

CHRISTIAN SERVICE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Department of Theology



TOPIC

**THE UNDERSTANDING OF WEALTH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CHRISTIANS
LIVES, REFLECTION ON MARK 10:17 - 23**

PROJECT WORK

(LONG ESSAY)

BY

JOSEPH BAIDOO

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DECLARATION

I Joseph Baidoo do hereby declare that this project report is the result of my own original research, except for sections for which references have been duly made, and to the best of my knowledge, no part it has been presented to this University College or may other institution for the award of a degree.

Signature:..... Date:.....

Joseph Baidoo

(Student)

Signature:..... Date:.....

Mr. John Kojo Ntsiful

(Supervisor)

Signature:..... Date:.....

Ebenezer Adu-Ampong (Rev.)

(Heard of Department of Theology)

DEDICATION

First of all I would like to dedicate this work to the Lord of host, who gave me wisdom to put down this educative work, and has sustained me to complete it through His Grace.

Secondly, I dedicate it to my supervisor Mr. John Kojo Ntsiful (A senior Lecturer Christian Service University College-Kumasi) with whom this work would not have been a reality.

I like to dedicate this work to Miss. Dorcas Adjei of Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi.

Last but not least, I cannot ignore “Brain Innovation Printing Press” particularly Sister Jacqueline Obeng, David Owusu and Reginald Boakye Yiadom.

I cherish you all and may God richly bless you.

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CHAPTER ONE

General Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

There are many understandings and views about wealth, but which ever understanding one has for wealth, determines how one values it, searches for it, handles it, and uses it. The term “wealth” originates in a less commonly recognised form, “weal”, an Anglo-Saxon word now meaning a general state of well-being. For an individual the word “wealth” signifies well-being resulting from outward rather than inward causes such as health or contentment¹.

Wealth is not innate evil but an opportunity for godly service. Though wealth is not the greatest value on earth, wealth can be a good thing. We should however not put our trust in it because it can be lost or stolen.

This is what Jesus, the Christ pointed out when he cautioned men to lay up treasure safe from the flux of human events. The view of the Old Testament (OT) and of the New Testament (NT) is that, wealth is a blessing from God. Abraham is a typical example of a wealthy God-fearing man.

Because God made the world and everything in it, wealth as a part of God's creation cannot be recognised as evil. In the Bible it is often depicted as a blessing from God, and as sign of his favour. But the faithfulness in the use of riches brings spiritual reward, for true wealth and true riches are the spiritual blessing which God gives, rather than his material blessing.

¹Baker, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Book House Company 1999),Page 1159

But we should be mindful that, possession of wealth however, brings with it the duty of generous liberality towards those in need and such is Christ's own example. Though he was rich, yet for the sake of human beings he became poor, so that by his poverty human beings might become rich. (2Corinthians 8:9)

Again the bible recognises that the possession of material wealth brings with it great dangers, for a example, there is the danger of failing to acknowledge that God is the source of the blessing, there is also related danger of trusting in riches. Another spiritual danger associated with riches is materialism that is making riches the centre of one's interest.

In the bible, among the many things more important than wealth the bible mentions the fear of the Lord, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, integrity, righteousness and peace.

We should not centre our minds on the fact that, wealth is the only sign of God's blessing. One may think that, once he or she is wealthy, we should consider him or her as source of power in the society, church, organisations etc. One may have wealth but may not have the fear of the Lord, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, integrity, righteousness, peace that the bible mentions as more important than wealth, but the one who does not have wealth may have them, but people may not see him or her as one who has been blessed by God, and most of the time society do not recognise them.

However, because this is a fallen world, wealth is also a partaker of our fallen. If it is used to exploit, dominate, or persecute, it becomes a great evil. Covetousness is equivalent to idolatry (Col 3:5) and love of money is the root of all evil

This is the reason why the researcher wants to write so that we would have clear understanding of wealth, because wealth is good but it could also become evil when one does not have clear understanding of it.

1.2 Issue at Stake

It has come to notice that, the understanding of today's Christians about wealth has shifted from the biblical perspective that emphasis the fact that, wealth is to glorify God and it is a blessing from God.

Also the uses of wealth which God is expecting from wealthy Christians of today is not seen, and giving to the poor and needy which is one of the purposes God gave wealth to humankind has also vanished, and some of them, it has become a deity (they serve it as God).

Some Christians misquote the bible and say that wealth is evil. Their point is that the rich man in Luke 19 went to hell because he was rich; but it is rather, because he committed the sin of neglecting the poor, refusing to use the riches God gave him to give to help the poor, and needy ones.

Again the rich are not cursed because they are rich, but when they neglect God, and spend their energies piling up riches and for treating cruelly the weak and poor.

This means that, it is not sin if somebody is rich but the person becomes an enemy of God or begins to hate God immediately he or she begins to love his or her wealth or possessions.

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary the word love means "a strong feeling of deep affection for somebody or something or a person, it can also mean a thing or an activity that you like very much".

So when somebody become a lover of wealth or riches it means that, the person will associate himself or herself to it more than God; The person will become the worshiper of wealth which is against the word of God. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. (Exodus 20:4-5b NIV).

Because today’s Christians lack this understanding it is very difficult to use their wealth to glorify God.

If today’s Christians would serve the Lord and do not have clear understanding of their wealth they might think they are worshipping God, but rather worshipping their wealth.

Scholars have not identified this as a problem; it is affecting the Church today.

The researcher wants to write about this in order to draw attention to this phenomenon so that the understanding of wealth to Christians will meet God’s purpose of entrusting wealth to mankind.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions seek to provide answers to the following;

What

1. What is wealth to you?
2. What is your assertion on wealthy people in your Church?
3. In what way do you think wealth or possession can prevent someone from putting his or her trust in the Lord?
4. What do you think is preventing some of the wealthy Christians today from making good use of their wealth?

5. What do you think those who have wealth in your Church can do to help the expansion of the Kingdom of God on this earth?
6. What do you think the Church can do to help those who have wealth to make very good use of it?

How

1. How do you see the wealthy people in your Church?
2. Do you think it can affect the growth of the Church?
3. How can the Church help those who have wealth to make very good use of it?
4. How do wealthy people in your church contribute to the Church Activities?

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The study aimed at establishing a deeper knowledge on the understanding of wealth and its implications on Christians lives: A reflection on Mark 10:17-23.

