

GETTING WITH THE PROGRAM

by Ed Reid

(Stewardship Director - North American Division)

It seems that organized people get the most accomplished. Businesses and homes that are managed well seem to prosper. Somehow it just makes sense that when we conduct our spiritual business it too should be done in a systematic and businesslike manner. In fact, we are told, "If systematic benevolence was universally adopted, according to God's plan, and the tithing system carried out as faithfully by the wealthy as it is by the poorer classes, there would be no need of repeated and urgent calls for means at our large religious gatherings. There has been a neglect, in several churches, of keeping up the plan of systematic benevolence, and the result has been an impoverished treasury and a backslidden church." (*Review and Herald*, Jan. 1, 1875).

The Scriptures abound with counsel on having a definite plan regarding our response to God's goodness and our efforts to carry out the great commission. Solomon states, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."(Proverbs 3:9,10). Being systematic in putting God first gives Him the opportunity to bless the balance that we have discretion over.

As part of the specific instructions to the disciples Jesus commanded, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The support of our offerings, accordingly, should include our local church, our community, our conference and the world-wide program of the church. Again, He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."(Luke 9:23) If something is done daily it becomes a habit -a part of our lifestyle. In an article on Christian Benevolence in the *Review and Herald*, Jan. 11, 1898 Ellen White states, "It is not emotional spasms of piety that make us children

of God. He calls upon us to work for principles that are true, firm, and abiding."

After all, God's blessings come on a regular and systematic basis. "God's children should be educated to see that He has claims upon them. As regularly as the seasons come round, He gives us the harvest of the earth. His liberality is constant and systematic; and our returns to Him are to be made in accordance with the gifts which day by day He bestows to us. The steady, unfailing flow of Jehovah's goodness testifies of His love and benevolence. Then shall we not, with hearts filled with gratitude for all His blessings, respond by dispensing His gifts as faithful stewards?" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 14, 1897).

The idea of bringing offerings to God is found throughout the Bible. In most cases offerings were brought in response to the blessings of God, not in order to secure favor or for a special purpose. For example, when the wise men from the east came to see Jesus at His birth their stated purpose was "to worship Him." (Matt. 2:2). And when they found Him they did worship Him, and as part of that worship they gave Him gifts.(Matt. 2:11).

As Christians we give to our God because He is God. He is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. When we accept the Lordship of Christ we acknowledge that He is the One who daily provides for us. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He reminded them that it is the Lord that provides "our daily bread." Though we are to be concerned about meeting the various needs of God's church the primary motives for giving are not based on the present needs of His church. From a Biblical perspective acceptable offerings are motivated by our desire to offer ourselves to God. We recognize God as Lord of our lives. Therefore, our offerings become an act of homage and submission to the One who redeemed us and is now our Lord. Offerings also demonstrate that we have faith in God's providential care. Our offerings say that our relationship with our God is more

important than "things" and that we trust Him to provide for our needs. An acceptable offering is an embodiment of the worshiper's gratitude, thanksgiving, joy, and love. We all know that God doesn't need the money. "Yet God permits us to show our appreciation of His mercies by self-sacrificing efforts to extend the same to others. This is the only way in which it is possible for us to manifest our gratitude and love to God. He has provided no other."(*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 18).

Finally, an acceptable offering, although spontaneous, is at the same time systematic. God blesses us on a regular and continuing basis and we respond in a regular and systematic way.