

God's Tithe

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It may be assumed that every sincere Christian wishes to know the truth about tithing. You have heard it said that an honest man does not object to being reminded of a debt, because he intends to pay it. Likewise, the person who is truly born again is eager to know what God's word teaches on the important subject of the use of his money. We know that the Bible places the sin of covetousness on the same list with such sins as adultery, fornication, drunkenness, lying and stealing. And we know, too, that there is a strong tendency to forget God's part and use it for our own selfish desires—even the lost man realizes that.

Often we hear people say, "I don't believe in giving any certain per cent; I just give as I feel." But you dare not apply that to other phases of your Christian duty, such as church attendance, prayer, honesty, or chastity. The very essence of immorality is following one's own "feelings" rather than the will of God. Sometimes a person says, "I give whatever my conscience tells me." Paul persecuted the church "in all good conscience," so if a man's conscience does not lead him to do what the Bible teaches, his "conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15). Man's conscience is not a guide, it is the prompter after the way is pointed out.

Do not let anyone tell you that the Bible is not clear, easily understood, on the subject of tithing. Its teachings on this subject are as plain as those concerning salvation, church membership, baptism, or morals. The way to understand the Bible is to take what it says at face value and to begin trying to practice it. With this in mind I take as my text the words that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord" (Lev. 27:30). These words are clear: "The tithe is the Lord's." Now notice that it does not say "From now on you are to act as if it belongs to the Lord," nor "It is a good policy to dedicate the tithe to the Lord." Moses said plainly that "The tithe is the Lord's." The Jews understood this just as we do. The tenth part of his income belonged to God just as my books and my typewriter belong to me.

I. The first question that arises in our minds is *What is the tithe?*

The tithe is the portion that ancient peoples, even before the days of Moses, gave to God to be used for the support of their religious leaders and for atoning sacrifices. We do not know where it began nor how long it has been in existence.

The first instance of tithing in the Bible is the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek, "the priest of the most high God." Abraham was returning from a battle loaded with the spoils of victory. His heart was filled with gratitude for the help that God had given him in warfare, so he expressed his appreciation by giving the priest "tithes of all" that he had gained (Gen. 14:17-20).

The next example of tithing is that of Jacob. Many preachers and teachers have represented Jacob as a schemer who undertook to drive a bargain with God. But a careful reading of Gen. 28 shows that God had already

made an *unconditional* promise to Jacob that he would bless him and keep him in all of the places where he went. Then, Jacob, overwhelmed by the realization that God had spoken to him, said "If God will be with me . . . of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (vs. 20-22). This vow was the result of God's mercy to him and suggests a motive for all tithing.

Now when God gave the laws on Mt. Sinai he included the tithe as one of them and gave specific instructions about it. Besides my text there is Numbers 18:20, 21.

From this we see that one tribe of the children of Israel was not allowed to pursue the usual agricultural means of livelihood, but they were to devote their full time to leadership in religious services, and were to live on the tithes which the other eleven tribes gave. And even the priests were to give a tithe of what was given them of the children of Israel (Num. 18:26). (Likewise the preachers today are to tithe just as their members do.) The Jewish law made it plain that they were to bring a tithe of the increase of the fruit of the tree, e. g., oil and wine, of the seed of the land, of the herd, and of the flock (Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 14:22, 23; 2 Chron. 31:5, 6).

When the children of Israel backslid they forgot their tithes. Under wicked Ahaz "the doors of the house of the Lord" were shut up, but good King Hezekiah called the people back to God. Then Azariah, the priest, said, "Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store" (2 Chron. 31:10). Similarly, when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and set up the worship of God again, he found "the Levites and the singers" were out in the fields working. He brought

them back and "Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries" (Neh. 13:12). The failure to bring the tithe was always a mark of backsliding in Israel.

Furthermore, withholding the tithe was a grievous sin. God called it "robbery." Malachi (3:7-18) was preaching to the people about consecration, about returning to the Lord, when they lifted their brows in astonishment and said, "Wherein shall we return?" The prophet says: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." And the prophet did not tell the people to shed tears, or to be more regular in their church attendance in order to get back to God. He said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." God cannot bless his children when they are disobedient. True spirituality involves the proper use of material things.

But someone may well ask, "What about the New Testament? These scriptures that you have been reading are all from the Old Testament." I remind you that Jesus put his endorsement upon the tithe. The one-sided Pharisees were keeping strictly the tithe and certain other laws of God but had left out the true spirit of religion that causes man to be concerned for his fellows. Notice what he says in Matt. 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." He plainly says that they ought to

tithe even the small, almost worthless, products—this from the lips of our Master.

Look now at the will of God as revealed by Paul. Read 1 Cor. 9:13, 14.

“Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

When he speaks of those “which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple,” he is referring to the sons of Levi who were given the tithes for their full-time service in the temple (cf. Num. 18:20, 21 again). Having pointed out that God had a plan for the support of his workers in the Old Testament, he then, in verse 14, shows that that same plan is in effect today. The words translated “even so” may be translated “in like manner” or “thus.” In other words, Paul was saying that just as he ordained in the Old Testament that his workers were to be supported by the tithes and offerings, so he has not changed his plan; New Testament workers are to be supported in the same way. Nothing could be plainer than this. The tithe is still the Lord’s. He has not called out workers without providing for their support.

What shall we say the tithe is, then? Ten percent of a man’s income. No! It is the ten percent of his income that he gives “unto the Lord.” That brings us now to my second point, if the tithe is the Lord’s, how are we to get it to the Lord? We are told to lay up treasures in heaven. But how?

II. How are we to give our tithe?

Often we hear appeals made to Christian people to give “to the church,” “to pay the preacher,” “to send out missionaries” or “to help support the cause.” But this is not the emphasis in the Bible. All of the work of

the churches, if it is real Christian work, is God's work. He is directing it as well as possessing it, and "we are laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). All the work of Christ in the New Testament was done by his churches, and his churches were supported by his children. It is my opinion that "campaigns" for money, "drives," "rummage sales," "bazaars," "ice cream suppers," and the like are an abomination in the sight of God when used to raise money for the church. Such are not necessary when God's people will give Him what belongs to Him.

When the people of the Old Testament were commanded to give their offering "unto the Lord," they were given further instruction about where to bring it. Moses said, "Then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord" (Deut. 12:11). Nehemiah told the Jews to bring tithes and offerings "unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God" (Neh. 10:37, 38). And in chapter 13, verses 12 and 13, he appointed treasurers to take care of the tithes and offerings and to "distribute unto their brethren," the religious leaders. In Malachi 3:10 the prophet commanded the people to "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."

How was the money to be given in the New Testament? In Acts 4:33-35 we are told that the church at Jerusalem sold their lands and houses and brought the money and laid it down "at the apostles' feet." Then later (6:1-6) "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and they chose seven men to attend to properly distributing the provision. These early Christians gave "unto the Lord" through the church. Laying it at the apostles' feet was putting it in the church

treasury, for we know that even the twelve had a treasurer (Jno. 12:6).

We find the same thing under Paul's ministry. He and Barnabas were sent out by the Church at Antioch (Acts 13:2, 3) and supported by various churches. He later wrote to the Philippians about a certain period in his ministry saying, "Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedona, *no church* communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only" (4:15). Notice he said *no church*. Paul never expected his missionary work to be supported by individual subscriptions, but by churches, and he is pointing out here that when the gospel was first preached in that region this method was not well understood and practiced.

This agrees with what he told the Corinthian church. And he said that he gave the same order to "the churches of Galatia" (1 Cor. 16:1). He wrote: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. 16:2). This money was to be sent to the poor saints at Jerusalem. Whether it was their tithe or an offering we cannot say. But for those who follow the Bible as the sole guide in all matters of faith and practice it sets forth a clear teaching. "Upon the first day of the week"—that is our Lord's day and the ordained time for every Christian to worship God in tithes and offerings. "Let every one of you"—not husband and wife together, nor parents for children, nor the rich for the poor, but each one separately. "Lay by him in store"—this is obviously the church treasury, else it would not prevent the "gatherings" when Paul should arrive. Verse 3 shows that the church was to send it to Jerusalem by some of their own approved members. There is not a suggestion in the New Testament to authorize your giving the Lord's money

any way other than through your church. "As the Lord hath prospered him"—this is the principle laid down all the way through the Bible: if a member makes much money he is to give much; if a little, he is to give little. And there has never been a stated per cent in revealed religion nor heathenism other than the tithe. It is God's per cent; it is reasonable; it is fair to all.

I come now to summarize the answers to these two questions. The tithe is not any ten per cent of your income that you choose to set aside for religious, philanthropic, or social causes. It was never so in the Bible. Jesus spoke of "the altar that sanctifieth the gift." The tithe becomes the Lord's when it is placed on His altar. His altar in this age is a local New Testament church treasury. The tithe is merely the minimum of our responsibility. We should also bring offerings, even sacrificial offerings, into His church. If the church does not use the money as it should, it is up to the individual member to help increase the vision of the other church members; or in case nothing can be done, to co-operate or join another that is a New Testament Church.

Every man can tithe if he is willing. God has promised to make it possible for him to meet his needs if he will "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Let no man say that he cannot afford to, for he cannot afford to refuse to tithe. Let no one say that he cannot compute the tithe for men in every walk of life and of varying educational attainments are tithing. Finally, let no one say that he will not, for the Bible says, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jno. 2:4).

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