

BEWARE OF MANIPULATION ... PART 1

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For a few weeks now ... we've been looking at money.

Although inherently neutral ... it has a dark side. Some people are covetous ... have a love for money ... want more ... put their trust in it rather than God.

There are people covetous and greedy in all walks of life ... and as we saw last week ... churches ... ministers... church leaders ... are not immune.

Religion is BIG BUSINESS. In the USA ... there are a total of hundreds of billions of dollars. Members donations alone are about \$74.5 billion per year.

And there are people out there who want a part of that. All those innocent gullible sheep to be taken advantage of ... you and I too?

In one way or another ... we will be approached for our money. It might be direct ... in our face. It might be more genteel. We need to be aware ... alert ... of someone coming to us with a good story seeking to get our money off us.

Two key points

- not every church or minister is dishonest
- remember: it's your money ... so make sure you're happy if you wish to give some of it away

The scriptures do give us warnings:

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (Writing to the Church)

2 And **many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.**

3 **By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words;** for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

(KJV) make merchandise of you (you are business to them)

(WNT) Thirsting for riches, they will trade on you

These false ministers ... in the Church .. motivated by greed and covetousness ... WILL EXPLOIT THE BRETHERN. Using deceptive words.

Matthew 7:15 (NKJV)

15 "**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.**

They are out to exploit ... trade ... make merchandise ... so we need to observe and judge. They look like sheep ... but ... they are ravenous wolves. Keep an eye on them ... you will know them by their fruits.

Acts 20:29-35 (NKJV)

29 For I know this, that **after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (Out to devour)**

30 Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. (Some of your elders will rise up...seeking a following ... after your money)**

31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. (That's the issue Paul is dealing with ... he never coveted anyone's finances ... property ... or assets)**

34 **Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.**

35 I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And **remember the words of the Lord Jesus**, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' ” (*this is a direct order to the elders*)

Paul emphasised the importance of not being covetous ... of supporting others.

We also saw last week Jesus' reference to those who are hirelings. They look like shepherds ... but they are only there for the money. If the money stops ... or danger arises ... they're gone!

So it's clear even in churches ... believers need to be alert ... for covetous individuals ... elders and shepherds who are devouring wolves and hirelings. Some people see churches as “soft spots”.

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 **But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (Subtle ... crafty ... not obvious)**

4 For **if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!** (*Paul is talking about preachers who will turn up in your assembly ... preaching a gospel ... but a different gospel*)

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NKJV)

13 **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**

14 **And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**

15 **Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,** whose end will be according to their works.

They look like authentic preachers! Motivated by “followings” ... greed and covetousness.

2 Corinthians 11:20 (NKJV)

20 **For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.**

Takes advantage of you! You submit and succumb!

(GW) When someone makes you slaves, consumes your wealth, seizes your property, orders you around, or slaps your faces, you put up with it.

They were being taken advantage of. Paul himself didn't do any of this. He didn't impose on others ... try to get from them. But ... others did! They were after money ... status ... power.

Paul occasionally got support from others and was very grateful when he did. But went out of his way to avoid any appearance of desiring money from the brethren. He often preached at his own expense. He was a good example.

There are two basic approaches that churches use to get money from their members or donors.

Traditionally ... the number one way ... threats ... pressure ... often making people feel guilty about not being generous enough. A negative message.

It comes across as: “How can you selfishly keep all your money when you could give into God's work and help preach the gospel and save souls?”

People might be pressured to feel guilty if:

- thinking of taking the family on holiday
- buying a new car
- moving to a better house

The paraphrase is usually: “How can you spend the money on yourself ... when millions are dying for lack of knowledge?”

A lot of churches have used guilt and pressure to get their people to give. The Church of God hasn't been immune to that.

Now if anyone wants to give ... wants to support someone ... and it's voluntary ... freewill ... then fine. We're free to use our money as we see fit. But there should be no pressure on us ... or threat ...or manipulation.

2 Corinthians 9:5-8 (NKJV)

5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. *(Paul wants them to help the brethren)*

6 But this I say: **He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**

7 **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**

8 **And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.**

The gift should be from the heart. Not under compulsion ... not under pressure ... not being manipulated.

In context ... this is a gift for the brethren ... NOT FOR THE MINISTERS OR ANY CHURCH ORGANISATION ... but for the needy brethren.

There were difficult times for the saints living in Jerusalem ... much hardship. This was support for the saints.