1. It specifically gave a detail explanation of wealth.
2. It also has provided some reasons why Christians must not put their trust in their wealth but in Jesus, the Christ.
3. Has provided some ways by which the Christians can change their attitude toward wealth or possessions.
4. And has come out with biblical reasons why Christians must use their wealth or possessions to help the marginalised in the Church and in the society.

1.5 Scope and Focus of the Study

The Scope of the work is centred on the biblical understanding of wealth and also looked critically into the rich young ruler and Jesus' account in Mark 10:17-23 and its implication on contemporary Christians lives.

1.6 Research Methodology

The researcher sourced information on both primary and secondary sources. The primary source derived from questionnaires and the secondary source derived from research works of others and other materials on wealth and possessions, published and unpublished books, journals, magazines, and newspapers etc.

1.6.1 Methods of data collection

The data collected from both primary and secondary source; the primary source was sought from questionnaire that was distributed out to obtain the information from needed people such as Reverend Ministers, Pastors, Church leaders, Wealthy people etc. Which made the work complete.

1.6.2 Sample/ Sampling Procedure/ Technique

The researcher employed simple Random sampling.

1.6.3 Data analysis

The researcher has interpreted and analysed the information obtained from the fieldwork by using qualitative approach because the researcher used people who can give quality and reliable information.

1.7 Literature Review

According to Kudadjie and Aboagye Mensah, it is not true that the rich man in Luke 19 went to hell because he was rich; but rather, it is because he committed the sin of neglecting the poor, refusing to use the riches, God gave him to give to the poor and needy ones.²

² Kudadjie and Aboagye Mensah book Christian Social Ethics (1992), page 92

Jong, From this corrupted world to Heaven above, said that, “those who are rich in their hearts cannot enter the kingdom of God. Such people are too filled with their own thoughts and merits that they have no room for the world of God to enter”.³

Who are those rich in their hearts? The lovers of possession or the worshipers of wealth and since God’s word cannot enter them; they naturally reject the gospel and are unable to go to Heaven. The point I am making here is that, wealth or possessions can take the position of God from your heart and you may think about yours own way of doing things instead of the word of God.

A wealthy man without the word of God is filled with greed and his greed for material possessions prevents his heart from being set on God.

They don’t want to place the kingdom of God in the first place; because they are self-satisfied and self complacent and are not interested in the washing away of their sins.

In Martin’s book Where the action is, “a bible commentary for Layman

“Riches are not evil per se. But they can easily become the object of trust.”⁴

“Christians cannot treat the poor of the world with justice unless they give away a large part of what they own”⁵

The giving away of possessions is only part of the giving away of part of any good thing which is preventing us from living the life God is offering.

One understanding that Christians must have is that giving out to the poor is one of the ways can keep us closer to God.

Many scholars like McKenna, Jerry Vines, and William Hendrickson in their interpretation of the account of the young rich ruler, stated, because of his money he

³Jong, From this corrupted world to Heaven above (2008), pages217-219

⁴ ` Martin, Where the action is: A bible commentary for Layman Mark (1977) page 88

⁵ John Hargreaves , A guide to Mark’s gospel (1999), Pg 180

thought he can buy eternal life but eternal life cannot be bought, neither through the effort of human beings, but eternal life comes through the grace and the works of Jesus Christ.⁶

In my view, this young rich ruler may have heard about Jesus as a good teacher as he saluted Jesus, that He (Jesus) can teach him right and simple way of acquiring long life so that he can enjoy himself with his wealth that is why when Jesus taught him different from what he was thinking, he turned his back on Jesus in grieve.

According to Baker, Job was a wealthy man before his ordeal and twice as wealthy afterword because God prospered him with cattle and livestock and blessed the work of his hands.

God in no way questioned the legitimately of their wealth. Although wealth is sometimes associated with violence and oppression, it is sometimes a gift from God representing a blessing on his people. Sometimes wealth can help us when there is trouble, although it cannot shield us from God's judgement. 'Wealth can tempt us to forget God and prevent us from enjoying things'. To Baker "God entrust his wealth to individuals and institutions in order to increase its value".⁷

So, as compassionate stewards of God's property we are fully responsible to him for the proper administration of his wealth. At the same time we are the legitimate owners during the period of our stewardship. Complete economic self-sufficiency for an individual or even a small community is difficult, if not impossible, because of the curse on the ground.

⁶ McKenna, Jerry Vines, and William Hendrickson. The Gospel according to Mark (2002), page 20

⁷ Baker, The Wealth and a Christian (Baker Book House Company 200) ,page 94-98

In the words of Baker, “This forces us to cooperate with other men of all types to increase our capita wealth”. He Said “This is a way in which our inter dependency as human beings is demonstrated”.⁸

We have to bear in mind that how we manage our cooperation with other people will determine to a large extent the value of our wealth.⁹

Nevertheless, wealth can be enjoyed for the prospect of family continuity; it offers the status it provides, and the opportunity for the exercise of power.

When Christians begin with God creating the Heaven and the earth and pronouncing it good, all the earth is full of the beauty, goodness, and love of a holy God.

Christians see the word of God, Spirit of God and wealth flowing together in oneness without antagonism. Through Christ all wealth is clean, and both spirit and wealth are to be fulfilled God’s purpose and prosperous life.

“In the biblical view the Spirit of God naturally flows through everything that belongs to Christians and as a blessing purely because He is (God). The Lord then blesses everything the child touches; Guided with purity, honesty, and with the burden of his fellow labourers on his heart, he works as into the Lord, realising that nothing is secular¹⁰.

Baker says “the view of God is active in wealth and present in the whole of creation removes the sense of guilt associated with the accumulation and use of wealth”¹¹

For the Christian human possession is not opposite to the life of the spirit but the very medium through which we grow to be fully human. It is in the use of the wealth that we

⁸ Baker, Wealth and a Christian (Baker Book House Company 200),76

⁹ Baker, Wealth and a Christian (Baker Book House Company 1999), page 49

¹⁰ Baker, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Baker Book House Company 1999),Page 1161

¹¹ Baker, Wealth and a Christian (Baker book House company 200),page 69

grow to be fully human. It's the uses of wealth that we learn to choose between the wrong passion of the flesh and pure passions of the spirit.

Baker quoted John Wesley's injunction to Christians, "Make as much as you can; Save as much as you can give as much as you can; The Christian view frees us in our pursuit of wealth and permits us to bring greater sense of well-being to the hungry as part of the task of bringing the kingdom of God to reality on earth".¹²

Money is a form of wealth which serves as a temporary medium of purchasing power (General perception of money), it is accepted in payment of debts and in exchange for goods and services because people know others will accept it in like circumstances.

