

## **Stewardship: Motives of the Heart Honesty With God**

Lesson #7 for February 17, 2018

Scriptures: Luke 8:15; 11:42; 16:10; Leviticus 27:30; Genesis 22:1-12; Hebrews 7:2-10; 12:2; Nehemiah 13.

1. In this lesson we will discuss the essential points of tithing and its relationship with other aspects of the Christian's life. Are we being honest with God? Can He be trusted? Can we be trusted? Would you knowingly steal from God? Or, are there excuses for not paying an honest tithe?
2. Do truth and honesty go together? Are we born honest? How many little things that we do in our daily lives are really dishonest?
3. How do you feel about someone that you discover has been dishonest? Is it all right if you cheat on your taxes? Are there other areas of life where it is easy to be dishonest?

Dishonesty is practiced all through our ranks, and this is the cause of lukewarmness on the part of many who profess to believe the truth. They are not connected with Christ and are deceiving their own souls.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 4, 310.0 (1879).

4. Jesus also had some important things to say about honesty.

**Luke 16:10-11:** <sup>10</sup> “Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones. <sup>11</sup>If, then, you have not been faithful in handling worldly wealth, how can you be trusted with true wealth?”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*\* (2nd ed., Luke 16:10–11). New York: American Bible Society.

5. Why is it so easy to think of the money we receive in salary or other forms of income as ours? Didn't we work hard for it? Why does God say that a portion of it belongs to Him? Hasn't He given us the strength to do our daily work?
6. Read Leviticus 27:30 and Malachi 3:8.

**Leviticus 27:30:** One-tenth of all the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, belongs to the LORD.—*Ibid.*\* (Leviticus 27:30).

**Malachi 3:8:** <sup>8</sup> [The LORD said:] “I ask you, is it right for a person to cheat God? Of course not, yet you are cheating me. ‘How?’ you ask. In the matter of tithes and offerings.”—*Ibid.*\* (Malachi 3:8). [Content in brackets is added.]

7. God is not asking us to please be generous and give our tithe! The tithe is His!

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse” (Malachi 3:10), is God's command. No appeal is made to gratitude [139] or to generosity. This is a matter of simple honesty. The tithe is the Lord's; and He bids us return to Him that which is His own.

“It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:2. If honesty is an essential principle of business life, must we not recognize our obligation to God—the obligation that underlies every other?—Ellen G.

White, *Education*\* 138.4-139.1.

8. Read also Malachi 3:10. God gave us a direct command to pay our tithes. Ellen White affirmed that this is not an appeal to generosity or gratitude; it is a matter of honesty. God said that the tithe belongs to Him. And so, He has asked us to return to Him what is His.
9. Do we honestly recognize that everything we have comes from God and that we owe it all to Him? Is that a basic tenet of our belief system?
10. Read Genesis 22:1-12. The story of Abraham's willingness to offer his son as a sacrifice at God's command is a story that still rings down through history. Abraham's life of faith is clearly chronicled in the Bible. We recognize that there were some lapses in his trust in God such as when he lied about his wife in Egypt, and later, in Canaan, and then, when he took Hagar as a secondary wife because he did not think God could give him a son by Sarah who had stopped having periods. When that son was about 20 years old, they traveled those three days and nights to Mount Moriah; Abraham was actually prepared to offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham had decided that since Isaac was the son of the promise, God would either bring him back to life or He would provide a substitute. (See Hebrews 11:19.) Of course, we know that God provided a substitute sacrifice. Clearly, Abraham's faith grew from those first contacts with God in Ur all the way until he died. Faith should be a growing characteristic of every Christian's life.
11. Read Hebrews 12:2 and Romans 10:17. What do these texts tell us about the source of faith. Do we have any examples from the life of Jesus about tithing? What about Matthew 22:15-22? The word *finisher* in the *King James Version* or *end* in the *Good News Bible* could also be translated *perfecter*. It is a unique word at this site in the New Testament.
12. Ephesians 4:13-15 and Hebrews 5:14-6:3 make it very clear that God's intent for us is for our faith to be exercised and to grow, to mature, and to increase. So, has your faith clearly grown over the past year? Would it be fair to say that if your picture of God has not changed in the past year, you are worshiping a graven image?
13. Tithing is a very specific example of one way of exercising our faith. It is not a legalistic requirement. When we tithe, we are claiming God's promises of blessings to those who are faithful to Him. It is a statement of our faith. It is a very visible, clear evidence that we have real faith. Anyone can claim to have faith. See James 2:19. But, to tithe is an act of faith.
14. Read Luke 11:42. What was Jesus saying about tithing? What does tithing have to do with the "weightier matters of the law"?
15. Read Genesis 28:14-22. Imagine yourself in Jacob's shoes. He was running for his life into strange territory where there were wild animals and enemies of all sorts. He finally became so tired that he had to lie down and use a stone as a pillow. While sleeping, he had a vision of a ladder coming down from heaven; he realized that God was with him.
16. **Genesis 28:18-22:** <sup>18</sup> Jacob got up early next morning, took the stone that was under his head, and set it up as a memorial. Then he poured olive oil on it to dedicate it to God. <sup>19</sup>He named the place Bethel. (The town there was once known as Luz.) <sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow to the LORD: "If you will be with me and protect me on the journey I am making and give me food and clothing, <sup>21</sup>and if I return safely to my father's home, then you will be my God. <sup>22</sup>This memorial stone which I have set up will be the place where you are

worshipped, and I will give you a tenth of everything you give me.”—*Good News Bible*.\* (Genesis 28:18-22).

