

IS MONEY THE PROBLEM?

"A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his Master's stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master's interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity, because his master trusts him." —C.S. p. 113

1. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD.

Before a surveyor can accurately determine boundaries or establish the limits of a plot of ground, he must first establish a point of reference. If there should be any error in this point every other calculation will be in error. Therefore, it is essential that this starting point be exact.

The entire history of the human race has been a series of mistakes because men have refused to accept their divine point of origin. This point of reference was established by God when He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion . . ." Gen. 1:26.

Note the specific points of this first stake. First, the existence of God (a God who plans and speaks); second, the creation of man (exposing the lie of evolution); third, the duties of man (his relationship to his Creator).

The Edenic world was teeming with life. Here was a world of action which required direction and control. So God created a man for a job which already existed. And this job was so important that man was made in the image of God. God was the Owner—man was His steward, or manager. But man blew it!

2. EVERY MAN IS A STEWARD OF GOD.

Every person becomes a steward of God at birth and remains one until death. He may be a good one or a bad one—in the church or out of it—but he is still a steward, nothing more, nothing less. Man was never given the position of owner, neither can he be. Stewardship is a blessing!

An owner would be forced to depend on himself—to look after himself—for there would be no one higher. In a world where uncertainty is the daily fare of every individual such a man would carry an unbearable burden.

But as a steward, man is under the constant care and protection of a loving God, who regards him as one of His children. Jesus referred to this relationship when He gave the people the prescription for a life free from anxiety. " . . . your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, . . . and all these things shall be added unto you." Matt. 6:32, 33.

3. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP INVOLVES A TOTAL COMMITMENT.

A Christian steward is concerned with and responsive to the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He must be ever cognizant of the words of Christ, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Luke 22:42

A valuable lesson can be learned in total commitment from mountain climbers. The goal is a mountain peak. The climb appears impossible due to precipitous cliffs and deep chasms. The danger of falling rocks, avalanches, and raging storms may await the climber. But desire, preparation, and total commitment, coupled with the refusal to turn back in the face of what appears to be insurmountable odds, has conquered every major peak in the world.

The Christian steward has the goal of eternal life before him. It may appear impossible at times. But the desire, preparation, and commitment will enable him, by the grace of God, to ascend above the fog-bound valleys of a materialistic world and reach the peak where heaven, the new earth, companionship with God and the holy angels await.

This is the goal of every steward who recognizes that he is a steward. This is his reward. **No half-hearted preparation or application of time and talent will suffice.** The very term **steward** denotes service. Effectual service demands wholehearted commitment.

4. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MEASURE GOD'S PLANS BY HUMAN STANDARDS.

Egypt — great nation, mighty army, cavalry, and chariots — all the weapons of war.

The Israelites — just a band of unarmed slaves.

God had a problem, you say. Would He enlist outside help or employ sabotage within? No. He used lice and flies and frogs until the Egyptians were so sick of the whole mess they practically drove the Israelites out! But that's the way God did it.

What about the Red Sea? How would they get across? God worked it out.

When they became thirsty God had Moses to lead the people and herds to a rock in order to get water. When they became hungry God provided. It wasn't a problem with God!

From these few instances it must be easy to see how utterly impossible it would be to attempt to measure God's plans by human methods and standards.

But how could a man possibly understand the plans of God when there is such a gap in knowledge, experience, and capacity? No matter how much a person might learn; no matter how long he might live; no matter how much he might improve his ability—his total knowledge, experience, and ability would be less than zero in comparison with God's. One gets a faint idea of this when he realizes that man knows only beginnings and endings—God exists from eternity to eternity.

People are so prone to take credit for everything they do. If God's plans appeared reasonable — capable of being completely understood from the human standpoint, men would certainly take the credit for whatever was accomplished.

But if one follows God's directions, which may not appear reasonable — and they work — the tendency will be to follow the next plan with much less reluctance. And after plan after plan succeeds, hopefully (to God at least) the time will come when people will simply obey without question. In this way their faith and confidence will be strengthened until it finally controls the entire life.

This is the only safe and rational way for the Christian steward. God as the Owner has every right to expect instant and unquestioned obedience from men, His stewards.

