

Cure for Selfishness

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Study Given by W. D. Frazee—September 23,

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" Ephesians 3:8-11.

God has a plan, and He is carrying it out. It requires the cooperation of His people. He is to be glorified through His church, not only in this world but in the heavenly universe. All the universe is watching with inexpressible interest to see the demonstration.

What is that demonstration? Paul speaks of it here as the fellowship of the mystery according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Jesus. That purpose is that God and man might be united; that in humanity shall be fully reflected the divine image. That was the purpose in the beginning.

"And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" Genesis 1:26.

Satan sought to interfere with it. In fact, he sought to cancel it out, to annul it. But God took the problem that the entrance of sin made and began His wonderful effort to use it as the circumstance through which to make a more glorious revelation of His plan and purpose than has ever been done before in eternal past.

It should thrill our hearts that you and I have been chosen to come in at the end of human history and play a part in the great demonstration as His people are brought to fully reflecting the divine image.

If we are going to reveal the character of God, if we are going to be like Him, we must understand who He is and what He is, and those traits of character that He has must somehow come to be ours.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" 1 John 3:2.

We see Him, and as we behold, we become like Him. 1 John tells us twice what God is:

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" 1 John 4:8,16.

Do you know what love is? Well, it isn't selfishness. Love is not selfishness, and selfishness is not love. So in seeking to become like God we are seeking to get away from selfishness and into love.

Putting it in human words I say that God sought long and earnestly as to how that might be done in our experience. And the plan that God devised is a simple and wonderful plan. We are told:

"For God so loved the world, that He *gave*..." John 3:16.

And while it is true that love is to precede giving, it is also true that giving strengthens and develops love. Jesus understood that principle when He said:

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"
Matthew 6:21.

Putting it in human words God said, as the great lover and the great giver, I want My children to be like Me. I will share with them the experience and the joy of giving from love and through love. And that it may become a fixed habit, an eternal trait in their character, I will arrange a plan that will cause them to give not once or twice, but over and over again. And every act of giving shall strengthen in their lives this trait of love.

My dear friends, that's God's plan. And that is what forms the basis of the system of tithes and offerings that God has given to His people. It is a part of His great plan to develop in us His character that we may reveal to the world and the heavenly universe the fellowship of the mystery that God and man can agree together and that man can reflect the image of God.

That is a long way from bazaars and fancy fairs and church suppers to raise money for religious purposes. A thousand miles away.

Back in 1844 when the leading religious bodies were rejecting the message of William Miller and the other heralds of the Advent, and making fun of what they called the Millerite movement, they began to bring in these oyster suppers and ice cream socials and other methods of raising money to support the church. Those two things came in together—the rejection of the Advent message and the bringing in of the worldly methods of raising money. They were two different faces of the same coin, and the coin was the fall of Babylon.

I mention that only in passing. I turn to the brighter view of God's true plan for His church.

In the time of the end every divine institution is to be restored. Among the remnant people God has purposed that giving shall reach its height. So He has put before this people more cause for means and more opportunities for giving than any other movement in the history of the work. We are surrounded with human needs, physical and spiritual. The cause of the mission fields are kept before us. In our mission reading from the Sabbath School, through the *Review and Herald*, through ingathering, and in various ways, we are conscious of the world's needs. And all around us we come in contact with these needs. Some disaster strikes, or some family needs food, clothing, money. All these different things call upon us.

A church needs to be built. A school building needs to be built, literature needs to be provided for missionary efforts. Some young person needs to be assisted in school. So on and on, and we are asked to help. What is it all for? Continual giving starves covetousness to death.

There are various ways God might have handled this, but the way He chose to do it was to make us stewards. A steward is one intrusted with some property, business, or money which he manages for the owner. God has never relinquished His rights as owner of this world, but He has made man His steward.

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" 1 Corinthians 4:2.

Obviously the only way we can carry out our stewardship is to know what the directions are, and be willing to carry them out. Several years ago there was a big firm in London that stationed an agent in New Orleans with instruction for buying and selling cotton. By cable they would tell him to buy so many bales of cotton. Or, as the market got into a certain condition, they would cable him to sell so many bales of cotton. So he was their agent as he got directions.

One day he got a cable from London. It told him to sell three hundred bales of cotton. He thought he knew just what the market was doing, and if he held just a day or two he could get a much better price for that cotton. So he did. Sure enough, as he expected, the market went up. He sold the cotton at a higher price. He sat down and wrote to London what he had done, and enclosed the money.

Presently he received a letter which said, We received your letter and the check. We are sending you a check for the difference between the price we told you to sell and the day you sold. That is not our money. It is yours. You did that on your own judgment. With this we are relieving you of your responsibility. We need a man in New Orleans who will buy when we say buy, and sell when we say sell. It came out good this time, and you are the winner. Some other time it might not work that way.

