

**CORONARY CHRISTIANITY - WHY AND HOW WE GIVE TO THE LORD - Part One - Sunday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching # 1373**  
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**WHAT THE CREATION OF THE WORLD HAS TO DO WITH YOUR OFFERING ON SUNDAY- The Unavoidable Stewardship Principles of Genesis 1, 2 and 3**

Today we're going to launch a brief series on giving. I was making a mental note as I prepared these four teachings. Over the 28 years I've pastored this church I've had people approach me many, many times with sermon suggestions. "When are you going to deal with sexual immorality?" Or, "It's high time somebody (I wonder who they had in mind?) preached on revival!" Or it might be prophecy, or healing, or temptation, or whatever.

But never - not **once** - has anyone come up to me and said, "Boy, pastor Don, we just don't hear nearly enough about **giving** in our church!" It's almost as though we have this unspoken attitude that our money is our business. And blessed be the pastor and church who knows better than to touch people's wallets.

But there's a problem. The Jesus we praise in all our worship choruses talked about two subjects more than any other - **money** and **judgment**. So I don't want to stand before Him one day and have to face His rebuke just because we don't like people prying into our material wealth.

My goal in this message is to establish a Biblical vision of how and why we give to the Lord. Especially when we talk about **tithing**, my experience is the church - even that portion of the church that teaches and practices tithing - still tries to mandate and establish it on the basis of Old Testament law. Please don't misunderstand me. I **do** believe in the New Testament practice of the tithe and beyond. I **don't** buy the argument that tithing is an **Old Testament** practice that has somehow been replaced in the church age.

But I think the **reason** many people mistakenly **think** that about tithing is the **way** in which the New Testament church tries to instruct followers of Jesus in **practicing** the tithe. I think we **invite** the kind of arguments against it that we usually receive. If we **teach** tithing as law people will **think** of tithing as law. And they all know we are no longer **under** the law in that strict saving sense anymore.

It's time to rethink our approach to tithing. Not our **practice**, but our **Scriptural approach** needs realigning, and, for that reason, we're looking back today to the creation of the world. We're not looking at the giving of the law to Moses. And we're not even looking at the **practice** of tithing in the examples of **Abraham (Genesis 14:20)** and **Jacob (Genesis 28:22)**, both of which **predate** the giving of the law.

We're going back to the opening chapters of Genesis to establish, not a **law**, but a **pathway** - a pathway that **takes you somewhere** - a life-style of cooperating with Father God in the establishing of the proper order and safe-guarding of everything else He wants to place under the sphere of your governance. We're doing this because I'm convinced that, with the best of intentions, we can so easily **distort** and **pollute**, with legalistic mandates, something that was so obviously established - right in the patterns of the creation account - to be life-giving and soul-freeing.

Let's look at some of the key principles regarding honoring the tithe from **Genesis 1, 2, and 3**. Of course, there is no **mention** of the tithe or tithing here, and I'm not trying to pretend there is. But

there is a **pattern** laid down - a pattern that I hope you will clearly see involves the honoring of things God has set aside for Himself, not for **His** enrichment, but for **our** increasing freedom, dominion, and development.

1) **IT WAS CLEARLY THE CREATOR'S INTENT THAT MANKIND BE DESIGNED TO ENJOY AN INCREDIBLE STEWARDING OF THE MATERIAL CREATED REALM**

**Genesis 1:27-28** - "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Man was specifically created to exercise incredible stewardship and dominion over all of God's creation. There was a tremendous amount of joy and freedom that man was to exercise over the environment in which God placed him. This was a part of what the **image of God** looked like in mankind. While this would end in terrible abuse with the Fall, it was clearly God's intent that mankind enjoy a **fruitful dominion (28)** over the rest of the created realm. Man wasn't an **equal** with the rest of creation. He was to **subdue** it and **steward** it with a God-given delight and dominion.

2) **INTRINSIC TO THE WHOLE CREATION ACCOUNT IS THE SETTING ASIDE OF A PORTION OF THE MATERIAL CREATED REALM FROM MAN'S OWN TOUCH AND USE**

**Genesis 2:16-17** - "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Please notice that this is more than a simple **eat** or **don't eat** issue. This is not some ceremonial, religious ritual in that sense. This is an issue of **knowing how we are made** and **embracing lovingly ordered bounds**. In effect, God was saying, "Everything within your reach is for your use and enjoyment - everything **except a small portion**. A small portion is not for your touch. I have reserved a small portion of the material realm to be off limits to your own discretion. It is not under your discretion and control as is everything else I have given you in the garden. This is to be Mine and Mine alone."

The whole creation account revolves around this point. Nothing else makes any sense without this central insight. In the garden God gives man a test. **"Everything else is yours. This isn't yours. This is mine alone."**

Ponder this slowly. **Why** did God reserve this small portion? Was He going broke and was worried man would get everything and He would be left with nothing? Was He just flexing His muscles in the garden?

"No, Pastor Don. God was just testing man's obedience."

And that's true, He was. But what **kind** of obedience? What was the specific **nature** of the test? And why did God choose this particular kind of test? Why not some kind of sexual temptation? Why not the setting up of some kind of idol to see if they would bow down and

worship it? Why some silly piece of fruit on a tree?