"When the Lord gives a work to be done, let not men stop to inquire into the reasonableness of the command or the probable result of their efforts to obey. The supply in their hands may seem to fall short of the need to be filled; but in the hands of the Lord it will prove more than sufficient." P.K., p. 243.

5. MAN IS IMPRESSED WITH AMOUNTS: GOD REGARDS ONLY THE SACRIFICE.

Jesus used the sacrificial gift of a poor widow to teach a great principle: "... this poor widow hath cast in more than they all." Luke 21:3. What a bombshell!

He wasn't condemning the large gifts. Large gifts should not be unusual or surprising, for those who have been given a talent for making large sums should always give large gifts—if they are faithful stewards. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Luke 12:48. Jesus was presenting a principle—that the size of the gift isn't as important as the sacrifice which it represents.

Jesus condemned no one. He simply called attention to the fact that the widow had made the greater sacrifice; therefore, her gift was the largest. "For all these of their abundance cast in unto the offering of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had." Luke 21:4. In order for the rich men to have equalled her gift, they would have had to give all they possessed—plus their next meal.

In the story of the poor widow, Jesus was calling the attention of His disciples to the fallacies of human evaluations and estimations.

PRINCIPLE: Sacrifice is more important than the amount.

6. GOD ISN'T INTERESTED SO MUCH IN WHAT PEOPLE DO, AS WHY THEY DO IT.

As people are impressed with big things, they also seem to be impressed with accomplishments. Sometimes this leads to the idea that the end justifies the means which, of course, is entirely wrong.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? ... and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Matt. 7:22, 23.

Certainly with such an impressive record these folk would have been highly esteemed and commended by the average church. But it doesn't appear that the Lord was impressed—He didn't even know them. Something went wrong. "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." Matt. 6:1.

The wrong is not in doing alms before men, but in the motive for doing them. Very often good deeds are done for the wrong motives. Selfishness, love of display, the approbation of others, may lead one to do things that otherwise he would not do.

A common example of this would be the giving of an offering because someone sitting next to you might notice if you gave nothing. Giving an offering is a great and good thing, but not if the motive is wrong.

The motive is very important in heaven's evaluation, because the motive is an indicator of the heart. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8. Love caused Jesus to die for us.

In God's plans there is never any pressure. He never demanded that anyone keep His commandments. He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. God's kingdom is based on love, and man is free to choose.

The true Christian will not need to be unhealthfully stimulated to spur him into action. Love for God will accomplish it. This type of love—motivated action—is the only kind that God will accept. (1 Cor. 13)

"No matter how high his profession, he whose heart is not imbued with love for God and for his fellow men, is not a disciple of Christ. . . . He might display great liberality, but should he from some other motive than genuine love bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God. In his zeal he might even meet a martyr's death, yet if destitute of the gold of love he would be regarded as a deluded enthusiast or an ambitious hypocrite." Test., vol. 5, p. 168.

"The followers of Christ should not wait for thrilling missionary appeals to arouse them to action. If spiritually awake, they would hear in the income of every week, whether much or little, the voice of God and of conscience with authority demanding the tithes and offerings due the Lord." Test., vol. 4, p. 474.

PRINCIPLE: The key to hearing the voice of God is to be spiritually awake.

7. MAN'S PLANS ARE LIMITED — GOD'S PLANS ARE UNLIMITED.

In man-made plans the total funds for a project are almost limited by the size of the gift of the largest donor. In God's plan, where the standard of giving is based on sacrifice, rather than amount, there is no limit. Untold millions have come into the cause of God because of the example of the poor widow and her two tiny mites.

Man's plans are always limited, because he is limited. He may brag of his accomplishments, but what are they in comparison to the vastness of God's universe and His enterprises?

Man may boast of his high buildings, great bridges, and huge dams, but when faced with the terrible forces of uncontrolled nature he is helpless. The naked fury of fire, wind, and flood are all beyond his control. But when his weakness is combined with divine strength, and in everything follows the divine command, his potential is unlimited. It is a waste of time to think otherwise. (Isa. 55:6-9)

"Let none waste time in deploring the scantiness of their visible resources. The outward appearance may be unpromising, but energy and trust in God will develop resources. The gift brought to Him with thanksgiving . . . He will multiply as He multiplied the food given to the sons of the prophets and to the weary multitude." P. K., p. 243.