But ... no threats ... compulsion ... manipulation ...but certainly encouraged to be generous in helping others who were needy ... but their choice.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-5 (NKJV)

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

5 **For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.**

Paul wasn't there to get anything out of the brethren.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 (NIV)

5 **You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.**

1 Thessalonians 2:5 (Voice)

5 **As you know, we didn't sandwich the truth between cunning compliments—we told it straight—and before the eye of God, we never conspired to make a single cent off of you.**

The key problem that Paul sought to avoid was ... appearing to be after their money.

1 Thessalonians 2:6-10 (NKJV)

6 **Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.**

7 But **we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.**

8 So, **affectionately longing for you**, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, **because you had become dear to us.** (*We valued you ... we loved you ... we cared for you ... we were good shepherds ... not hirelings*)

9 **For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.**

10 You are witnesses, and God also, **how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;**

Paul explains to a number of the churches that he often preferred to pay his own way. He had a right to be supported ... elsewhere he quoted the Old Testament law that you shouldn't muzzle the ox while he's treading out the grain ... and applied that to himself. But ... to avoid criticism that he was after money and possessions ... he often chose to pay his own way and not burden the brethren. He was a good example ... though he had to warn the brethren continually to watch out for others ... false apostles ... false teachers ... who were out to manipulate the believers.

And threats ... pressure ... fear ... guilt ... have been among the most popular tools for many years ... to get money.

HWA Money Letters

Money was a very very frequent topic — probably the most frequent. Of 618 Co-worker/donor letters ... 525 mention financing in some way. The word "offering(s)" appears in 423 letters, "money" in 378 and "tithe(s)" in 376. Over 100 letters contain the word "emergency" in connection with finances.

The majority were often associated with significant pressure to give ... and threats of eternal consequences of holding back:

May 5, 1969: Writing about the Holy Day offerings.

"I am discouraged and sorely disheartened, Brethren, because THE FACTS ARE that on these seven occasions, the receipt of money at Headquarters to carry on the Work of God drops off AS MUCH as the amount put into these offerings! That can only mean one thing! Most of you Brethren are NOT putting in ANY real special Holy Day offering at all, but instead taking what otherwise would have been mailed in as tithes and normal offerings and putting THAT into the Holy Day offering!

Brethren I wonder if that is not doing almost exactly what Ananias and Sapphira did! Please read that again-it is in [Acts 5:1-11](#). They professed that they put in the amount they sold their property for. Peter said THEY LIED to THE HOLY SPIRIT. They DROPPED DEAD! **If YOU profess that what you put in the Holy Day offering is a SPECIAL HOLY DAY OFFERING, when it is only a regular offering, is not that**

about the same thing? Brethren, in the name of Jesus Christ I say I WOULD BE AFRAID to do such a thing!"

Unfortunately Mr. Armstrong didn't just "target" the well-off to give out of their abundance, but also the poor. "Widow's mites" are mentioned in 98 of his letters. He was careful to point out that widows should give *more than one* mite:

November 20, 1945: Co-Workers, I have to appeal to you now ... we need the widow's mites IN LARGE NUMBER now as never before—from many who may not be able to send in more, and have sent nothing in for some time!

June 9, 1947: I know that, while MOST of our Co-Workers are in poor economic circumstances and can send only the "widow's MITES"—notice it was "MITES," not just one "mite,"—and while it is these many small amounts of a couple dollars, or a five or ten, they are the very BACKBONE OF THIS WORK...

March 30, 1969: Remember that even the widow's mites HELP GREATLY in this Work.

January 15, 1962 (about the building fund) : "MANY OF YOU WHO ARE ABLE AND OUGHT TO PLEDGE ... HAVE FAILED OR REFUSED!

Brethren, do you realise this is the work of ALMIGHTY GOD? Do you realise HE is holding you accountable, according to your ability? It is not yet too late-but if you've become a spiritual slacker, there is a Lake of Fire looming ahead, and I say to you in all sincerity and love, and by authority of Jesus Christ, you had better begin to fear and TREMBLE! This (offering) is EXPECTED of you, and if we don't do MORE than expected, we are UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS, and Jesus Christ says that the unprofitable servants are to be thrown into the Lake of Fire! I did not decree that-CHRIST DID!"

