

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren,

Money is a very sensitive issue with most people. In far too many cases there prevails a deep-seated animosity toward the concept of tithing, or, for that matter even the more benign form of giving—commonly called offerings. Is it possible that this prevailing attitude toward economic responsibilities might have something to do with the corresponding virtually ubiquitous impoverishment of mankind? Nothing simply occurs. There are reasons. The wise seek to understand and correct the defects involved. Have we taken the time to explore properly our orientation, individually and perhaps collectively, in the discharge of our whole and complete duty? Does our orientation correspond to that evidenced by our Savior Jesus Christ? Let us not allow for ourselves a prejudiced judgment. All the facts must first be considered. There are many inequities in this life. Is it possible that God allowed some, if not all, such conditions and circumstances for the purpose of trying and testing man whom He placed on this earth? Why such disparity in economic status? Is it solely based on the one apparent factor, even if major? The difference of diligence, aggressiveness, and ability, as opposed to that of inability, as well as apathy and indifference? We may be surprised if we will patiently wait for God to speak. Let us not form conclusions until all the information is considered. One question looms large: does man's attitude toward such economic responsibilities have anything to do with his present state of impoverishment? Almost anyone is willing to tell you why the poor are always in a state of want. But, is the presumptuous castigation of the poor sufficient to explain all that is happening to individuals, and to nations? We shall see.

Man's attitude toward life and responsibility is of measurable significance to God. Money is only one of the responsibilities of life. God considers them all. Yet, as we shall see, money is a major area, and for good reason. Does not our orientation toward money matters reveal to God, as well as the individuals themselves—if called and empowered by the Holy Spirit—the premise of confidence and the scope of that confidence in this physical life? Literally, we need to ask, are we doing all that we should with *that which He has given to us*? Let us take a cursory look into those matters today as they apply to us—to all who sincerely and honestly love the truth of God. A deeper look, if carefully weighed, might be

of considerable interest. We will know ourselves better and probably be induced to effect necessary change. Is there any man who does not need to make such changes? None is yet perfect in such matters.

God Aware of All Things

What this world needs to understand is the fact that God has had a much greater hand and influence in the affairs of this life than anyone realizes. It is a fact hard to ascertain and even more difficult to comprehend. It will be shocking to most just to realize that God is to some degree responsible both for the wealth of some and the poverty of others. In Hannah's prayer, the Holy Spirit inspired her to utter the following words: "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up" (1 Samuel 2:7). Continuing in verse 8, we read: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory . . ." Expanding on this inspired theme, Hannah said: "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail" (verse 9).

Earlier, God had given to Moses these words which he faithfully repeated to Israel: "Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? but it shall not prosper." Israel had failed to act in faith on the promise of God. Yet, when told not to pursue that which He had initially asked them to do, Israel compounded her mistake, she took things into her own hands and presumptuously did that which she was first asked to do, but resisted. She was told not to expect the blessing of God (Numbers 14:41). And she did not prosper. Men must learn to respond willingly to the instruction of God, not just when they feel it necessary to respond. God has the power to make or break anyone in accord with His will. Some peoples in this world are blessed by the decree of the King of all the earth. Others are paying a heavy price for failure in some way. What we see in this society of the last days is occurring either by the express purpose of God, or that which He is allowing. All mankind must come to recognize that fact. These same conditions apply to us individually. All for reason. Anticipating the perpetuation of this devious, rebellious, and fractious orientation, God inspired Moses to write: "And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee" (Deuteronomy 28:29). In general God has established—set in motion—a certain course of circumstances. Blessings are a beneficent intervention with kindness on the part of God in favor of those He honors. Likewise, however, curses are deleterious interventions based on rules, regulations, and conduct which proscribe specific behavior. The consequences of this behavior are conditions which would not have been experienced otherwise—either individually or nationally. The important thing to remember here is that whether one is living under the condition generally applicable to

humankind or those circumstances specifically determined by God, they are living through that which is ordained by God. In a beautiful flourish of verbal inspiration David spoke of those who are the recipients of God's blessings.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away (Psalm 1:1–4).

God is not limited by time. Many years later, the Apostle Paul spoke of these same conditions. As we shall see, God was still doing the blessing. To the Corinthian church he wrote: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, *as God hath prospered him*, that there are no gatherings when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2).