PRINCIPLE: Man is limited to following God's directions—God is unlimited in producing results.

8. OFFERINGS CAN NEVER BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR OBEDIENCE.

No offering, regardless of its size, can ever be a substitute for obedience.

(Ps. 51:16-19). Examples: Cain and Abel; Saul and the Amalekites.

"And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, . . . for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God . . . And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king." 1 Sam. 15:13-15, 22, 23. It is a serious matter to disobey God or take things into one's own hand!

We cannot buy off God, or bribe Him. He is the Creator. The greatest gift on earth would be as nothing in comparison to the vastness of His kingdom. How, then, could we give Him a gift when He owns the very objects we would use as an offering?

Offerings are an outward expression of love and gratitude, and love and gratitude are best demonstrated by obedience, whether to our earthly or our heavenly parent.

An offering to God is an act of worship. It expresses our love and gratitude to Him. Songs won't adequately do it. Prayers won't suffice. It must be a self-sacrificing effort. And this can be demonstrated by giving.

"The Lord does not need our offerings. We cannot enrich Him by our gifts. . . . Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of His mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no others." C.S., pp. 18, 19.

Because an offering is a gift to God, it must be set apart before we spend any of our incomes for ourselves. God must be first in everything. Therefore, after that which belongs to God (the tithe) is set apart, the freewill offerings should be given. These become as sacred as the tithe.

If this is the only way it is possible to express love and gratitude to God, if our hearts are filled with love for Him, then our gifts and offerings will be as continuous as His blessings. They will flow as freely as a mountain stream and not have to be stimulated by anything than the love principle.

"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."
Luke 12:48

"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee." Deut. 16:17.

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." 1 Cor. 16:2.

Many times the offerings which come into the treasury of the church are not offerings at all, but contributions to some financial need. They cannot be regarded as offerings, for they are given from the wrong motive. **God ordained that His work was to be supported by freewill offerings—not contributions.** (Mal. 3:8-10)

God has only one plan for financing His work, the return of the tithe and the giving of freewill offerings. The tithe would amply support the ministry and the freewill offering would adequately finance churches, schools, mission programs, etc.

Offerings should be given to God and then distributed to things. In fact, that is the way a person gives to God—through the distribution to the things which make up God's cause. **But the object to which one gives must be God.** It must be the outward expression of love and gratitude.

One's offerings should not be subject to personal emotion or feeling. Feelings change. God's love is constant. He sends the "rain on the just and unjust." The steward must consider his offerings so insignificant in comparison with God's gift to him, that nothing, or no one, can prevent him from continual giving. (C.S., p. 25)

9. GOD IS CONCERNED WITH MOTIVES – WHY WE DO THINGS

The most important element in giving is the motive which prompts it. Why one gives is more important than the gift.

So many gifts are made for selfish reasons. Gifts are made to impress people, to call attention to the donor, as a tax deduction, or as a constant reminder of some person. In all these is an element of selfishness. Any gift which still has the impress of the giver is not really a gift, but a donation. God owns everything.

The urgency of the need, nor the merit of the objective, should have nothing to do with the motive in giving. True giving is the result of love—only love. "Love must be the principle of action. Love is the underlying principle of God's government in heaven and earth, and it must be the foundation of the Christian's character. . . . And love will be revealed in sacrifice." C. S., p. 197 (John 3:16)

Paul said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us . . ." (2 Cor. 5:14). Constrain means to compel to leave me no choice. This love of Christ in the heart will compel a person to good works. He will not wait for things to give to—he will look for opportunities to express his love. The love of Christ will so fill his heart that he will constantly seek ways to give. Love is like that. It cannot be retained. It must be distributed. Joy and happiness only come through unselfish giving. All Christian giving will be in response to the love of God.

10. UNACCEPTABLE OFFERINGS.

Because a gift is the outward expression of the feelings of the heart, it is important that the heart be perfect if the gift is to be perfect. Giving is not to be a heart stimulant—it is an indication of the condition of the heart. If the heart is spiritually healthy, gifts to God for the advancement of His work and for the charitable purposes will be as regular as the beating of the heart. The key is the condition of the heart.

“Many ceased to deny self, and not a few withheld their tithes and offerings. God in His providence called for a reform in His sacred work, which should begin at the heart, and work outwardly.” S. M., book 2, pp. 177, 178.

