

GORDON LINDSAY

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Who Receives the Tithe?

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all.

Genesis 14:18-20

There is a law in the Bible, generally recognized by scholars, called the Law of the First Mention. When a subject of importance is introduced in the Scriptures, the fundamental truths of the whole subject come into view. This is true concerning the matter of tithing which is referred to in Genesis 14.

Abraham had returned after his great victory over the kings. Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, came forth to meet him. After Melchizedek had blessed him Abraham "gave him a tenth of all."

The book of Hebrews includes some additional information concerning this mysterious Melchizedek. Who was he? Some think he may have been Shem, who after many generations was still living in the days of Abraham. But whether he was or not is unimportant here. The significant thing is that he is a type of Christ. This is pointed out in Hebrews 7:17, speaking about Jesus: "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." The priesthood mentioned here is different from Aaron's.

Now the fact that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek is meaningful, for Melchizedek was a type of the priesthood of Christ. Abraham's act of paying tithes to him, therefore, portrayed the real significance of a New Testament believer's giving of tithes and offerings. Many Christians give reluctantly because they think their money is going to other human beings. But ministers are only stewards who handle God's money. a Christian does not give to man but to Christ! This is clearly conveyed in Hebrews 7:8 — "And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on."

The writer of Hebrews was not talking about the Aaronic priesthood which, within a few years, was to pass from the picture. The Melchizedek

priesthood of Christ was to be everlasting, "of whom it is witnessed that he lives on." In other words, Christ of the Melchizedek priesthood — He who never dies but ever lives in heaven — receives tithes of men.

What a wonderful truth!

Giving More Than Money

For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5

These verses no doubt speak of salvation through Jesus Christ, but they certainly go much further. They infer a deep dedication to Christ and His service. This giving of self is even more important than the giving of material means. Indeed it implies that something has happened which was even more than the apostles dared hope for.

Not all believers understand this selfgiving. It is a sad truth that the majority of Christians are willing to trust in Jesus as their Savior, but they know little about the kind of consecration involved in this higher plateau of Christian experience. Paul speaks of this in Philippians 3:8, 13-14:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.... Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

Paul willingly suffered the loss of all things that he might win the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. So it was that the people of Macedonia, though in deep poverty themselves, were liberal "beyond their ability." Besides this they gave themselves to the Lord in a full measure of devotion.

This is the true secret of giving. First, a person must give himself to God and His service, then give his money. One is not a substitute for the other. Having said these things, the apostle then gives one of the most simple yet most profound statements on giving, and on how God evaluates it.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

The sum of the matter is that no man can outgive God. He who sows (gives) sparingly shall reap sparingly. But he who sows abundantly shall reap abundantly. As in the natural world, so in the spiritual: As a man soweth, so shall he reap. That is the unalterable *How to Be Enriched by Giving* law of giving.

The Way to God's Heart

Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

One of the most thrilling statements in the Old Testament are the words the angel spoke to the prophet Daniel in Daniel 10. For three weeks the prophet had prayed and fasted for his nation. Indeed all during his long life Daniel had been fully committed to God. Kingdoms rose and fell, but his consecration to God never wavered. The prophet's advice and counsel were eagerly sought by those in positions of power. Nor did Daniel ever compromise his principles for the sake of expediency. He was a man whom God could trust absolutely.

At the end of his twenty-one days of waiting upon God, he won a glorious victory. By giving himself to persistent intercessory prayer, he broke the power of "the prince of Persia." Satan's lieutenant or chief deputy over the Persian Empire had hindered the Lord's messenger in a battle in the heavenlies. But now at last the angel came with the answer and his salutation was those thrilling words, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, fear not" (Daniel 10:11,19 King James).

It is possible for every Christian to receive this special love of the Heavenly Father. The recipients are those who first give themselves to His service and then of their means unstintingly and ungrudgingly — "for God loves a cheerful giver." That is the secret of God's special love.

A rather close Scotsman by mistake put a guinea into the offering instead of a twopence. This so disturbed him that he went to the deacon.

"I made an error when the offering plate was passed. Could I please get my guinea back?" he said.

The deacon pointed out that that which was given to God could not be recalled (Matthew 5:23-24).

Disappointed, the parishioner said, "Well, anyway, I'll get credit for a guinea." To this the deacon replied, "I am sorry sir, but it was your intention to give only twopence, so that is all the Lord will give you credit for!"

To win the special love of the Father, a Christian must give willingly, joyfully, abundantly—"for God loves a cheerful giver."

The only thing a person truly keeps is that which he puts in God's bank with joy.

