

## STEWARDS OF POSSESSIONS

"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." Leviticus 27:30.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, 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." Malachi 3:10.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Matthew 23:23.

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." I Corinthians 16:2.

God has never worked without a plan. He had a plan for making this world. He had a plan for the making of man. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). God had a plan for the human race. When people have conformed to His plan they have experienced happiness. When they have moved contrary to His plan they experienced unhappiness. God has a plan of salvation. Agreed upon before the foundation of the world, it is stated in His Word: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). God has a plan for His churches. It is that they shall be composed of baptized believers joined together for the purpose of carrying out Christ's will in their respective communities and extending His kingdom to the ends of the earth. God has a plan for the church ordinances. They are two in number, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's broken body and shed blood. God has a plan for the officers of His churches. It is that they shall be pastor and deacons.

God also has a plan for financing His churches and the interests of His Kingdom. It is unthinkable that the God of order, who works according to a plan in every other realm, would leave this important matter of financing His churches to a haphazard method. His plan for this is clearly and definitely outlined in the Scriptures. God's plan for sustaining the work of each of His churches and proclaiming His gospel throughout the world is that every Christian shall tithe his income and then make offerings, placing both in the treasury of his church.

Money is a magic word in its power to possess people while it makes them think they possess it. Through the centuries the desire to earn money has been practically universal. Today there are many who have a desire for money without earning it. Consequently, they want others to give them money. An increasing number secure money by theft and robbery rather than by earning it.

Earning money is the duty of a Christian. He may earn money for a livelihood by manual labor, by intellectual pursuits, or by a spiritual ministry. God's Word says, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:14). It is God's will that His people be industrious, thrifty and successful. The Bible encourages people to earn money in conscious dependence upon and fellowship with God, but never in any manner which dishonors the Lord or injures one's fellowmen. It is commendable in any child of God to earn money according to Christian principles and for unselfish and Christian purposes.

Money is stored up personality. It represents a man's talents, powers of judgment and choice, degree of skill and faithfulness in service. It represents the earning power which God has given him and His providential blessing in permitting him to work. Money is the very essence of self. A person cannot separate his money from his life and deal with it on a different plane, or in an opposite way, from what he does with his life. Self and substance cannot be separated. Personality and possessions cannot be divorced. If one is a faithful steward of his personality, time, talents and influence, he will be faithful in the stewardship of his possessions.

God's Word says many things about money and possessions. It instructs us about acquiring money and using it. It tells us the attitude which we should have toward money. It warns us of its transitoriness and uncertainty, "Wilt thou get thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Proverbs 23:5). The Bible encourages us to earn money according to the golden rule and in a God-honoring manner, and then to use it rightly. Partnership with God requires that we earn money by righteous methods only.

A basic and fundamental teaching of the Bible is God's ownership of all and man's stewardship of all. Because of man's need of recognizing and acknowledging the fact that God owns all, the Heavenly Father instituted the practice of tithing. God requires the tithe as a token of His ownership of and authority over the earnings and possessions of men. Man possesses but God owns. If the wealth which man possesses is in lands, he must remember that God's Word says, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1); if in livestock, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10); if in cash, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8); if in earning capacity, "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). The tithe is a constant reminder and insignia of our relationship to God. He is the Creator; we are His creatures. God owns; we merely possess. In presenting our tithes to God, we acknowledge our dependence upon God; in withholding our tithes from God, we declare our independence from God. Personality and possessions cannot be divorced. A man can no more separate himself from his possessions than he can separate himself from his soul. That is why they are either a blessing or a curse to him.

Tithing is just one phase of God's eternal moral law. This law was obeyed long before the era of Moses, as was the law of the Sabbath. Of Abram it was recorded in Genesis 14:20, "And he gave him tithes of all." Genesis 28:22 tells us that Jacob said, "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Tithing was the spontaneous act of all of God's children whose hearts were filled with gratitude for His mercies.

Through Moses the Holy Spirit wrote, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy unto the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30). From the days of Moses until Christ came to earth the people practiced tithing. While our Lord was here in the flesh tithing was the common practice of all the Jews. Being reared in a godly Jewish home, where the Old Testament Scriptures were studied, believed, taught and obeyed, Christ practiced tithing when He earned money as a carpenter. Even His most bitter enemies, the scribes and Pharisees, were faithful tithers. On various occasions they accused Christ of breaking the Sabbath and violating other laws, but they never had a single opportunity to charge Him with failure to tithe. Christ never abolished tithing. He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Christ denounced the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees and rebuked them for omitting the weightier matters of the law, but He commended them for tithing. He said, "These ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23). Of course, anybody who knows anything about the meaning of words is aware of the fact that "ought" contains the idea of obligation.