Gold is the highest earthly standard by which we can compare God's judgements. Even the New Jerusalem is to be constructed with gold. So from Eden to the New Jerusalem gold is a valuable form of wealth.

Despite its special characteristics among forms of wealth, money is still a marketable good and is not equally useful or valuable in every possible situation. Neither gold nor any other form of wealth has absolute value but is subject to the law of God.

Covetousness or the desire to be rich is an evil against which the scripture frequently warns or against. The love of money is described as the root of all kinds of evil. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

1.8 Significance of the Study

When this research work is completed successfully, it would help Christians to understand the reasons why God has entrusted wealth or possession to them, and also the work will serve as a guide for wealthy men and women to know how to use their wealth or spend it.

¹² Baker, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Baker book House company 1999),1160

This research work will come out with the real understanding of wealth in biblical perspective.

Another important benefit this work has provided is that, it has brought out the dangers of misusing wealth, and how wealth can become an impediment for Christians to enter into the Kingdom of God, last but not least that we should not be lovers of wealth and possessions.

1.9 Organization of Chapters

The study has been organized in five chapters.

Chapter one talks about the overview of the whole study with general introduction and objectives of the study, research methodology and scope and content of the study and what other people have said about the topic which are relevant to the study and other books and journals that are relevant to the study.

Chapter two touches on the historical background to wealth, poverty and Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler.

Chapter three focuses on the biblical interpretation of wealth and possession, the dangers of riches, in the account of the rich young ruler and Jesus' conversation and the right uses of wealth and possession in Mark 10:1 7-23.

Chapter four is where the researcher has analyzed the data collected to answer the questions for this study.

Chapter five contains the summary, conclusion and recommendations

CHAPTER TWO

The Historical background to wealth, poverty and Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we dealt with the general introduction of the topic, and what people have said about wealth, in this chapter we will be touching on, the Jewish views of poverty, wealth, and Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler

2.1 Jewish views of poverty and wealth

Over the course of Jewish history, different attitudes have been held towards poverty and wealth. Unlike Christianity, in which some strands have viewed poverty as virtuous and desirable, Jews have generally viewed poverty negatively.

In general, Jewish texts have portrayed poverty as an unjustifiable burden. In contrast to the consistently negative view of poverty, Kravitz and Olitzky describe a rapidly changing attitude towards acceptance of wealth as desirable as the Hebrews transitioned from being nomadic shepherds to farmers and ultimately to city dwellers.¹³

In Kol ben Levi, Jacob Jill, Greer Simon writes, "There are two trials before the individual: the test of wealth and the test of poverty... Both are difficult... but the test of wealth is greater than (the test of) poverty"¹⁴

Jacob Jill, Greer Simon quoted Cosimo Perrotta "servile and hired work was not scorned by the Jews of the Old Testament. Instead, such work was protected by biblical commandments to pay workers on time and not to cheat them"¹⁵.

¹³ Kravitz Leonands, Olitzky Kerry, and M Mishiel: A modern commentary on Proverbs .(2008),p.104

¹⁴Kol ben Levi, Jacob Jill, and Greer Simon, there shall be no needy; pursuing social through Jewish law and traditions, Jewish lights published Justice through Jewish Law and Tradition (Jewish Lights publishing 2010) p.142.

Though, they hired non-wealthy men to work for them, not to punish the poor among them but in order to serve the non-wealthy men by paying wages after they have worked for them.

According to Joseph Lifshitz, quoted by Jacob Jill, Greer Simon "Jewish tradition insists that man can, and should, have a powerful impact on the material world."¹⁶

Simon asserts that material wealth is highly valued in the Old Testament (Tanakh); the Hebrew seek it and God promises to bless them with it if they will follow his commandments¹⁷

Joseph Francis Kelly writes that biblical writers portray God as enabling men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Solomon to achieve wealth and that this wealth was considered a clear sign of divine favor. We can see from these writers that, the Old Testament also insisted the rich aid the poor. Prophets such as Amos castigated the rich for oppressing the poor and crushing the needy.¹⁸

In summary, the Old Testament saw wealth as something good but warned the wealthy not to use their position to harm those with less. The rich had an obligation to alleviate the sufferings of the poor

2.2 Jesus' Encounter with Rich Young Ruler

The rich young ruler confidently came to Jesus to seek how he could enter into the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus proved to him that the kingdom is not for those secure in their riches.

¹⁵ Cosimo Perrotta quoted by Jacob Jill, Greer Simon, there shall be no needy; pursuing social through Jewish law and traditions, (Jewish lights published 2010) page 142.

¹⁶ Lifshitz Joseph Isaac, Markets, Morals and Religion (Transaction publishers2008),p.123.

¹⁷ Eisenberg Ronald LWhat the Rabbis said: 250 (Topics From the Talmud ABC-CLIO 2010),p.142

¹⁸ Joseph Francis Kelly the biblical uses of wealth (Cambridge, Harvard University press 2010), page 89

In Mark 10:17, a rich young man came running – an unusual feature, since few people ran under the hot Palestinian sun – and wanted a quick answer to a profound question.

“Good Teacher”, he asked “what must I do to inherit eternal life”? (Mk 10:17, NIV). In Jesus’ reply, “why do you call me good”? “Jesus’ question does not mean that He was trying to deny that title, but to sober the questioner”.¹⁹

The man ran up with a flattering remark to gain Jesus’ approval. Jesus asks him to think about his language. Does he really know what “goodness” is? Only one Person is Perfect good and that person is God.

So why do you call me good? Jesus answered “No one is good – except God alone”.(Mark 10:18) This response is a frequent source of puzzlement, but given Jesus’ servant posture and the fact that he has sought to veil his messianic identity, it is perhaps not as puzzling as often supposed. It is not essentially different from the testimony of John 5:19, that “the son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the father doing”. It is important to recall that in Judaism only God is characteristically called “good”.

Rabbis welcomed any number of titles (e.g. Mk 12:38), but only rarely was a rabbi addressed as “good teacher”. For fear of blasphemy against God, who alone is good²⁰. Similarly, the response of Jesus in Mk 10: 18 direct the man unambiguously to God.