Rich Man, Poor Man

As long as we live in this world, some people will be rich and some will be poor. Jesus said, "For the poor you have with you always" (Matthew 25:11). Among today's poor are those who are going through a period of testing but will experience God's abundance tomorrow. But rich or poor, regardless of their circumstances, all have the privilege of giving the same in God's sight!

This is beautifully demonstrated in the case of the widow who gave her last two mites. On that day the Lord had come into the temple and had sat down across from the treasury. There he watched the people as they came by to drop in their offering. He had just preached a sermon condemning the religious hypocrites who cheated widows out of their property. He had pointed out that their deeds were the more reprehensible because they were done in the name of religion.

Now while the Lord was observing the people as they gave (and this suggests that the Lord watches all our giving and records it), He saw a poor widow drop in two mites. He also witnessed the rich giving out of their abundance. Compared to their gifts, the widow's mites appeared trifling. Some might have cautioned the woman by reminding her of her extreme poverty and that it was imprudent of her to give away all that she had.

"Since the rich are giving so plentifully, there really is no need for you to sacrifice all you have," they might have told her.

But not Christ. It was here that the Lord revealed one of the most inspiring truths about giving: all have the same privilege of giving to God's service, and all have the right to the blessings which therein accrue. The Lord made a statement that must have shocked the Pharisees: "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43-44).

Obviously God reckons differently than men. In judging the size of the gift, God considers the resources of the giver and the amount he has left after he gives. This great principle is definitely established in the divine system of tithing.

There is another instance recorded in the Scriptures in which a poor widow gave everything she had. Referred to simply as the widow of Zarephath, she was reduced to her last morsel of food for her son and herself. They would eat this and die, she thought. Then along came Elijah, the man of God.

"Make me a little bread cake from it first, and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son," he said boldly.

She obeyed. As a result, "The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord which God spoke through Elijah" (I Kings 17:13-16).

From this, it is apparent that God encourages all His people to give. Even the poorest cannot afford *not* to give, for in their giving is the assurance that God will supply their needs.

Those converted to Jesus Christ on foreign fields need to be taught this, too. Perhaps one of the greatest errors made in these lands has been the assumption that the people are too poor to give. This has cheated new Christians out of the spiritual — even physical—abundance God intends for them. Therefore, the poor as well as the rich should be taught to give to God's work. Their offerings are to be accepted, even if some onlookers believe they are giving too much. Surely the poor need the blessing of God as much—if not more — than the wealthy.

Stealing from God

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and contributions.

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!"

Malachi 3:8,9

This passage is one of the most startling in the Old Testament as far as believers in Christ are concerned, for in it a serious charge is made: he who fails to bring in the tithes and offerings is a robber. Indeed, the prophet seems to be crying out in holy horror, raising his hands to heaven, "Will a man rob God?"

In frank language the prophet says that a man who withholds the tithe robs God. The money is no more his than the property of his neighbor. No Christian has a right to the tithe; he is only a steward, responsible to see that it is brought safely into the Lord's storehouse. Besides the tithes, a Christian also owes the Lord offerings. There is a difference, however, between the tithe and the offering. While the amount of the tithe is fixed, each person decides the amount of his offering. He may give what he chooses.

The apostle Paul speaks of the law of giving. "He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully," he says (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Although, in one sense, a Christian is a steward of everything he possesses, in another sense he actually owns them only for the time being. Peter, in referring to the duplicity of Ananias and Sapphira in handling their property, said, "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" (Acts 5:4).

During his lifetime, a Christian may dispose of his possessions as he pleases. He may give generously to God's cause or withhold. But this is not true of the tithe. It is no more his than the money the teller handles at the bank. It is a fact that when he appropriates the tithe for himself he is doing the same as an embezzler.

No rationalizing can circumvent the plain words of the prophet who, aghast at the people withholding the Lord's tithes, exclaimed, "Will a man rob God?" Such a sin strikes at the heart of God's work, for He has ordained that the ministry should be supported by tithes and offerings. If all of God's people became guilty of this evil, the church would disappear from the earth. Somebody obeyed God in giving so that others—including us — could hear the gospel. It follows that when God's money is withheld, the spiritually needy are deprived of the message of life, and the sin becomes grievous indeed in the sight of the Lord.

Those who do not believe in tithing squirm and say that the tithe has no place in the New Testament era. By saying this, in effect they ignore the plain statements of the Scripture and aggravate their sin. For Jesus Christ Himself said of the paying of tithes, "But these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Matthew 23:23).