Here is the reason, and everything hinges on our understanding it correctly and deeply. There is nothing ostensibly **religious** about fruit. At this time the fruit and growth of the garden was the sustenance of Adam and Eve. It was what they ate. It was what they lived on. That means this test is a **stewardship** test. It's a test that relates to **everything else** about Adam and Eve.

Everything else about their dominion over the created order depends on this test. And the test is to **establish this truth: in terms of man's relationship both to God and the rest of the created order, his relationship to the set aside portion determines his rulership over the whole**. Hear that again. Man's faithfulness with the **part** established his relationship with the **whole**.

The test is what will man do with the part God says is off limits to his own discretion. Does man think that everything he can get his hand on is **his**? That's the issue. It is **still** the issue. Does he know the difference between all that God has given him to exercise his own dominion over, and the small portion God has chosen to **not** put at man's disposal? Do **you** know the difference?

3) **THE FALL BECOMES EFFECTIVE THE MOMENT ADAM AND EVE COME TO BELIEVE THEY NEED BOTH THEIR PORTION AND THE SEPARATED PORTION OF THE CREATED WORLD TO SECURE THEIR OWN FUTURE AND HAPPINESS**

**Genesis 3:1-5** - "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' " [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Notice carefully what's happening here. Satan convinces Eve, and Eve convinces Adam, that they will both be better off if they have, not only their own portion of creation, but God's restricted portion too. He convinces them that they will secure themselves better for the future if they ignore the difference between what is God's domain and what is theirs.

And what we've learned from the history of mankind in this world is very simple. In seeking to acquire God's portion, they ended up not only losing what they thought they might **gain**, but they lost what they **had** as well. So we see that the tithe is not God's way of **taking away** from what we have. Rather, it is His way of **securing** our future with the rest of His material good given to us.

Now we're in a better position to learn why, in those famous words about tithing from the prophet Malachi, God places tithing as the **first step** in His wayward people returning to Him - not only financially, but spiritually as well:

**Malachi 3:6-12** - "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. [7] From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of

hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' [8] Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. [10] Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. [12] Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.

The point of these verses is so frequently missed. They're not just about money. The starting place in man's unmaking was his failure to listen to God about what was God's alone and what was man's. When we honor God with our tithe we begin **unbending**, as it were, what was set askew in the fall. In honoring God with the tithe we lay the foundation, the starting place, in ordering our lives according to His will and way.

And that's not all. We lay the foundation - the starting place - for a properly exercised dominion and stewardship over the rest of our created world that we've been given "richly to enjoy," but which will only be enjoyed on His terms - not ours.

Tithing is not merely an Old Testament legalistic ritual. It's a gracious, God-given **provision** (not **regulation**). It's a provision, not for receiving salvation and forgiveness, which can only be found through faith in Jesus Christ, but the practice of the tithe provides, beyond forgiveness, a fundamental **untangling of the threads of the fall in my life**. It's not a slick plan some churches have devised for paying bills or fund raising. It's establishing God's rule into the fabric of my whole life - not just the religious part. Because remember, what Adam and Eve **lost** through the failure to honor God's portion of the garden was their dominion over **all** the rest of it. Not just some religious portion of their lives.

Perhaps more clearly than anything else, tithing shows the **extent** or the **limits** of God's authority in my heart. Tithing has little to do with some dusty Old Testament texts and more to do with extending God's proper dominion and blessing over all the other areas of my life.

Tithing is strikingly related to the Fall. Man lost dominion over the **whole** because he didn't obey God's instructions for the **part**. God placed a tree in the center of the garden and said to man, "The rest is **yours. This is not. The rest is for your use. This part is not.**" There is simply no understanding the **meaning** of the Fall apart from this test. There are no poisoned apples, or witch's spells. This has nothing at all to do with magic. God was establishing an eternal pattern. **Two tests** were unfolding, and, in a certain sense, **still** unfold as people either learn, or fail to learn, to live life under the terms of the Creator's authority:

- a) **First, God tests the issue of rights and authority** - Who is the Creator of everything in the garden? Did Adam and Eve understand the **terms** of living as creatures? They didn't have **anything by right**. They received everything as a gift. Adam and Eve were **created** beings. They were graciously **placed** in a garden they didn't build or earn. Whatever strength they had to **tend** the garden they received from their Creator's all-supplying hand. This is **still** the test of the garden. This is still crucial to a proper understanding of our relationship to God's created order.

This was precisely the issue around which the Fall revolved. Did Adam and Eve get it? If they came to see themselves as the **owners** and the **ones in charge** they would take matters of this material world into their own hands. In essence, that's what Eve and Adam did. By and large, we've been doing it ever since.

- b) **Second, God tests Adam and Eve's trust in His goodness and care for their future.** Would they believe, really believe, that everything would work out for their enrichment in all the **rest** of the garden if they honored God in this one special place in the **center** of the garden?

Of course, we know Satan convinced Eve and Adam that **they would end up with more if they had what God had set apart.** And we also know that in taking for themselves the portion God had set apart, they **not only lost God's portion, but the rest of the garden as well.**

This, I believe, is a Biblical starting place in considering the practice of the tithe. I don't teach tithing as **law.** I proclaim it as a **pathway to fulness.** I want everyone in this church to discover it, not as a burden, but as **unbending the twisted effects of the Fall,** not just receiving the forgiveness of sins. Beyond our forgiveness, the tithe is a gracious **provision,** not a wooden, powerless, commandment. Keep your life in the center of the garden. In every area of your life, you'll bear more fruit there.