What the members of the Corinthian church had amassed was a direct blessing from God. He had granted the increase. Therefore, what these members gave to the poor saints in Jerusalem was a small portion of what God had given to them. They were required to give as God had given.

In the above context, we all need to understand an underlying principle.

God Makes It All Plain

Through Moses God blessed His chosen children, the twelve tribes of Israel, with a gift of His laws, statutes, and judgments. Obedience to those priceless spiritual principles has much to do with all blessings received from the hand of the Father. As though in anticipation of men's clever and deceitful arguments, God gave the following warning to Moses:

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant* which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:17–18).

All power in the universe rests with God. Even the power to obtain wealth, and conversely to make one poor. God exercises that power on the basis of specific responsibilities. These are cases where God is directly and purposefully intervening in the

affairs of specific people. This is contrasted with those who were made either rich or poor on the basis of some unrevealed plan. For instance, those who have gained much by exploiting others. At this point in time, who knows exactly why God has allowed such people to gain monetary ascendancy? There are a couple of indications we shall note a little later. For the present, let us take careful note of this singular fact: God has the power to make wealthy and impoverish. Again, we must emphasize the basic question: Why would God create such disparity of comfort and well-being? There must be a reason, for God is a God of purpose in all things. In due time we will understand.

Continuing, in Deuteronomy 29:9, God emphasizes His desire to bless, and His requirements for prosperity. As we note, God has the ability and the power to bless according to His promise. Individuals must be very careful about contending with anyone or even coveting against one who has been richly blessed. Do we always know precisely whom God has increased greatly? We could be resisting the will of God. Man's problem is the same in all areas of life. To him, he thinks he knows what God wants or is doing. It is always what the individual thinks—for he is always right in his own eyes.

Notice a few other texts which show God is responsible for a man's or nation's prosperity:

To Eli God spoke of Israel's prosperity (1 Samuel 2:32). When entering the promised land, Joshua encouraged faithful obedience—a necessity by which Israel would receive the promised prosperity (Joshua 1:7). Nehemiah recognized the source of empowerment, prosperity, and success (Nehemiah 2:20). When charging Solomon with future responsibility, David, his father, emphasized the promise of prosperity and success. At the same time, God addressed him concerning these matters (2 Chronicles 1:12 and 1 Kings 2:2–4).

From the texts given, we know the power of wealth and the opposite condition of impoverishment rest with God. He works with men—all men—according to His will. In order to conduct our lives acceptably to God, we must understand that will. Even so, some things of God's doing cannot be known until planned and purposed events come to fruition. Solomon explained it this way: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Ecclesiastes 11:5). God blesses, curses, and in general works with mankind according to a broad, all-encompassing purpose and plan. He has revealed the essential components of that plan *for the called*. By careful study, prayer, and hearing the commissioned servant of God, the called can live according to the will of God—even in economic matters. It requires simple faith—the vital ingredient for life everlasting itself. How we react to many responsibilities is of great interest to God. Our reactions reveal the orientations which we have given to our lives. More later on this point.

How Blessings Are Achieved

Indeed, God wants to bless, abundantly, His children. The path by which those blessings are achieved is spiritual, not physical. The Holy Spirit inspired John to write: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). And Christ said: ". . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Therefore, whatever God requires of us is a part of that way of life and abundance. Man simply cannot have that which he desires unless he walks in the way which God ordained as the way to such fulfillment. When we properly consider all the elements of this letter we are made to realize that God does not require anything of us except that which produces abundance and great blessings. Man's problem is simply the fact he does not see things as God does. Literally, he will fight the very way by which he could receive everything he rightly desires. God loves His children and wants to give of His great abundance to them. Divine purpose demands that we manifest the same character, the keen desire to give of our abundance to those who have legitimate need. We shall soon see that our anticipated blessings come from making sacrifice for the good of others—the perfect example set by Christ, and the Father. The willingness on the part of the Father to give up a Son, and a willingness on the part of a Son to give up His life for the benefit of others.

Do any of us want to hear God repeat the words He spoke to Israel just before captivity? Through Jeremiah He said:

O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee? Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is *found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents*: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned (Jeremiah 2:31–35).

Then, note verse 37: "Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and *thou shalt not prosper in them.*" Though we feel confident in the cogitations of our own minds, can we be absolutely sure we are reflecting the thinking of God? We must give ourselves time to meditate—thinking objectively, not subjectively.

