

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – The Impact of Tithing – 17–23 February 2018

Christ wants us to know that we are amenable to God alone in tithing for the gospel. “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). No church should treat people to whom God has given His tithe as amenable to the church instead of to God.

Sunday: Together We Fund the Mission – Which mission? There were two missions in Christ’s day: the regular lines of the Jewish church, and the self-supporting disciples of Jesus. Let us go to the heart of the matter: as laymen see the lowering of standards (ministers not living up to health reform, neglecting dress reform, lightly regarding the Sabbath, irreverence in worship, calling truth error, and forsaking the faith once delivered to our Adventist pioneers) in the regular lines of our Seventh-day Adventist Church, faithful laymen are choosing to return the Lord’s tithe to His self-supporting ministries – shockingly, leaders in regular lines are desperate to stop the Lord’s tithe flowing to His self-supporting ministries! Increasingly, faithful laymen are finding these statements by Ellen White helpful: “The Jewish rulers recognized the obligation of tithing, and this was right; but they did not leave the people to carry out their own convictions of duty. Arbitrary rules were laid down for every case” {DA 616.3}. “The people to whom God has given His means are amenable to Him alone. It is their privilege to give direct aid and assistance to missions” {SpM 176.7}. “God calls for a revival and a reformation. The ‘regular lines’ have not done the work which God desires to see accomplished. Let revival and reformation make constant changes. Something has been done in this line, but let not the work stop here. No! Let every yoke be broken. Let men awaken to the realization that they have an individual responsibility” {SpM 175.2}. “It would be poor policy to support from the treasury of God those who really mar and injure His work, and who are constantly lowering the standard of Christianity” {3T 553.2}. “The tithe is the Lord’s” (Leviticus 27:30) and with Him alone people have to do in the matter of tithes. Just as whether the first fruits designated for the regular lines of Levites (Deuteronomy 18:1-4) be also given to the self-supporting non-Levites (2 Kings 4:42-44) is a matter for the Lord, so is the tithe a matter for the Lord to decide. Whether or not a person will pay the Lord’s tithe to Him, is a matter for him alone to decide, just the same as whether or not he will worship God at all, and as whether he will keep the Sabbath or not.

Let us be clear: to whom should we pay the Lord’s tithe? to those to whom is committed the charge of the Lord’s work – whether the regular lines or the self-supporting ministries. We find a non-Levite, Elisha, in a self-supporting ministry, receiving “first fruits” (2 Kings 4:42-44). It was as a self-supporting missionary that Paul laboured in spreading the knowledge of Christ throughout the world, and he not only received funds (Philippians 4:15) but also approved receipt of the same (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14). Pay the Lord’s tithe to those who, most fully of any that you know, are truly standing as the Lord’s representatives to spread the knowledge of His truth.

Monday: The Blessings of God – We read, “And Isaac sowed... and received... an hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him” (Genesis 26:12). The blessing of the Lord does not come because of our prosperity, but is the cause of it. Man may sow, but it is God who gives the increase. He does not always give us material wealth, as an evidence of His blessing; yet the sure promise in Malachi 3:10. However, no thought of what we may receive should ever enter into our service to God; for in that case it would not be service to God, but mere self-serving. God’s promise to Isaac was, “I will multiply thy seed” (Genesis 26:24). This was a repetition of the promise given to his father, Abraham, that God would bless him by giving him an abundant posterity. Now let us take notice of the significance of the statement occurring in the same chapter, that God blessed Isaac in giving him an abundant harvest for his sowing. God multiplied his seed that he sowed, and from this Isaac could learn the reality of God’s promise when He said, “I will multiply thy seed,” meaning his own posterity. Thus every returning harvest is a reminder to us that God will multiply godly men and fill the earth with them, and it is at the same time an announcement of the coming gathering of the faithful at the final harvest, which is the end of the world and the coming of Jesus Christ.

Tuesday: Purpose of the Tithe – Ellen White had the following to say about the use of the tithe: “The tithe is set apart for a special use. It is not to be regarded as a poor fund. It is to be especially devoted to the support of those who are bearing God’s message to the world; and it should not be diverted from this purpose” {RH, Supplement, Dec 1, 1896}. “God’s ministers are His shepherds, appointed by Him to feed His flock. The tithe is His provision for their maintenance, and He designs that it shall be held sacred to this purpose ...” {1MR 189.3} “But while some go forth to preach, He calls upon others to answer to His claims upon them for tithes and offerings with which to support the ministry, and to spread the printed truth all over the land” {Testimonies, vol 4, 472}.

