

# **Stewardship: Motives of the Heart**

## **The Role of Stewardship**

Lesson #10 for March 10, 2018

Scriptures: Colossians 1:16-18; Hebrews 4:14-16; 3 John 3; Genesis 6:13-18; Revelation 14:6-12; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

1. We have looked at many aspects of stewardship. It is a big subject. Every true Christian must be a careful steward.

It is not a theory nor a philosophy but a working program. It is in verity the Christian law of living. . . . It is necessary to an adequate understanding of life, and essential to a true, vital religious experience. It is not simply a matter of mental assent, but is an act of the will and a definite, decisive transaction touching the whole perimeter of life.—LeRoy E. Froom, *Stewardship in Its Larger Aspects* (Mountain View: Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1929), p. 5.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sabbath, March 3].

2. So, what does it actually mean to be a Christian steward? Is Christian stewardship central to our idea of Christianity? *Our Bible Study Guide* suggests that stewardship may be likened to a chariot wheel.
3. Surely, every Christian who is a careful student of Scripture will recognize that Christ is the center of all of Scripture. He was the God of the Old Testament. (John 5:39-40; Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4) Of course, He is also the central figure in the New Testament. And He will be the future King and Leader of God's kingdom forever. Even Satan will bow down and recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord and that God did everything right.

**Philippians 2:9-11:** <sup>9</sup> For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name.

<sup>10</sup>And so, in honour of the name of Jesus  
all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below  
will fall on their knees,

<sup>11</sup>and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Philippians 2:9-11). New York: American Bible Society.

4. Ellen White concurred writing, "Jesus is the living center of everything."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism\** 186.
5. Surely, we would agree based on Galatians 2:20 and Philippians 1:21 that for Paul, Christ was the Center of his life.
6. Read Colossians 1:16-20; Romans 8:21; and 2 Corinthians 5:17. In these verses we learn that Christ was the Creator of all things, that He will one day set us free from slavery to decay, and that He will make us new creatures by turning those who accept Him into His friends. He did this by coming and sharing our human condition so that we could share His future.
7. Read John 15:5. "For without me you can do nothing." (*NKJV*) Compare Acts 17:25,28. What is implied by these words? As far as we know, Christ was relatively poor throughout His entire life on this earth. (See Luke 2:24 and Leviticus 12:6-8.) Do we have any evidence that He gave offerings? Or, paid tithe? There is, of course, the story about the fish with the money in its mouth which was used to pay the temple tax for Peter and Jesus. (Matthew 17:24-26)
8. *Our Bible Study Guide* then turns to talking about the sanctuary in the Old Testament. Have

you ever thought of the sanctuary in the context of stewardship? Seventh-day Adventists have become famous among Christians for their understanding of the Old Testament sanctuary and its relationship to the heavenly sanctuary. Ellen White said: “The correct understanding of the ministration [of Christ] in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Letter 208*,\* 1906; *Evangelism*\* 221.2. [Content in brackets is added.]

9. Our understanding of the prophecies of Daniel, especially Daniel 8&9, in connection with our understanding of the Jewish sacred calendar has led to our interpretation of prophecies and some important assessments about where we are in human history. It is absolutely essential that we understand: 1) Why Jesus had to die. 2) What He is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary. 3) Whether we want to be faithful Seventh-day Adventists.

“Standing on the *sola Scriptura* [Scripture alone] principle, Biblical Adventism builds its doctrinal system from the general perspective of the sanctuary doctrine.”—Fernando Canale, *Secular Adventism? Exploring the Link Between Lifestyle and Salvation* (Lima, Peru: Peruvian Union University, 2013), pp. 104, 105.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Monday, March 5 including content in brackets].

10. In order to understand our doctrine about the heavenly sanctuary and what happens there, it is essential that we read Zechariah 3:1-5; Revelation 12:10; and Daniel 7:9-10. We must also read chapter 28 in *Great Controversy* entitled “The Investigative Judgment” in the older editions and “Facing Life’s Record” in the more recent editions. That chapter must be compared with chapter 47 in *Prophets and Kings* entitled “Joshua and the Angel.” If we skip the understanding presented in those places, it is very easy to misunderstand what we read in places like 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14-16; and Revelation 14:7.
11. We need to answer questions like: 1) Who is accusing us? and 2) Who is representing us before the throne of God? It is Satan who accuses us; it is Jesus who defends us. Satan is also continually accusing God! God the Father also loves us (John 3:16; 16:25-27) and defends us, as far as possible. We must never allow anyone to suggest that the Father is the one accusing us. It is essential also to read John 3:17-21; John 5:22; and John 12:47-48 to understand exactly what Jesus taught about who is the judge.

**John 3:17-21:** <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

<sup>18</sup> Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God’s only Son.

<sup>19</sup>This is how the judgement works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil.

<sup>20</sup>All those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. <sup>21</sup>But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.—*Good News Bible*.\* (John 3:17-21).

**John 5:22:** “Nor does the Father himself judge anyone. He has given his Son the full right to judge.”—*Ibid*.\* (John 5:22).