The “me” in the rhetorical question is emphatically thrust to the front of the sentence, meaning “Why do you call me good”? Likewise, the pronouncement that “No one is

¹⁹Eisenberg Ronald L What the Rabbis said: 250 (Topics From the Talmud ABC-CLIO.2010) p.142

²⁰ James R. Edwards; The Gospel according to Mark(1987), Mk. 10:17 page 20

good – except God alone” could also read “except the one God”, expressly directing the man to Israel’s one true God (cf. Deut. 6:4).

In addition, Jesus gives the man a digest of the ethical commandments in the Decalogue in Mk 10:19, (cf. Exodus. 20:12-16; Deut 5: 16:20). To the prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and dishonouring of parents, Jesus commands the man not to defraud the poor.²¹

This commandment is not found in the Ten Commandments but may have been added because of its relevance to the rich man. Since wealth is often gained at the expense of the poor.²²

The expressed emphasis on both God’s goodness and commandments in Jesus’ response to the man suggests that despite his moral zeal (or perhaps because of it) something is lacking in his relationship with God, this man still lacks something before God, even if he keeps all the commandments.

Jesus’ unexpected counter question intends to move the man beyond confidence in his moral rectitude to the ultimate purpose of his life, which is to know God.

In Mk 10:20, the word for “observed” is “phulasso” this word was used in classical Greek as a military term meaning “to guard, watch”. It was used of sentinels keeping guard. As used here in connection with the commandments, it refers not only to the act of obeying them, but to that solitude for their preciousness and honour, that leads one to carefully guard them from being broken. It means, “To take care not to violate”.

²¹Contra W. D. Mchardy The commandment “do not defraud” (Mark 10:19)

²² Contra W. D. Mchardy, a Reference to the Old Testament”. 107 (1995-96), Mark 10:19

The young man is relieved by the Lord's answer. If the eternal inheritance could be obtained on so simple a condition as the keeping of the Decalogue (the Law), it was already his daily duties he has been performing.

But the deeper meaning and larger requirements of the law were yet hidden from him because in his reply to Jesus he said Teacher, these things, all of them; I have carefully obeyed from my boyhood".

Mk 10:21 "and Jesus beholding him He loved the man" (the rich young ruler)

The Greek word "emblepō" which is translated "beholding" means "to fix the eyes for a moment on an object," It speaks of a characteristically searching gaze turned on an individual.

The Greek word "Agapaō" which is translated love means 'a love called out of one's heart by the preciousness of the object loved'. It is used in the New Testament of God's love, and of the love that God is, according to Wuest's Word studies translation on Gospel of Mark "The tense is ingressive aorist, speaking of entrance into a new condition"²³.

Jesus fell in love with this young man but Jesus loves not virtues only, but seeds of virtues also. Matthew includes in the young man's answer to Jesus, the words, "what do I still lack yet"? (Matthew 19:20b)

This young ruler thought once he has observed all the law that was given to Moses by God he has every opportunity to enter into the kingdom of God. Because if he has wealth and again has not deviated from the law as a Jew, it means he qualified; the ruler did not know that his wealth is a talent and it must be used and that will be a key for him to go to

²³ Wuest's Word studies translation on the Gospel of Mark

the kingdom of God. In the Expositors word studies for the Greek Testament translation, “The man is conscious of his defect, an important point in his spiritual condition”.²⁴

Mark 10:21b, the sale and distribution of his property were the necessary preparations in his case for the complete discipleship which admits to the divine kingdom. The words are not a general counsel of perfection, but a test of obedience and faith which our Lord saw to be necessary in this particular instance.

The word “follow” in verse 21c of Mark chapter 10 is the Greek word “akoloutheō” “to follow one another, to take the same road that another takes”. Jesus took His stand on a road of self – abnegation, (thus He denied His position as a Son of God), and dedicated Himself as a sacrifice, of service to others. So in order for Jesus to have given this young ruler eternal life, the only thing this young man needed to do is was denying himself as a wealthy man and have personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But before this is done obedience would have been the first and the most important step that, this man needs to take, in order to become a disciple of Jesus he has to become a learner of Jesus Christ.

Taking the same way of Jesus would have resulted in a significant improvement of himself in his receiving salvation in answer to his faith in the Lord Jesus as Saviour. But the only thing which was keeping him from taking this step was his love of wealth.

Swete Word studies for the Greek New Testament translation reads; “And Jesus, having fixed His searching gaze upon him, fell in love with him, and said to him, one thing you are lacking; go, whatever you have, sell at once and give at once to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, make a beginning of following with Me on the same road that I am taking and continue to do so”²⁵ (Mark 10:21).

²⁴ Word studies for the Greek Testament translation (1987)page105

²⁵ Swete Word studies for the Greek New Testament translation(1987) page 102

Swete says “As he heard the sentence, his brow clouded over, the light hearted optimism of his mood broke down”.²⁶

When this young ruler thought of the wealth he has acquired; and to give them away and begin his whole life anew by following Jesus was not easy for him.

This is because the Jewish people have an idea that anyone who live in poverty has been cursed by God and those who have wealth have been blessed by the Lord, so to go and sell out his “blessings “and give them to the “one cursed” (the poor people) from his understanding of wealth was not convincing to him. To him if he sold his property and gives it to the poor, he would count him among those who have been cursed, and this thought made him sad.

Mk 10:22 the verb “was sad” in Greek is *stugnasō*, which is translated “to be sad, sorrowful”.

The word is used of the saddening of either the face of nature or the human face, of the dark, stormy night, of the sombre, glooms.

The sadness of which this word speaks is usually the result of disappointment and grief, and that is the case here. The word paints forcibly the gloom which clouded his face.

According to Swete, “The answer did not exasperate, but it gave him pain which was visible on his countenance”.²⁷

Thus, though he made a good decision, he could not achieve it because his riches were indeed as thorns which threatened to choke the seed of the word as Jesus said in Mark 4:7, 19.

²⁶Swete Word studies for the Greek New Testament translation(1987) page 100

²⁷ Swete An interpretation of Greek New Testament translation (1997)page 111

Mk10:23 Jesus looked round, When the man was gone, the Lord's eye swept round the circle of the Twelve, as He drew for them the lesson of the incident.

(Mk10:23b) "How hardly" is the translation of the Greek word *pōsduskolos*. *Pōs* is always used with an exclamation, and mean "how!"

"*Duskolōs*" means "with difficulty", this does not mean that wealthy people cannot go to heaven but the ability to stop loving their wealth and submit themselves for the teaching of Christ.

