

# ***Sabbath School Today***

## **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

### ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart***

#### **Lesson 3. God or Mammon?**

One marked feature in the teachings of Christ is the frequency and earnestness with which He rebuked the sin of covetousness, and pointed out the danger of worldly acquisitions and the inordinate love of gain. In the mansions of the rich, in the temple, and in the streets, He warned those who inquired after salvation: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

—Ellen G. White, *The Retirement Years*, p. 95

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A fundamental truth underlies all human existence. *No human being anywhere can claim rightful title to even one dollar as being his or hers.* This principle, which is at the heart of the 1888 message, is taught in a well-known verse: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish" (John 3:16). Obviously, this means that "the world" was doomed to "perish" unless God gave that Gift. It's a blunt, straightforward recognition that "the world" (everyone, not just believers) owes everything to that divine Gift. No one can believe the gospel without recognizing immediately that he now relates to money and material things in a new way.

Another text states the same principle even more clearly: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: and He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). The original language implies that a new compulsion now grips the heart, stronger than the old compulsion of selfishness.

This powerful truth lays an ax at the root of our love affair with money. If we believe that Christ "died for all," that is the same as saying that we died along with Him and that if He had *not* died for all, we would all be dead and would therefore have nothing.

Ellet J. Waggoner says, "It makes a vast difference whom one serves. The servant derives his importance from the dignity of the one served. [The apostle] Paul served the Lord Jesus Christ. Everybody may serve the same Master. 'Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey?' (Rom. 6:16). Even the ordinary house servant who yields to the Lord is the servant of the Lord, and not of man. ... 'No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye can not serve God and mammon' (Matt. 6:24). No man can serve the Lord and have other service besides that" (*Waggoner on Romans*, pp. 9, 10).

You may just now be wrestling with some temptation to put something you don't really need, or some person, as the object of your heart's devotion in place of your true Savior.

- Before you are tempted to sacrifice your soul, God shows you a glimpse of how wonderful Heaven is.
- Before you snatch at some earthly riches, He reveals to you the true wealth of His salvation "in Christ."
- Before you worship some earthly "idol," He shows you how precious is His eternal friendship.
- Before you seek fulfillment in some forbidden infatuation, He shows you the eternal preciousness of true love.
- Before you are dazzled by the "glory" of the lights of Times Square, He shows you a glimpse of the eternal glory of the cross of Jesus!

All this is in that blessed preamble to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2). How can we be so stupid as to let anything in spiritual "Egypt" confuse and bewilder us?

So, what's wrong and what's right about our use of money? The Ten Commandments, if appreciated and followed, would long ago have solved the world's painful economic inequities. But they haven't succeeded. Some spiritual virus continues to create vast gulfs between the "haves" and "have-nots."

Here's the Good News: When we understand and believe the inspired preamble, when we appreciate what the Son of God *has done* for us, modern idolatry loses its charm. It's not the gold or silver or wooden crosses in churches that captivate our souls; it's the understanding of the love of Christ that is revealed at *His* cross. In the light of that cross of Christ, our beloved "idol" turns into "ashes" even before we worship it! All the glitter that once attracted us has lost its sheen and we actually begin to "glory ["boast," *The Revised English Bible*] ... in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

God never asks us to give up something unless first of all He shows us how precious is the Gift He has *already* given us! Maybe we can say it this way: He never asks us to give up a stuffed doll until He shows us a precious live baby in our arms. He never asks us to give up a plastic toy car until first He shows us He has *already* given us a genuine new car.

Inheriting the wealth of the universe "in Christ" for all eternity—this is why you *cannot* place any other "gods" (mammon) before the Lord when you *believe the truth of the gospel*. It's not a works trip. *It's a faith trip*. Faith is like dynamite; it's powerful, it "works." It saves you *before* you sin! It saves you *from* sin!

Jesus' solution to our selfishness is not to shame us, but to share with all of us the good news that we can enjoy a dynamic, practical victory over the love of money.

One great little nugget of truth is in Galatians 5:16, 17. If you let the Holy Spirit hold you by the hand as you choose to walk with Him, you "cannot do the [evil] things" that otherwise your sinful nature would want you to do!

—From the writings of *Robert J. Wieland*, et al. as noted

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/2eRaR8pnOXg>

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