March 2, 1967: "... Many professing to be Church MEMBERS say, when a Co-Worker letter arrives, in a grumbling, complaining disgust: "Oh, that's another of Mr. Armstrong's REQUESTS for MONEY," and many don't even read the letter! "Are YOU one of those? If so, LET ME BURN YOUR EARS before the Almighty GOD burns YOU in the Lake of FIRE! If that has been YOUR

attitude -- if YOU are only on the GETTING side, and SHUN helping, and giving to the cause of GOD, then I say to you ON AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST, if you don't REPENT and QUICKLY, and change that hostile, despicable, detestable attitude, **you DO NOT BELONG in GOD'S CHURCH!** You are some of the ROTTEN, PUTRID, spiritual WASTE that has been PLUGGED UP INSIDE OF THE SPIRITUAL BODY OF CHRIST'S WIFE, And if THAT doesn't make your ears tingle, and AWAKEN you, then **Jesus Christ says to YOU through me, YOU are in danger of the Lake of FIRE!** THINK OF IT! How ASHAMED God must be with His Church!... ”

Sep. 9, 1968: "MANY who DO have the ability [to give]... are **GUILTY BEFORE GOD of shirking**—of letting the SATANIC attitude of GET fill their minds... **The only reward later, will be DEATH in the LAKE OF FIRE!"**

March 30, 1970: “But now I have to come to you with the frank statement that drastic action must be taken. The BIG immediate need is extra cash funds — NOW — IMMEDIATE! First is, that I am calling for a full day of FASTING AND PRAYER FOR THIS WORK FOR THIS SABBATH, April 4th. The second I ask of all who can and are willing. This was suggested this afternoon by Mr. Stanley Rader, our legal counsel and financial adviser. It is that those in position to do so, if willing to do your part for God's Work in this immediate crisis, **go to your local bank and borrow whatever you are able — from \$100 to \$1,000.** Most bankers will ask why you want it. There could be many needs at this season — income tax payments coming up — you are short of funds temporarily — or just tell him you want to make a special donation to your Church. For those who can and will do this, borrow merely on your signature — don't mortgage anything — whatever you are able, to be paid back monthly. **And you should not obligate yourself to monthly payments except what you will be able to pay OVER AND ABOVE tithes and offerings for the Work** — so that it does not lower the income for the Work through the rest of the year.

I know that many of our members do, from time to time, buy such things as a new TV set, or dishwasher, on monthly payments. **Perhaps some will want to put off such a purchase** and let those monthly payments go to repay a loan at the bank that will

supply God's Work with IMMEDIATE CASH, which is the serious IMMEDIATE NEED”.

November 2, 1972: Brethren, we have to face a VERY SOBERING AND SERIOUS SITUATION. Unless drastic CHANGES take place, we are going to have to reduce many vital phases of the Work, and eliminate others. That means seeing the Work... start going BACKWARD for the first time in 40 years! ... Brethren... WE DARE NOT LET THAT HAPPEN! ... Brethren, I KNOW the CAUSE of our present situation. WE AS A CHURCH HAVE BEEN LETTING DOWN... That means that NOT ONLY God’s WORK is in danger—**MANY of YOU BRETHREN are in MORTAL DANGER! I say to you candidly, I know that some, if not MANY of you are in REAL DANGER of the LAKE OF FIRE!** ... Let’s not dodge the real issue—let’s not deny the REAL CAUSE—Let’s not PASS THE BUCK! **Our own personal, individual SALVATION is at stake**... Jesus Christ, has shown me THE REAL CAUSE—not merely of the present situation, BUT OF THE DIMINISHING INCREASE IN INCOME—and consequently IN THE ENTIRE SCOPE AND POWER OF THE WORK these past three and four years!... **I know that the ETERNAL LIVES of many—perhaps more than HALF... are at STAKE...**”

Dave Pack: Clarion Call — The Time is NOW!
Excerpts from Sermon (2007)

Yeah, I know, one or two can leave and say, ‘Hey, you stopped preaching and started meddling, now you’re messing with my goods here on earth’ ”

If you were born in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, then you’re rich”

If you hold those riches, I’m telling you, you trust in them”

Go get a big chunk out of your home. And put your money where your mouth is and send it here. And I’m not talking about one, two, three thousand either. How about ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, or one hundred thousand dollars? Go do it”

Wives, you can be independent in this. You have half the worth of whatever you have in your house. I'm officially telling you this...Wives, legally you have half the funds. What are you going to do about it?...Husbands...'well, my wife is not in the church'...tell her...'you don't have a voice woman' "

Go get those assets and get them here"

Don't sit on vast resources that we can use now"

I do not covet your silver or gold...the gold and silver is God's and He will get it someday"

We need many hundreds of thousands of dollars to arrive at God's headquarters soon...the timing is now"

This is different...ask Him for the faith to liquidate certain assets and give it to the work"

I'll say it again, we are talking about liquidating existing assets...it all belongs to God and the brethren"

There will be follow-up sermons.

