

A THEOLOGY OF WEALTH DEUTERONOMY 8:18

You must remember the LORD your God, for he is the one who gives ability to get wealth; if you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day.^{1,2}

Events leading me to commit my life to Christ included a singular experience. Whilst engaged in a move from New York City, a trailer containing all our furnishings crashed while transiting the Washington Beltway near Oxen Hill, Maryland. The trailer hitch broke detaching the trailer and destroying all our furniture except for a baby crib. I rented a truck to haul the smashed furniture so that I could file an insurance claim, recouping at least a little money. When lying flat on one's back, there is really only one direction to look, and that is up.

In the interim, we settled in South Houston, Texas, where I obtained work with a construction crew making additions at the Ethyl Corporation on the Texas Ship Channel. Lynda and I accepted an invitation to attend a revival service at the Pasadena Boulevard Baptist Church in Pasadena. During that service, Lynda was converted to Christ and I was deeply affected by the transformation in her life. In the weeks following Lynda's conversion, I began to read the Bible seeking peace for my troubled soul. I began reading through the Bible for the first time; while reading the Book of Ecclesiastes, I read these words, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" [ECCLESIASTES 12:1]. The words haunted me; I could not escape them.

During that same week, I received a settlement from the insurance company for the furniture that had been destroyed; the amount received was nine hundred dollars. In 1970 that was a sizeable sum of money for our family, and the more so when one considers that as a graduate student at the Einstein College of Medicine I had received a stipend of \$125 per month. The question of what we should do with all that money weighed on our minds. Of course, we wanted to replace our furniture, but we faced a series of moves in the immediate future. I would soon initiate graduate studies at the University of Texas Health Science Centre in Dallas. Though I did not really know God, I knew there was a God and I knew that He was worthy of worship; He deserved my best service. Having discussed the matter, Lynda and I uncharacteristically agreed that we would give the entire cheque to the church we had only begun attending; the following Sunday I placed in the offering plate that cheque for \$900.

When an average monthly salary was considerably less than the amount of that cheque, the gift caused quite a stir in the church. We received a visit from the Pastor early the following week. He was astonished and wondered if we had a special project in mind for such a sizeable gift. We didn't know about offering envelopes, nor did we understand how a church distributes the gifts given. Therefore, when the Pastor asked how we wished the moneys to be used, we replied that we simply wanted to honour God.

¹ **The NET Bible** (Biblical Studies Press, 2003)

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Perhaps you consider our decision foolish, but I suggest that as beneficiaries of His grace, we were learning to worship. Lynda had received new life, and any expression of gratitude was insufficient to pay for the stirrings in my heart and for the life journey I was contemplating. What we did, though we could not really understand it, was to acknowledge what to that point had been unacknowledged blessings from God.

The text before us for this day states, “You *shall* remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you *power* to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” Reading that same command from the **NET BIBLE** provides a yet more literal translation. “You *must* remember the LORD your God, for he is the one who gives *ability* to get wealth; if you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day.”³

I am not suggesting that the latter translation is more accurate than the former, but the **NET BIBLE** does seem more emphatic in my estimate. I consider that the English noun “ability” seems to convey more strongly the intent of God’s Word than does our English noun “power.” Likewise, the English verb “must” seems livelier than does the English verb “shall.” I believe that we need to return to an attitude that takes seriously the commands of God and cease to treat Him as a kindly, though remote, grandfather.

Moses delivered an imperative and not a suggestion. Attached to the admonition is a promise, however. This promise chosen for our message this day is reminiscent of another statement written by Solomon.

“Honour the LORD with your possessions
and with the first produce of your entire harvest;
then your barns will be completely filled,
and your vats will overflow with new wine.”

[**PROVERBS 3:9, 10**]⁴

As Canadians, we are privileged to live in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, and we who reside in this Peace Region live in one of the richest regions of this blessed nation. Perhaps some among us doubt this statement, especially as we have just commenced a new school year with all the attendant expenses; but remember that we actually have the ability to provide for the education of our children. Wealth as something due us has been commonly accepted in society throughout adult life for most of us sharing this service. It is almost impossible to imagine living without enough money for our needs, even if our wants sometimes go unmet.

