

GOD'S FINANCIAL PLAN

God never works with^{out} a plan. He had a plan:-----

1. In the making of this world
The sun and moon and stars move in rhythmic order according to that plan.
2. For the making of man
He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Gen. 1:26
3. For the human family upon this earth.
When they move according to that plan the result is harmony, and happiness. When they move contrary to that plan the result is jangling, inharmony, hatreds and unhappiness.
4. Of worship
Is minutely set out in the tabernacle, regarding which He said, "See that ye do it according to the pattern."
5. Of salvation
Was known and definitely agreed upon before the foundation of the world. This plan is outlined in His Book. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31
6. For the organization of the church.
His plan was that the church should be a body of baptized believers joined together for the purpose of carrying out Christ's will in the community and extending His Kingdom to the ends of the earth.
7. For the ordinances of His church.
They are two in number, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's broken body and shed blood, and baptism symbolizes Christ's resurrection.
8. For the officers of the church
They are the pastor and deacons
9. For financing His church and Kingdom.
It is unthinkable that the God of order in every other realm would leave this important matter to a haphazard, hit-or-miss method. There is too much involved for it to be so left. The plan is clearly and definitely outlined in the Scriptures. At no time have I ever found where God has changed that plan. If we are to rightly understand His plan for financing His church and Kingdom we must consider the following:---

I. The Ownership Of God

The world and all that is within it belongs to God. He made it, and in His infinite thought for it, He has a destiny that must be accomplished. Back behind everything human and terrestrial there is the sovereign, supreme, absolute ownership of God. It is difficult for us, who glory in our independence, to recognize fully that both we and ours belong to God. If we are willing, however, to accept the plain teaching of God's word, there is no escape from such conclusions. God's title to the whole universe and everything that is in it clearly established in the Bible. And He has never for one moment relinquished His title.

1. His Ownership of Man

There are five great, outstanding facts which prove God's universal and specific ownership of us as Christian men and women. His claims of ownership are based primarily on:---

(1) Creation

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them". Gen. 1:27

"And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Gen. 2:7

God's creative act gave Him absolute possession over the product of His hand. It is the right of the maker over the thing made and this right is recognized by the laws of civilized man everywhere. "All things were made through Him (Jesus Christ); and without Him was not anything made that hath been made." John 1:3. Thus the New Testament approves the doctrine of God's creative ownership over man.

(2) Preservation

God has not only made the world and man, but man is kept by God's preserving power. Heb. 1:1-3 definitely states that all things, even man himself, are upheld and preserved by the hand of God's power. Since we are kept by the power of God, He claims us as His possession by right of His preserving and keeping power.

(3) Providential Care

Not only does God preserve us, but He furnishes us with all the elemental factors of life. His ownership of us is written in every prattle of good that goes into the stomach to sustain life, in every thread of clothes that warms and protects the body, in every bit of ozone that is breathed into the lungs, in every ray of light that guides the feet, and in every other earthly blessing with which He shows His love to us.

(4) Redemption

His right of ownership is found in a most significant way in the fact of our spiritual redemption. Paul says, "Ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price." I Cor. 6:19-20. And that price was the blood of Christ. The price of Christ's death on the cross paid by the Father's love intitles Him to a complete and absolute title and full possession of the mind, body, and soul of every child of God. The redemptive title to God's people is sealed with the blood of God's crucified Son and hence makes this possession doubly precious.

(5) Final Consummation

God is making abundant heavenly and eternal provision for His people in the land beyond the grave. The mansions are being prepared by the loving hands of God's Saviour for all the ransomed of God's people. It is His plan that His ransomed people shall live in endless bliss eternally with Him. This provision for the final consummation of man's destiny in the glorious realms above is another claim God has on His ransomed ones here.

Then with this question settled as to God's ownership of man, there arises another matter for consideration and that is:----

2. His Ownership of Things

Let us allow the Bible to speak authority here also.

