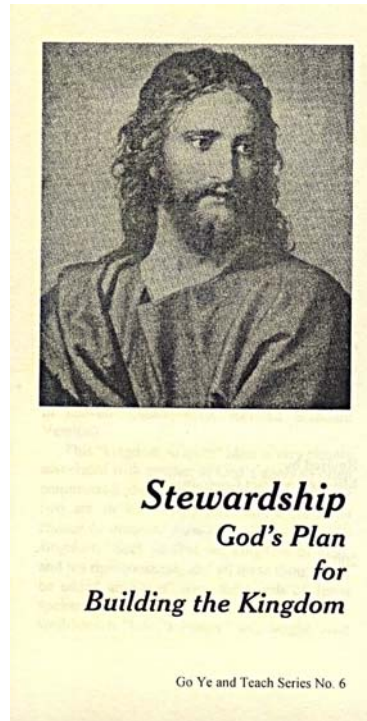


Stewardship

God's Plan for Building the Kingdom



Remnant
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
of Latter Day Saints

Revised by
Missionary Tract Committee
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STEWARDSHIP

GOD'S PLAN FOR BUILDING HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH

The Remnant Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints believes that from the beginning of creation there has been divine purpose in the universe, that there are definite goals toward which Divinity is directing all its movements. Our comprehension is limited, so that we dare not attempt to conceive the over-all goal as it exists in the mind of God. But we do know from the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples that God has at least one definite goal in mind that he expects mankind to work toward: his "kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, Revised Standard Version).

This "kingdom on earth" ideal is very closely associated with another of God's goals so often emphasized: the salvation of man. In fact, the two are so interrelated that *man's salvation cannot be divorced from the building of God's kingdom*. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" were the words of Jesus spoken to his followers on the same day that the well-known "Lord's Prayer" was taught. And although he was emphasizing that their physical needs would automatically be supplied as the result of such seeking, we are sure all will agree that man's spiritual needs will also be supplied when such searching is diligently followed.

Man's salvation, then, lies not in seeking to "save" his own individual life but in seeking "to build up the kingdom of God," as one version of the Scriptures records.

VARYING VIEWPOINTS BROUGHT INTO FOCUS

The *restored* gospel of Jesus Christ has sought for over 170 years to bring into proper focus the relationship of the varying viewpoints concerning the essential beliefs and practices leading to man's salvation. The ministers of this church have recognized the elements of truth to be found in the long-accepted "gospel of *personal salvation*"-which emphasizes the importance of "faith" and "grace" and "a personal Savior." But they have pioneered in emphasizing that there are *also* concepts of tremendous importance in the "gospel of *social salvation*," and have introduced the now common terms of "stewardship" and "brotherhood" and "works" into the concepts of salvation. They have taught that true salvation must be built upon a solid three-point foundation if it is to stand the scrutiny of God in the Day of Judgment. Not only must I be concerned with *my* personal condition of salvation, but I must be concerned with the physical and spiritual condition of the *other* inhabitants of my world community; my level or degree of salvation is greatly dependent upon my relationships in world brotherhood. I must also develop a righteous concern for improving my relationships with God; I must recognize that he, not I, is the center of the universe, and adjust my actions accordingly. In every righteous decision, therefore, I must consider (1) my God, (2) my brother, and (3) myself.

These concepts are basic in building the kingdom of God on earth. They are the attitudes that make the kingdom possible. And they are summarized in one meaningful word, *stewardship*. This word describes "God's plan for building his kingdom on earth."

In presenting a more detailed description of our understanding of this principle of God's, let me raise some of the questions people ask about stewardship:

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP

A steward is usually considered to be a custodian or supervisor of somebody else's property. How does the idea of stewardship tie into the building of the kingdom of God?

To participate wholeheartedly in building God's kingdom on earth, we must recognize that God is the creator and owner of the universe, that we have been given temporary custody of part of his earthly pos-

sessions. It is our responsibility to “hold in trust” the possessions which we have received into our care. In other words, we are *stewards* over God’s earth. We are held accountable for a wise management-that all partners in this venture (God, self, and fellow man) may benefit to the greatest extent.

Is stewardship primarily concerned with material possessions?

Stewardship is concerned with all phases of living. Our time, talents, and material goods are so completely integrated in this life that we cannot separate them and say that one is more important or of greater concern than the others. A modern prophet of the past century recognized that life is not divided into material or spiritual compartments: “All things unto him [God] are spiritual.” Science is now discovering how true this is. The things that we experience with our usual five senses may seem more real to us now, but eventually we shall discover that all material things are just different manifestations of the Spirit of God.