According to James, those who are poor will become rich in faith and inherit the kingdom, (James 2:5) so Jesus' statement does not mean the rich cannot enter into heaven, but those who have become lovers of wealth like this young ruler; because to leave their wealth and follow Jesus would be very difficult.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have dealt with The Jewish views of poverty and wealth, as well as Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. From this conversation between Jesus and the rich young ruler we learn that the love of wealth can easily become an object of worship instead of God. Again it is an obligation for wealthy people to help the poor in their societies.

CHAPTER THREE

The biblical interpretation of wealth and possession and the dangers of riches

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we spoke on the Jewish view of poverty and wealth and Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler.

In this chapter we are touching on, the biblical interpretation of wealth and possession, the dangers of riches, in the account of the rich young ruler and Jesus' conversation in Mark 10:17-23. We shall also look at the right uses of wealth and possession,

In the conversation between Jesus and the young rich ruler there are two verses which some Christians interpret wrongly to mean that, rich people are devilish, and sinners, and some of them have an idea that rich people will go to hell while the poor will go to heaven.

I would like to discuss these two verses and other biblical passages that have been misinterpreted by some Christians and have contributed to these wrong misconceptions and opinions concerning wealth and possessions.

3.1 The biblical interpretation of wealth and possession

In Mark 10:21, Jesus looked and loved him and said "one thing you lack" "Go and sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me" (NIV).

With reference to this verse some Christians think that because this young man was rich, he was a sinner that is why Jesus told him to sell out his possessions so that he can become clean and then he could follow Jesus; but this interpretation is wrong. The question we can ask ourselves is this: If wealth defiles the person who is rich then why

does God give wealth to His people? Jesus did not order the rich young ruler to sell his wealth so that he can be clean and sanctified but rather Jesus showed him what he must do to enter into the kingdom of God; that is using his wealth and possessions to help the poor and needy.

Again in verse 23 “Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God” with the parable in verse 25 “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (NIV)

Some Christians hold the view that, because of this statement, rich people could never go to heaven, but this is not biblical and it cannot be accepted. In the bible, people like Abraham and Job, were blessed by God. Abraham for example was described as a friend of God (cf. Genesis 18:17-18). If wealth or money is evil God would have asked him to give his possessions away.

If Christians would recognize that, God is their source of wealth and ask God what they should use it for; wealth cannot stop them from entering into the kingdom of heaven.

Some Christians also misquote I Timothy 6:10 as saying “Money is the root of all evil,” we should note that, what the bible says is, “For the love of money is the root of all evil” (RSV).

Though in the gospel of Luke and the book of James there is pronouncement of “Woes” on the rich and wealthy people, but these do not mean that wealthy people would not go to heaven (Luke 6: 24, James 5: 1-6).

According to the bible, riches in themselves are not bad, they are often seen as a gift from God and a sign of God’s blessing on those who obey His commands. *“Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord that delighteth greatly in His commandments, his seeds shall be mighty upon earth, the generation of the upright shall be blessed; and his righteousness endureth forever (Psalm 122:1-3 Olive Tree Bible).*

Other passages that teach that wealth and riches are a gift from God to those who love him are: Deuteronomy 8:11-18; Ecclesiastes 5:19; Hosea 2: 8 etc.

Psalm 24:1 “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord...” (Psalm 24:1 RSV). “All the animals in the forest are mine and the cattle on thousand of hills” (Psalm 50:10 RSV).

“All the silver and gold of the world is mine” (Haggai 2:8 RSV), just as God himself is good, so are the riches that belong to Him. See also Deuteronomy 8:11-18, Ecclesiastes 5:19, Hosea 2:8 etc.

With the above bible passages the rich and wealthy people are not cursed because they are rich, but whenever they neglect God, and spend all their energies piling up riches, and treat cruelly the weak and poor then it makes them love their wealth instead of God and His word.

3.2 The danger of riches in the account of the rich young ruler and Jesus’ conversation in Mark 10:17-23

This rich young ruler who came to Jesus whether he understood what eternal life meant or not, his purpose of coming to Jesus was to inherit eternal life and considering how the rich young man run to Jesus and his salutation to Jesus, one gets the impression that he was prepared to do whatever Jesus would tell him (cf. Mark 10: 17b). This means that, he knew Jesus could give him exactly what could solve his problem.

But very unfortunately, he became sad when Jesus asked him to “go and sell all your possessions and give it to the poor and will have treasures in heaven and follow me (Mark 10:21b). Why, because he loved his wealth so much that it was not easy for him to do what he was asked by Jesus. Initially when Jesus said you know the

commandments; “Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and your mother” (Mark 10: 19). The rich young man replied confidently that he had kept all the law, saying “Teacher all these things I have kept from my youth” he had the idea that once he has kept all these commandments he is qualified to inherit this eternal life he has requested; but unfortunately for him, Jesus said he was left with one thing. The young ruler has observed the entire commandments from his childhood, but the most important thing was that, in order to get chance into the kingdom of God he had to stop loving his wealth and possessions.

We love from the heart, without the heart one cannot love, anyone who loves wealth and possessions can never love God, may be the person can have the desire of loving Him (God) but once the love of wealth and possessions have taken place, it is impossible to follow what God is requiring from him or her.

Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37, instruct Christians to love God with all their heart, soul and mind because it is the greatest of the commandments. This is important because if anyone invites Christ to come into his or her life it is the heart that Christ will come and live, so if a person’s heart is filled with wealth and possessions that means there is no room for Christ in that heart. Such a heart would not, and cannot think about the kingdom of God in the first place, this is because he or she is self satisfied and self complacent, and such people do not have any expectations about the kingdom of God. After all, he is so rich in his heart that, he lacks nothing from God. Jesus asked the rich young ruler “sell everything you have and give it to the poor. You will then have treasure in Heaven”. (Mark 10:21b). This does not mean that you can attain eternal life

if you sell all your possessions and give them to the poor. But rather, your love of material possession can prevent your heart from being set on God. “Such people are too filled with their own merits that they have no room for the word of God to enter.”²⁸

Before one can obey the commandments of God, the love of God must come first, because this rich young ruler did not love Christ but rather material things he could not accept the direction of Christ which was leading him to what he has desired for. 1John 2:5 urges that we should not love the world or anything in the world, because if anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him” (1John 2:5 N.I.V).

Though this rich young ruler had observed all the commandments of God as he said but because he loved his wealth, the love of God could not show up when he was told to go and sell his possessions and give it to poor.