(1) His universal ownership

The material universe belongs to God because He created it. He created all that is. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Gen. 1:1. They are therefore His own. Neither you nor I nor our remotest ancestors had one thing to do with the creation. "Behold, unto Jehovah thy God belongeth the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that therein is." Deut. 10:14. He said, "Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." Job 41:11. Therefore, "The earth is Jehovah's and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." Psalm 24:1. In the beginning God put the stamp of His ownership upon all things and He has never removed it. He has never transferred what He created to the ownership of another. He put Adam in the Garden of Eden "to dress and keep it", but not to own it. "God has made all things for Himself", and has never given anyone a quit claim on any of His property. On the other hand, He has repeatedly asserted His ownership.

(2) His specific ownership

a. He owns the land

"The land is mine". Lev. 25:23

b. He owns the silver and the gold

"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts."

Haggai 2:8

c. He owns the cattle and the beasts

"Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills". Ps. 50:10

d. He owns and gives to individual power to get wealth

"But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for He it is that giveth thee power to get wealth." Deut. 8:18. In other words, ability to make money is a God-given talent.

As between man and man there is ownership. The possessor has a title and right to his farm, his store, his money or whatever he possesses that guarantess him against any other man, but his title is a human instrument and is only good in man-made court of law. God has a prior claim to the world and to all the wealth of the world. His title dates back to eternity. It grows out of, and inheres in, the rights of the Creator. It is a title that is primary, absolute, and unquestionable. Man of himself cannot produce anything. Man of himself does not own anything. Man and all his possessions belong to God.

When Jesus came the Divine ownership was an established doctrine. He did not therefore, have to establish the fact of the ownership of God; He only had to interpret it. Much of His teaching pertained to this question. In fact, one out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is on the subject of property and the use and abuse of money. In parable and in precept Jesus taught his disciples that the wealth of the world belonged to God and that if they would trust their lives to God and seek first His Kingdom that God would take care of their material wants. He also assured them that a man's life did not consist in getting hold on earthly things.

But it remained for the first church, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to enterpret for us the doctrine of God's ownership. "And not one of them said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own." Acts 4:32. The thing that happened to these Christians was that God became real to them. When God becomes real to the members of our church today, then will the ownership of God become a fact of experience and the possession of property will become a sacred right. This is the teaching of the New Testament.

II. The Stewardship Of Man

In the light of the scripturally established fact of God's ownership of us and our possessions, we as Christians should recognize the following facts which should govern our lives:---

1. If God owns us, we should be pliant and obedient in His hands and subject our wills and the disposals of our lives to the demands of His great will.
2. If God owns what we possess, then we are only tenants and stewards. We ought therefore to act like stewards and not likeowners.

What is a steward? A steward is a person entrusted with the management of estate or affairs not his own. All laws of logic, philosophy, and ethics would add the further idea that this management is to be according to the will and direction of the real owner. Stewardship is the Christian law of life. The New Testament concept of stewardship in its full sweep involves all the factors of life.

There are two elements over which the steward has charge, self and substance, and these two things go together. The central thing in stewardship is man's relation to God. Faith in Christ includes surrender to Christ. When Jesus becomes our Lord, we become His stewards. There can be no Lordship on the part of Jesus without stewardship on the part of His followers. Lordship implies stewardship; one cannot exist without the other. Stewardship grows out of our obligation to God as Creator. Owner and Giver of all things material and spiritual, and is indispensable to a life of obedience, love, and gratitude. The Christian belongs to God, and, as a simple acknowledgement of that fact, a first share of time, talents, energy, and money should be laid on the altar of God to be used in His Kingdom enterprises.

III. The Division of Income

1. The Bible measure for making this division

The recognition of the ownership of God and the acknowledgement of the stewardship of man requires the setting aside of a definite portion of income for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. The minimum portion of an income which is to go to the Divine Owner for the support of the interests of His Kingdom is one tenth. That is the only measure for individual giving definitely set forth in the Scriptures. The Bible reveals God's plan for financing the work of His Kingdom. His plan provides for tithes as an acknowledgement of God's ownership, and the making of offerings as an expression of man's love and gratitude for God's care.