You said stewardship is a “plan for building God’s kingdom on earth.” Is it a detailed listing of duties and procedures?

There are some rather detailed procedures outlined in the field of economics, but beyond that the plan is general-based upon the two great commandments: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The kingdom of God does not consist primarily of policies or programs, schemes or laws, but of people-people whose minds, hearts, and characters have been converted to Jesus Christ and his teachings. With a desire to discover the laws of God and to obey them, men will gain daily guidance from God that will lead to the right relationships necessary in kingdom-building. Of course programs and policies will be formulated to unify certain objectives, but they will be only means to an end. And the end is the expression of the love of God which man feels in his own soul, and which urges him to include other people in his plan of life.

Can this idealistic plan be made practical?

The Scriptures indicate that man has made righteousness practical before. Enoch “walked with God” (Genesis 5:24), for he “pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5). Historical writings indicate that there were others in Enoch’s day who also walked with God. “Enoch’s city” of righteousness, Zion, is the object of song in many religious hymnals. Our church is pledged to make such a condition practical; it is committed to the establishment of a literal social order based on ideals converted into practical religious conduct.

A literal social order?

Yes. For the kingdom to become a reality, there must be a beginning. Our people are trying to develop a nucleus for Christ’s world-wide coming kingdom. Just as the early Christians gathered together into a specific community relationship, so we believe that modern Christians who have a special concern for the kingdom must gather together into community relationships for putting into practice Christian ideals. Such a literal social order is designated by the familiar name, “Zion.”

Are you suggesting a communal- “all things common”-society of Christians?

No. The biblical account of the early Christian community may mislead one to believe that it practiced communism (Acts 2:41-47), but further study of the situation will indicate that the early saints retained private ownership of necessities and sold only those possessions which were surplus to accumu-

late funds to “part to all men, as every man had need.” The Moffatt translation records Paul’s commendation of the saints at Macedonia for contributing to the support of needy Christians: “It is a matter of give and take; at the present moment your surplus goes to make up what they lack, in order that their surplus may go to make up what you lack. Thus it is to be give and take-as it is written, He who got much had nothing over, and he who got little had not too little. . . . Everyone is to give what he has made up his mind to give; there is to be no grudging or compulsion about it” (II Corinthians 8:14,15; 9:7).

Does your church anticipate creating a political government?

No. Of course we expect our members to be interested and participate in all phases of good government, but as a group we do not desire to control the political destinies of peoples who do not voluntarily desire to become a part of the association of Christians specifically devoted to building God’s kingdom. We feel that the government of the United States was divinely established, and that it offers the best atmosphere under which the Zionic ideals may be perfected; however, we ask all of our members throughout the world to be loyal citizens of their nation and to use their influence to assist in developing the highest type of good government where they reside.

In order that surpluses could be redistributed in any large segment of society, there would have to be some organization established, wouldn’t there?

Yes, God made provision for such. Within the church, men known as “bishops” are primarily responsible for developing and supervising such distribution. They are selected especially for the “temporal” or economic matters of the kingdom of God on earth.

Can you give me a general overview of the financial aspects of your “stewardship” program?

To begin with, let us again remember that stewardship is concerned with a wise management of resources in order that all may have their needs and just wants supplied. The criterion of success in stewardship is not an amassing of personal wealth but service and wealth contributed to the community. God has spoken in modern times and said, “For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare.” When we see or hear of people starving, it sometimes seems this is not true. But primarily such a condition is the result of poor distribution of material goods. God has asked men to so organize themselves that this will not happen.

How is this “organizing” accomplished?

The church received instructions over a century ago which have become known as the “financial law.” In it are instructions outlining steps to be taken by each individual who desires to comply with the economic aspects of stewardship. One of the first steps is to recognize God’s ownership of man-s possessions by paying tithing.

What do you mean by “tithing”?

The primary meaning of “tithing” is *tenth*. The idea of tithing is very old. The early Hebrews in Bible times paid tithing (Genesis 14:20; Malachi 3:8,10). It was also practiced in early Christianity (Matthew 23:23). It has been especially emphasized and explained in modern revelation to our church.

Tithing means “tenth.” But . . . tenth of what?

Many Christian churches have interpreted the Bible as teaching that tithing is one tenth of each person’s *income*. We believe, however, that the proper meaning is one tenth of man’s *increase*. As practiced

in the agrarian economy of Bible days, once each year (annually) the farmer gathered together or took inventory of his possessions and paid tithes on his increase for the year preceding. After reading of this procedure, many have mistakenly said this increase was their income. They forget that the biblical family had been daily using the current products of the land. Therefore their basic needs had mostly or totally been supplied before the herd, or the flock, or “whatsoever passeth under the rod” was tithed. (See Leviticus 17:30-32.)