Admittedly, God requires other things of His children besides tithing. Jesus said that men ought to tithe and also to remember mercy and justice. But to insure that there be no mistake in this matter, the book of Hebrews clearly shows that tithing was practiced by the New Testament church many years after Pentecost. As previously noted, the ascended Christ received tithes of those who gave to Him in faith; "and in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on" (Hebrews 7:8).

This Scripture portrays a great truth. The plain fact is that he who withholds the tithe robs Christ. And there is a penalty.

Sometime ago, a man who professed to be a Christian was asked by his minister whether or not he believed in tithing.

"No, because the thief on the cross did not tithe, and he was saved," the man replied.

The preacher then inquired if he ever gave offerings to the church.

"No," the man said, "the thief on the cross gave no offerings — and he made it to heaven."

Once more he was asked whether he ever gave to missions; again the answer was the same.

Then the minister said, "I see only one difference between you and the thief on the cross. He was a dying thief, and you are a living thief."

Does Tithing Pay Off?

In chapter three of Malachi there is a remarkable promise in which the Lord asks His people to prove Him. This is most unusual. God rarely asks His people to prove Him; instead He proves them. The phrase is used in this latter way in the Bible many times. The only other case of God's allowing Himself to be proved is where Gideon asked the Lord to let him prove His call in the case of the wet and dry fleeces.

But in the matter of the tithe, God actually invites His people to prove Him! "Test me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts." Christians are invited to put the Lord to the test and see whether or not tithing pays off. The fact that once people become consistent tithers, they in most cases remain so throughout life, gives powerful evidence of the validity and practicality of the promise.

Some people say that they seem to have a curse on their lives. How can they break the curse? Let them be faithful in paying their tithes and giving offerings and see whether a blessing does not come instead of a curse. Now there are different kinds of blessings: spiritual, material, and financial. The Lord's promise says, "Test me ... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need" (3:10). The challenge: bring your tithes and offerings into the storehouse and discover what will happen.

The prophet goes on to say that the Lord will rebuke the devourer and preserve the fruits of the ground. If the children of Israel were faithful in their giving, they were promised such prosperity that all nations would call them blessed. While this promise was specifically given to Old Testament believers, the apostle

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." These are promises which Christians, as children of Abraham by faith, may claim.

Indeed this is the one promise that God has invited Christians "to prove" and see if He will not fulfill it.

Misunderstanding God

"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need."

Malachi 3:9-10

This is the proof text generally used by ministers when preaching on tithing. It is, of course, a powerful statement. Nevertheless, a serious misunderstanding among many tends to dull the lesson these verses would teach. The misinterpretation often runs like this:

God's people are enjoined to bring their tithes and offerings into God's storehouse; if they fail, God will put a curse upon them.

But a half-truth sometimes does more harm than an outright untruth, for the half-truth is far more readily believed. The idea that God is watching like a martinet for an opportunity to inflict a blow on any person who makes a false move is altogether wrong.

God is not waiting for a chance to put a curse upon someone; the Bible shows that because of sin the earth is already cursed! When Adam and Eve deliberately sinned in the Garden of Eden, the curse came upon the world. It became universal. The curse came on the animal kingdom, which today lives by the law of the jungle—by tooth and claw. The curse came upon the earth — it brought forth thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:14-19). The curse came also upon the weather, producing storms, cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes, and other deviations. All sorts of disasters came upon mankind.

On the other hand, Jesus came to earth to save men from the curse, as Galatians 3:13-14 shows:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree" — in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

All the spiritual blessings that came upon the children of Israel during the Old Testament age came by anticipation of Christ's sacrifice, for the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).

Now the question is: did Christ's sacrifice on Calvary automatically remove the curse irrespective of the individual's part? The whole teaching of the Scriptures negates that. One passage in particular gives a conclusive answer to this:

"Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall; for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."

Matthew 7:24-27

In other words, he who fails to act upon the words of Christ is not only under the curse, but is headed for disaster and ruin.

Two facts stand out: this earth is still under the curse, and divine judgment is reserved for those "who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

With these facts in mind, the passage in Malachi becomes clearer. God is not going to curse us if we fail to obey Him. The curse is already here! We are automatically under the curse of sin and death!

Now it is true that under the New

Testament dispensation we pay tithes and give offerings under the law of grace rather than under the Mosaic law. But disobedience of the law of Christ carries the same penalty as disobedience to the law of Moses. The writer of the book of Hebrews (10:28,29) says that greater light involves greater responsibility:

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Through obedience to Christ, the curse is removed. We receive all the blessings that we lost under Adam. Disobedience means that we lose that

divine protection and revert back under the curse.