“It is possible to obey the details of the laws but still be disobedient in our general behaviour”²⁹

For example, we could be very precise and faithful about giving 10 percent of our money to God, but refuse to give one minute of our time in helping others and serving them (poor, needy) with our possessions that God has given as a talent.

Some Christians love their wealth even more than their lives.

Those who love material things know what the bible says about helping the marginalised in their societies, but because they love wealth and possessions more than their own self they find it difficult to care for the marginalised.

Jesus told the rich young ruler to keep the law if he wanted to inherit eternal life. Jesus said this because one must first realize that he is indeed a sinner if he or she wants to

²⁸ Paul C. Jong From this corrupted to Heaven above (1980) page 217.

²⁹ Paul C. Jong From this corrupted to Heaven above(1980) page 212

believe in the Lord as his saviour, and it is the law of God that teachers him or her. Again, Jesus wanted to see if this rich young ruler considers himself righteous, and thinking, “I have never killed anyone, never stolen anything, and never committed any adultery”.

But we should not forget that using our wealth and possessions to help weak and the poor in our society is another way of obeying God, and one cannot obey some of the commandments and leave the rest because Christians are to obey all the commandments of God.

3.3 The right use of wealth and possession

Mark 10:21b Jesus told the rich young ruler “Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me.”

This rich young ruler did not consider that Jesus the Christ was the real owner of his possessions; if he had considered Christ as the owner he would not have found it difficult to sell his possessions to become HIS (Jesus) disciple.

Jesus loved the rich young ruler that is why He told him to follow Him, in other words, Jesus wanted to show the rich young ruler the way he should use his wealth, and that way is to trust in the Lord rather than to trust in his riches.

In Luke 12:16 Jesus Christ told the story of the rich fool who amassed wealth and put his trust in his riches rather than in God. Those who pile up riches for themselves are regarded as fools by God.

“Riches are not to be amassed for their own sake. They are meant to be used in the service of God and of mankind”³⁰

³⁰ Kudadjie and Aboagye-Mensah, Christian Social Ethics (1992) page 98.

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) shows that no one has the right to live an expensive life while his neighbours live in poverty and suffering, without his doing anything about it.

We should not forget that God punishes those who use their wealth and riches selfishly. So our wealth and possessions should be spent according to the teachings of God.

Has one ever asked how does God expect me to spend my wealth and riches?

One most important thing that we should not forget when it comes to how a Christian should use his/her riches is that, the real owner of his wealth and possessions is God.

When people become rich they forget that, the source of their possessions is from God (Psalm 24:1 R.S.V).

The first thing that any rich man or woman must bear in mind is that I am not a real owner, but I am only a steward; a manager of God's riches. Therefore, he or she must use it in order to please God.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded and from the one who has been entrusted much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48 N.I.V)

Our riches and wealth are to be used in one of these ways.

- Give to the contribution of God's work
- Give to the poor and needy
- Taking care of yourself, family and saving for your future.

Apart from these, any other ways of using your riches and wealth can be considered as waste. So many Christians are spending their riches in non-biblical ways and we should avoid such habit.

There are many good examples in the bible of people who gave for God's work. Let first start from the people of Israel , as one example, the people of Israel brought more gifts than were needed to build the sacred tent for the worship of God, so much so that Moses had to issue a command to stop further donations (Exodus. 36:2-7). With this attitude God made a promise to them (Exodus 30:26). Because nowadays Christians are not willing to support God's work they always find themselves wanting when it comes to the protection of their wealth and possessions.

We can also talk about King David who gave materials from his state treasury as king and also from his personal property, for the building of the temple (1 Chronicle 29:3).

In the New Testament we read of several women who gave money to support the work of Jesus (Luke 8:3). Mary, John Mark's mother gave her house to be used for the first Lord's supper and as a church for the first Christian community even in times of persecution (Acts 12:12)

Matthew 27:57-60 gives the accounts of Joseph of Arimathea who gave up his own newly made tomb for the burial of the body of Jesus.

God is expecting today's Christians to give for the building up of the kingdom of God, and it is great opportunity, privilege, a blessing and a joy, we should not let this pass us by.

In the bible God has a special interest in the poor and needy. He blesses those who help the poor; it was hard in those days to neglect the poor.

The rich young ruler who runs to Jesus asking what he can do to inherit the eternal life missed the opportunity to get into God's kingdom because he was not prepared to put

his riches at the disposal of the church and the society from which the poor, needy, windows were looked after.

Acts 4:32-37, tells what the early Apostles were doing (sharing their possessions and caring for the widows etc.)

It is also very important to save for our future needs, such as old age, time of illness, and death.

3.4 Conclusion

If Christians would recognize that, God is their source of wealth and ask God what they should use it for; wealth cannot stop them from entering into the kingdom of heaven.

Wealth and possessions are not evil as some Christians think, but it can simple be an object of worship which is idolatry.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data analysis of the study

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed the biblical interpretation of wealth and possession, the dangers of riches in the account of the rich young ruler and Jesus' conversation in Mark 10:17-23, the right uses of wealth and possession.

In this chapter we shall be discussing the understanding of wealth and possessions particularly of wealthy Christians at Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi (Kumasi Ashanti), Five (5) Ministers from different denominations view about wealthy people in their churches

4.1 How wealthy people at Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi (Kumasi Ashanti) understand their wealth?

The population of Fifty (50) wealthy people in the Ebenezer Methodist Church at Edwenasi. Thirty (30) out of them are of the view that, through their hard work they have acquired their wealth. They believe that, though it is God who gives, but without their hard work they wouldn't have had them.

Ten (10) out of the fifty are of the view that, it is God who has given them their wealth because they are good Christians.

The last ten (10) are of the view that it is just a blessing of the Lord, not by their effort.

4.2 How wealthy people at Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi's use their wealth and possessions

4.2.1 Category one: In every month thirty (30) out of fifty (50) wealthy people in the Church give seven percent (7%) in support of God's work, the minimum payment of tithe they make is eight percent (8%) every month.

They reluctantly give one percent (1%) out of their income every month in support of needy and poor people.

They spend sixty percent (60%) on themselves and family and save twenty four percent (24%) of their income at bank every month.

4.2.2 Category two: Fifteen (15) out of the fifty wealthy people give eight percent (8%) in support of God's work, the minimum payment of tithe is nine percent (9%) every month none of them gives in support of poor people either outside or in the Church.

