

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart God or Mammon?

Lesson #3 for January 20, 2018

Scriptures: Psalm 33:6-9; 50:10; Matthew 19:16-22; 1 Peter 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-15; Exodus 9:14; Philippians 2:9-11.

1. In the Scriptures God made it very clear that we cannot serve Him and money at the same time. (For example, see Luke 12:20-21.) What does it mean to “serve mammon”? We all have to earn a living and provide for ourselves and our families. Does a poor family which spends all of its time trying to survive in a country where many people are starving to death qualify as “serving mammon”? We need food, clothing, and housing. *Mammon* means wealth.
2. If we are focused on God and all He has done for us and wants to do in us, does that make it easier to place a proper value on money?
3. What was God’s first reason for claiming ownership of us? He is our Creator. Read Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6-9; Isaiah 45:11-12; Jeremiah 51:15; and John 1:3. Everything in the universe was created by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It was Christ that spread the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth. It was His hand that hung the worlds in space, and fashioned the flowers of the field. “His strength setteth fast the mountains.” “The sea is His, and He made it.” Psalm 65:6; 95:5. It was He that filled the earth with beauty, and the air with song. And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father’s love.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 20.1.

4. Contrary to some religions, Christianity does not teach that material things are basically and inherently evil. The Bible teaches that material things are to be used for the glory of God.
5. Read Deuteronomy 26:10-13. These verses suggest that we should be thankful to the Lord for everything He has given us and that we should share the good things we have with the Levites (our pastors), foreigners, widows, and orphans. This second tithe was to be set apart for those individuals. The second tithe was to be used mainly for the support of the poor. The first tithe was, of course, for the support of the temple and the Levites.
6. But, earlier, God had given another set of directions which are quite interesting. Read Deuteronomy 14:22-29. Once again, they were advised to set aside a tithe; this time they were to use the tithe to feed themselves and their families and to share with the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. But, they were specifically told that they were to take the produce or animals—or, if it was some distance from home to Jerusalem, they were to sell the produce and carry the money so that when they got to Jerusalem, they could buy beef, lamb, wine, or beer—to celebrate in the presence of the Lord. But, they were not to neglect the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, or the widows. How should we interpret those directions in our day? If you are having a beer party, should you invite the pastor? We are not asked to travel some distance to a place of worship. Instead of giving a second tithe to support the poor and needy, we pay taxes to the government and expect them to care for the poor. Is that a satisfactory solution? God was more concerned about us caring for the poor and worshiping Him as we should than about what we eat or drink. Compare Proverbs 31:4-7.

7. Does the fact that Jesus as Creator made everything place on Him the responsibility of knowing what is best for what He has made?
8. Various aid organizations have tried to evaluate the situation in our world as far as food is concerned. While some parts of the world are starving, other parts have more food than they need. The experts who have tried to assess the situation believe that if food were distributed equally—or at least fairly—there would be enough for everyone to eat. For those of us who live in countries with plenty, do we have an individual responsibility to help those who are starving? Did your mother tell you to eat your food because children were starving in China and India?
9. Jesus was unique in human history. He is called the Son of God and at the same time a/the Son of Man. We know, in fact, that He has always existed. There was never a time when the divine Christ was born. A second mystery involving Jesus is the fact that He was able to come to our earth and live as the human Jesus while having available to Him at any time the possibility of exercising His divine power. However, He did not exercise that divine power until resurrection Sunday when He arose from the grave, using His own power. (See John 10:18; *Desire of Ages* 785.2.)

Here are two mysteries for the price of one—the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. . . . Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation.—J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 53.—[as quoted in *Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, January 15.]