Then your church teaches that its members should pay one tenth of their annual increase after their needs have been provided?

Yes. Although our economy is no longer agrarian, we believe that a tenth of the increase *after* needs are supplied is the proper and just law. Instructions to our church in the past century have clarified this understanding. This is a part of the financial law as taught by our financial leaders (bishops).

How does your church define needs?

Needs consist of those basic physical requirements which all men everywhere have in common. They may be summarized as a reasonable level of expenditures for food, shelter, replacement of clothing, equipment or furniture, medical care, necessary travel, and taxes. These living costs must be met in order to maintain physical health and well-being, and to assume our financial share of citizenship responsibilities. The final decision of what shall be included as necessary living expenses must always be left to the individual.

What uses does the member make of increase?

The three major uses of increase could be summarized as follows:

1. Giving to the work of God. Tithes, offerings, oblations for the care of the poor and needy, and surplus are all contributed from the increase.
2. Saving toward an inheritance. Part of the increase should be saved or conserved in the purchase of a home, furniture, equipment, clothing, or other tangible assets.
3. Spending for just wants. After meeting our obligation to our families for necessary living expenses, and to the church for tithes and offerings, we may spend part of our increase for just wants such as recreation, cultural activities, higher education, gifts or hobbies.

What use is made of tithing?

Tithing is used primarily for supporting missionaries' families, those engaged in General Church administration, maintaining the General Church offices, and providing for other administrative expenses incurred in financing the Lord's work. It is also used for the support of the educational program of the church.

How do you determine the amount of tithing you owe?

By making a financial statement. The first step for a new member is to list all his resources, deduct the total of his liabilities, and determine his net worth at present fair value. The net worth represents his increase economically since birth. On this figure will the first tithing payment be based. Annual tithing payments following are determined by deducting the total necessary living expenses for the year from the income of that same period. The balance represents the member's increase for the year. Tithing is one tenth of this increase.

Then, in order to know how much tithing you owe, you must also know what your expenses are?

Yes, one of the major purposes of our financial law is to help the member develop ability and skill in the management of personal and family finances. Of course money is needed to defray the expenses of missionary work and the administrative phases of kingdom-building. But the simplest way to fill that need-if that were the only purpose of the financial law-would be to make a simple percentage assessment on income as many churches do. Instead, however, our law asks all its members to become good stewards and it provides a plan of accounting primarily aimed at helping the individual.

Does the financial statement have any other purpose than giving the individual a better understanding of his financial condition?

Yes. The financial law states: "It is required of the Lord, at the hand of every steward, to render an account of his stewardship." So every member should give an accounting for the material blessings which have come into his possession as a stewardship. This is accomplished by filing a financial statement annually with the presiding financial officers of the church. Such an accounting is also an affirmation of the member's pledge to devote his possessions to the building of the kingdom. Do not misunderstand: this is not a legal document binding one's possessions to the control of the church leaders; it is a moral obligation one voluntarily makes to use his possessions in a way that seems best in furthering the kingdom. He is advised to counsel with the bishops when any great financial change is contemplated which will affect procedures in establishing the social order now in process.

Doesn't this "filing" infringe upon the member's privacy?

In the first place, the filing of a financial statement is entirely voluntary. It is done by those who have faith in the principles proposed in stewardship. Besides, man's privacy in financial matters is much more curtailed than this by governmental requirements for tax statements, financial report, etc.

What else is involved in your understanding of financial stewardship?

The following statement, written many years ago, outlines the general steps of compliance with financial stewardship:

"The Order of Bishops believe it to be the duty of every member of the church to acknowledge his stewardship by complying with the law as given in the Scriptures:

"(1) Filing his inventory [First financial statement]

"(2) Paying his tithes

"(3) Paying his surplus

"(4) Making his offerings

"(5) And thereafter giving an account of his stewardship annually as provided in the law of God [Annual financial statement]."

The privacy of each member's response to the law of stewardship is guarded by the Bishopric.

You have mentioned "surplus" among the early Christians. But . . . what do you mean by surplus?

Surplus is that part of a man's possessions, whether moneys or properties, of which he has no present or immediate need even for reasonable security. The need, of course, is determined by the man's position, sphere of action, his business, and his dependents.

Who determines if a member has a surplus, and how?