They also spend seventy percent (58%) of their income on themselves and family and save twenty two (25%) percents in every month.

4.2.3 Category three: Five out of fifty wealthy people also give twenty percent (20%) in support of God's work and ten percent (10%) tithe paid in every month, five percent (5%) in support of poor people, and forty percent (40%) on themselves and family and they save twenty five percent (25%) at bank every month.

In total for these three categories of wealthy people at Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi, at the end of every month twenty five percent (25%) of their amount is given in support of God's work, twenty seven percent as their tithe (27%), six percent (6%) to

help poor and needy. They spend one hundred and fifty eight percent (158%) on themselves and families and save seventy one percent (74%) at bank every month.

4.3 Ministers view on how wealthy people can affect the growth of the Church

Out of five (5) ministers interviewed, three (3) of them are of the view that, seventy (70%) percent of church growth depends on wealthy people when it comes to the growth of the church, apart from the Holy Spirit who does the greater part of the work.

4.3.1 Wealthy people can help increase the membership the Church: Their presence encourage others to come to Church. For example a person who has heard about Mr. Kwame Despite would wish to worship at where he worships with the idea that he will give in support of the poor people in the Church and he or she would one day enjoy that particular donation.

4.3.2 Wealthy people can also help in propagating the Gospel: Because the Church cannot have enough funds to propagate the Gospel, if the wealthy people are not willing to support the missionary work it will stand still. The Church needs monetary support and other material things to reach out of people who have not come to know Christ.

The Church needs support from the wealthy people in the Church because this is one of the reasons God has given them His wealth. They are therefore stewards.

In Jesus' ministry he gave one example which tells us that wealthy people are just stewards and not the owners.

"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover. Where do you want us to prepare for it? They asked. He replied,

As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, the teacher asks where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there". (Luke 22:7-12 N.I.V)

It is clear that one of the reasons why God made this man wealthy is to support Jesus' ministry work. "Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, the teacher asks where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples"? This gives us clear understanding that, the man was just a steward and the real owner of his possession is God.

Very Rev. Godson Amankwah Amponsah (Superintendent minister Methodist Church Ghana Kwadaso Circuit) is of the view that, it is not accidental that God has created such people in our churches, and societies but it is His intention to create them in order to serve as a catalyst to propagate the Gospel and the growth of the Church.

If wealthy people refuse to give in support of God's work it means they are refusing to perform their duties as God's creatures.³¹

4. 3.3 Two ministers (2) out five are of the view that, a Church without wealthy people suffers in its financial affairs, and it always affects the growth of the Church.

One example was that, there was a wealthy man in Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi in the year 2004 which was the time the Church was started his name is Dr. Asare (he has been awarded on two occasions as the National best Farmer) helped the Church to build their Temple in just six months. The minister Very .Rev. Aboagye Permpeh the then minister in charge, (now the minister at Freeman society in Kwadaso circuit) described Dr. Asare as a catalyst for the growth of the church at that time. Within one (1) year church membership grew from twenty members to eighty.³²

³¹ Very Rev. Godson Amankwah Amponsah (Superintendent minister Kwadaso Circuit) 15th May, 2015

³² Very Rev. Aboagye Permpeh (Minister in charge Freeman Methodist Society Kwadaso Circuit), 10th May, 2015.

4.4 Minister's view on why some wealthy people don't use their wealth in support of God's work

Two ministers out of five interviewed are of the view that, some wealthy people don't see the uses of what they give and some time the church misuses their donations.

Again, some of the wealthy people have become addicted to their possession or have become the lovers of their possession and they view their wealth as not the provision of God and for this reason they don't see the need to give in support of either God's work or the marginalized.

Another point is, when one considers his or her possessions more important than God, especially when he or she becomes enslaved or captive to his or her wealth and possessions. It creates very poor relationship with the possessor and God, such people find it difficult to give because he or she will always be thinking of receiving to multiply what he has and not thinking of giving out. Such people are of the view that, they are capable of doing everything without God's help.

Furthermore, the way the person acquired his or her wealth has a big influence on whether to give or not. If the person acquired his or her wealth wrongly it creates a big problem when it comes to uses of it. For example a young man who has gained his wealth through arm robbery might find it difficult to give because people will ask for the source of his wealth.

Last but not least, if the person is not taught biblically on how to use wealth and possessions giving will become a problem.

4.5 Conclusion

The above discussion shows the understanding of wealth and possessions particularly of wealthy Christians at Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi, and the Ministers view on how wealthy people can affect the growth of the Church. It also points out the impact it would have on the growth of the church if care is not taken.

CHAPTER FIVE

General Conclusion of the study

5.1 Summary of the Study

The study examined the understanding of wealth and its implications on Christians' lives: It was divided into five (5) chapters with some subdivisions where necessary.

The work considered the general introduction which focused on the background to the study, statement of problem, aims and objectives of the study, Scope and Focus of the Study, Significance of the study and research methodology. Also the views of some scholars which have a bearing on the study were considered. These views were examined under subheadings such as Jewish views of poverty and wealth which talk about how the Old Testament people consider poverty and wealth. The study dealt in details Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler and it also gave out the biblical interpretation of wealth and possessions, also the danger of riches in the account of the young rich ruler and Jesus' conversation in Mark 10:17-23.

The work further examined some important topic which was necessary to touch on such as the right uses of the wealth and possessions.

Furthermore, the study evaluated how wealthy people at Ebenezer Methodist Church understand their wealth, and the uses of their wealth and possessions and it also took consideration of the minister's view on how wealthy people affect the growth of the Church, and the reasons why some wealthy people don't want to give.

5.2 Issues that came out during the Research

. During the research it came out that, Ebenezer Methodist Church Edwenasi was built within six months (6) and the members grew from twenty (20) to eighty (80) within one

year (1). Again it came out during the research that out of fifty (50) wealthy people of Ebenezer Methodist church forty five (45) out of the fifty have not been able to give ten percent (10%) as their tithe every month; five percent (5%) out the fifty have been able to give ten percent (10%) as their tithe every month.

It also came out during the research that, at the end of every month they give twenty five percent (25%) in support of God's work, twenty seven percent as their tithe (27%), six percent (6%) to help poor and needy. They spend one hundred and fifty eight percent (158%) on themselves and families and save seventy four percent (74%) at bank every month.