(1) The tithe is grounded in man's relation to God

Man is dependent upon God. Man is indebted to God. The law of the tithe has its origin in and is based upon this fundamental spiritual relation. In the second chapter of Genesis it is recorded that God put man into the garden of Eden to dress and keep it, but in the very next verse we are informed that God reserved a certain tree of the garden for Himself. Here, at the very birth of the race, God is asserting His ownership. Man's first sin was not simply the stealing of an apple from God's tree; it was a revolt against God's ownership; it was the denial of the sovereign rights of God and the blasphemous assumption that man owned what had so freely been placed in his care. Right here in the dawn of creation the fundamental principle of the tithe is found.

(2) The tithe antedates the Mosaic Law

The patriarchs in the dim early ages recognized the tenth as a reasonable portion to be offered to Jehovah. "Abraham gave Him tithes of all." Gen. 14:20.

In an hour of blessed spiritual vision Jacob vowed a solemn vow: "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Gen. 28:22

Thus, the matter of tithing was the spontaneous act of God's servants whose hearts are filled with gratitude for the mercies and blessings Jehovah had bestowed upon them.

(3) The tithe was written into the Levitical system by the Holy Spirit through Moses.

It is the simple statement: "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." Lev. 27:30

Thus through the centuries from Moses to Christ God's people, in accordance with His own express command, made the tenth the basis of their giving. The tenth was the basis but not the sum total of their giving.

(4) The tithe is assumed in the New Testament

The N. T. was born in an atmosphere where tithing was the custom and the practice. The people knew of no better way to express their indebtedness to God and had no other plan for the support of the divine religion except tithing. It is, therefore, not necessary for the N.T. to reaffirm the law of the tithe; it is only necessary to assume it.

(5) The tithe is approved in the New Testament

The N. T. definitely recognizes and approves tithing. On two different occasions Christ endorsed or approved the practice of tithing. The first is in Luke 11:42 when He is dining with a Pharisee; the second is in Matthew 23:23 when He is speaking in the temple. In both instances He calls attention to the conduct of the Pharisees who are so careful to tithe even the herbs of the garden, but leave undone the weightier matters of the law. He commends them for tithing, saying, "This ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." The word ought which he uses, contains the idea of obligation and shows definitely that Christ was of the opinion that they should tithe. These passages both acknowledge and approve tithing.

2. The Bible Method of Making this Division

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse". Mal. 3:10 Note that He asks everyone to bring his tithes to the place of worship. It is not to be held until some committee comes after it. It is to be brought as an expression of thanksgiving and act of worship.

God's financial plan is set forth more clearly perhaps in I Cor. 16:2 than in any other single verse. It says, "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 collections when I come". This text shows the method to be:--

- (1) Periodic "On the first day of the week".
- (2) Personal..... "Let each one of you"
- (3) Provident..... "Lay by him in store"
- (4) Proportionate..... "As God hath prospered him"
- (5) Preventive..... "That there be no collection when I come".

I have tried to set before you God's way of financing His church and His Kingdom as clearly as I have known how to do it. You can contrast His with ways that you have known and perhaps tried. It now devolves upon us to make a decision as to which way we expect to pursue.

Personally I intend to go in God's way or not at all.

3. The Bible Motives for Making this Division

- (1) Loyalty to God
We have no more right to set aside scriptural giving than others have a right to set aside scriptural baptism.
- (2) Our spiritual welfare
Spiritual development is dependent in part upon our fidelity in following God's plan of financing His church and Kingdom.
- (3) Desire for an affection testimony
We cannot have this if we love material possessions more than we love the Lord.
- (4) Desire to honor the Lord

God's people should bring God's money to God's house on God's day for the support of God's work and the glory of God's name.

"Naught that I have my own I call,
I hold it for the Giver;
My heart, my life, my hope, my all,
Are His, and His forever."