10. Jesus as God (Colossians 1:15-20) came down to this world to show us the true picture of God. Satan has done everything he possibly can to misrepresent God; in our day, he is doing everything he possibly can to prevent us from taking the time and effort to learn the truth about God and the truth about the life and death of Jesus. Instead, he offers any kind of ploy he can think of to distract our attention. One of his most successful efforts has been to get human beings to focus on money and what money can do for them. In what way does the love of material things depersonalize our understanding of God?
11. Read Matthew 19:16-22. Try to imagine yourself in the position of that rich young ruler. Remember that the Jews—like many religious people today—believed that being rich was a proof that he was a good person and God was, therefore, blessing him. So, what Jesus said to the rich young ruler was: “Give up all that the world regards as God’s blessings; and then, as a despised poor man who apparently is not blessed by God, come and follow Me!”
12. Despite the fact that this young man had virtually everything the world had to offer, he was not satisfied. Why not? What was it that he still felt was lacking? Did he have a “God-shaped hole” in his heart?
13. How can we make sure that we have a right relationship to the things of this world whether we are rich or poor? Is it okay to “store up money” in a retirement account to provide for yourself and/or your family in your old age?
14. When Adam and Eve sinned, they placed themselves and all of humanity as debtors to God with a debt that we can never repay.

God’s love for us set in motion the plan of redemption. Jesus became a “surety” for us (*Heb. 7:22*). It is Christ’s identity as the Redeemer that reveals the most important transaction ever made. **Only the sacrifice of His life**

could accomplish the required payment of divine justice. Jesus paid the debt of sin that we owed as justice and mercy embraced at the cross. The universe never had seen or witnessed the display of such wealth as was used in the payment for the redemption of humankind (Eph. 5:2).—*Ibid. for Tuesday, January 16. [Bold type is added.]**

15. If Jesus “paid the debt,” to whom was it paid? To the Father to assuage His wrath? To the Devil to buy us back? What do we mean when we say that Jesus “paid the debt”? If a soldier dies on the battlefield, we sometimes say, “He paid the ultimate price.”

By pouring the whole treasury of heaven into this world, by giving us in Christ all heaven, God has purchased the will, the affections, the mind, the soul, of every human being.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 326.1; *FLB** 101.6; *AG** 173.2; *HP** 198.3; *OHC** 104.3.

16. Does the fact that God has purchased our wills mean that we no longer have any choice?
17. Christ's death has rescued us from a multitude of problems. Read Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Peter 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-15; Galatians 3:13; and Revelation 1:5. These verses tell us that Christ has saved us from the power of darkness, God's anger, the worthless manner of lives that we have been living, an overwhelming fear of death that makes us slaves, the curse that is upon us for breaking the law, and our sins.
18. Jesus came and lived and died “to deal with sin” (Romans 8:3) and to destroy the Devil. (Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8) How did Jesus destroy the Devil? By telling the truth? And demonstrating it in His life?
19. Read John 19:30. While Jesus was, no doubt, not speaking Greek but Aramaic in those final moments of His life on this earth, the Greek word *tetelestai* meaning “it is finished” has been called the most important word ever spoken. Do you agree with that assessment? What did Jesus think was finished when He made that statement? In His prayer earlier as recorded in John 17, He suggested that He had correctly represented the Father. Was that His mission to this world?
20. Why is it that the life and especially the death of Jesus and how He died destroy the Devil and deal with sin and make salvation possible for the entire world?
21. It has often been said that the death of Christ “satisfied justice.” What does it mean to say that “justice is satisfied”? Is *justice* a code word for God's wrath or anger? What should be our response?
22. Many Christians and pastors have looked through Scripture to find a humble statement representing what our response should be. It is very interesting that our *Bible Study Guide* chose Job 42:5-6.

Job 42:5-6: ⁵ In the past I knew only what others had told me, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. ⁶ So I am ashamed of all I have said and repent in dust and ashes.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Job 42:5-6). New York: American Bible Society.

23. When Job uttered those words, what was God's immediate response?

Job 42:7-8: ⁷ After the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz, “I am angry with you and your two friends, because you did not speak the truth about me, as my servant Job did. ⁸ Now take seven bulls and seven rams to

Job and offer them as a sacrifice for yourselves. Job will pray for you, and I will answer his prayer and not disgrace you as you deserve. You did not speak the truth about me as he did.”—*Ibid.** (Job 42:7-8).