He had the check and a chance to hunt a new job. What was the trouble with that man. He wanted to make the decisions instead of carrying out the decisions. There have been times when human beings have sought to carry out their

stewardship with God in something like that. But our text says it is required that a man be found faithful.

There are two parts to our stewardship. One is that of the tithe, and the other is that of the offerings. While they have some things in common, there are some things in which they are far different.

For an example, the amount. How much is the tithe? Ten percent of all our income. Is it always ten percent? Well, if it isn't ten percent it isn't tithe. You may pay a part of it, but you are not paying tithe unless you pay ten percent. The word means tenth. And if we pay less than ten percent we are paying on our tithe, not our tithe. And it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

What is the percent for offerings? God has left that with you. We are told that among the ancient Israelites, along with the tithe, the total given amounted to one fourth of their income. And some gave as much as a third for religious purposes. It might be thought that such a great strain upon the people would deplete them, make them poor. But to the contrary, it was the condition of their prosperity.

We have various opportunities to give, both through the channels of the church, the Sabbath School, missionary work, and individually helping the poor and needy. Helping brothers and sisters that may need help. There are many ways in which we are called upon.

My point is that the tithe is a specific amount, and the offerings may be as large as God blesses us and our hearts respond under His guidance.

If I am a steward, how much of the money am I a steward of? All of it. Who is the owner of it all? God. Since I am God's steward, should I ask Him what to do with His money? That's right. About the offerings, I can pray about the amount. About the tithe, I can only pray that I am accurate.

I want to take up a very interesting point about the tithe—the usefulness and purpose of it. In ancient Israel the tithe was designated to the Levites, the Lord's ministers in the sanctuary. The Levites paid tithe to the Priests. So all the people were directly or indirectly supporting the priesthood.

In the New Testament plan God has ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live off the Gospel, and He set up a church organization to disperse those tithes.

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" Malachi 3:8-10.

We are to bring the tithe. Do you know what the opposite of bring would be? Keep. So we are not to keep it or retain it. We are to bring it. How much are we to bring? All of it. Where are we to bring it? Into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house. The word meat means food.

We can apply this spiritually and think of the spiritual blessing that come to us as members of the church through the ministry of the work, but this has a very literal application.

"There must be meat in the treasure house of God wherewith to sustain the laborers" *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, page 250.

God intends that the ministry, set apart by the church for the preaching of the Gospel, shall be sustained by the tithe. Therefore He intends that there shall be in the treasury meat to sustain it. Pay the laborers so they can go on preaching the Word.

Suppose God's people don't bring in the tithe. What will be lacking? The meat. God desires that there shall be plenty in the treasury.

From time to time in this movement there has risen those who thought that by suggesting various plans they could improve the work. Some have thought that it would be a good thing to use the tithe to sustain the colporteurs. Do we have some statements that the work of the colporteurs is as important as that of the ministry? Yes. So some thought it would be well to use the tithe to help in that. Some thought it would be well to use the tithe to help in educational work. Do we have some instructions that exalt the work of the teacher, and show that it is a most important work? Yes. But through the Spirit of Prophecy God, who instructs His stewards, has told us that the tithe is not for that purpose at all. So I read:

"I am bidden to tell our people that they are making a mistake in applying the tithe to various objects which, though good in themselves, are not the object to which the Lord has said that the tithe should be applied.

"On reasons that the tithe may be applied to school purposes. Still others reason that canvassers and colporteurs should be supported from the tithe. But a great mistake is made when the tithe is drawn from the object for which it is to be used—the support of the ministers. There should be today in the field one hundred well qualified laborers where now there is but one" *Ibid*, 248.

Does God have plans to support the educational work and the colporteur work, and all the other lines of work? Yes. He has plans to carry on the self-supporting work, but not through the tithe any more than the school or colporteur work.

The tithe is reserved by God for the purpose of the ministry. You and I are stewards. On this point God is testing our honesty as well as our gratitude. He is seeking to see if we will follow directions like that man in New Orleans didn't. That man brought his judgment into it. You can see how our ministers are warned on this point:

"Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work.

"The minister should, by precept and example, teach the people to regard the tithe as sacred. He should not feel that he can retain and apply it according to his own judgment because he is a minister. It is not his" *Ibid*, page 247.

The tithe doesn't belong to the individual member, and it doesn't belong to the individual minister. Who does it belong to? God. And He has set up an organized church in the earth to receive that tithe and disperse it.

I don't think we can improve on God's plan. What do you say? God has a wonderful plan.

