God. “Grace can curb the lust for money. Grace can enable us to live and work in situations that are even demonic, provided we are called by God to work there and to do so wholeheartedly and for God.” (64) Thus, the integration of giving to Caesar (capitalism) and God (doing the Lord’s work) is accomplished through the thriving capitalist engine we are familiar with here in North America and globally.

Money and Managing God’s Household

Chapter 8, “Whose Money is it Anyways?” could be the most insightful chapter in *Money Matters*. Stevens and Lim outline the basis for stewardship and ownership from the Bible: “God is the ultimate owner of everything. The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it (Ps 24:1).” (98) On the subject of giving and donations, which many of us do regularly, the authors offer practical ways to understand the heart transformation. When we give from the heart, giving transforms our souls. “We do not ‘have’ souls; we are souls. And giving does something for our souls.” (104) “Jacques Ellul eloquently insists that money is power, part of the complex and unusually invisible realities called the principalities and powers (Eph 6:12)...as a power, money makes a Godlike claim on us, but when we give money, we disenfranchise it.” (104)

Money Matters is a powerful and informative read that moves us to better steward God’s money. Stevens and Lim give clarity and hope to guide us in handling earthly wealth from an eternal lens and a Kingdom of God mindset. I concur with David W. F. Wong of Finishing Well Ministries who says, “While

we cannot serve God and money, this book will open our minds and hearts to serve God with money.”

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