How Does God View the Poor?

There is an abundance of texts which speak of the way the people of this world react monetarily. Let us take note of a general orientation: "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). But, how does God view the poor? The following are a few indications.

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 23:22).

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause (Exodus 23:6).

And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard (Exodus 23:10–11).

And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; *thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger*: I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:10).

And if *thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay* with thee; then *thou shalt relieve him*: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For *they are my servants*, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: *they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God* (Leviticus 25:35–43).

God has not changed. Spiritual Israel of today is of greater concern to God. The instructions of old were given to a nation which in all of its activities illustrated God's intent and purpose for that new people—the called of God. Every law, statute, and judgment of God has its spiritual application for the people of God today.

What God Expects of Those He Has Blessed

Read the following texts to determine how God views the poor and the obligation incumbent upon those blessed of Him (Leviticus 25:29–55 and Deuteronomy 24:8–22). Why? Does God penalize the successful? Indeed, no! He is teaching us, the called, the elements of His divine character. That character is learned by trial, experience, and sacrifice. Consider: What if Christ had evidenced the same attitude most, if not all, men do today? We would have no Savior. Since no man was, or is, worthy of that sacrifice, certainly we cannot justify our negative attitudes toward the poor on the basis of any physical or mental superiority. We as a people deserve the sacrifice of Christ far less than our poor brothers and sisters deserve our sacrifice for them.

Mighty and meaningful purpose is revealed through those agrarian laws given to ancient Israel. The same principles apply to us today! So strong was the concept of relieving the poor in the minds of the ancients that Job's friends frequently condemned him believing he had violated these cardinal principles and was therefore, receiving his just desserts for failure to abide by them. Zophar said, "Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not;" (Job 20:19). Of course, Zophar was wrong. He and his two friends were condemned by God. Job had been very generous toward all who experienced need. Here is a case to illustrate the absurdity of anyone attempting to read hearts and minds of others, or the cause of others' problems. It further illustrates that for purpose God can allow even the "perfect" to undergo trial. But, until God reveals the purpose, no human being can know. That fact, however, does not mean, the afflicted cannot grow closer to God, improve his mental orientation, and more effectively crucify the old self. What he does not know, until revealed by God, are the exact reasons for the difficulty experienced. As Job's case makes apparent, assuming can be dangerous. Those who attempted to read his heart and mind were censored. Only the foolish would tread that course.

At every level of responsibility God honors and favors those who do not forget the poor. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon heaps praise upon the virtuous woman. Her activities include concern for the poor. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is

far above rubies She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Proverbs 31:10, 20). In the preceding verses a wise mother teaches her son acceptable values and responsibilities. "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8–9).

Not many people were given special recognition in the time of Jesus Christ. Zacchaeus was one of them so honored. Though the specific reasons are not given for the special honor accorded him, there are hints of those reasons. Could it have been his attitude about and orientation toward those monetarily deprived?

And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham (Luke 19:8–9).

Apparently as Christ taught the twelve chosen disciples heavy emphasis was placed upon the necessity of giving to the poor. In a given situation, these trainees, jumped to the conclusion that Christ was addressing the need of the poor.

And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor (John 13:27–29).

Several years later, after the twelve original apostles had been commissioned and were preaching the gospel, God chose to call Paul to preach that same message to the Gentiles. For reason, God through the Holy Spirit, had compelled these giants of the truth to get together and compare notes. The comparison was favorable. Only one principle was emphasized: "Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do" (Galatians 2:10). By revelation, Paul had already understood the necessity of remembering the poor. He was aggressively practicing that principle.

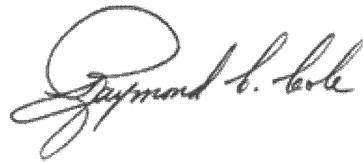
In Jesus' teachings—to the twelve—He strongly taught the need to remember the poor (Luke 6:30).

To summarize the concept of remembering the poor, allow us to quote Psalm 82:1–4:

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.
How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.
Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver
the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

There is much information yet to present regarding this subject. Page and weight limitations dictate the necessity of dividing this subject into two issues of the *Monthly Letter*. We want to thoroughly analyze the Biblical contexts of the subject. This seems to be a logical breaking place for this time. The real significance of the subject will be spelled out in the second issue devoted to the subject.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Raymond C. Cole". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Raymond C. Cole