Let me discuss a practical angle of this thing with you. Could it happen in the history of the church that circumstances might arise where some member or members might have some doubts as to just whether the tithe is used in the best way? Oh, yes. In fact, if you look back in Malachi you might find some things that would make you wonder if the conditions among the priesthood were part of the reason the people didn't bring the tithe anymore than they did. But nevertheless God said, Bring the tithes to the storehouse.

"Some have been dissatisfied and have said: 'I will not longer pay my tithe, for I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work.' But will you rob God because you think the management of the work is not right? Make your complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right. *Ibid*, page 249.

In the government it would hardly be the thing to quit paying our taxes just because we thought something wasn't right in Washington. We smile at that. But God doesn't have force in His plan. If we bring our tithe, it won't be through force or fear. It will be through love. Remember, that is the demonstration.

I want to share something interesting with you. I have a very old book in my hands. One of our veteran ministers in the General Conference for many years gave

me this little book, which I treasure very much. It has some special testimonies which were sent out to our ministers many years ago. This particular one I am going to read from is called, Series A of *Special Testimonies*, Number 1, page 27. I think you will be interested as I read:

"You who have been withholding your means from the cause of God, read the book of Malachi, and see what is spoken of in regard to tithes and offerings. Can you not see that it is not best under any circumstances to withhold your tithe and offerings because you are not in harmony with everything your brethren do? The tithes and offerings are not the property of any man, but are to be used in doing a certain work for God. Unworthy ministers may receive some of the means thus raised. But dare anyone because of this withhold from the treasury and brave the curse of God? I dare not. I pay my tithe gladly and freely saying as did David, Of thine own have we given Thee. A selfish withholding from God would tend to poverty in our own souls. Act your part my brethren and sisters. God loves you, and He stands at the helm. If the conference business is not managed according to the order of the Lord, that is the sin of the erring ones. The Lord will not hold you responsible for it if you do what you can to correct the evil. But do not commit sin yourselves by withholding from God His own property. When persons declare that they will not pay their tithe because the means are not used as they think they ought to be, will the elder of the church, or the minister, sympathize with the sinner? Will he aid the enemy in his work?" Series A of *Special Testimonies*, Number 1, page 27

What is it God is trying to do? He is trying to get His people in shape to make the demonstration, to reveal here on earth that His people individually and as a group can live on earth the life of heaven, and reveal on earth the love of heaven. Let's let God get us ready for the demonstration. And remember, part of it is revealing this love in giving. And as the calls come, everyone has the chance to reveal this character of love.

Some of us may have very little to give. At times some of you may not have anything. But sooner or later everyone of us receives something. And there is one wonderful thing about the tithe. Everybody can pay it, because the tithe is simply a certain percentage of what you receive. Just as soon as you receive anything, one tenth of it will be tithe.

Suppose you had a pie, and you cut it into ten parts. It wouldn't make any difference if it were a great big pie or a little pie. You cut it into ten parts, and lay one part aside. That would be the tithe. So the poor man as well as the rich man can pay a faithful tithe. And in that sense, the rich man can't pay any more tithe than the

poor man can. He may give larger offering, but as far as the tithe is concerned, we are all on the same footing.

So I hope all our students, as you get your tiny labor check at the end of the month, appreciate the fact that God has made you a steward. And one of the big reason in our educational work here at Wildwood that we have this plan of students actually getting a check for their labor is so they can personally go through the experience of being a steward and pay tithe into the treasury of the church, thus fulfilling God's statement in Malachi. However we get our income, one tenth is holy.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Friends, what kind of blessing do you want? If all you want is money, and God should shower down so much that you actually didn't have room to hold it, that would be something. Well, I wonder if that is the blessing we want. I am sure He has promised us all we need.

But what is this blessing that there will not be room enough to receive? I wouldn't exclude temporal blessings, but I would say that I am sure the great blessing we want is standing and entering into the character of God, of receiving the fullness of His Spirit into our hearts. And we are in the time when we are going to see the windows of heaven opened, and from the heavenly sanctuary the final outpouring of the Spirit in the latter rain so there will truly not be room enough to receive it.

I want a part in that, don't you?

Our Father, seal to our hearts the lesson Thou hast taught us from Thy word this morning. Give us a great appreciation of Thy beautiful plan for sharing with Thy children the experience of giving, the experience of loving. May we gladden Thy heart by being cheerful givers, faithful stewards. And thus may we enter into Thy eternal purpose of revealing here on earth the character of God. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

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W.D. Frazee Sermons
PO Box 129, Wildwood, GA 30757
1-800-WDF-1840 / 706-820-9755
www.WDFsermons.org
support@WDFsermons.org