God has blessed us. This wealth, this plenty that we enjoy, is not because we are strong and deserving. Do we actually imagine that we deserve this grace more than do people living in the Sahel Region of Africa? The Steppes of Ukraine are even richer than are the Prairies of Canada, and yet that nation is impoverished and barely able to feed its own people. The potential mineral wealth of the Congo exceeds that of Canada, and yet that nation seems mired in perpetual civil war and the people live in abject poverty. Surely, God has blessed us, though our nation appears to have forgotten who gives us the ability to get wealth. Therefore, we need to remember the Lord who has blessed us.

³ **The NET Bible**

⁴ **Holman Christian Standard Bible**, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Following every major catastrophe in our world, Canadians repeatedly prove their generosity; and I am not speaking of the moneys siphoned out of our pockets by coercive government social policy. Canadians prove to be generous, despite the plundering of their earnings by parliamentarians intent on redistributing Canadian wealth. God has blessed Canada, in spite of our refusal to acknowledge His goodness.

WE ARE OBLIGATED TO REMEMBER THE LORD OUR GOD — The text begins with the admonition to *remember* the Lord God. Many truths should be remembered. A husband is well advised to remember his wedding anniversary and to remember his wife's birthday. These are important dates for a man to remember. It is good to remember assignments and responsibilities at work; bosses are pleased when we keep them from looking bad by fulfilling assigned tasks. Similarly, it is good to remember the Lord.

But what does it mean to remember the Lord our God? Surely one cannot forget that God exists? In order to answer this question, review the verses preceding our text. "Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'" [DEUTERONOMY 8:11-17].

To forget God is to neglect His commandments; forgetfulness results when people assume that the blessings enjoyed have been secured through their own power. At first, those blessed by God appear to have drunk from the waters of Lethe, and then they enter a state of intellectual oblivion to the goodness of God. At last, they begin to assume that their own abilities secure the blessings they enjoy. They situate themselves at the centre of their own little universe, stealing from God the praise that is due His Name.

This is the genesis of the present condition describing contemporary society. Paul reviewed society as it existed at that time; we must conclude that he provides quite an accurate description of society in this day. This is how we got to where we are today. "Although [people] knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” [ROMANS 1:21-28].

The Apostle teaches that failure to remember God and His goodness leads to a progressive amnesia that afflicts the one so affected with a form of spiritual Alzheimer Disease. The afflicted individual demonstrates a progressively atrophied moral fibre and the conscience is increasingly dulled. Ultimately, evil begins to reign among these moral pygmies because they have forgotten God’s goodness—they not only do what displeases God, but they seek approval of their moral poverty. The more they forget God, the more God surrenders them to the consequences of their actions. This tragic condition, unfortunately, can afflict professing Christians to an astonishing degree, for it is possession of Christ and not mere profession of the Faith that transforms the soul.

Remembering God—keeping His commandments, His rules and His statutes—is the way we are taught to express our gratitude. Think for a moment of how one expresses gratitude. We express gratitude by saying “Thank you.” Each cook appreciates thanks for preparing a fine meal. As I prepared this message, I recalled an incident when Lynda had prepared a favourite dessert for our enjoyment, but I was distracted by the pressures of the day. I forgot to say “Thank you.” It took her two days to express her disappointment, but she was clearly disappointed that I had not expressed gratitude. She was right, and she was right to call me to account for my oversight. Similarly, God expects us to express our gratitude for His goodness to us.

We express gratitude through permitting the Spirit of God to reign over our lives. We are generous toward those in need, beginning with our fellow saints and reaching beyond to those in spiritual destitution. This generosity is expressed through our prayers for the well being of those for whom we are concerned, but it is also demonstrated in seeking to share with those in need. Perhaps we need to refresh our memories.

Paul teaches, “Charge [Christians] not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future” [1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19].

Again, we are taught, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” [HEBREWS 13:16].

We remember God when we acknowledge that all that we hold is by His mercies. When we offer our gifts as an expression of gratitude we are remembering God. This is the reason gifts are offered and not given under compulsion. We are to be characterised by gratitude, offering our gifts as an expression of thanksgiving for His mercies. We Christians do not “pay the tithe,” but rather we offer gifts as an expression of gratitude.

This is the basis for Paul’s encouragement to the Corinthians to give generously. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.’

“He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15]!

