

The Pearl

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Jesus compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a pearl of great price.

Part 1

In Matthew, chapter 13, Jesus told a parable about a man who sold everything he had to buy a fine pearl. It immediately follows another parable about a man who sold everything he had to buy a field containing a great treasure. Here are these two short parables:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. [Matthew 13:44-46]

These two parables were not intended to encourage us to invest in real estate and jewelry—they are about the kingdom of heaven. Ellen White wrote commentaries on all of Christ's parables in her book, Christ's Object Lessons. Here are some excerpts of what she said about the parable of The Pearl of Great Price.

The blessings of redeeming love our Savior compared to a precious pearl. He illustrated His lesson by the parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Christ Himself is the pearl of great price. ... All that can satisfy the needs and longings of the human soul, for this world and for the world to come, is found in Christ. Our Redeemer is the pearl so precious that in comparison all things else may be accounted loss.

Christ "came unto His own, and His own received Him not." John 1:11. The light of God shone into the darkness of the world, and "the darkness comprehended it not." John 1:5. But not all were found indifferent to the gift of heaven. The merchantman in the parable represents a class who were sincerely desiring truth. In different nations there were earnest and thoughtful men who had sought in literature and science and the religions of the heathen world for that which they could receive as the soul's treasure. Among the Jews there were those who were seeking for that which they had not. Dissatisfied with a formal religion, they longed for that which was spiritual and uplifting. Christ's chosen disciples belonged to the latter class, Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch to the former. They had been longing and praying for light from heaven; and when Christ was revealed to them, they received Him with gladness.

In the parable the pearl is not represented as a gift. The merchantman bought it at the price of all that he had. Many question the meaning of this, since Christ is represented in the Scriptures as a gift. He is a gift, but only to those who give themselves, soul, body, and spirit, to Him without reserve. We are to give ourselves to Christ, to live a life of willing obedience to all His requirements. All that we are, all the talents and capabilities we possess, are the Lord's, to be consecrated to His service. When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasures of heaven, gives Himself to us. We obtain the pearl of great price.

Salvation is a free gift, and yet it is to be bought and sold. In the market of which divine mercy has the management, the precious pearl is represented as being bought without money and without price. In this market all may obtain the goods of heaven. The treasury of the jewels of truth is open to all. ...

The gospel of Christ is a blessing that all may possess. The poorest are as well able as the richest to purchase salvation; for no amount of worldly wealth can secure it. It is obtained by willing obedience, by giving ourselves to Christ as His own purchased possession. Education, even of the highest class, cannot of itself bring a man nearer to God. The Pharisees were favored with every temporal and every spiritual advantage, and they said with boastful pride, We are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"; yet they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Rev. 3:17. Christ offered them the pearl of great price; but they disdained to accept it, and He said to them, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Matt. 21:31.

We cannot earn salvation, but we are to seek for it with as much interest and perseverance as though we would abandon everything in the world for it.

We are to seek for the pearl of great price, but not in worldly marts or in worldly ways. The price we are required to pay is not gold or silver, for this belongs to God. Abandon the idea that temporal or spiritual advantages will win for you salvation. God calls for your willing obedience. He asks you to give up your sins. "To him that overcometh," Christ declares, "will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Rev. 3:21.

There are some who seem to be always seeking for the heavenly pearl. But they do not make an entire surrender of their wrong habits. They do not die to self that Christ may live in them. Therefore they do not find the precious pearl. They have not overcome unholy ambition and their love for worldly attractions. They do not take up the cross and follow Christ in the path of self-denial and sacrifice. Almost Christians, yet not fully Christians, they seem near the kingdom of heaven, but they cannot enter there. Almost but not wholly saved, means to be not almost but wholly lost.

The parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls has a double significance: it applies not only to men as seeking the kingdom of heaven, but to Christ as seeking His lost inheritance. Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen. God looked upon humanity, not as vile and worthless; He ... saw it as it might become through redeeming love. He collected all the riches of the universe, and laid them down in order to buy the pearl. ...

