

## ***Sabbath School Today*** **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

### ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart*** **Lesson 8. The Impact of Tithing**

There's a fundamental truth that underlies all human existence: *No human being anywhere can claim rightful title to even one dollar as being his or hers.* This principle 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 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.

This idea parallels one of the essential elements of the 1888 message—the new covenant truth, which is God's one-way promise to write His law in our hearts, and to give us everlasting salvation as a free gift "in Christ." E. J. Waggoner caught the Bible idea: "The covenant and promise of God are one and the same. ... God's covenants with men can be nothing else than promises to them. ...

"After the Flood God made a 'covenant' with every beast of the earth, and with every fowl; but the beasts and the birds did not promise anything in return (Gen. 9:9-16). They simply received the favor at the hand of God. That is all we can do—receive. God promises us everything that we need, and more than we can ask, or think, as a gift. We give Him ourselves, that is, nothing. And He gives us Himself, that is, everything. That which makes all the trouble is that even when men are willing to recognize the Lord at all they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be an equal, 'mutual' affair—a transaction in which they can consider themselves on par with God." [1]

God has instituted a plan of managing money that perpetually reminds us that we do not own "our" assets. In the early days of our world, even before there were any Jews, He instituted the tithing system—returning one-tenth of all we get to Him.

The idea is not that God is poor and needs a dole from us. And it's not a taxation system. To return a tenth of our income to God acknowledges that "if One died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14). It also acknowledges that we are handling Someone else's property. The tenth we return to Him says that we see ourselves as thankful stewards of life itself. Tithe is a tangible hallelujah, a lifeline that helps connect our alienated souls to reality, a reminder of our tenuous grasp on life and on all we have.

The principle of giving is the antithesis of getting. Everyone is born with the spirit of getting; no baby ever cries because another one is hungry. The "cheerful giver" whom God loves is not that way by nature. No one has any natural-born righteousness. The "cheerful giver" is a selfish person (we all are by nature) who has been renewed by a heart appreciation of the "unspeakable gift" of God's grace in Christ. His cheerful giving is the fruit of a faith that works by love (see 2 Cor. 9:15; Gal. 5:6).

Although God so loved the whole world that he gave His Son for it, those who appreciate the Gift are stockholders in His grand enterprise of telling the world the good news. All who believe are members of His family, with a vested interest in the plan of salvation. The tithes and offerings that are acceptable to God are those that are given as freely as He gave His offering in our behalf. God has directed that they be used in His worldwide program of proclaiming the good news: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. ... Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" (Mal. 3:8-10).

The "storehouse," or God's "house," symbolizes His temple or organization on earth—the church. We don't *pay* tithes to God, nor *give* them; we *return* them to Him. They are His. He does not keep a cent for Himself, but uses all of it in support of His world network of agencies proclaiming the pure gospel—His church on earth.

Does God intend for even poor people to return to Him a tenth of their meager income? The answer is that *everyone* is invited to share in the blessing of being shareholders in God's enterprise. Never in the history of the world has anyone suffered because of returning the tithe to the Lord. He has made Himself personally responsible to fulfill an ironclad promise: "Prove Me now herewith [in tithe-paying], saith the Lord of hosts, If I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes" (Mal. 3:10, 11).

The tyranny of materialism is cruel bondage, a constant oppression of spirit. It is the pressure of keeping up with the neighbors or the relatives, excessive concern for clothes, houses, furniture, cars, vacations, anything to bolster our sagging self-esteem. In loving concern for our happiness, the Lord pleads with us, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15, *New International Version*).

Could Jesus have been speaking especially to us today? Yes, most surely. Never in world history has any people had more “good things laid up” than we have. Jesus’ point is that these material baubles are neither true wealth nor permanent. “The pagan world runs after all such things” (vs. 30). But God has already given us wealth infinitely better! “Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ... Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near. ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (vss. 32-34).

—From the writings of *Robert J. Wieland*

**Endnote:**

[1] Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, p. 71, CFI ed. (2016).

**Notes:**

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

[https://youtu.be/BHGwvo\\_7uls](https://youtu.be/BHGwvo_7uls)

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