Let us know how much you plan to send and when you plan to send it...You must be willing to communicate...If you do need to counsel, please do that...If you are not ready to distribute what you have...you don't believe the flow of prophecy"

This is announcing the last blast, the clarion call as it were, to finish the work...Whether it is 4,5,7, 9 years to go, God knows...This is liquidating assets...I have the authority to tell you to do it...I have the moral and spiritual, and ecclesiastical authority to tell you to do what I have also done"

Get it now when it requires faith...when you are dead you don't need it...if you named us in your wills, it can take us months or years to get it"

And this is the real test of Laodicea...either hold on to your assets...or give it...God is in this decision, no question. Testing the church's faith"

This is the Laodicean age...Be careful that you don't tell us how to spend your assets...It belongs to God..You don't tell God or His servants how to spend it"

Your faith is being tested. Think about that"

We will all fast on November 17th...I have to...ask you for a very special financial sacrifice for God's work"

Fast for faith and courage in others with more than you to give...Go get a big chunk out of your house...assets, IRAs, and pension funds...

These are illustrations of pressure being brought on people to hand over their money ... and lots of it ideally.

If you don't ... you're likely Laodicean ... Mr HWA says you may burn in hell ... at the very least you're a sorry specimen of a Christian ... selfish and uncaring. Who knows how many people got themselves into financial trouble by giving ... or didn't give ... and lived with guilt?

You might say, "Don't churches and ministries and religious groups need money? Hall rental ... media ... publishing ... support of the ministry?"

Yes ... of course they do. But it shouldn't be by manipulating the brethren ... engaging in threats ... pressure ... bullying ... guilt ... or arm-twisting.

It shouldn't be that hard for converted people ... who have a giving spirit ... to see genuine needs and support them. And if people don't care ... aren't generous and good-hearted ... then twisting arms and threatening hell-fire isn't dealing with the real problem.

I think a great example was set by George Mueller. I think you will be familiar with him. In over 70 years of a major charitable work ... **he never asked anyone for a penny.**

Brief history of George Mueller

George Mueller ... lived almost the entire nineteenth century, 1805 to 1898; died at 92.

He spent most of his life in Bristol and pastored the same church there for over sixty-six years.

He was known around the world in his own lifetime, and still is today, for his orphan ministry. He built five large orphan houses and in his lifetime cared for over 10,000 orphans in his life (accommodation, food, clothing ... and Bibles).

He did all this while he was preaching three times a week from 1830 to 1898, at least 10,000 times. And when he turned 70 he fulfilled a life-long dream of missionary work for the next 17 years until he was 87. He traveled to 42 countries preaching on average of once a day, and addressing some three million people.

He gave three chief reasons for establishing an Orphan-House: 1. That God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the means, in its being seen that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened. 2. The spiritual welfare of fatherless and motherless children. 3. Their temporal welfare.

The order of those three goals was intentional. He makes that explicit over and over in his writings. The orphan houses exist to display that God can be trusted and to encourage believers to take him at his word. He wrote:

“It seemed to me best done, by the establishing of an Orphan-House. It needed to be something which could be seen, even by the natural eye. Now, if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an Orphan-House: there would be something which, with the Lord's blessing, might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God besides being a testimony to the

consciences of the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God. This, then, was the primary reason for establishing the Orphan-House. . . The first and primary object of the work was, (and still is) that God might be magnified by the fact, that the orphans under my care are provided, with all they need, only by prayer and faith, without any one being asked by me or my fellow-labourers, whereby it may be seen, that God is FAITHFUL STILL, and HEARS PRAYER STILL.”

Earlier in his life, he gave up taking a salary from the Church, when he was about 26, resolving to trust God entirely for his needs, rather than “the arm of flesh.”

HWA referred to him as an Apostle of Faith.

So, no Internet ... no phones ... no Facebook ... much smaller population in those days ... and received income of around \$150M. And never asked even for a cent from anybody. That's a great example of faith and avoiding any appearance of evil or covetousness.

Mr Mueller had a very different methodology. No threats ... no sentimental pleading ... just went to God and let Him know ... let God move on people as necessary.

He might be somewhat of an extreme example? I don't personally believe it would be wrong of a minister or church to highlight a need (especially if not obvious) ... and encourage the brethren to provide support.

Unfortunately ... not uncommon for churches ... religious leaders ... to use carnal methods ... psychology ... threats ... pressure ... guilt ... to boost their income ... all the while claiming that people who are giving to God will be blessed. There's too much abuse out there ... and we should be careful about it.