Let us look again to Malachi, remembering that the earth is already cursed—that it still brings forth thistles and thorns. But God says to the obedient (Malachi 3:11,12),

"Then I will rebuke the devourer [the curse] for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,' says the Lord of hosts."

The blessing is positive. God promises to send a blessing. He will "open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need." The lesson is clear. God does not send the curse; the curse is already here. But as we obey the law of Christ, through the law of grace, He not only protects us from the curse and lifts it from us, but will send such a blessing that there is not room enough to receive it.

God's Property Rights

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.

Psalm 24:1

"The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," declares the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 2:8

"Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

Deuteronomy 10:14

"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die."

Ezekiel 18:4

The doctrine of tithing is based upon God's ownership of all things. He owned the earth during the Old Testament dispensation, and He owns it in this present age. The doctrine of grace does not change the fact of God's ownership. Much of the trouble between nations and between individuals arises because of the disregard of property rights. The same disregard of God's rights brings the violator into trouble. The principle of God's ownership is seen in I Timothy 6:7, "For we have brought nothing into the world, So we cannot take anything out of it either."

God's property rights must be respected under grace, just as they were under the Mosaic law. The tithe now, as in those days, was a token of the unchanging truth that God is Lord of heaven and earth.

From this arises the principle of stewardship. God is the owner, we are the stewards. The acid test of consecration is whether or not we dedicate our money and our business to the Kingdom of God. Our Christian profession is only superficial until we are ready to assume stewardship responsibility.

How men handle money separates the Church into the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad, the true Christians and the hypocrites. We choose the side we are on.

Firstfruits

The principle that God reserved something for Himself was established in the Garden of Eden. God said that man could freely eat of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he ate of it he would die. Adam and Eve disobeyed and suffered the consequences.

In Genesis 4, twenty-five hundred years before the law was given through Moses, the sons of Adam brought to God "of the fruit of the ground ..." and "of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat portions." The word "firstlings" is used a number of times in the Old Testament. Four times out of six it refers to the tithes of the land and of the cattle. Firstlings and tithes have a synonymity; tithes were equated with the firstfruits. Stewardship had its inception with the beginning of the race.

Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, who was a type of the priesthood of Christ, setting an example to his descendants for all time to come.

God especially chose Abraham because He said that Abraham would teach his children the way of the Lord (Genesis18:17-19). Apparently Jacob, who reached the age of twelve while Abraham was still alive, received instruction from his grandfather. When he met the angels ascending and descending and made his consecration to God, his first thought was to vow to give the tithe to God.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee."

Genesis 28:20-22

It is certain that Jacob continued his vow during his lifetime, thereby following his grandfather's practice of devoting to God a tenth of all he would receive. Tithing was not a human invention but a divine institution appointed by God.

Forgotten Clause

Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it.

Leviticus 27:30,31

While most Christians are familiar with the law of the tithe, there is one clause involved which is generally overlooked. Should for any reason an emergency arise in which it was necessary to borrow from the tithe, when the person replaced it, he was to add one-fifth — or twenty percent. This seems rather high interest. The reason for it undoubtedly was that God wished to discourage individuals from appropriating what belonged to Him. Knowing human nature as He does, He understood only too well that once a person used the tithe, there was grave danger that he would not repay it. The devil would exert himself, if at all possible, to make it difficult to repay what had been borrowed. It would then become a vicious cycle.

When the tithe was withheld, the law of prosperity was violated, the law of blessing was canceled, and it became more and more difficult for a person to balance his books.

For this reason, God charged a high rate of interest so as to discourage borrowing the tithe.

This principle is applicable today. Better to do the borrowing from another source where the interest is not so high and the danger of default is not so great.

The Timeless Principle

There are those who contend that tithing was only for the Old Testament days and not for the age of grace. This is a half-truth, but not the whole truth. Concerning tithing Jesus said,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the other."

Matthew 23:23

Let the people who say this was spoken before Christ's death, and therefore is of no effect, consider the import of Hebrews 7:8. This verse explicitly declares that thirty-five years after Calvary, Christ in heaven — He who is of the Melchizedek priesthood — *received tithes*.

In other words, the tithe is the Lord's. It is not to be appropriated by man. One of the most subtle errors being made by some otherwise good people is that when something Jesus has said is incompatible with their views, they explain it away.

"Christ spoke that before the birth of—the Church — therefore it doesn't apply to us," they say.

