



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #29: "God as Your Partner"

SCRIPTURE READING - MALACHI 3

Memory Verse: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . 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... " Malachi 3:10.

1: WHAT IS GOD'S CLAIM CONCERNING THE EARTH?

The claim to ownership is one of the highest claims that the Lord can make. These four statements assert God's ownership of all:

1. He owns the earth.

Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."

The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, looked over his capital city and said: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built. . . by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" He forgot that God is God, and He is the owner and ruler of all. For seven years Nebuchadnezzar wandered about, out of his mind and eating grass like an ox, until his reason returned and he understood that power and wealth were only lent to him by God.

2. He owns the vast creation.

Psalm 50:10-11: "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are Mine."

3. He owns all the silver and gold.

Haggai 2:8: "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts."

4. He owns us.

Psalm 100:3: "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Isaiah 43:1).

Man himself is God's possession, as is illustrated by the story of the Vermont judge during the war between the states. He informed the attorney for a slaveholder who was trying to extradite a runaway slave, that "his evidence of ownership" was not adequate. "Well, what does your honor require?" asked the lawyer. "Nothing less than a bill of sale from the Creator Himself," the judge replied.

2: ON WHAT FOUR GROUNDS CAN GOD CLAIM OWNERSHIP OF ALL?

1. He created all things.

Exodus 20:11: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 95:5).

God made the earth out of nothing (*Hebrews 11:3*) and hung it upon nothing (*Job 26:7*). He took of the dust of the earth and made man. He made everything and furnished the material. He owns everything. Some men think they own it or at least some part of it-or ought to. Some say they are going to rule it. But the owner and ruler is God; and He is very much alive today. How comforting is this thought in a day when the world is threatened with atomic destruction. Said the psalmist: "[God] laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever" (*Psalm 104:5*).

2. He upholds and sustains all things.

Hebrews 1:3: "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Acts 17:28: "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being."

"Upholding all things by the word of His power. Men call it gravitation. What is gravitation? Oh, it is the power that makes the earth go round the sun! Well, what is this power that makes the earth go round the sun? Oh, that's gravitation! And so we think in circles. What is that power but the will and power of God? Yes, and our lives are sustained by Him! Our hearts beat day and night, and our blood flows through its channels. We eat and drink, work and play, think and love and worship, and we don't understand it all; but in our hearts we know that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*).

3. He purchased all after it was lost.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Ye are not your own. . ye are bought with a price."

Dear friend, God made you, and He bought you with the blood of Jesus Christ. Shall any man withhold himself from this gracious God and Saviour? Every loaf of bread and every blessing comes marked with the cross of Calvary. Had God's plan not been carried out, there would be neither man nor bread.

4. He gives power to get wealth.

Deuteronomy 8:18: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth."

Some are better managers than others. Some are sharp dealers. But our talents are gifts of God. He gives us all some talent to earn a living for ourselves and our families. We may use these talents, misuse them, or half-use them.

3: HOW IS MAN RELATED TO THESE POSSESSIONS OF GOD?

He is the steward of God's goods. And "a steward is a person entrusted with the management of estates or affairs not his own. He administers what belongs to another." "As between me and my fellow men,

what I hold belongs to me, and I have a right to defend title to it; but as between me and God, it belongs to Him" (R. L. *Davidson*).

Heaven's goods are entrusted to the earthly steward.

Luke 12:42: "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?"

Matthew 25:14: "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods."

Every man is entrusted by the Master with wealth, a little or a lot—with most of us, it is a little. We will be judged, not by the amount we have, but by what we do with it and how we handle it.

4: WHAT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS?

1. Faithfulness.

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

Faithfulness—that is a grand word. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (*Luke 16:10*). Unfaithfulness works the same way. To the faithful steward the owner of all will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (*Matthew 25:21*).

2. Accountability.

Matthew 25:19: "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them" (Luke 16:1-2).

The Spirit of God reproves men of sin and judgment (*John 16:8*). Surely every man who has not crushed out the thought knows that he must render an account to God for life, health, wealth, time, and all things.

5: WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN STEWARD'S FIRST RESPONSIBILITY?

The great duty of a steward is to make the best possible use of that which is entrusted to him, not for himself, but for the owner. The sinful steward will make himself first. The Christian steward will make God first. Here are three texts to make it plain.

1. Psalm 116:12: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

2. Proverbs 3:9: "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase."

3. Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

6: HOW DO GOD'S STEWARDS FILL HIS EARTHLY STOREHOUSE?

There are two ways to keep God's storehouse full.

1. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse.

Malachi 3:10: "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."

What is the tithe? The tithe means one tenth. If a man earns \$1, his tithe is 10 cents. If he earns \$100, it is \$10. If he earns \$1,000, his tithe is \$100. And that is when it may get hard. The more God blesses, the harder it seems for some men to pay tithe, as the poet said:

"I was so poor, my purse so small,
"I hardly felt one tenth at all.
"I gladly gave from my poor store
"With but the wish I could give more.
"But now my purse, which was so small,
"Contains one million, all in all;
"And wonder I each passing day
"If I can give one tenth away!"