5.3 Conclusion

The study set out to examine the understanding of wealth and its implications on Christians' lives and has established that, the understanding of wealth of today's Christians are far away from the purpose that God gave wealth to mankind and because of this, it is affecting the growth of the church and the expansion of the kingdom of God. It was also established that, because of lack of biblical understanding of wealth and possession so many Christians have become reluctant in giving and they have become lovers of their business, they cannot obey the word of God and follow His principles and directions.

With these facts, some wealthy people are worshipping their wealth and possessions instead of God. Because they love their wealth more than God and His word, and it has become an impediment for them to go into the kingdom of God. It can be concluded and can be inferred from the survey that, until the wealthy Christians of today understand the

reasons why God has given them wealth and possessions it will be very difficult for them to use it according to the will of God, and it will affect their way to the kingdom of God.

5.4 Recommendations

Even though some of today's wealthy Christians lack biblical understanding of wealth and possession, others are doing their best in their societies and churches but not to the biblical expectation.

These recommendations have been carefully selected in line with the outcome of this research.

A. The researcher wishes to propose that periodic training sessions and seminars should be organized for wealthy Christians to sensitize and also educate them on biblical uses of wealth and possessions.

B. Similarly, the researcher wishes to recommend that proper teaching concerning the reasons why God gave wealth to man should be taught in our church bible study meetings and at least once in a month during morning or evening worship service.

C. Again, the researcher wishes to suggest that ministers of the gospel must take the responsibility to teach the dangers of wrong uses of wealth and possessions and to shape their member's mindset from thinking that, they are the real owner of their wealth and possessions.

D. Last but not least of the recommendations the researcher wishers to put forward that periodic seminars and teachings should be organized by the various Christian Leaders and ministers to help and shape the attitude of wealthy Christians of today and also to keep them in check so that they do not deviate from biblical principles of using wealth and possessions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

ORAL INTERVIEWS

Very Rev. Godson Amankwah- Amponsah. (Superintendent Minister Methodist Church Ghana, Kwadaso Kumasi Circuit) 15th May, 2015.

Very Rev. Aboagy Prempeh (Methodist Minister Freeman Society-Kwadaso Circuit Kumasi) 10th May, 2015.

Rev. Castrol Opoku Asare (Apostolic Faith Mission International Prestea District) 10th June, 2015.

Very Rev. Grace Dodoo (Methodist Minister, Aldersgate Society Agric Junction-Kumasi) 17th May, 2015.

Rev. Ohene Forson (Methodist Minister Ahwia Society -Kumasi) 24th May, 2015.

Questions for Interview

Topic: The understanding of wealth and its implications on Christians lives reflection on Mark 10:17-23.

The research questions sought to provide answers to the following;

1. What is wealth to you?
2. What is your assertion on wealthy people in your Church?
3. In what way do you think wealth or possession can prevent someone from putting his or her trust in the Lord?
4. What do you think is preventing some of the wealthy Christians today from making good use of their wealth? (Giving out to the poor)

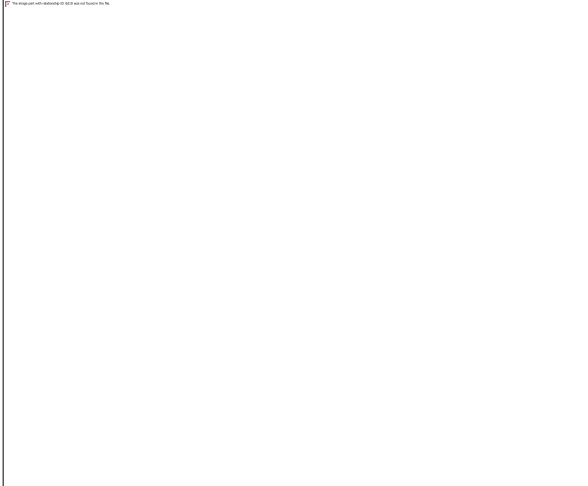
5. What do you think those who have wealth in your Church can do to help the expansion of the Kingdom of God on this earth?

How

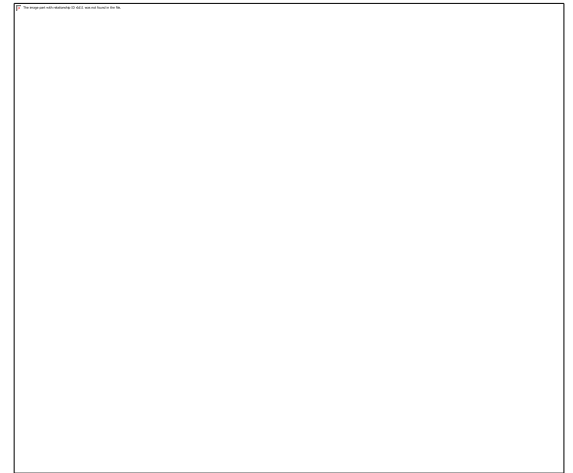
1. How do you see the wealthy people in your Church nowadays? Do you think it can affect the growth of the Church?
2. How can the Church help those who have wealth to make very good use of it?
3. How do wealthy people in your church contribute to the Church Activities?

Appendix B

Some relevant pictures



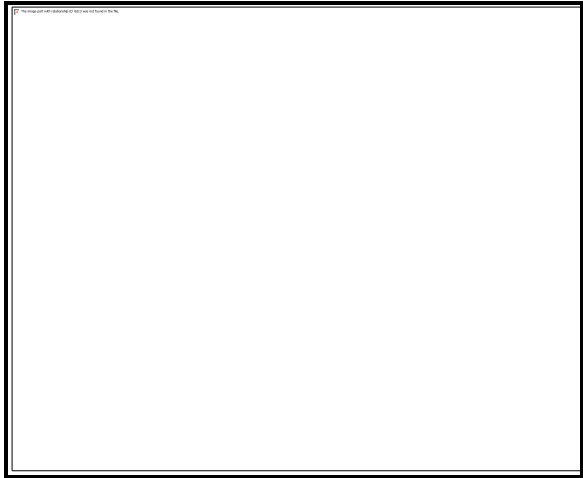
Researcher at Bethel Methodist Society,
Kwadaso - Kumasi



Researcher at Ebenezer Methodist
Church – Kwadaso Edwenase - Kumasi



Researcher with Very Rev. Godson
Amankwah Amponsah – Sup. Minister,
Kwadaso Circuit - Kumasi



Researcher at Apostolic Faith Mission
International - Prestea



Researcher with Rev. Castro Opoku
Asare, District Pastor, Apostolic Faith
Mission International - Preatea

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