Thus the command for us to forgive others that we may obtain forgiveness (Mark 11:25,26) is said to be no longer in effect—that God forgives, anyway.

Christ's command for us to ask the heavenly Father for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) is said to be now out of date — that He gives the Holy Spirit whether we ask for Him or not.

The command to lay hands on the sick that they may recover (Mark 16:18) is said to be only for the apostles. Since we have modern medicine now, we do not need the services of the Great Physician.

The promise that believers should speak with new tongues (Mark 16:17) is said to be no longer in effect.

And so it goes. But Jesus swept all this sophistry away in His warning in Matthew 7:26,27.

Everyone should read those verses carefully and prayerfully.

There is, however, a difference between law and grace, between the Old Testament and New Testament dispensations. In the matter of giving under grace we willingly and gladly give of our own free will rather than under the law of compulsion. Thus when Paul was urging the saints at Corinth to give liberally, he admonished them to do this not by commandment, but as an act of grace, even as Christ gave Himself and became poor for our sakes:

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich...

But now finish doing it also; that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have.

2 Corinthians 8:7-9,11,12

The apostle then shows that he who gives liberally, cheerfully, and not of necessity will reap bountifully and thus be in a position to give more and more. But he who sows sparingly will have less and less to give:

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully: Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6,7

Those who contend that they are not to tithe because they are under grace and not under the law generally wind up giving less than a tithe. Tithing entails keeping books with God. Nontithers are notorious for thinking that they have paid more than tithes when they have not.

Some try to back up their failure to tithe by saying that they are not under law but under grace. Although they probably are not aware of it, their disobedience brings them under the law of the disobedient, as Paul declares: "Law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious..." (I Timothy 1:9).

To refuse to give cheerfully to God's work is a serious matter, for it undermines the very plan God has established for the support of His Church.

So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

2 Corinthians 9:14

Grace is grace. But disobedience to God's commandment is not grace, but disgrace. And the transgressor will surely suffer. He who robs God must surely pay the penalty, for he deliberately places himself outside the hedge of divine protection.

As we have said, the tithe is a good way to begin giving, but Christians who dedicate themselves to Christ will soon go beyond the tithe. As God blesses them, they will increase their giving. Some now give twenty percent, thirty percent, and even more of their income. And the more they increase their giving, the more God blesses them.

Do Good Works Matter?

Ministers often preach that good works will not get us to heaven. This is true. Millions of people are basing their salvation on their good works, but this is a delusion.

Nevertheless, by the very nature of the case, good works hold a place of the highest priority after conversion. We are saved on the sole basis of Christ's merits, but afterwards we are saved to good works; we are saved to serve.

Because the apostle James found that some were deprecating the importance of good works against faith, he gave the people a stern lecture. He told them that if they depended on faith without any works following, it was a sure sign that they had the wrong kind of faith.

"But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow," he said, "that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). True faith produces good works. And God sets a high value on them.

The story of Dorcas who was raised from the dead is a case in point. She was a woman "abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did" (Acts 9:36). But apparently while in the prime of life, she was struck down with a fatal illness. Her death was felt to be an irreparable loss to the saints at Joppa. They sent for Peter, who was at Lydda, to come post haste. When he arrived he found them weeping and showing the coats and garments that Dorcas had made. They apparently made it clear to Peter that Dorcas was indispensable. Why had God taken her?

Now it is the lot of saints as well as of sinners to die. Some die young. But usually Christians do not pray that these should be raised from the dead. This case seemed to be different. Peter dropped to his knees in prayer.

Then evidently feeling in the Spirit that it was the will of God for him to pray for the restoration of the woman's life he said, "Tabitha, arise." And Dorcas opened her eyes and came alive! She was not raised from the dead on the basis of her good works; yet who will say that in some way those good works did not enter into the picture? Would Peter have prayed in this

way for a woman who during her lifetime was indolent and careless in her Christian responsibility?

As if to emphasize the importance of good works, the next recorded incident of the book of Acts was the outpouring of the Spirit upon the house of Cornelius. Why should this centurion, of all men, be the first of the Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit? What was it about this man that especially distinguished him from many others? Note the description:

Now there was a certain man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually.

Acts 10:1-2

Three things are specifically mentioned about Cornelius: (1) he feared God, (2) he was a liberal giver, and (3) he was a man of prayer.

Giving is the essence of living. Carnal man seeks for himself. The truly enlightened person seeks to give as much as he can.