24. Job said that he was ashamed of his words; but, God was proud of Job’s words because they represented the truth about God. Who was right?
25. Do these verses suggest that we could actually live lives and speak words that would be an honor to God’s kingdom? Could we, like Job, say of God “what is right”?
26. Read Exodus 9:14. In this passage God was speaking very strong warning words to Pharaoh. We know what the results were. But, what did He mean when He said: “There is none like me in all the earth”? (Exodus 9:14, *NKJV**)
27. In the simplest terms, it means that there are no other gods. (See Exodus 8:10; Deuteronomy 4:39; 32:39; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 42:8; 43:10; 44:6; 45:5-6,18,21; Daniel 3:29; Micah 7:18-20; and Mark 12:32.)

It is impossible for the finite minds of men to fully comprehend the character or the works of the Infinite One. To the keenest intellect, to the most powerful and highly educated mind, that holy Being must ever remain clothed in mystery.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 5, 698.2-699.0.

28. It should be immediately obvious to every Christian who takes the Bible seriously that there is no one else equal to God. For an example, see Isaiah 40-55.
29. God is also separate and distinct from all that He has created. Read 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 55:8-9; Jeremiah 10:10; and Titus 1:2. These verses make it clear that there is no one else like our God; He is high above us—as high as the heavens are above the earth. And this wonderful God promises us life; in fact, He did so before the beginning of time.
30. Considering the fact that God created the entire universe, and thus, everything in it belongs to Him, how could human beings choose to worship anything else? If God were no different from an ordinary human being, He would laugh at our foolishness. But, God loves us so much that He is jealous about us. He does not want anything to hurt us. While everything in the universe belongs to Him—not only we ourselves but also all our possessions—God loves it when we choose to use them properly for His name’s sake.
31. God not only owns everything (Job 38:4-11) but also we are dependent upon Him for every single heartbeat and every breath. (Acts 17:25,28; *Christian Education* 195.1; *Education* 130.5; *The Faith I Live By* 28.1-2; *Patriarchs and Prophets* 115.1; and especially *Review and Herald*,* December 20, 1890, par. 15: “Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God.”)
32. Read Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 50:10; 104:16; Ezekiel 18:4; Haggai 2:8; and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. These verses make it very clear not only that we belong to God but also that everything in the universe belongs to Him.
33. Ellen White agreed:

All things belong to God. Men may ignore His claims. While He bountifully bestows His blessings upon them, they may use His gifts for their own selfish gratification; but they will be called to give an account for their stewardship.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 9, 246.2.

34. We will always be stewards or tenants of what belongs to God. We can never create something that did not come from God. We cannot own anything that did not come from God. But, God will not force His will upon us. He refuses to do that.
35. Think what it means that, in reality, you do not own any of the things that you “possess” but that they belong to God. What should that tell you about how you should relate to the things in your possession? If God truly owns everything, how should that affect our spending habits?
36. Think of the environment in which God placed Adam and Eve at the beginning.
- Adam and Eve were given the garden of Eden to care for. They were “to dress it and to keep it.” They were happy in their work. Mind, heart, and will acted in perfect harmony. In their labor they found no weariness, no toil. Their hours were filled with useful work and communion with each other. Their occupation was pleasant. God and Christ visited them and talked with them. They were given perfect freedom.... God was the owner of their Eden home. They held it under Him.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*,* vol. 10, 327.1.
37. When we recognize that God created everything and that everything thus belongs to Him, how should that affect our relationship to our environment?
38. What does it mean to say that God is a “jealous God”? God feels about us just as loving parents feel about their children, only many times more because His love is so much deeper and broader.
39. Could we develop a simple rule for deciding if some particular use of something that God has loaned to us is a proper use of that thing or an abuse of that thing? See 1 Corinthians 10:31.
40. In light of what we have studied in this lesson, why does God seem to provide so much more generously to some than to others? Is He responsible for all the famines and droughts that occur? Do we recognize Christ as our Creator, Redeemer, and the Owner of everything? He became a Human Being so He could reach out to human beings. Most of all, He wants to be our Friend. (John 15:15)
41. In light of all this, what should our relationship to Him be? Could we really be friends of our Creator? Shouldn't we be spending more time in contemplation of His life and His death in order to get to know Him better?
42. How should we relate to people who do not believe in creation? Do we have to convince them of the truth about Who created our world before we can speak about God to them? If there were no Creator, what worship options would people have?
43. *To worship* means that we hold something or Someone as a value to us in our lives—we consider that Person or that thing to be “of worth.” Every human being wants to be a part of, or relate to, things that are of worth.
44. In that light, would you agree that human beings were created for worship? Unfortunately, many in our world are trying to divide up their worship. They say they want to worship God; but, they also want to worship mammon. Ultimately, that is not possible.