A man who inherits money for which he puts forth not an ounce of effort is tempted not even to tithe it. But he should, and he will, if he is a good steward. The tithe is not man's plan, but the plan of God's own devising. It reveals man's faithfulness and his recognition of God's ownership of the entire ten tenths.

2. Bring offerings also.

Psalm 96:8: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts."

God requires the tithe. What a man gives above that is his offering, or gift. The offerings of two men drawing the same amount of salary might vary depending upon their generosity or their ability to give.

7: HOW FULLY WAS THIS PLAN TO BE CARRIED OUT?

Land, trees, flocks, herds, salary—all are to be tithed.

Leviticus 27:30, 32: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord. . And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord."

Jacob promised to pay tithe to God on the very necessities of life.

Genesis 28:20-22: "Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

In the New Testament, Jesus approved tithe even on a very small income.

Matthew 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

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Jesus reproached the Pharisees for paying tithe on the small garden vegetables and then neglecting to be just and honest in larger matters. Yet He told them that their tithing on the little herbs of the garden was right. If a man is honest in tithe and dishonest otherwise, his tithing honesty will not cover the other dishonesty. The reverse is also true.

5: FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS THE TITHE USED?

In Abraham's day the tithe was paid to God's priest.

Genesis 14:18-20: "Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most High God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the Most High God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."

The first mention of tithe in the Bible is in the days of Abraham, who paid tithe to Melchizedek.

Up until that time the family was the unit of organization in God's work, and there was no centralized worship. Just as soon as a priest appeared outside the family unit, then the tithe appeared. It is simply God's plan of supporting His organization. Israel paid tithe to the Levites.

Numbers 18:21: "And, behold. I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. "

In the time of Moses, and thereafter, the tithe supported the Levites who looked after the Temple services. Jesus approved the tithe in His day, even though He rebuked the Jews for other shortcomings. Not until God forsakes the church are we free to withdraw our support. And Paul advises that the same plan be followed for the support of the gospel ministry.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14: "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 preached the gospel should live of the gospel."

Paul insisted that those who preached the gospel should live of it, just as the Levites lived of their Temple work. Paul often declined help, but later regretted that he had not required the people to do more. If the Jews paid, what shall Christians, with the whole world to reach with the gospel, do then?

9: WHAT CURSE IS PRONOUNCED ON UNFAITHFULNESS?

Malachi 3:8-9: "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."

Here is a curse against robbers. The selfish man reaps his own sowing. The unprofitable servant. who merely receives but does not impart, will be cast out.

Matthew 25:30: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

10: WHAT BLESSING IS PRONOUNCED ON FAITHFUL TITHE PAYERS?

God pours out upon them a great blessing.

Malachi 3:10-11: "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. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes. and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field. saith the Lord of hosts."

Here are three promises for tithers:

1. Acts 20:35: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

2. Luke 6:38: "Give, and it shall be given unto you."

3. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7: "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. . Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

The good and faithful servant will enter into the joy of the Lord at Christ's coming. What a wonderful assurance Jesus gave:

Matthew 25:21: "His lord said unto him. Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Peter said, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee." Jesus said, "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:28-30).

On an English cathedral an inscription reads: "What I spent, I had. What I saved, I lost. And what I gave, I have."

"That man is no fool who parts with what he cannot keep, to get what he cannot lose." Dear friend, pay tithe for the support of the gospel. It is God's way to enrich your life and further the work of His kingdom. He doesn't need your money. But you need His presence and blessing in this great partnership of life.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"The tithing system did not originate with the Hebrews. From the earliest times the Lord claimed a tithe as His, and this claim was recognized and honored. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God (Genesis 14:20). Jacob, when at Bethel, an exile and a wanderer, promised the Lord, 'Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee' (Genesis 28:22). As the Israelites were about to be established as a nation, the law of tithing was reaffirmed as one of the divinely ordained statutes upon obedience to which their prosperity depended.

"The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures, and that to Him man's gratitude is due for the good gifts of His providence.

"'He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things' (Acts 17:25). The Lord declares, 'Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills' (Psalm 50: 10). 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is

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Mine' (Haggai 2:8). And it is God who gives men power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8: 18). As an acknowledgment that all things came from Him, the Lord directed that a portion of His bounty should be returned to Him in gifts and offerings to sustain His worship.

"The tithe. . . is the Lord's.' Here the same form of expression is employed as in the law of the Sabbath. 'The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God' (Exodus 20: 10). God reserved to Himself a specified portion of man's time and of his means, and no man could, without guilt, appropriate either for his own interests.

"The tithe was to be exclusively devoted to the use of the Levites, the tribe that had been set apart for the service of the sanctuary. But this was by no means the limit of the contributions for religious purposes. The tabernacle, as afterward the temple, was erected wholly by freewill offerings; and to provide for necessary repairs and other expenses," *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 525-526

"God has made men His stewards. The property which He has placed in their hands is the means that He has provided for the spread of the gospel. To those who prove themselves faithful stewards He will commit greater trusts. Saith the Lord, Them that honor Me I will honor' (1 Samuel 2:30). 'God loveth a cheerful giver,' and when His people, with grateful hearts, bring their gifts and offerings to Him, 'not grudgingly, or of necessity,' His blessing will attend them, as He has promised. '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: 10." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 529