

ONE TENTH OR ALL?

One who believes that every dollar belongs to God, and is to be used for Him, will not imagine that he has discharged all obligation by "giving a tenth to the Lord." One who talks about the "Lord's tenth," probably thinks about "his own" nine-tenths. The question is not what proportion belongs to God, but having given all to Him, what proportion will best honor Him by being applied to the uses of myself and family, and what proportion will best honor Him by being applied to benevolent uses. Because necessities differ, this proportion will differ. One man has a small income and a large family; another has a large income and no family at all. Manifestly, the proportion which will best honor God by being applied to benevolence is much larger in the one case than in the other. If men's needs varied directly as their incomes, it might, perhaps, be practicable and reasonable to fix on some definite proportion as due from all to Christian and benevolent work. But while men's *wants* are quite apt to grow with their income, their *needs* do not. When John Wesley's income was L.30, he lived on L.28, and gave two; and when his income rose to L.60, and afterwards to L.120, he still lived on L.28 and gave all the remainder.

There are multitudes in the land who, after having given one-tenth of their increase, might fare sumptuously every day, gratifying every whim, and live with the most lavish expenditure. Would that fulfill the law of Christ? – self sacrifice.

There is always a tendency to substitute form for spirit, rules for principles. It is so much easier to conform the conduct to a rule than to make a principle inform the whole life. Moses prescribed rules; Christ inculcated principles – rules are for children, principles for men.

The law of tithes was given when the race was in its childhood, and the relations of money to the kingdom of God were radically different from what they are now. Money had no such spiritual

equivalents then as now. The Jew was required simply to make provision for his own worship; and this might appropriately be met by levying upon a certain portion of his increase. But, under the Christian dispensation, the world is our country, and the race our kindred. The needs of the world to-day are boundless; hence, every man's obligation to supply that need is the full measure of his ability; not one tenth or any other fraction of it.

The principle that every dollar is to be used in the way that will best honor God is as applicable to capital as to increase or income, and in many cases requires that a portion of *capital* be applied directly to benevolent uses. "But," says one, "I must not give of my capital, because that would impair my ability to give in the future. I must not kill the goose that lays the golden egg." The objection is of weight, especially in ordinary times; but these are times wholly extraordinary; and this is the world's emergency. It may be quite true that giving one dollar now out of your capital would prevent your giving five dollars fifteen years hence. But one dollar now may be worth ten dollars fifteen years later.

Money, like corn, has a two-fold power – that of ministering to want, and that of reproduction. If there were a famine in the land, no matter how sore it might be, it would be folly to grind up *all the seed-corn* for food. But, on the other hand, suppose, in the midst of the famine, after feeding their families and doling out a handful in charity, the farmers were to put all the increase back into the ground, and do it year after year, while the world was starving! That would be worse than foolish. It would be criminal. Yet that is what multitudes of men are doing. Instead of applying the power in money to the end for which it was intrusted to them, they use it almost wholly to accumulate more power. A miller might as well spend his life building his dam higher and higher, and never turn the water on to his wheel.

Bishop Butler said to his secretary: "I should be ashamed of myself, if I could leave ten thousand pounds behind me." Many

professed Christians die "disgracefully and wickedly rich." The shame and sin, however, lie not in the fact that the power was gathered, but that it was unwielded.

It is every man's duty to wield the widest possible power for righteousness. But let a man beware! This power in money is something awful. It is more dangerous than dynamite. The victims of "saint-seducing gold" are numberless. If a Christian grows rich, it should be with fear and trembling, lest the "deceitfulness of riches" undo him; for Christ spoke of the salvation of a rich man as something miraculous. – Luke 18:24-27.

Let no man deceive himself by saying: "I will give when I have amassed wealth. I desire money that I may do good with it; but I will not give now, that I may give the more largely in the future." That is the pit into which many have fallen. If a man is growing large in wealth, nothing but constant and generous giving can save him from growing small in soul. In determining the amount of his gifts, and the question whether he should impair the capital, or to what extent, a man should never lose sight of a distinct and intelligent aim *to do the greatest possible good in a life-time*. Each must decide for himself what is the wisest, the highest use of money; and we need often to remind ourselves of the constant tendency of human nature to selfishness and self-deception.

– *Selected.*