17. Is there anything complicated about paying tithe? It is a very simple and straightforward method of calculating God’s share. It is much simpler than filling out the income tax forms for the government!
18. God’s plan in the tithing system is beautiful in its simplicity and equality. All may take hold of it in faith and courage, for it is divine in its origin. In it are combined simplicity and utility, and it does not require depth of learning to understand and execute it. All may feel that they can act a part in carrying forward the precious work of salvation. Every man, woman, and youth may become a treasurer for the Lord, and may be an agent to meet the demands upon the treasury. Says the apostle, “Let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” [1 Corinthians 16:2]—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* August 25, 1874, par. 23; *Counsels on Stewardship*\* 73.1; *FLB*\* 244.3; *GW*\* 223.2; *3T*\* 388.4; *YRP*\* 245.4; “Special on Tithing” *PH166*\* 3.4. [Content in brackets is added.]
19. Can you think of some examples in your personal experience about blessings you have received because you are paying a faithful tithe? Are you keeping a record of ways in which God specifically blesses you?
20. It is often said that we give God our tithes. How can you give God something that He already owns?

**Leviticus 27:30:** One-tenth of all the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, belongs to the LORD.—*Good News Bible*.\* (Leviticus 27:30).

Tithe belongs to the Lord and therefore is holy. It does not become holy through a vow or a consecration act. It is simply holy by its very nature; it belongs to the Lord. No one except God has a right to it. No one can consecrate it to the Lord, because tithe is never part of a person’s property.—Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Stewardship Roots* (Silver Spring, Md.: Stewardship Ministries Department, 1994), p. 52.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Wednesday, February 14].

21. We do not in any way make tithe holy by setting it aside. God has already designated it as holy. He has the right to do so because He gives us everything that we have. Withholding that portion of our income from Him is dishonest.
22. Read Hebrews 7:2-10. After winning the war against those enemy kings, Abraham paid one-tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek. We know very little about Melchizedek. In all of the Bible, there are only a few passages in which he is mentioned. (Genesis 14:17-24; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1,6,8,10-11,15,17) We know nothing about his parents or his descendants. Yet, the father of the faithful, Abraham, paid a tithe of the spoils of war to him. What should we learn from that?
23. We recognize that the Sabbath is holy. It is our day to communicate with and celebrate with God. We do not make the Sabbath holy by keeping it; we recognize that it is so designated by God. Our tithe should be regarded in the same way. It is “set apart for sacred use.” That is the meaning of *holy* in the Bible.

In like manner a tithe of our income is “holy unto the Lord.” The New Testament does not reenact the law of the tithe, as it does not that of the Sabbath; for the validity of both is assumed, and their deep spiritual import explained.

God has made an absolute reservation of a specified portion of our time and our means. To ignore these claims is to rob God. Christians boast that their privileges far exceed those of the Jewish age. Shall we then be content to give less to the cause of God than did his ancient people? The tithe was but a part of their liberalities. Numerous other gifts were required besides the free-will offering, or offering of gratitude, which was then, as now, of perpetual obligation.

While we as a people are seeking faithfully to give to God the time which He has reserved as His own, shall we not also render to Him that portion of our means which He claims?—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* May 16, 1882, par. 28-30; *Counsels on Stewardship*\* 66.3.

24. Does paying a faithful tithe on a regular basis help us to grow our faith? Does it help us to recognize our dependence on our relationship with God? How would you determine if a new blessing which you have experienced was a result of God rewarding you for your paying tithe?
25. Hezekiah was one of the few bright lights among the kings of ancient Judah. He did many things to bring the people of Judah back into a correct relationship with and a correct worship of God. How did he do that? See 2 Chronicles 29-31. He did what was “right in the eyes of the LORD.” He “set in order” the house of the LORD, and the Passover was kept properly. As a result, there was great joy in Jerusalem. Pagan images, altars, and the high places were destroyed. As a result, there was a revival of heart and reformation of practice, resulting in an abundance of tithing and offerings. (2 Chronicles 31:4-5,12)
26. Several hundred years later, Nehemiah gave another example of revival, reformation, and tithing. See Nehemiah 9:2-3;13:1-31.
27. What is the difference between revival and reformation?

Revival and reformation are two different things. Revival signifies a renewal of spiritual life, a quickening of the powers of mind and heart, a resurrection from the spiritual death. Reformation signifies a reorganization, a change in ideas and theories, habits and practices.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* February 25, 1902, par. 8; *Christian Service*\* 42.2; *1SM*\* 128.1.
28. Can we claim to be God’s faithful people and to be looking for revival, reformation, and finishing the gospel if we are not faithful in our paying of tithe? Would it be like expecting your car to continue to travel without putting gasoline in the tank? Revival and reformation are essential parts of the Christian’s experience, and it happens inside the church. (Psalm 85:6)
29. It is not the actual act of paying tithe that makes the difference; it is our decision and emotions that are connected with that act that makes the real difference. Why is that? They increase our faith, sharpen our spiritual vision, and renew our commitment to honesty.
30. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34; compare Hebrews 8:7-13. God is asking us to be His partners.