Nor was he the only centurion in the Scriptures who was blessed. The man whose servant was healed by Jesus built the Jews a synagogue in Capernaum. Giving never saved a man, but generosity indicates that God has done something in the man's life that sets him apart.

You Can Take It With You

One of the saddest things in life is that people who work hard all their lifetime and who finally accumulate a sizable property at death too many times lose it all. Often those to whom the property descends prove unworthy, squandering it on worldly and selfish purposes. If only there were some way for people to take it with them!

Yet if they realized it, they can. The fact is that we can take nothing with us if we wait until death strikes; nevertheless, if we choose in time, we can send it on ahead. In the beautiful Sermon on the Mount, the Lord told the people how it can be done:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal."

Matthew 6:19-20

At death the believer really does not die; he merely moves into another sphere of existence. For the Christian it is "absent from the body ... present with the Lord." The Bible says there is a place called Paradise where the righteous go (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). In view of the fact that all of us are hastening toward that time, it is important that we plan ahead. Does not the traveler make preparation if he anticipates going to Europe or to some other far-off place? Certainly he does; and so for this reason, the apostle Paul enjoins all of us who must someday leave this life to lay up a store for the time to come:

Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

1 Timothy 6:18-19

If there is sadness in heaven, it must be experienced by those who had the opportunity to do good for the Kingdom of God with their material blessings, but through neglect or carelessness lost their property forever. Just a little thought, just a little planning, and they could have taken it with them. But now, it is too late! They are saved, but the reward that could have been theirs has slipped forever through their fingers.

We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of what we have done in our lifetime, said the apostle Paul. In the parable of the two talents, the Lord commended the faithful servant who earned two talents the same as the one who had gained five:

"His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:23

A woman whom I knew quite well inherited some two million dollars. She promised different ministers to "do something substantial for the Lord's work," but her promises were all future. She fancied herself a businesswoman who could double her wealth in a short time, then do even more for the Kingdom of God. Sad to say, she was taken in by smooth confidence men who wasted her property. Indeed, they left her in stark poverty. Toward the end of her life, she was unable even to maintain herself. The woman who was rich died poor. She failed to take it with her.

Today is the day of opportunity; tomorrow may be and often is too late. As stewards, we are obligated before God to see that the property we leave behind is disposed of in the way that will do the kingdom of God the most good. In that way, we can take it with us!

"Set Your House in Order"

Hezekiah was one of the greatest of Judah's kings. One of the nation's most powerful reformations took place during his reign. Hezekiah removed the images and high places and abolished idolatry. Of him it was said:

He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him And the Lord was with him; wherever he went he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

2 Kings 18:5,7

But Hezekiah made one serious mistake.

When Sennacherib came up against the cities of Judah, he compromised. In an hour of weakness, he gave him all the gold and silver of the house of the Lord.

And Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house.

At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

2 Kings 18:15,16

What was the result? Hezekiah succeeded in pacifying the Assyrian king only for a short time. In Sennacherib's second invasion, he sent the cruel and profane Rab-shakeh to terrify the inhabitants of Jerusalem into submission. During those dreadful days of trial, Hezekiah fell sick and was about to die. Then came Isaiah with the word of the Lord, telling him to set his house in order, for he would die and not live. As we know, Hezekiah's desperate prayer for deliverance brought him a respite of fifteen years. Nevertheless, there is a tremendous lesson in the story of Hezekiah. He had given all the Lord's gold and silver to a heathen king; now, near death, he was told to set his house in order.

Many of God's choicest saints are in Hezekiah's place. They have lived a godly life.

They have served the Lord and, during their lifetime, have perhaps given liberally to His cause. Nevertheless, as they are coming to the evening time of their lives, their house has not been set in order. How is this? The fact is they have not been fully obedient as stewards. For when they leave this world, those possessions which should go to the Lord's work and may have so been intended, go into other channels than the Kingdom of God!

Many people who are faithful to God in tithes and offerings never think about how their property should be handled when they leave this world. And in some cases it amounts to more than they have given during their lifetime! Many die intestate, which means the state in effect will make out their will. That in most cases will be quite different from what they intended

The truth is that every Christian should make out a will (or a trust) which will guarantee that their property will be used after their death in the way intended. Where there are dependents or children, they should, of course, be properly remembered. Having seen to this part, they should take care that the Lord is also remembered. One must set his house in order during his lifetime. Afterwards, it is too late.

The Key to Prosperity

When the rich young ruler left Jesus and the disciples, the Lord remarked sadly that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, the chances were negligible. The disciples were so astonished that they asked in dismay, "Then who can be saved?"