Many have accumulated possessions, thinking that they themselves are the masters, only to find that maintaining, repairing, and storing them requires so much time that they are the servants! Our property and wealth, however, are wonderful things when we recognize them for what they are: material

blessings bestowed by a loving Creator, given in order that we might distribute His blessings to others.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 40.

45. So, what can money buy? Can any amount of money supply the emotional needs for love, belonging, purpose, hope, adventure, satisfaction, and wholeness that humans so much long for?
46. Read Matthew 6:31-34 and Matthew 7:7-11. God has promised to give us whatever we need. If our requests are reasonable, He will respond at the best possible time. In fact, John 3:16 tells us that He loved us so much that He gave all of heaven in the form of His Son to die for us so that we can have eternal life. What more could we ask?
47. In this lesson we have sought to consider the two sides of the debate over God versus mammon. Do you feel that you have a clear understanding of both sides? Is there any question in your mind about whether or not God is the Creator of the entire universe?
48. In Paul's day, there was an early stage of development of an idea called *gnosticism*. *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* describes *gnosticism* as:

a generic term for a variety of religious movements of the first centuries of the Christian era. Although the theology, ritual practice, and ethics of these groups differed considerably, all purported to offer *salvation from the oppressive bonds of material existence through gnosis*, or "knowledge."
—Paul Achtemeier, ed. (italics supplied), *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 380.—[as quoted in *Ibid.** 41.]
49. Gnosticism was a direct attack against some of the most fundamental beliefs of Christianity. Gnostics did not believe that Christ could be a human being if He was God. Any person with a physical body could not be sinless because anything physical was evil. He could not live in the uterus or even be born to a physical woman; therefore, Mary herself would have to have been more than human.
50. In summary, we need to remember that inherently our world was created as good. See Genesis 1. Unfortunately, as human beings we have corrupted it through our sins. Having sold ourselves into the hands of the Devil, we are in a hopeless condition unless God does something to rescue us.
51. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Peter 1:18; Hebrews 2:14-15; and Galatians 3:13. As Christians we believe that Jesus did indeed truly become fully human in addition to being fully divine. There is no distinction in God's mind and there should not be in ours between that which is spiritual and, therefore, good and that which is physical.
52. So, do we find ways to worship God every day and not just on Sabbath? Do our decisions reflect the fact that we are not our own but we have been bought with a price? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
53. In our dealing with our environment, do we recognize that God is owner of all? Do we have a tendency to love the gift more than the Giver? Do we recognize that while we cannot serve God and mammon, we can use mammon to serve God? God has given us not only material possessions to use for His honor but also talents which should be used for His glory. How can we multiply the talents that God has given us?

© 2017, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. *Electronic version. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: December 26, 2017

Z:\My Documents\WP\SSTG-Hart\Stewardship\SS-3-Stewardship-2018_01_20-Fin+.wpd