Offerings made in response to urgent needs, emotional appeals, or those which are given grudgingly, are not acceptable to God. Many would shudder if they realized how God regards them. “It were better not to give at all than to give grudgingly; for if we impart of our means when we have not the spirit to give freely, we mock God.” C.S., p. 199

The rejection of God’s plan has produced an offensive list of methods for financing His work. Man’s list is almost endless. Because selfishness, the sin of the world, is also the greatest sin of the church, men turn away from God’s plan, and turn to methods that will produce funds from sources other than their own, or at least deaden the pain in giving. The selfish heart will seek any means which will serve its own interests. It will seek other methods to accomplish this without sacrificing its own desires. Every such method is an abomination to God.

Because God “has arranged the plan of salvation so that it begins and ends in benevolence” (Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 548) it can be seen how important sacrifice is to His followers. It must be constantly kept in mind that “God so loved” that He gave. Because it was love that motivated God to give Jesus, the only acceptable gift must also be motivated by love. Any other motive would make the gift a mockery.

It is difficult at times to draw the line to determine which method is in “addition to,” or what is right or wrong. How does one determine his course of action? The answer is motive. Is the motive self-serving, or God-serving? Does one want to live more like God, or more like the world? An examination of the motive will solve these sometimes perplexing problems. When the motive is love for God, every question will have the right solution. (C.S., pp. 201-206)

PRINCIPLE: Some methods may be all right if they are in “addition to” but they must never be in “substitution for” personal sacrifice.

11. GOD ORDAINED ONLY ONE PLAN, THE TITHES AND FREEWILL OFFERINGS TO FINANCE HIS WORK.

God ordained one plan for the financing of His work—the return of the tithe and the giving of freewill offerings.

“If our people had the love of God in the heart, if every church member were imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice, there would be no lack of funds for home and foreign missions; our resources would be multiplied; a thousand doors of usefulness would be opened; and we should be invited to enter.”
C.S., p. 37

God holds Himself responsible for the success of His work. He has a plan. His plan is workable. He blesses men with property. Faithful stewards return the tithe and give free-will offerings. These would be adequate to support God's cause.

If more money is needed, God would bless men with more income. The tithe would increase as would the freewill offerings. If still more money was needed, He would simply bless man with more income. It is that simple. This would place the financing of the gospel work directly under the control of a creative God.

It must be obvious that, in God's plan, men and women are blessed first before anything becomes available for His cause. But when men fail to follow God's plan and substitute plans of their own devising, they not only deprive God's cause of necessary support but actually cheat themselves. Such is the folly of substituting human wisdom for divine direction.

If all followed God's plan, the treasury would be full. "Should means flow into the treasury in accordance with this divinely appointed plan—a tenth of all the increase, and liberal offerings—there would be an abundance for the advancement of the Lord's work." A. A., p. 75

"If all the means which have been wasted by our own people in self-gratification had been devoted to the cause of God, there would be no empty treasuries, and missions could be established in all parts of the world." C.S., p. 291

God never intended that His church should go from crisis to crisis. "God has deposited with His people in this world enough to carry forward His work without embarrassment" (Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 197). God's plans work. **LET'S WORK THEM!**

"God's people are called to a work that requires money and consecration. The obligations resting upon us hold us responsible to work for God to the utmost of our ability. He calls for undivided service, for the entire devotion of heart, soul, mind, and strength.

"There are only two places in the universe where we can place our treasures—in God's storehouse or in Satan's; and all that is not devoted to God's service is counted on Satan's side, and goes to strengthen his cause. The Lord designs that the means entrusted to us shall be used in building up His kingdom. His goods are entrusted to His stewards that they may be carefully traded upon, and bring back a revenue to Him in the saving of souls. These souls in their turn will become stewards of trust, cooperating with Christ to further the interests of God's cause.

"The Lord does not propose to come to this world, and lay down gold and silver for the advancement of His work. He supplies men with resources, that by their gifts and offerings they may keep His work advancing. The one purpose above all others for which God's gifts should be used is the sustaining of workers in the harvest field. And if men will become channels through which heaven's blessing can flow to others, the Lord will keep the channel supplied. It is not returning to the Lord His own that makes men poor; withholding tends to poverty . . ." C. S., pp. 35, 36.