... It is the Holy Spirit that reveals to men the preciousness of the goodly pearl. The time of the Holy Spirit's power is the time when in a special sense the heavenly gift is sought and found. In Christ's day many heard the gospel, but their minds were darkened by false teaching, and they did not recognize in the humble Teacher of Galilee [the Son] of God. But ... On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was given. Christ's witnesses proclaimed the power of the risen Saviour. The light of heaven penetrated the darkened minds of those who had been deceived by the enemies of Christ. They now saw Him exalted to be "a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts 5:31. They saw Him encircled with the glory

of heaven, with infinite treasures in His hands to bestow upon all who would turn from their rebellion. As the apostles set forth the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father, three thousand souls were convicted. They were made to see themselves as they were, sinful and polluted, and Christ as their friend and Redeemer. Christ was lifted up, Christ was glorified, through the power of the Holy Spirit resting upon men. By faith these believers saw Him as the One who had borne humiliation, suffering, and death that they might not perish but have everlasting life. The revelation of Christ by the Spirit brought to them a realizing sense of His power and majesty, and they stretched forth their hands to Him by faith, saying, "I believe."

Then the glad tidings of a risen Saviour were carried to the uttermost bounds of the inhabited world. The church beheld converts flocking to her from all directions. ... All hearts beat in harmony. The only ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character, and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom. ... The Spirit of Christ animated the whole congregation; for they had found the pearl of great price.

These scenes are to be repeated, and with greater power. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be more abundant. The Spirit awaits our demand and reception. Christ is again to be revealed in His fullness by the Holy Spirit's power. Men will discern the value of the precious pearl, and with the apostle Paul they will say, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Phil. 3:7, 8. ¹

The Kingdom of Heaven is so valuable that it is easily worth all that we have to obtain it. We will talk about how to do that after the deFluiter family, accompanied by JoAn Witzel, sings, "I Surrender All."

[music – Hud, Larry, and Travis deFluiter with JoAn Witzel, "I Surrender All"]

Part 2

In the first segment, we heard a parable about The Pearl of Great Price, which encourages us to give up everything to gain entrance into the Kingdom of God. It is surprising to some people that the free gift of salvation costs so much.

Several years ago there was a famous publicity stunt in which Oprah Winfrey gave every member of her studio audience a new car. The car was free, but the audience members had to pay the license and registration fees, buy car insurance, and pay for scheduled maintenance. No doubt some of the audience members sold the car as soon as they could because they could not afford to keep it.

Salvation is a free gift; but once it has been received, there is a high cost of ownership. Just as a car quickly wears out if you don't take care of it and change the oil, you will lose your salvation if you neglect it.

Sadly, there are many Christians who get baptized and then, thinking they have their ticket into heaven, feel there is nothing more they need to do. The theological term for this is, "Cheap Grace."

The Bible is clear. Salvation is a free gift—but it requires sacrifice.

¹ Ellen White, Christ's Object Lessons, Chapter 9, "The Pearl", <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/col/col9.html>

In the Garden of Eden, God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior to them; but He also demanded a sacrifice from them. When Cain would not perform this simple act of thanks, God was displeased.

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” [Genesis 4:3-7]

God had been very specific about the sacrifices He would accept. In particular, He demanded a blood sacrifice that was symbolic of the blood that Jesus would shed to save mankind. But Cain thought it would be more meaningful to God if he sacrificed something he grew himself. Cain was wrong.

Later, God gave Moses specific instructions about how to build a sanctuary that would portray the plan of salvation in symbols. A complete explanation of the symbolism of the sanctuary is the subject of another broadcast. For now, let’s just say that the sanctuary service included mandatory sacrifices of animals. The blood of the animals did not cleanse the sinner; the blood of the animal symbolized the blood Jesus would shed to cleanse the sinner. If blood was not sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, there was no atonement for sin.

In the Old Testament, in addition to those sacrifices, God also expected His people to pay tithe, that is, one tenth of their increase.

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. [Leviticus 27:30]

I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting. [Numbers 18:21]

Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. And there rejoice before the LORD your God—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you. [Deuteronomy 12:11-14]

Animal sacrifices pointed forward symbolically to the sacrifice that Christ would make. The book of Hebrews explains why the sacrifices were to end when Jesus Himself became the Passover Lamb and was slain for our sins. God made sure that the sacrificial system would end by tearing the curtain of the temple when Christ was crucified, and later by sending the Roman army to completely destroy the temple so that no more sacrifices could be made there ever again.