**John 12:47-48:** <sup>47</sup>“If anyone hears my message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came, not to judge the world, but to save it. <sup>48</sup>Those who reject me and do not accept my message have one who will judge them. The words I have spoken will be their judge on the last day!”—*Ibid*.\* (John 12:47-48).

12. The core message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as presented in Scripture and spelled out by Ellen White should be the truth about God, His character, and His government. All other doctrines find their meaning as they help us to understand God’s character.

13. Stewardship, of course, reflects what we really believe about the plan of salvation and about our responsibilities to God.
14. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. This is a great passage in helping us to understand that we are not asked to go through anything that Jesus Himself did not experience. And surely, the Devil made His temptations as fierce as possible.
15. When Jesus came to this earth and was born as a baby boy, the Devil was certain that he would be able to get Him to sin. That was Satan's first goal. More than 30 years later as Jesus was in His ministry, the Devil, having failed to get Him to sin in any way, began to take a second approach. If he could not get Jesus to sin, he would try to make His life so difficult that He would give up and go back to heaven without actually sinning. When that failed and Jesus's life ended with His death on the cross, the Devil and all his angels did what they could to keep Him in the grave. Remember that Satan claims everyone who is dead as being in his rightful domain. But, as we know, Jesus arose in His own power and came forth from the grave; there was nothing Satan or any of his angels could do about it. (*Desire of Ages* 785.2)

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster.... Those who study the Redeemer's wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 5, 1137.

16. Read John 14:6; 17:17; and 3 John 3. As we read in John 3:17-21, we will be judged by the truth. Thus, it is essential that we recognize that Jesus was the truth and that He wants nothing more for us than to live according to that truth.
17. Research into why people join churches and whether or not they stay has demonstrated that a person must accept and live according to at least two of these three basic principles if s/he is going to remain faithful to the church: 1) He must believe in the teachings and doctrines of the church. 2) He should become involved in one way or another in the church's activities, participating on a regular basis. 3) He must feel that he is a regular member of a relatively small group of Christian friends who will miss him if he is not there.
18. For the typical person of the world who becomes a Christian, this involves a fairly radical change.

**Ephesians 4:20-24:** That was not what you learnt about Christ! <sup>21</sup>You certainly heard about him, and as his followers you were taught the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup>So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to—the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. <sup>23</sup>Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, <sup>24</sup>and you must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy.—*Good News Bible*.\* (Ephesians 4:20-24).

19. Careful Bible students will recognize that there have only been two times in the history of our world when God warned of a coming catastrophe: 1) The flood in Noah's day; (Genesis 6:13-18; Matthew 24:37) and 2) The three angels' messages recorded in Revelation 14:6-12. Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that we have a correct understanding of the three angels' messages. More than that, we have stated that our mission to the world is to explain those messages clearly to those with whom we come in contact. Are we doing that?
20. The first angel's message tells us that the hour of God's judgment has come. Does this mean the time when God judges us? Or, the time when He is judged? Or, both?
21. The second angel reminds us that Babylon is fallen. In light of a fuller understanding of the books of Daniel and Revelation, it is clear that this is talking about apostate Christianity, particularly the Roman Catholic system.

22. In the third angel's message, we come across the most fearsome warning in the entire Bible. We need to be able to explain clearly what is meant by *the mark of the beast*, *the wine of God's fury*, *God's wrath*, and what the fire is that will consume the wicked at the end. If we cannot explain these things in biblical terms, we have not lived up to our mission.

In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. **There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 9, 19.1; *LDE*\* 45.3; *LHU*\* 357.2. [Bold type is added.]

23. The *Bible Study Guide* suggests that presenting the three angels' messages to the world is the point where our teachings will either stand or fall. How well are we doing?
24. More than just being able to explain things, are we living lives that match our teachings? Read 1 Peter 1:15-16 and Hebrews 12:14. Clearly, we are challenged to live holy lives in accordance with God's plan for us.

The Romans discovered that a chariot wheel lasted longer if a band of iron was placed around the rim. The craftsman heated the metal to expand it just enough to slip it over the rim. Cold water shrank it to a tight fit. The band of iron then made contact with the road as the wheel turned.

The iron band on the rim can represent the concept of stewardship. This is the moment of truth, where our spiritual lives rub against our practical lives. It is where our faith meets the ups and downs of life through successes and failures. It is where our beliefs get real in the rough-and-tumble scuffles of daily living. Stewardship is the outer wrapping of who we are and what we do. It is a witness of our conduct and of a life well managed. Our daily actions that reveal Christ are like the iron on the wheel that touches the road.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Thursday, March 8.

25. Do we really believe that we can do all things through Christ as He strengthens us?

The sanctification of the soul by the working of the Holy Spirit is the implanting of Christ's nature in humanity. Gospel religion is Christ in the life—a living, active principle. It is the grace of Christ revealed in character and wrought out in good works. The principles of the gospel cannot be disconnected from any department of practical life. Every line of Christian experience and labor is to be a representation of the life of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*\* 384.1.