He wants to write His law in our hearts. If we come to develop that kind of relationship with God, we will see a constant growth in our faith.

31. This new covenant experience is spoken of in several places in the Bible. Shouldn't we desire that new covenant experience? If we pay a faithful tithe, are we not rejecting the materialistic principles of consumerism that seem to dominate our world?

32. Could we literally claim the promises of Malachi 3:9-10?

**Malachi 3:9-10:**<sup>9</sup> [The LORD said:] "A curse is on all of you because the whole nation is cheating me. <sup>10</sup>Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple, so that there will be plenty of food there. Put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things."—*Good News Bible*. \* (Malachi 3:9-10). [Content in brackets is added.]

33. A close, selfish spirit seems to prevent men from giving to God His own. The Lord made a special covenant with men, that if they would regularly set apart the portion designated for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, the Lord would bless them abundantly, so that there would not be room to receive His gifts. But if men withhold that which belongs to God, the Lord plainly declares, "Ye are cursed with a curse." [Malachi 3:9]—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* December 17, 1889, par. 4; *Counsels on Stewardship*\* 77.1. [Brackets and content in brackets are added.]

34. Ancient Israel lost its special relationship with God and ultimately was destroyed as a nation because while they claimed the privileges of that special relationship, they rejected the responsibilities. Thus, ultimately, they rejected God and were rejected by Him as a nation.

35. But, coming down to the very practical questions, what would you say to someone who says, "I just cannot afford to tithe"? Are they actually saying that they do not trust God? Is such a person rejecting the idea that tithe is actually holy? Do we believe the words of Leviticus 27:30?

36. If you have paid a faithful tithe at one time in your life but are not doing so now, did you notice a difference? Jesus said we must be honest even in the "little things" in life. (Luke 16:10) Would tithing be considered a little thing?

37. Could you describe the spiritual and practical rewards of returning the tithe? Many Christians, including Adventists, pay a tithe when it is "convenient." Is that okay with God?

38. What difference would it make to modern Christians if they truly lived in partnership with God? If a significant number of Christians were actually doing all that God asks us to do, would we be in the kingdom of heaven by now?

Times were tough. She had nearly exhausted all her resources. As with other widows of the time, life was tenuous at best. Drought had engulfed the land so that even wives with husbands to provide for them and their families found making ends meet an almost unachievable challenge. Her cupboards were virtually bare, and there was just enough to prepare one final meal for her son and herself. The future was bleak indeed.

Now the prophet Elijah enters the scene. He asks the widow for a favor--for a cup of water; but what he does next seems unusually callous. "Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it *first*, and bring it to me; and *afterward* make some for yourself and your son' " (1 Kings 17:13, NKJV, *emphasis supplied*). The demand, however, comes with a promise: "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth' " (1 Kings 17:14, NKJV). The widow of Zarephath acted in faith and did as Elijah had instructed. God, in turn, honored her faith, making good on His promise to sustain her and her son. Jesus said, " 'Seek first the kingdom' " (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). Our study this week, likewise, calls us to seek God's kingdom first by returning an honest tithe; but it couples that call with the divine promise that builds our faith.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 94.

39. Would you agree that God's faithfulness is never in doubt; but, it is forever doubted? Would you call that an oxymoron? Think about the people we have studied in this lesson who paid a faithful tithe. Did God reward them as He had promised?
40. Unfortunately, each new generation must reestablish its relationship with God. There is every reason to believe that God would be delighted to demonstrate His trustworthiness to anyone who tests Him. Are we willing to try?
41. Are we willing to admit and practice the truth that a portion of our income called *the tithe* does not belong to us at all? That 10% belongs to God. When we use it for other purposes, we are, in effect, stealing from God.
42. If you found an envelope on the street with a lot of money in it, what would you do? Would you attempt to find the rightful owner? Would you claim that it is yours? When we return the tithe to God, we are acknowledging that it always belonged to Him.
43. Shouldn't we be happy to enter into a partnership with God for which He promises blessings? How can we lose? Is paying a faithful tithe one method of storing up treasure in heaven? (Matthew 6:19-21)
44. Is God taking a chance on us by giving us the tithe along with the rest of our income? Is it really possible that God could bless us so that we would do better with the 90% than we now do with the 100%? Do we believe His promises?
45. In our consumer society, we depend on money for almost everything we do. Is it safer to trust in our bank accounts and our retirement funds instead of trusting God? Do we believe that "God takes care of those who take care of themselves"?
46. Have you found that paying a faithful tithe increases your faith? Or, does it take a lot of faith to pay tithe? Or, both?
47. Should faithful tithe-payers discuss the issue with non-payers? Is that our responsibility? What percentage of people in your church or denomination pay a faithful tithe?

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