What did Jesus mean by His statement about the camel and the rich man? Was He putting a premium upon poverty? Was it necessary for people to sell all their possessions to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven? Peter in a moment of sadness said, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." In other words, he was still going to follow Jesus to the end, though it looked like a dark road ahead.

But although Christ's first statement was strange, His next was even more astonishing. Instead of remarking that the disciples should join a mendicant order, He promised them that if they were faithful to their consecration, they would not only receive eternal life in the world to come, but in this life a hundredfold in material possessions!

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life.

Mark 10:29,30

These verses demand explanation. Look at the words again, for there can be no mistake: "a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms...." It says, "a hundred times as much ..."! That means that he who gives up thousands for Christ's sake is eligible to receive hundreds of thousands. Take notice, also, that the Lord is not speaking of this in the age to come when God's people will walk the streets of gold, but now! Whatever this means, and it is hardly possible to misinterpret it, it is obviously the master key to prosperity.

Examine the words more closely. The promise is not restricted to a favored few. It says, "no one who has left ... but he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age." All who fulfill the conditions are eligible for the promise. If we are to take these words literally, as we must, then. God could have some millionaires in the Church enjoying the blessings of God. Of course there would probably not be many, because there are few who will actually fulfill the conditions.

At first these words of Jesus seem contradictory. The Lord has given warnings of the most solemn character of the danger of trusting in riches — so much so that the apostles doubted whether anybody could be saved. Then He implied that those who follow Him fully will be stewards of great riches. What is the explanation of this seeming paradox?

The answer is not difficult. There are important conditions attached, conditions which are inseparably associated with the promise, which are an essential preparation for this stewardship.

We must note that God is not interested in making people poor merely for poverty's sake. Ultimately He will make us all rich. He became poor that we, through His poverty, might become rich. But God is greatly interested in separating His people from trusting in riches. Jesus spoke of a fundamental failing in human nature — the tendency to place an undue value on material things, as if they were the secret of happiness:

"For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

Matthew 6:32,33

Paul also says, "and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it ..." (1 Corinthians 7:30,31). God's people may have possessions, but these possessions are not to possess them.

The sad fact is that many Christians cannot stand prosperity. King Uzziah of Judah "was marvelously helped until he was strong. But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly ..." (2 Chronicles 26:15,16). Money is so alluring, and it seems to have such power and can do so many things, that its possession is supposed to be the badge of success. A poor man is often considered a failure. People largely ignore the Scripture which says, "Did not God choose the poor of this world

to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

Human vanity pushes a man to keep up or to get ahead of his neighbors, and money, however secured, seems to be the means by which this can be done. For these reasons men develop a passion for money. The desire often becomes so strong that they feel any end justifies the means. Again and again we have seen God's servants go down before this temptation. The great promise of the hundredfold blessing that Christ gives is only for those who have overcome the evil of loving money.

This then is the secret of the amazing promise of the hundredfold blessing of houses and lands. It is for those who in their hearts have fully given up all these things for the gospel's sake. Not everyone will be required, as the Lord asked the rich young ruler, to auction off his goods to give to the poor. Nevertheless, those who qualify for the promise will very likely some time in their life face the test of everything seemingly lost that they may win Christ and fulfill God's will in their lives. Jesus said to Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?" And that is where most people fail to become eligible for the promise. The risk of such absolute consecration seems too great.

Why Prosperity?

Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life."

Mark 10:28-30

These words of Jesus were in answer to Peter's wistful comment, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." It is interesting to note that this amazing promise of the hundredfold blessing in material things was fulfilled in Peter's life. Did he actually receive an hundredfold blessing in houses and lands?

Before we answer this question, we must observe that the Lord did not intend that the riches promised were to be lavished on oneself for the indulgence of the flesh. Far from it! Paul comments seriously about people with such motives:

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

1 Timothy 6:9,10

Those who qualify for the promise that Jesus gave to Peter are those that would rather follow Christ than inherit all the riches of the earth; those who can use money but will never let money use them. If God can trust a man, He may permit him to handle a great deal of His money so that it can be used to bless the multitudes.

Was this true with Peter? When the disciples were multiplied — three thousand on one occasion, five thousand on another—"all who were owners

of lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet..." (Acts 4:34,35).

You can imagine the total value of the money received! Of course it was not to be used on themselves other than for their modest needs. It was their solemn duty to see that everyone of the company was fully cared for.

These offerings were not only for supplying the needs of the people, but obviously for supporting the evangelistic teams that went out. It is often overlooked that within a short time the persecution in Jerusalem was so fierce that the entire membership of the mother church, with the exception of the apostles, was scattered.