God's Word plainly says, "All the tithe is the Lord's." Since "the tithe is the Lord's," it certainly is not man's. Therefore, nobody should ever say, "I give the tithe." Man cannot give that which is not his. "The tithe is the Lord's," but it is in our hands until it is placed in the Lord's treasury where it belongs. God says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10). Tithes are to be brought into God's storehouse, or church, as an expression of thanksgiving and an act of worship.

The Lord's tithes are to be brought cheerfully, lovingly and worshipfully into His house. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Corinthians 16:2). Thus, it is clear that this bringing of the tithes is to be periodic, personal, proportionate and purposeful. This is the Lord's plan. It has worked every time and in every place that it has ever been tried. When the Lord's method is followed deficits do not occur. Moreover, those who obey Him faithfully in this matter are happy, successful and useful Christians.

Failure to tithe is an act of rebellion and robbery. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Malachi

3:8-9). Robbery is taking that which belongs to another and appropriating it to one's own use. How wicked to rob one's fellowman who has done one a favor, but how much more so to rob God who loves one with an everlasting love!

Tithing is not necessarily an expression of liberality, but it is an evidence of honesty. Failure to tithe is proof of dishonesty because "The tithe is the Lord's." To take from the Lord that which is His is robbery. You may say, "But I can't see it that way." Possibly not, because you don't want to see it, but the Bible says, "The tithe is the Lord's." You may say, "But I have debts and obligations to others." But the Bible says, "The tithe is the Lord's." It is never right to rob God in order to pay others. Surely, you do not want to take and use that which is not yours! If you do, that is positive proof that you are not right with God.

Bringing the tithe into the Lord's storehouse every Sunday morning as an act of worship will save any Christian from the love of money, from covetousness and from robbery. To withhold the tithe from the treasury of the Lord is to keep in our possession that which does not belong to us and never did. The laws of the land call the appropriation to ourselves for our own use of that which belongs to another embezzlement. If you have been withholding that which belongs to God, do not continue that sinful habit.

Occasionally a church member, who is not honest enough to bring the Lord's tithe into the storehouse, will try to justify his sin of robbing God by saying, "Tithing is legalistic. Salvation is free. We are not under law but under grace." It is true that we cannot earn our salvation. But if one's gratitude to God, under grace, is less than that of the Jew who never knew Christ something is certainly wrong and lacking. Any Christian under grace has a larger obligation than any Jew under law. That kind of an argument reminds me of a story. An old bachelor bearded with a comely widow who was a good housekeeper and set an unusually appetizing table. He thought; he talked; he proposed; he was accepted; the knot was tied. Then he astonished his bride by saying: "Hitherto as a matter of law and obligation I have paid you ten dollars a week for board, but now as a matter of love I shall pay you one dollar a week and make special contributions from time to time as I feel like it." If a person living under law tithed, it is unthinkable that one whom Christ has saved and who is under grace should do less. Besides, it is a certainty that nobody ever became poorer as a result of tithing.

Bringing the Lord's tithe into the Lord's treasury is evidence of obedience, honesty, wisdom, faith, gratitude, love, loyalty, dedication and compassion.

All who withhold their tithes rob God. Are you living in a house on which you have made payments with the Lord's tithes? Are you using furniture and appliances in your home on which you have made payments with the Lord's tithes? Are you driving

a car on which you have made payments with the Lord's tithes? Are you wearing clothes and jewelry which have been paid for with the tithes which you have withheld from the Lord? If so, you will pay the penalty sooner or later, plus a high rate of interest. If you take that which is the Lord's and use it for yourself, for others or for any other purpose, you will lose more than you take from Him, as certainly as you live. If you rob God, He will see to it somewhere along the way that your expenses will be increased more than the amount you have taken from Him. You can't put anything over on God. You may think you can, but you will discover later that you failed to do so. Don't try it! "Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

If you will be faithful in bringing the Lord's tithes to His house on the Lord's day for the support of His work and the glory of His name, you will be abundantly blessed. He will open the windows of heaven and pour out upon you abundant blessings -- personal, material and spiritual. If you doubt this, put Him to the test and see for yourself.