

A Theology of Money and Possessions: SYLLABUS

Randy Alcorn, Instructor

THS 564J: June 8-9, 2007

Western Seminary, 5511 SE Hawthorne, Portland, Oregon 97215, (503) 517-1800

REQUIRED TEXT

Money, Possessions and Eternity, Randy Alcorn, revised and updated version (Tyndale House, 2003), 476 pages. Note: the original edition was 1989, but it has been substantially changed.

Required reading, available online: *Money: The Currency of Christian Hedonism*, John Piper, 9 printed pages. This is available in a booklet form from Generous Giving of Chattanooga, Tenn., 2005. It's chapter seven in Piper's *Desiring God*. The full text of the chapter is available at the following address, where you may read it online or print it out as hard copy, which I recommend, so you can mark it for your benefit and for discussion in class: www.desiringgod.org/dg/id162.htm.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKS

The Treasure Principle: Discovering the Secret of Joyful Giving, Randy Alcorn, (Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 120 pages.

Rich in Every Way: Everything God Says About Money and Possessions, Gene Getz (Howard Books, 2004)

Stott on Stewardship: Ten Principles of Christian Giving, John R.W. Stott. Chattanooga, Tenn.: Generous Giving, 2003.

COURSE SUMMARY

“A Theology of Money” will explore the biblical doctrine of money and possessions, with special emphasis on using them to have an impact on eternity. With a view toward God’s glory and eternal rewards, it will include practical application and attention to the stewardship of money in churches, families, and in personal lifestyle choices.

The central focus of the class will be the Scriptures dealing with money and possessions, particularly those chosen by the instructor in the pre-assigned “Inductive Biblical Overview of Money and Possessions.” While this course covers stewardship as a whole, it has an unapologetic emphasis on giving because the professor believes Scripture contains such an emphasis.

COURSE FORMAT

A large portion of the class will involve a direct study and discussion of numerous biblical texts, to get an accurate sampling and larger perspective on what Scripture says about this crucial subject. This will produce more of a biblical than a systematic theology of money and possessions, but as we piece together these passages it should produce some overall systematic perspectives.

The instructor will present central ideas and supplementary insights. He will call on students to draw their own conclusions, with guidance from the instructor and input from other students. Class discussions based on thoughtful biblical study and contemplation of the assigned reading will be of major importance.

Handouts will supplement class discussions. The core of the course is the instructor's approach to the subject matter as reflected in the 2003 edition of his book *Money, Possessions and Eternity*.

While questions and answers and handouts will sometimes take us outside the core subjects in the book, most of the class, by design, will cover the subjects covered in the book. We will not be reading from the book in the classroom, nor will discussions be limited to what's covered in the book. However, students should note that the course *will* largely reflect the instructor's approach and viewpoints that surface in the book. His convictions and perspectives, and his view of the most logical and helpful approach to the subject matter have not appreciably changed since writing the revised edition four years ago. So if you feel that reading the book is sufficient, and you have no need to re-address these areas in a classroom context, then this is not the course for you. If, however, you would like to further explore the Scriptures and seek development of some of the perspectives addressed in the book, you should benefit from this class.

COURSE GOALS

Upon completion of this course you will . . .

BE:

1. More confident in your ability to identify and deal with biblical texts on money and possessions.
2. More mature in your walk with God, as you cultivate your perspectives and seek ways to better live out God's calling to a life of sanctified stewardship.
3. Better prepared to face financial trials, temptations and opportunities, as well as to experience joy in generously managing God's assets.

KNOW:

1. The central biblical texts on money and possessions.
2. How these texts should radically shape and correct and energize our perceptions and daily decisions.

BE ABLE TO:

1. Summarize what Scripture says about money and possessions.
2. Answer some questions that people frequently ask about money and possessions.
3. Convey to others—in your family, small group, class or congregation—a revolutionary understanding of the biblical teaching about money and possessions, including God's ownership and our stewardship.
4. Experience on a deeper level the life of joyful obedience in embracing Christ's lordship over us and over "our" money and possessions.

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Eternal Perspective Ministries, 503-668-5200. My assistants Kathy Norquist or Linda Jeffries are at this number Monday-Friday. When I'm not available (usually I'm out of the office), they should be able to help you.