And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went abroad preaching the word.

Acts 8:1-2,4

The Jerusalem church was no longer supporting the saints in Jerusalem, for they were scattered abroad. What was the church doing? Obviously it was helping these gospel teams that went out.

Apparently many of the people returned when the persecution lessened. Nor did God forget those in the mother church when they were in need. Some of the ministers who had been successful in establishing branch churches, such as the one at Antioch, took up substantial offerings and sent them to the saints at Jerusalem to tide them through.

God remembered the mother church forty years after Pentecost. At that time the Roman army had surrounded Jerusalem. Suddenly for no apparent reason the Romans left for a short period. The Christians, remembering the warnings of Jesus, fled to Pella during this time of respite, where a strong church was established. The unbelieving Jews remained to be caught in the slaughter when the Romans returned and captured the city. Those who survived the siege were taken into captivity and sold into slavery. But God took care of His own.

17

The Great Commission

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

Mark 16:15

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Acts 1:8

From these two commands of Jesus it is evident that the Church of Jesus Christ was to be a missionary Church. But through many long dark centuries the Church nearly forgot its mission. While millions were born, loved and died without Christ, men and women who professed Christianity retreated from life and lived in monasteries and nunneries. Only in the last century did the Christian world begin to awaken. Then in many cases it was independent groups and missionary societies which sprang up and received the vision of missions. Staid state churches often looked askance at these missionary efforts.

This brings up a question often asked. The prophet Malachi said that tithes and offerings were to be brought into the storehouse. Which storehouse? Certainly the local church must be supported. It must be included in the storehouse. Many churches have failed badly in the support of the pastor. There is no argument that Christians should not support the home base. But is that the only base to support?

If that view were entirely correct (that the established churches are the only bases to support) then missionary work would be greatly hampered, for the initial impetus to world evangelism has come largely from independent missionary societies, with the church gradually catching the vision and bringing up the rear. Of course many churches today have a great missionary program, for which we thank God.

Whatever way it is done, the Bible clearly teaches that all of us have a deep responsibility to evangelize the heathen. Indeed the fulfillment of this work is tied up closely with the actual coming of the Lord:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

Matthew 24:14

According to these words of Jesus, this age will not end until the gospel witness reaches all nations.

The mother church at Jerusalem sent out missionaries. And as soon as the Gentile church at Antioch had gained strength, it entered into a missionary program. The Holy Ghost Himself separated Barnabas and Saul and called them into a missionary ministry. Barnabas had already given away his possessions, and Paul in his numerous epistles made clear that he personally had no reserve funds. Yet traveling into new territory required money. Where did these missionaries get it? Obviously the church at Antioch made provision for their early missionary travels.

As Paul went from city to city, establishing new churches, he relied upon them to send him support. After informing the Corinthians of their responsibility to support the ministry, he mentioned that in new fields he could not expect support. For this reason he said that he had proclaimed "the gospel of Christ without charge." At times churches he had founded supported him. But communications in many areas were poor, and sometimes when he had no support, he and his companions had to work with their hands. But it is clear that such a system was not the best since it left workers in an exhausted condition. A tired preacher could hardly be at his best in the pulpit.

Paul's teaching concerning mission fields is clear: in a new field he would say little about offerings so he would not "hinder the gospel." But once a church was well-established, he would urge the people to support the local church and to support those in missionary fields. And he was not slow in emphasizing this need.

The basic fact is this: all of us. have an obligation either to go ourselves to the mission field, or to support those who do go. Local churches and denominations surely have an obligation to support those who go. But independent missionary groups also have been greatly used of God, often being the catalyst to spark powerful missionary efforts. The latter by the nature of the case are more free to follow the moving of God's Spirit on the field. And yet, sadly enough, some independent groups who purport to support missions have sadly failed in their stewardship, and in some cases have misused God's money. It is our responsibility to wait on the Lord and

to be guided by the Spirit of God in our missionary giving, that we have assurance it will go into proper hands.

Remember, God loves a cheerful giver. And no one can out-give God. So bring all your tithes into the storehouse of God and prove Him, even as He asks you to do.

Who gets the tithe? Is money the only gift? What if I'm poor (or rich)? Can God be robbed? Does tithing pay off? Am I cursed if I don't tithe?

What about "borrowing" God's money? Isn't tithing just for the Old Testament? Can I "take it with me"?

These and other questions about biblical giving are answered in this brief volume by the late evangelist, author, and publisher, Gordon Lindsay.