Wednesday: The Storehouse – The Lord’s storehouse is not a single place, but wherever there is a need in the vineyard of the Lord, there is the Lord’s storehouse. Leaders in our Seventh-day Adventist Church often restrict the storehouse to the conference of the regular lines and oppose the idea of self-supporting ministries receiving tithe. God grant that such kingly voices that restrict His storehouse shall not be heard! Past leaders, such as the former vice president of the General Conference, Robert J Kloosterhuis, admitted that there is no biblical or Spirit of Prophecy proof that the conference is the storehouse – in an article published in August 1997, he wrote the following: “Is the storehouse the local conference? Or the local church? It may surprise you, but the Bible does not sanction either one as the storehouse! There are those who believe the storehouse should be the local church. They see parallels in the practices of ancient Israel. They contrast the present practice of Seventh-day Adventists with that of Scripture and say it is not biblical to have the local conference as the storehouse. On the other hand, the world church follows the plan of the local conference/mission as the storehouse. Which is biblical? Unfortunately, this question is not easily answered by a crystal clear statement of Scripture either in favor of the local church or of the local conference” (Ministry, August 1997, pp 14-17). What says Ellen White about the storehouse?

“There are only two places in the world where we can deposit our treasures – in God’s storehouse or in Satan’s, and all that is not devoted to Christ’s service is counted on Satan’s side and goes to strengthen his cause” {6T 447.2}. “This world is the Lord’s storehouse, from which we are ever drawing. He has provided fruits and grains and vegetables for our sustenance. For us He makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall. The whole human family, good and evil, are constantly drawing from God’s storehouse. It makes every difference with those so highly privileged how they receive the Lord’s gifts and how they treat the contract the Lord has made with them. He has made them His almoners, directing them to draw from His storehouse, and then make a return to Him in gifts and offerings, ‘that there may be meat in mine house’” {Manuscript 73, Dec 12, 1900}. “Do not worry lest some means shall go direct to those who are trying to do missionary work in a quiet and effective way. All the means is not to be handled by one agency or organization. There is much business to be done conscientiously for the cause of God” {SpM 422.1}. “He to whom God has entrusted unusual gifts should return to the Lord’s storehouse that which he has received, by freely giving to others the benefit of his blessings. Thus God will be honored and glorified” {YRP 195.2}.

Here is the example of Ellen White in tithing: “It has been presented to me for years that my tithe was to be appropriated by myself to aid the white and colored ministers who were neglected and did not receive sufficient properly to support their families. When my attention was called to aged ministers, white and black, it was my special duty to investigate into their necessities and supply their needs. This was to be my special work, and I have done this in a number of cases...

“If there have been cases where our sisters have appropriated their tithe to the support of the ministers working for the colored people in the South, let every man, if he is wise, hold his peace. I have myself appropriated my tithe to the most needy cases brought to my notice. I have been instructed to do this; and as the money is not withheld from the Lord’s treasury, it is not a matter that should be commented upon; for it will necessitate my making known these matters ...

“Some cases have been kept before me for years, and I have supplied their needs from the tithe, as God has instructed me to do. And if any person shall say to me, Sister White, will you appropriate my tithe where you know it is most needed, I shall say, Yes, I will; and I have done so. I commend those sisters who have placed their tithe where it is most needed to help to do a work that is being left undone; and if this matter is given publicity, it will create knowledge which would better be left as it is. I do not care to give publicity to this work which the Lord has appointed me to do. I send this matter to you so that you shall not make a mistake. Circumstances alter cases ...

“But for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe who have placed the tithe in my hands, and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of the most needy minister they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated. I write this to you so that you shall keep cool and not become stirred up and give publicity to this matter, lest many more shall follow this example” {Ellen White, January 22, 1905 (Letter 267, 1905), to Elder GF Watson, president of the Colorado Conference (Spalding-Magan Testimonies, 215-216)}.

Thursday: Tithe and Salvation by Faith – Tithing is a test of our trust in God, not only for earthly things, but also for eternal salvation; if we withhold tithe for fear of want, or if we cannot trust Him to provide us an earthly living, how can we trust Him to keep our souls alive in eternity? “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6). Let no one beguile you that you “withhold” tithe in giving it to self-supporting ministries; Ellen White says, “as the money is not withheld from the Lord’s treasury, it is not a matter that should be commented upon” {SpM 215.4}.