We express gratitude to God by living godly and holy lives. We express gratitude to the Lord God by making every effort to do what is pleasing to Him. We express gratitude to our Master through obedience to His commands. When we demonstrate a submissive spirit we show gratitude to Christ our Lord. Gentleness demonstrates a heart filled with gratitude toward the Lord God. Growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ demonstrates gratitude to Him.

WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THE BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE — Modern Canadians are living on the interest drawn on spiritual capital invested by prior generations. However, I fear that we are rapidly squandering both the interest and the capital. Governments—federal, provincial and municipal—seem to be engaged in a constant and unrelenting effort to redefine morality. I was shocked some years ago when Pierre Pettigrew, then Foreign Affairs Minister, suggested that the churches had no business with issues of public morality.⁵ His suggestion has grown more fashionable among many in modern society!

If an individual will honour God, that person must acknowledge that the blessings enjoyed are a demonstration of divine goodness and grace. If you doubt that God is good, consider what happens should God cease to bless the farmer with rain in its season and sunshine needed to grow the crops. If you think that God is not good, what happens if He should withhold strength or health—even a brief time? We are constantly showered with divine grace and goodness. Of the Father, Jesus said that “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” [MATTHEW 5:45].

The Psalmist penned a thought-provoking statement in **PSALM 9:17**.

“The wicked shall return to Sheol,
all the nations that forget God.”

The statement is thought provoking precisely because it confronts us with the knowledge that even our national existence is the result of God’s grace. The blessings we enjoy as Canadians—peace, prosperity, plenty—are demonstration of God’s mercy and grace.

Those who went before us, carving a nation out of the wilderness, did so in the knowledge that they enjoyed the benefits of divine providence. They were a grateful people who rightfully acknowledged the mercies of the Almighty. Now, we have reached a day when we assume that peace and prosperity that is slipping through our fingers as so much water is the deserved result of our strength or something enjoyed because of our own wisdom.

⁵ Arthur Weinreb, **Government to churches: no right to speak out against same sex marriage**, <http://www.canadafreepress.com/2005/weinreb020105.htm>, accessed 21 September 2015

If this self-centred spectacle were confined to the halls of Parliament, it would be tragic enough, but this attitude has become a generalised consensus of almost the entire populace! Worship of God has become occasional and optional, even among the professed people of God; and we continue to focus solely on our own pitiful, dying lives.

Take note of the account of one of David's final acts before seating Solomon on the throne of the Kingdom. "David the king said to all the assembly, 'Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great, for the palace will not be for man but for the LORD God. So I have provided for the house of my God, so far as I was able, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, coloured stones, all sorts of precious stones and marble. Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God: 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by craftsmen, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the LORD?'

"Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced ***because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD.*** David the king also rejoiced greatly" [1 CHRONICLES 29:1-9]. Note especially how the generosity of the King touched the heart of the leaders of the nation.

David chose to honour God, being obedient to the vision God had placed in his heart. As a result, many others were encouraged to honour God. They did not take a vote or organise an offering; they simply obeyed the shared vision. Just so, we can "buy" a piano, or we can invest in worship. We can "pay" an associate pastor, or we can invest in our assembly. We can "support" a television ministry, or we can advance the Kingdom of God. I want to honour God, believing that if we are obedient to the vision He has given us as a congregation that we will encourage many other fellow Christians, even Christians in other churches, to join in honouring God through generous worship.

One statement in the Proverbs seems at first to be rather self-evident. Solomon writes, "The blessing of the Lord makes rich" [PROVERBS 10:22a]. However, the assertion is anything but ordinary. The wise man confesses that when God blesses, man is enriched. The converse would imply that when God withholds His blessing, man is impoverished. What else can the Psalmist mean when he writes:

"The LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favour and honour.
No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly."

[PSALM 84:11]

At one point in his lament, Job responds to his erstwhile friends, reminding those miserable comforters of the sovereignty of the LORD.

“With God are wisdom and might;
he has counsel and understanding.
If he tears down, none can rebuild;
if he shuts a man in, none can open.
If he withholds the waters, they dry up;
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.”

[JOB 12:13-15]

Like ancient Israel, modern Canada has forgotten the source of her wealth. God, speaking through His servant Hosea, reminded Israel of her neglect, and He might well remind us of our own neglect of the blessings we enjoy.

“She did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished on her silver and gold,
which they used for Baal.”

