

Tithing

Bishop Cameron Ford
March 13, 2016

I want to take just a few of the remaining minutes to share my thoughts and testimony about the law of tithing and some of the great blessings that the Lord has prepared for those of us that are willing to obey this commandment. It is interesting to think about the areas of the gospel that people generally struggle with, because it reveals how well the Lord knows his children. In my mind, these challenge areas can be broken into three categories: 1) Demands and guidance on the fulfillment of our carnal pleasures and desires with the Law of Chastity and Word of Wisdom, 2) Demands and guidance on the use of our personal time with the requirement of Sabbath day observance and fulfillment of callings, and 3) Demands and guidance on the use of our financial resources through the law of tithing and fasting. Each of these areas can be simplified to a matter of priorities and trust in the Lord. He is asking us to trust that He knows how best to mold us into the kind of people that, in our heart of hearts, we really want to be.

In its basic concept, money represents freedom and security; freedom to go where we want and do what we want. It represents cars, houses, food, clothing, vacations, power, and influence. If we face towards the world and keep our eyes focused on the priorities of the world, the carnal man has almost no resistance in having us choose to do very different things with our freedom than the Lord would have us do. The law of Tithing uses money, the very mechanism of freedom and security, to keep us facing towards Him so that we can keep our eyes focused on His priorities, which as we know, is the immortality and eternal life of our souls.

Where and how we spend our money is the clearest indication of what is most important to us, of where our hearts really reside. Our payment of tithing declares to the Lord, and most importantly, to ourselves, that our hearts are truly with Him.

In saying that we rob Him when we do not pay our tithing and fast offerings, the Lord clearly considers himself to be a creditor to each of us. But in contrast to all of the other creditors in our lives, His motives in requiring payment are not selfish. Rather, they are based on love and a desire for our best good. I am absolutely confident that the Lord does not need our money to operate His church. He could easily guide the Prophet to the untold

treasures of the earth, or tell him exactly what stocks to invest in so that none of us would ever need to give a dime. But then the whole purpose of the gospel in molding and perfecting the Saints would be frustrated. It is in the striving to keep our covenants and asking God to help us do so, that the Lord's atonement can fully engage with us and help us to become like Him. So even though the Lord could do without us paying tithing, we desperately need the opportunity to pay tithing; we cannot do without it, or at least we will miss out on critical things the Lord would have us learn.

Let us quickly consider a few of the ways the Lord blesses us through the payment of tithing.

In October 2013, Elder Bednar shared some of the ways that the Lord can change us through obedience to the law of tithing:

"Often as we teach and testify about the law of tithing, we emphasize the immediate, dramatic, and readily recognizable temporal blessings that we receive. And surely such blessings do occur. Yet some of the diverse blessings we obtain as we are obedient to this commandment are significant but subtle. Such blessings can be discerned only if we are both spiritually attentive and observant. ... For example, a subtle but significant blessing we receive is the spiritual gift of gratitude that enables our appreciation for what we have to constrain desires for what we want. A grateful person is rich in contentment. An ungrateful person suffers in the poverty of endless discontentment.

We may need and pray for help to find suitable employment. Eyes and ears of faith are needed, however, to recognize the spiritual gift of enhanced discernment that can empower us to identify job opportunities that many other people might overlook—or the blessing of greater personal determination to search harder and longer for a position than other people may be able or willing to do. We might want and expect a job offer, but the blessing that comes to us through heavenly windows may be greater capacity to act and change our own circumstances rather than expecting our circumstances to be changed by someone or something else.

We may appropriately desire and work to receive a pay raise in our employment to better provide the necessities of life. Eyes and ears of faith are required, however, to notice in us an increased spiritual and temporal capacity to do more with less, a keener ability to prioritize and simplify, and an enhanced ability to take proper care of the material possessions we already have acquired. We might want and expect a larger paycheck, but the blessing that comes to us through heavenly windows may be greater capacity to change our own circumstances rather than expecting our circumstances to be changed by someone or something else."

I love how Elder Bednar focuses on how, by obedience to the law of tithing, the Lord most often provides for our financial needs by not changing our circumstances, but by changing us so we can change our attitude about our circumstances, change our circumstances, or change both. The Lord is not only focused on meeting the immediate needs of His children, but on teaching, molding, and transforming them. From time to time, this transformation requires us to be obedient even when we do not know how all of the other bills will be paid. As President Uchtdorf once said: "There are times when we have to step into the darkness in faith, confident that God will place solid ground beneath our feet once we do."

In closing I want to share an amazing account of our beloved prophet Joseph Smith, who was so often required by the Lord to step into the darkness in faith. I read from the words of Philo Dibble:

“When Joseph first came to Nauvoo, then called Commerce, a Mr. White, living there, proffered to sell him his farm for twenty five hundred dollars, five hundred dollars of the amount to be paid down, and the balance one year from that time. Joseph and the brethren were talking about this offer when some of them said: “We can’t buy it, for we lack the money.” Joseph took out his purse, and, emptying out its contents, offered a half dollar to one of the brethren, which he declined accepting, but Joseph urged him to take it, and then gave each of the other brethren a similar amount, which left him without any. Addressing the brethren, he then said: “Now you all have money, and I have none; but the time will come when I will have money and you will have none!” He [Joseph] then said to Bishop Vinson Knight: “You go back and buy the farm!”

Brother Knight went to White, but learned from him that he had raised the price one hundred dollars, and returned to Joseph without closing the bargain. Joseph again sent him with positive orders to purchase, but brother Knight, finding that White had raised the price still another hundred dollars, again returned without purchasing. For the third time then Joseph commanded him to go and buy the farm, and charged him not to come back till he had done so.

When Bishop Knight got back to White, he had raised another hundred on the place, making the whole amount twenty-eight hundred dollars. However, the bargain was closed and the obligations drawn up, but how the money was going to be raised neither Brother Knight nor the other brethren could see. The next morning Joseph and several of the brethren went down to Mr. White’s to sign the agreement and make the first payment on the land. A table was brought out with the papers on it, and Joseph signed them, moved back from the table, and sat with his head down, as if in thought for a moment. Just then a man drove up in a carriage and asked if Mr. Smith was there. Joseph hearing it, got up and went to the door. The man said, “Good morning, Mr. Smith; I am on a speculation today. I want to buy some land, and thought I would come and see you.” Joseph then pointed around where his land lay, but the man said: “I can’t go with you today to see the land. Do you want any money this morning?”

Joseph replied that he would like some, and when the stranger asked “How much?” he told him, “Five hundred dollars.” The man walked into the house with Joseph, emptied a small sack of gold on the table, and counted out that amount. He then handed to Joseph another hundred dollars saying: “Mr. Smith, I make you a present of this!”

After this transpired, Joseph laughed at the brethren and said: “You trusted in money; but I trusted in God. Now I have money and you have none”

Brothers and sisters, I know that if we ask for it, the Lord will bless us with the same kind of faith and trust that brother Joseph had. I also know that if we will resolve ourselves to always be paid in full to the loving shepherd of Israel, we will never, ever regret it.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.