As we just heard, Deuteronomy 12:11 said that the tithe had to be given at the temple in Jerusalem, and Deuteronomy 12:14 they could be given nowhere else. Numbers 18:21 said that the tithes had to be given to Levites for their service in the temple. Since there aren’t any Levites serving in the temple at Jerusalem

now, what are we New Testament Christians to do about the tithe? Did Jesus' death on the cross satisfy the requirement to tithe, the same way it satisfied the requirement to make animal sacrifices?

Tithe is mentioned only twice in the New Testament. The first tells what Jesus said to the Pharisees.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. [Matthew 23:23]

Jesus did not say this to abolish the tithe. He said, “You should have practiced the latter (that is, justice, mercy and faithfulness), without neglecting the former (that is, paying tithe).” He criticized them for neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness, which, Jesus said, are even more important than paying tithe. Jesus' point was not to diminish the importance of paying tithe by saying it is less important than justice, mercy, and faithfulness. His point was that these things are even more important than tithe.

The only other time in the New Testament where tithe is mentioned is a reference to Genesis 14, which tells how Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek after Abraham rescued Lot. Hebrews, chapter 7, compares Jesus to Melchizedek and says this about him:

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. [Hebrews 7:1-10]

Since Jesus is like Melchizedek, and Melchizedek collected tithe, the implication is that Jesus is entitled to receive tithe, too.

The question is, “How does one pay tithe to Jesus?” There is a joke about several ministers discussing this problem. The punch line is that the last minister just flings the offering plate up into the air. Jesus keeps what He wants, and the minister gets all the money that falls on the ground. But it is really no joking matter. Where, and how, should one pay tithe?

Malachi tells us about the unchangeable requirement to pay tithe. He gives us this message from the Lord.

“I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty. [Malachi 3:6-12]

God curses those who withhold their tithe, and blesses those who pay tithe. God invites people to test him. There are books full of stories about people who did test God in this way. Here is one of those stories, from the book Over and Over Again! 2, edited by Ronald Alan Knott.

Everyone had filed out of the church. I sat alone as the light from the stained-glass windows gave an unnatural glow to my surroundings. I held my husband’s \$25 tightly in my hand. It was all we had for groceries to feed our family of seven. My thoughts darted through the 25 years I had just spent away from the church that I had loved as a child. Now I was back home, vowing to go all the way with my Lord.

The moment of decision had come. How could I be tested so quickly with such a major decision? I knew \$25 would not buy enough food to feed us for the whole week. I also knew I had nothing else to give for tithe. I had been gone so long.

My new commitment pounded in my brain; the tears spilled out as I sat there in silence, pleading with God for direction. Soon the answer became very clear as the story of the widow and her mite came to mind. Yes, that is what I would do. I would give the whole \$25 to my faithful Lord, who had just welcomed me home again to stay.

Trying to explain to my husband and children what I had done was hard, but surprisingly, they seemed to understand. During the week we used up what remnants we had of food. Then the dreaded day came. All I could find in the house to feed the clan was one large potato.

I cooked the potato and prepared to cut it seven ways, as I called everyone to the table. We bowed our heads in prayer as my husband gave thanks for the food we were about to share. Before he could finish the prayer, the doorbell rang. We quickly chorused, “Amen,” and ran to the door in a group.

There stood my new pastor and his wife with bags of groceries in their arms and stacked at their feet. Through thankful tears I asked them how they knew we needed anything, for I had not told anyone of our dire circumstances. They said they did not know and were even afraid we might take offense at their gesture of goodwill. But the urge to bring us food was so strong that they were simply compelled to do so.

Was it a coincidence that they came while we were offering thanks in prayer for one potato? I know it was not. When I gave the Lord all I had to give Him, I knew in my heart He would never let us go hungry. How did I know? Because in the silent moments in my Father’s house and in the glow of the stained glass, I had claimed His promise.