Email: randy@epm.org or kathy@epm.org (Website: www.epm.org); FAX: (503) 668-5252-; Address for mailing course summary or inductive overviews unfinished prior to class: EPM, 39085 Pioneer Blvd., Suite 200, Sandy, OR 97055. These can also be emailed.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Attendance

Seminar sessions: June 8 & 9, Friday and Saturday, 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM. We will have short breaks and a longer lunch break. Please clear your schedule so you can attend all sessions, and arrange your commute to be on time. Those who miss one or two sessions may find themselves out of step since the class builds logically and progressively. We will not be able to go back and cover ground dealt with when a student wasn't present.

The class will be conducted in lecture/discussion style, lectures being interactive, with questions and answers. The goal of the discussions will be to cultivate your own biblically sound theology of money. We will examine Scripture, the text *Money, Possessions & Eternity*, and handouts bringing different perspectives on the subject.

B. Quality of Work

This is a graduate level seminar. Those taking it for credit will be expected to perform at that level. This means you must discipline yourself to do quality work and do it on time. You will be expected to have interacted carefully with the assigned readings, and to have done your inductive study of Scripture (unless you chose the class late and have requested permission to do it after the classroom sessions are over—not ideal, but acceptable in some cases). From this you'll participate in class discussions to form a learning community.

On your inductive study of Scripture you may hand write your notes IF you can do so legibly. If not, please type them. If it is easier for you to use a Word file of the Scripture passages that allows you to have more room for your responses, by all means request that from kathy@epm.org.

C. Pre-Class Preparation (Required for credit students; Recommended, not essential, for auditors)

1. Complete the inductive biblical overview of Money and Possessions, attached to the syllabus or available from Randy's assistant Kathy at Kathy@epm.org or 503-668-5252. These passages are the backbone of the course. Use the spaces provided to write down brief observations or questions concerning each passage.

Credit students should turn in their notes from the study on the first day of class. They will be handed back at the beginning of the second day. You should always have them with you in class. They will be

graded on indications from your written or typed notes that most passages have been read.

Time required: 9 hours: Simply read the passages, and jot down a few observations and questions. There are over a hundred passages, most of which will require no more than 5 minutes. This is intended as a broad overview of the subject matter, *not* an in-depth study.

Credit students should keep track of your hours spent in these passages. If after four hours you are still in the Old Testament, skip ahead to the New Testament passages to invest the other five hours. Most of your time should be spent simply reading Scripture, then making a few notes on each passage read. You may not read every passage, and if time is limited you should feel free to skip ahead.

Those auditing will profit from as much time in Scripture as possible, but you will still benefit from the class if you have not done preparatory work. If credit students can't complete this reading prior to the first class, you may complete it after the class meetings. However, you will benefit greatly if you've at least read the biblical texts in advance.

2. Read the text *Money, Possessions & Eternity* and the nine page Piper article. Credit students should read at the Mastery level (averaging about 30 pages per hour). This assumes careful interaction with the ideas, note-taking in book margins and/or in a notebook, and accountability for grasping material in class discussion. Keep track of your hours. If you finish in less time, you can invest it in the inductive study or the personal summary.

Time required: 16 hours.

D. Post-class Summary (For credit students)

Write a personal summary of the course. Draw from the material covered in class, the *Money, Possessions & Eternity* book, the Piper article and the inductive Scripture overview. Focus on the concepts that struck you as most important, interesting or useful. Write them out in the form of your choice, whether essay or outline--whatever form is most likely to be helpful for future reference as you come back to study, reflect or teach on this subject.

This summary might be done while reading, completing the inductive biblical overview and even as you jot down notes in the classroom. Then, you can take what you've done along the way, shape it into a cohesive form and turn it in. (Whether or not you come back to this, and I hope you will, doing this summary will help cement the class material for your future reference and contemplation.)

Time required: 5 hours. *Please mail your summary* to the instructor by August 1, 2007.

FINAL GRADE

The final grade will be determined on the basis of your completion of the assigned reading, the quality of your inductive study notes and your personal summary of the course. (Classroom participation will be taken into account in the case of a borderline grade.) All assignments must be completed with a passing grade to receive a passing grade for the course. Unless you qualify for an incomplete under provisions listed in the catalog, all assignments must be mailed by August 1, 2007.

READING REPORT

for credit students

THS 564J: A Theology of Money

Randy Alcorn, Instructor

June 2007

_____ I completed reading Professor Alcorn's book *Money, Possessions & Eternity*, at the Mastery level, before the class sessions.

_____ I read John Piper's article/chapter *Money: The Currency of Christian Hedonism* before the class sessions.

_____ I didn't read the following portions before class, but completed them at the Mastery level before August 1, 2007:

_____ I didn't read the following portions at all:

Name