26. Do the people in your town or city recognize that Seventh-day Adventists are representing the truth about Jesus Christ?
27. There were times when the iron bands on the chariot wheels of the Romans came off or needed to be reset. That was a very difficult process. In the same way, Christians may have to go through some very difficult times to separate us from the evils that we have grown accustomed to and bring us back into line with God's plan for us.
28. Think of the experiences of Peter. He was warned by Jesus and still failed at the trial. He was taught about reaching out to Gentiles through his experience with Cornelius recorded in Acts 10&11. Still, he slipped back into his prejudicial Jewish ways and had to be openly condemned by Paul as recorded in Galatians 2:11-14.

29. Read Luke 9:23; Galatians 6:14; and 1 Corinthians 2:16. What did the Romans think about crosses? In what ways are we to take up our cross? What does it mean *to be dead to the world*? How can we take upon ourselves the mind of Christ? How many of the doctrines of the church have noticeably impacted your daily life? Some people think that paying a very strict tithe and giving generous offerings is a sign of legalism. Could that be true? What is the relationship among Christ-centered stewardship, true Christianity and legalism?
30. If you have never tried to explain the three angels' messages, are you loyal to the Seventh-day Adventist message? What should be the relationship between practical Christianity and church doctrine?
31. Do you have a clear picture in your mind of the ancient sanctuary that was built at the foot of Mount Sinai? Do you understand each of the different parts such as the bronze altar, the laver, the golden lampstand, the table of showbread/shewbread, and the altar of incense, not to mention the ark of the covenant? Do you understand what each of those articles of the sanctuary, and later the temple, represented in terms of our Christian understanding?
32. Ellen White wrote some very startling words for us.

All who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to everyone that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them. [1 Peter 3:15]—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 488.3-489.0. [Content in brackets is added.]

33. She went on to say:

**The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross.** By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven.... Jesus has opened the way to the Father's throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God.—*Ibid.*\* 489.1. [Bold type is added.]

34. Once again, notice that it is absolutely essential to read the whole chapter in order to understand the meaning of these passages and also to read John 3:17-21; John 5:22; and John 12:47-48. So, who is the Judge? Who is our Mediator? Who is our accuser?

... There must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12.—*Ibid.*\* 422.0; *FLB*\* 207.5; *4SP*\* 266.1; compare *SR* 378.2.

35. Clearly, God must make decisions based on the records of our lives and the general direction in which we are headed before He can come to take some to heaven and allow the rest to die, awaiting the third coming.
36. This judgment that will take place before Christ's second coming is spoken of in Revelation, Daniel, and Matthew.
37. The coming of Christ, spoken of in Revelation, is symbolized elsewhere in the Bible by

marriage. And the symbol of a marriage supper or feast prior to the marriage itself is used in Scripture to describe the investigative judgment before the second coming.

The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary, brought to view in Daniel 8:14 ... is also represented by the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins, of Matthew 25.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*\* 426.1; *FLB*\* 207.4; *Mar*\* 248.4.

In the parable of Matthew 22 the same figure of the marriage is introduced, and the investigative judgment is clearly represented as taking place before the marriage. Previous to the wedding the king comes in to see the guests, to see if all are attired in the wedding garment, the spotless robe of character washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Matthew 22:11; Revelation 7:14. He who is found wanting is cast out, but all who upon examination are seen to have the wedding garment on are accepted of God and accounted worthy of a share in His kingdom and a seat upon His throne. This work of examination of character, of determining who are prepared for the kingdom of God, is that of the investigative judgment, the closing work in the sanctuary above.—*Ibid.*\* 428.1.

38. This process of the pre-advent judgment is also sometimes portrayed as a wedding feast, the supper prior to the wedding.
39. So, what does all of this sanctuary talk and judgment talk have to do with the challenge of stewardship?

In the judgment the use made of every talent will be scrutinized. How have we employed the capital lent us of Heaven? Will the Lord at His coming receive His own with usury? Have we improved the powers entrusted us, in hand and heart and brain, to the glory of God and the blessing of the world? How have we used our time, our pen, our voice, our money, our influence? What have we done for Christ, in the person of the poor, the afflicted, the orphan, or the widow? **God has made us the depositaries of His holy Word; what have we done with the light and truth given us to make men wise unto salvation? No value is attached to a mere profession of faith in Christ; only the love which is shown by works is counted genuine. Yet it is love alone which in the sight of Heaven makes any act of value. Whatever is done from love, however small it may appear in the estimation of men, is accepted and rewarded of God.**—*Ibid.*\* 487. [Bold type is added.]

40. Read Matthew 24:14. This is not a question but a prophecy; it is not even conditional. The gospel will be preached to the whole world; and then the end will come. The question is: Will we be a part of it? Or, not? Are we maximizing our efforts to spread the gospel? Do we understand our Christian doctrines, especially the teachings of the three angels' messages so clearly that we can present them to others who do not have an extensive biblical background?
41. We believe that there will be a great outpouring of the latter rain at the end of time. This will lead to an end-time harvest. But, the end-time harvest cannot take place unless there is a great sowing of the seed. Are we doing that sowing now?

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