

Thinking about it, I find it interesting that on the back of a one dollar bill are the words, "In God We Trust". It's on all the bills in my wallet. It's on coins too. According to the United States Treasury, putting that phrase on our country's money dates back to 1861. The Civil War was going on and letters poured in requesting that the deity be recognized on the currency. Changing something like that literally takes an act of Congress and two years later the United States Mint designed and put that motto on all currency and coins.

What's interesting isn't that people during the Civil War were wanting some recognition of a deity or that they chose that motto. What's interesting is where they put it. On currency? On the money used for transactions and payments every day? On the very thing that in the minds of so many provides for success, achievement, comfort, and peace? They ended up putting "In God We Trust" on something that really becomes the thing people trust in. It's like the number one thing that distracts people from God and into the sins of selfishness and greed.

That was the problem for the people Amos was writing to in the first lesson. Amos was a prophet of God who hadn't wanted to be a prophet. He didn't choose that life, God appointed him to go and tell God's message. And it was a tough one. This prophet isn't so well known. His book is often skipped over. We don't read from it often in church. Not too many of you have book of Amos quotes on your refrigerator. Probably because Amos as a whole is 95% law. That means almost all of the book is harsh sounding judgment from God. Within that 95% is this lesson.

How is your stewardship?

**Selfish
Dishonest
Forgiven**

If you've listened to the news at all over the last fifty years, you've heard about the war on poverty. Unofficially it started in 1964 with President Johnson stating the goal, "*Our aim is not only to relieve the symptom of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it.*" I'm not interested in arguing how successful or unsuccessful this war on poverty has been. The people of Israel were also conducting a war on poverty, but their's was a war on those in poverty. "**Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land...**" God was calling out the people abusing the poor.

Business leaders and professionals, that's who Amos wrote specifically about. These merchants properly took time off for the Sabbath. They closed up shop for the festivals and religious celebrations. But their selfishness never closed down. Stores that were closed were stores not making money. And they made money really well. They squeezed it out of the poor. They conducted deceitful business. But while worship was happening they couldn't do that and it made them anxious. "**When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?**" Instead of engaging in worship and praise to God they tapped their feet and wondered when it would be over so they could reopen their stores.

In recently years, stores across the country have tested the consumer waters regarding Thanksgiving. Stores used to open on Friday during the day. Then it was pushed to early morning. Then it was pushed to midnight. Then even earlier to 6 or 7pm on Thanksgiving. This outraged some who say encroaching on a holiday is terrible. Others just eat their turkey early and shop later. Now I'm certainly not suggesting we take up a fight against store owners who open on Thanksgiving. We can't advocate as a church that stores close because the Bible says it's right. And before we accuse them of greed and selfishness, it might be better to turn those bright lights of God's Word onto ourselves. Then we'll see our own selfishness.

Wouldn't a better motto on our currency be "In this money I trust"? That might reflect the truer thoughts of some, if not most people. Even we can get tight fisted when it comes to our money. We figure we've gone through a great deal to earn it. We worked long hours, put in overtime, did work that wasn't always fun. We earned it and it's important for what we want to do. So we guard it. Christmas is coming soon. We have to be able to give presents, so we can't be generous now. We need the latest iPhone that just went on sale. We need it. Sure others need help, but they'll have to get a job, work hard themselves. We can't be burdened with caring for them too.

The merchants waited impatiently for worship to end. Their stores were guaranteed profits. It was built into their business practices which included, "**skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales.**" Everything was stacked in their favor and against the poor. If they sold a bushel of grain, the bushel they used was a little smaller than an actual bushel. If they sold the bushel for a certain amount, the price was inflated just slightly. If they weighed things on a scale, the scale was already weighted in their favor. They couldn't lose money. The poor never knew and the business owner always won.

Big corporations are portrayed all too easily as greedy, cheating the system for their own gain. People just assume businesses tend to operate dishonestly. How else could they make all that money off of hard working middle class families? Those who can least afford to lose seem to be set up to have more taken. Those who already have seem to always get more. But are we seeing dishonesty in someone else when we must evaluate our own hearts? Do we not try to find ways to hold on to money we've earned? Don't we want to manage our money for the max return, even if that means a little bend in our favor or an insider tip? Our stewardship of money can sometimes seem just as dishonest as those Israelite merchants. We might even have thoughts of getting out of worship, which can be seen as a waste of time that could be used for making money. Get back to overtime to put away money to use buying all those things we love spending our money on.

Talking money in church sometimes is seen as a big no-no. These verses hit us hard because they hit us where we hurt. Managing money selfishly or dishonestly can be the problem. Seeing money as something to trust in or find security in is sinful. Money itself isn't sinful, our stewardship of it is tainted with our sinful nature. How is my stewardship of my money? To listen to Amos, not good. **"The LORD has sworn by the Pride of Jacob, I will never forget anything they have done."** It's tough to hear these four verses because God is mad. He's mad at us for being selfish, greedy, and dishonest at times. And he won't soon forget that kind of wickedness. Dishonesty and selfish sinful ambition deserves punishment. Sinful actions we've committed deserve punishment. The Lord has every reason to hold on to our sins and swear that he won't ever forget them.

In the book of Amos the good news makes up only 5% of the book, and it isn't in these verses. But God wants you hearing the good news. He reveals himself in all of Scripture as a God who doesn't forget. The Lord, the God of free and faithful love, doesn't forget what he sent Jesus to do for you. Jesus was the exact opposite of these merchants. Jesus was the Savior we needed. He came without any selfishness at all. He completely was willing to serve others. Willing to give himself for you. Willing to sacrifice himself for you and the whole world. Jesus was completely honest. His dealings with others were always draped in honesty. He told people of their debt before God. He also told them of what he had come to do, pay the debt of sin. He gave God's love a face and substituted himself for you under God's punishment. All God's judgment for your sinful greed, selfishness, and dishonesty fell on Jesus. You have forgiveness. God forgets your sins. And he never forgets his promises. Forgiveness and a future in heaven. Promises of rescue in Christ.

And this good news translates into actions in your life. Knowing you're free in Christ you can manage your money so that it doesn't manage you. You can truly trust in God more than your money. You can use your money wisely. Give some back to God because he's been gracious to you and let you use it for his glory. You can share with others. You can start businesses, do transactions with others, and operate in society with your money. You can save it or spend it knowing you've been freed and forgiven in Christ.

You know that having "In God We Trust" on our money doesn't mean anything for people. It almost seems sad to have that motto staring up at people as they get caught in the trap of selfishness and dishonesty with money. They trust in money more than God. We are there too at times, selfish and dishonest, seeing our money more for what it can buy us and how we can keep it. I need, you need, everyone needs more than just "In God We Trust". God doesn't leave you wanting. His gracious Word reveals the true God and Christ. God reveals what Christ did and how he saved us. He gives us something to trust in. We trust in Jesus. In Christ we're forgiven so we can be good stewards of money.