There's a good example (bad example) of religious abuse in:

Mark 12:41-44 (NKJV)

41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

42 **Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.**

43 **So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;**

44 **for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."**

The usual explanation is that Jesus is commending the widow ... she didn't have much ... but gave away it all anyway.

Usually ... the teaching to us is:

- even if you're poor ... give anyway (you'll still be broke but in some way Jesus will bless you)
- those of you who only gave \$100 ... or \$1,000 ... should feel ashamed ... you could have given a lot more. You didn't give "till it hurt!"

Often ... many very poor people give what they can ill afford ... partly because of this scriptural example.

But ... that was never God's intention ... to take away all of a poor person's meagre belongings. The very opposite of Jesus' teachings. GOD DIDN'T NEED THE WIDOW'S TWO MITES ... NEITHER DID JESUS.

God's word shows how He established a complete system in the Old Testament to protect and look after widows (and other vulnerable people). God's desire ... His system was ... to get support to the widows ... not from them.

This widow lady had been conned. Jesus knew that and He knew the original plan.

Exodus 22:21-24 (NKJV)

21 "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

22 "**You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.**

23 **If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;**

24 and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

The widow is vulnerable. No husband to protect her. Maybe children who may or may not be able to help her.

Orphans likewise. There was no social security in those days.

Deuteronomy 24:19-21 (NKJV)

19 **When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.**

20 **When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.**

21 **When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.**

Leave some for the widows. (Remember the story of Ruth and Naomi ... both widows).

I don't know if it's accurate to say that God has a "soft spot" for widows ... but He singled them out as vulnerable and needy who required extra help and support.

Isaiah 1:16-17 (NKJV)

16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.

Cease to do evil,

17 Learn to do good;

Seek justice,

Rebuke the oppressor;

Defend the fatherless,

Plead for the widow.

Isaiah 1:23 (NKJV)

23 Your princes are rebellious,
And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves bribes,

And follows after rewards.

**They do not defend the fatherless,
Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.**

Isaiah 10:1-2 (NKJV)

1 **“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees,**

Who write misfortune,
Which they have prescribed

2 **To rob the needy of justice,**

And to take what is right from the poor of My people,

That widows may be their prey,

And that they may rob the fatherless.

**(Voice) Such leaders intend to make helpless widows and orphans
their prey.**

**(NET) (they) deprive the oppressed among my people of justice,
so they can steal what widows own,
and loot what belongs to orphans.**

Many widows are vulnerable. In a church environment ... with a nice ... friendly minister preaching smooth things ... it's easy to feel safe and let your guard down.

Some ministers/churches exploit widows ... see them as easy prey. Nowadays ... they may own a house? Various assets? “You don't need these ... why not sell up and donate to God's work ... so that you can have an eternal blessing. Or ... make a will and bequeath it to the church”.

So ... even though a widow may not have much ... she ought to give away what she's got ... to the church.

But the entire Old Testament shows us God's system of getting support to the widows ... not from them.

So. What was Mark Chapter 12 all about?

Mark 12:41-42 (NKJV)

41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

That is not the start ... it's half way through the story.

Mark 12:38-40 (NKJV)

38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,

39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,

40 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

(TLB) 40 shamelessly cheat widows out of their homes

(Voice) 40 who spend widows' inheritances

This is happening in many churches. These guys looked good. Finest clothes. Recognised by others ... looked up to ... religious ... made long public prayers ... came across as faithful ... trustworthy servants of God. But the key criticism of Jesus: THEY DEVOUR WIDOWS' HOUSES!

These religious hypocrites despised God's word ... loved money ... even to taking advantage of vulnerable widows ... their homes ... their properties ... their money ... their assets.

Having warned the disciples about the attitude of these religious leaders ... Jesus sees an example right in front of Him. "Look guys!"

"Bless the lady's heart. She's only doing what her minister told her to do. She was an innocent dupe".

So Jesus wasn't primarily commending the widow ... so much as condemning any who would exploit or take advantage ... through their teaching ... of the poor and needy ... such as widows.

Matthew 23:13-14 (NKJV)

13 “**But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.**

14 **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses**, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore **you will receive greater condemnation.**

Some church leaders then ... and now ... are motivated by covetousness ... greed ... love of money. The LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL.

Jesus witnessed it among His own staff (Judas) ... He witnessed it in the religious leaders of His day ... and Apostles such as Peter and Paul warned us to be alert.

Even today ... churches can be found pressuring their members ... even the poor and the widows ... to “sacrifice” for the church ... often to support a comfortable lifestyle of ministers ... or a pet project. They’ll be condemned.