“I was young and now I am old; yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread.” [Psalm 37:25, NIV] ²

God does bless people who pay tithe. You probably have Christian friends who can tell you how they were blessed when they started paying tithe. It takes faith to pay tithe when money is tight; but, as Kimmie and JoAn Witzel are about to tell you, if you do, God will take care of you.

[music—Kimmie and JoAn Witzel, “God Will Take Care of You”]

Part 3

In the first segment we talked about the importance of paying tithe. We ended the second segment by talking about the blessing you can receive by paying tithe.

This brings us to the controversial subject of where to pay tithe. Quite naturally, most denominations think you should pay tithe only to that denomination because they have inherited the title of “Spiritual Israel”—but is that really Biblical? Let’s look very carefully at exactly what the Bible says about paying tithe.

A tithe is a tenth. But what is it a tenth of? We are told the answer in Leviticus 27, verses 30-33.

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it. Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the LORD. No one may pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If anyone does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed. [Leviticus 27:30-33]

Churches generally don’t quote this passage because it says that tithe comes from “everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees.” That is, it only applies to agricultural produce, not wages or commerce. Presumably that’s because there is no real increase when money simply changes hands. It is only when animals are born, or crops are harvested, that there is any real increase in wealth. That’s why the Pharisees were tithing their garden herbs, not money. Furthermore, God decided which animals to take by determining the order they would pass under the shepherd’s rod. You could not switch one animal for another. If you really wanted one of the animals that God selected, you had to redeem it by buying it back at 20% above market price.

There was a temple tax that had to be paid in cash, but all tithes and offerings had to be made by agricultural products. The corrupt practice of selling animals in the temple began when people who lived far away sold their animals, took the money to Jerusalem, and bought similar animals there because it is easier to carry cash than it is to drive an animal a long distance.

Technically, if you have only what the IRS calls “non-farm income,” you don’t owe any tithe, according to the letter of the law. But real Christians are bound by the spirit—not the letter—of the law. The spirit of the law applies to wages even if the letter of the law does not. So we have to honestly apply a Biblical principle that made sense in an almost entirely agricultural society to our modern urban culture. It doesn’t seem reasonable that God would want the entire burden of tithe to fall on the shoulders of farmers.

² Ronald Alan Knott, Over and Over Again! 2, pages 25-26

So we have to live by the spirit of the law—not the letter of the law. It’s always dangerous to do what we think God means rather than what God specifically says He means. Let’s look further into the scriptures to see if we can get any more guidance.

Here are two more verses about tithing you probably never heard in church. They are Deuteronomy 12, verses 17 and 18.

You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and olive oil, or the firstborn of your herds and flocks, or whatever you have vowed to give, or your freewill offerings or special gifts. Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns—and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to. [Deuteronomy 12:17-18]

Jews ate their own tithes and offerings—but only in the Temple. When the Jews made their sacrifices, they got some of it back! Some of the food was destroyed as a burnt offering, and some of the wine was poured out on the ground—but the rest was eaten and drunk by the priests and people who made the offering. Modern churches generally don’t give you a rebate on your tithe or offerings.

When a Jew went to the Temple and offered an animal, and got part of it back, it taught him that everything he has really belongs to God. When he gratefully acknowledged this fact by giving God some of what really belongs to God anyway, God graciously gave some of it back.

In Nehemiah’s day, the Jews had fallen into apostasy, and had not paid tithe or given offerings in many years. But Nehemiah led a reform movement, and chapter 10 tells us what the people vowed to do.

Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. [Nehemiah 10:37-39]

This passage says that the tithe is to be brought into the storerooms by a priest descended from Aaron. So, if one wants to go by the letter of the law, only someone descended from Aaron who has been ordained as a priest can collect tithes. You can wiggle out of your responsibility by saying that no priest descended from Aaron has been by your house to collect the peaches you picked from your tree and set aside, but have long since rotted. But we want to live according to the spirit of the law—not the letter.

A pastor will generally tell you that the phrase, “storerooms of the house of God,” means “the bank account of our denomination.” Why isn’t the storeroom the bank account of the nearest synagogue? Why isn’t it the bank account of the Catholic Church, or some Protestant denomination other than yours? How do you know where to give your money? Does it matter?

Most people give their tithes to their own church; but sometimes they become disillusioned with their church for reasons which may or may not be valid. Perhaps another church member offended them.