The payment of a surplus is voluntary, and the decision to make it is initiated by the member desiring

to give. However, this decision is subject to review by the bishops before it can be received by the church. It is felt that those who are more specialized in finances can avert an unwise and too generous contribution. The bishops take into consideration that in the long run a member may make a greater contribution to society through reinvesting what appears to be surplus, or they may feel that the amount is too great to leave the contributor with a reasonable safe margin of capital for the operation of his farm, business, or industry. In all cases, the member and the bishop must both agree before surplus is accepted.

Do you mean to say you discourage people from contributing to the church?

Yes, if it appears to be unwise. The church exists for the purpose of helping its members, and it is felt that all will prosper in proportion to the faith of people in the integrity of their leaders. The financial law exists to aid its members in discovering and practicing greater spiritual virtues. And when a member comes, willing to surrender his surplus for the benefit of all, he should be met by leaders with just as great benevolence and righteous honesty.

For what purposes is the surplus used?

The surplus is used for expanding and bettering the economic conditions of Zion. Today, among many things, these funds are spent for

1. Helping the needy, the sick, the widow, and orphan-supplementing the oblation fund
2. Purchasing lands for the general benefit of the church, such lands to be in addition to those already designated as stewardship lands.
3. Building houses of worship which are peculiarly the responsibility of the General Church
4. Reserves, to care for emergencies.

Provision is also made that as the surplus fund increases it will be a source for

1. Developing business, industrial, and agricultural stewardships for young couples and other worthy people
2. Providing costs for economic research and community planning for both existing and new communities of special significance to Zion
3. Promoting the literary interests of the church-if special need arises.

Prior to the extensive use of money as a medium of exchange, surplus was usually measured in goods. As a result, the term "storehouse" is still used to designate the depository for surplus funds, whether they be cash or goods.

How do you determine the distribution of surplus to achieve equality?

That is one of the main duties of the bishops. The general rule in any specific situation is to discover first: "What are the needs and just wants of this person or family?" Remember, equality is not achieved by giving everyone the same amount of money or income. Because of the variables due to family size, income, age, sickness, etc., there is no specific dollars-and-cents distribution that may be figured in advance of a knowledge of each situation. Also remember that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Distributing surplus isn't a giveaway program. Only in cases where physical and mental weaknesses make it impossible for the individual to contribute some talent to the cause of Zion is surplus "given." It is desirable that surplus "shall be earned" by the one receiving-even though the efforts expended for it may be, of necessity, small. The goal which we seek in redistributing surplus is to enable individuals to have equal opportunity for using their talents and capacities.

What do you mean by "making offerings"?

In addition to the tithe, which is an obligation to God, man may give freely of other portions of his increase as freewill offerings. Traditionally, members have given several kinds of offerings. The most

important of these offerings is that given to meet the operating budgets of the branches, and to provide building funds for churches. Members usually make regular offerings to care for these needs. A well-known offering is called the "Oblation." This is an offering taken at each service of the Lord's Supper, and is used to supply the needs of the worthy poor. Other members give offerings to support the church hospital, church college, and other church projects. Special offerings are often given at Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving.

In any society, there are many other important things besides its economy. . .

Of course. There are many basic requirements of human personality that must be supplied. People need security, companionship, recognition, response. The Zionite community's aim is to supply most fully these values. Economic organization exists only for the purpose that spiritual values might be recognized and enhanced. The development of the individual personality must be considered a most important goal of any group.

What are some of the other aspects of stewardship to consider?

A good steward must have certain basic standards. For the greatest good to the individual and his community, and to most fully meet the will of God, they must be expressed in everyday living.

Here are some of the basic standards every good steward should set for his home:

1. A home founded, unified, and motivated in love.
2. A home operated on democratic principles-never degenerating at any time into tyranny or autocracy-the personality of every member considered.
3. A home established on a sound financial basis-thriftiness but not miserliness.
4. A family well managed and organized to function efficiently in home, community, and church, developing responsible personalities with habits of punctuality and dependability. Members are stimulated to develop talents, personality, etc.
5. A home with a definite program of sex hygiene and high moral and ethical training based on wholesome attitudes.
6. A home that is friendly, neighborly, benevolent, and hospitable.
7. A home that is marked by a spirit of reverence and an awareness of God.
8. A household that has a sanitary, clean, and adequate housing unit.
9. A family schedule which allows adequate hours of sleep, a degree of privacy, certain aesthetic satisfactions, and an atmosphere of sound emotional control and development.
10. A home conditioned for creative living by beauty.

Where may I get additional books or pamphlets on the subject of stewardship?

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