[HOSEA 2:8]

CONTINUED BLESSINGS DEPEND UPON OBEDIENCE — “If you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day.” This conditional clause is significant. If you remember Who it is that gives you wealth, He will confirm His covenant. Obviously, there is an application in these words for each Christian.

One passage in the Proverbs disturbs me deeply. The passage is disturbing precisely because it confronts me with the knowledge of my own responsibility to administer wisely all that God has entrusted to me.

“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered.
The people curse him who holds back grain,
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.
Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favour,
but evil comes to him who searches for it.
Whoever trusts in his riches will fall,
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.”

[PROVERBS 11:24-28]

We do not give simply so that we can get; but we do receive because we give. We do not bargain with God, but God does bless us as we wisely administer our goods to His glory.

We need to adjust our view of worship through giving. Modern parents are willing to “spend” a great deal on their children. Orthodontics, organised sports (including hockey, softball, soccer, ice skating), music and dance lessons all require incredible expenditures of money, time and energy for parents. Parents spend these moneys and energies, generally without significant complaint. The question that should nag at our hearts is whether we invest an equal amount in our children’s spiritual future?

The money spent on ice skating lessons, on hockey, on soccer ensures a measure of activity for our children (activity that children once got through playtime with friends). Yet, it is doubtful that any of our youth will make a career of skating, or playing professional sports; however, our children will live and work in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Christian Faith. Shouldn’t we invest at least an equal amount in the spiritual welfare of your children as we do in caring for their recreational pursuits?

We Christians spend a considerable amount of money decorating our homes and dressing our bodies. No one condemns the natural desire to live comfortably in an attractive home or to dress modestly in attractive apparel; but I do wonder whether we spend as much preparing for our eternal home. Our Lord urges us to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” [MATTHEW 6:20]. Have we invested as much preparing for our spiritual dress as we have spent on clothing that will be out of fashion within a very short while or on clothing that may not even fit us within a year or two? Shouldn’t we spend at least as much money, time and energy preparing to worship as we do making ourselves look and smell attractive?

Occasionally, I become aware of complaints that I speak far too frequently on the subject of stewardship. Individuals registering such complaints frequently indicate their discomfort with all the preaching on giving. However, the Christian walk can be summed up by appealing to the concept of stewardship. God has given us life—we are responsible to use that life wisely to His glory. God has entrusted to us earthly treasure—we are responsible to employ those same treasures wisely in advancing His great Kingdom. God has given to us health and strength and ability—we are responsible to use all that we possess to His glory. Giving is very important to God, so important that he speaks of giving frequently.

Here is a fascinating note of interest to you. God is vitally concerned about this business of giving. A simple check of the ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION of the Bible reveals that the word *give* and its cognates occurs 1174 times. The word *faith* and its cognates occurs 436 times. The word *hope* occurs 169 times. The word *love* occurs 744 times. Apparently God is concerned about giving, if word usage counts! The aspects of the Faith that we think we know are emphasised less than is the act of giving.

Why do we give to the Lord? The answer is actually found in the Law of Moses. “[The purpose of tithing is to] teach you always to fear the LORD your God” [DEUTERONOMY 14: 23].⁶ If you wish to know what an individual loves, look at their calendar and their chequebook. The way one spends his time and his money reveals what is really important to him or her. It is one thing to say that we love God; it is another thing to live as if we love God.

⁶ Holy Bible: New Living Translation (Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL 1997)

You do love the Lord, don't you? If you have never been born from above, it is impossible for you to love either the Son of God or God the Father. Moreover, if you have never been born from above, it is impossible for you to love the people of God. The concept of giving—the very fact that I would have the audacity to speak of voluntarily giving out of your wealth to advance the cause of Christ—must assuredly be odious to anyone who is not a believer. The message must appear to confirm the caricature of preachers—they are always after money.

However, I assure you that God does not seek your money; rather, He seeks you. God is even now calling you to receive the gift of life that is found through surrender of your will to the reign of His Son in your life. As an outsider, you have no basis for bringing a gift before the Lord. As a believer, your life will be transformed.

This is the message we bring. This is the message we urge each outsider to receive, even today. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:2].

Each one who is a Christians must remember this promise of blessing given to us. Permit me to leave you with a rich promise that God Himself as provided to all who will receive it. The promise is recorded in 2 CORINTHIANS 9:8-11. “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that having all contentment in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.’

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” Amen.