Perhaps they disagree with a church board decision or a new church teaching. Perhaps there is a scandal involving a church leader. As a result, church members might withhold their tithes, or give their tithes to another ministry. When this happens, the church leader might quote the story of the widow's mite in Mark chapter 12.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." [Mark 12:41-44]

When quoting this verse, the church leaders argue that Jesus praised the widow for giving money to a church that He knew was about to murder the Messiah and would do everything it could to stop the apostles from spreading the Good News. Presumably their point is that no matter how valid your criticism of their church, it isn't as valid as the one Jesus had against His church, so you should continue to give your tithe to them anyway.

That wasn't Jesus' point. He didn't praise the rich people who gave large amounts to a corrupt priesthood. He praised the poor woman because she trusted everything she had to God. Jesus was talking about the importance of trusting God—not the virtue of giving tithes to an imperfect, maybe even deeply flawed, church.

Jesus did not encourage people to give one tenth to God—He told them to give ten tenths. We began this broadcast with Jesus' parable about the man who sold everything, not just a tenth of what he had, to buy the field containing a treasure, and the merchant who sold everything, not just a tenth, to buy a pearl. Jesus doesn't want just a tenth of our devotion—He wants all of it.

You have probably heard this story, recorded in Mark 10.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. [Mark 10:17-22]

As often as you have heard this, have you ever heard a preacher emphasize that Jesus said he should "give to the poor," and not, "give to the church?"

It is clear that God promises a great reward for those who devote their time and money entirely to God. This brings us back to the question of how and where to pay tithe since there aren't any Levites serving in the Temple in Jerusalem to pay it to.

You have to give somewhere—but where? I can't tell you the answer. It is a question only the Holy Spirit can answer when you sincerely inquire about it in prayer. The Holy Spirit will give different answers to different people. Acts 16 tells how Lydia gave Paul free room and board to allow him to preach the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul told the Corinthians to save up money to be sent to Jerusalem, not in order to give it to the Levites in the Temple, but to feed the poor. After they did this, Paul gave them this challenge in his second letter.

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. [2 Corinthians 8]

Paul said generosity is a test of sincerity. How sincere is a Christian who earns the average American income of \$30,000 a year but only puts \$1 in the offering plate whenever he goes to church? That's a sharp contrast to the merchant who sold everything he had to get the pearl of great price.

As I said before, I can't tell you where to give, or how much to give. Those answers can only be discovered through prayer. God may impress you to support hunger relief, mission projects, a music ministry, a local church, a Christian radio station, or some other ministry. There are lots of different churches and independent ministries that deserve to be supported. If every Christian donates generously to whatever ministry the Holy Spirit suggests, the Holy Spirit will allocate the funds properly.

Only through prayer will you discover how much God wants you to give, and where to give it; but I would be very surprised if the Holy Spirit impresses you to give less than 10% of your income to legitimate Christian ministries.

The Holy Spirit will give a specific answer to any individual who sincerely asks in prayer how to spend his time and money; and that specific answer will always be in harmony with the general principles found in the scriptures.

If a Spirit tells you that you don't need to tithe to any ministry, it isn't the Holy Spirit talking to you. Satan is very good at pretending to be the Holy Spirit suggesting excuses for why you can withhold your tithe. Satan may tell you the tithe only applies to agriculture, so you don't need to tithe your wages. Satan may say the tithe has to be collected by a Levite and stored in the Temple in Jerusalem, which doesn't exist any more. Satan may tell you that the law, including the requirement to pay tithe, was abolished at the cross. Satan may tell you that you can't afford to pay tithe right now—but that's OK because you will catch up later. Satan can give you lots of bogus excuses not to pay tithe. But deep down inside you must realize that these excuses won't stand up to examination on judgment day.

We began this broadcast by reading what Jesus said about a man who sold everything he had to buy a pearl. Jesus wasn't encouraging us to spend all our money on a piece of jewelry. He wants us to recognize what has true value. There is something much more important than a round, smooth, shiny mineral concretion. You must do all that you can to obtain it.

So, it is appropriate to end this broadcast with the words of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 18:28.

Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” [Luke 18:28-30]