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SHALL WE TITHE?

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(By special permission of Dr. J. T. Henderson, General Secretary of the Baptist Brotherhood of the South, which published this tract some years ago and which has had a wide circulation, we are printing it again to meet the insistent demand for special literature on the question of the Tithe. We commend this tract by Doctor Compere most heartily.)

We do not ask whether tithing is required by a law that is to be rigidly enforced, with penalties for its violation. The question is, Ought we to practice tithing? Will it please God for us to give one-tenth of our income for the support of religious work? Has tithing any place in Christianity?

BEFORE NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

1. Tithing is older than the Old Testament law.

In "The Law of the Tithe," by Babbs, it is shown that all the great nations of antiquity practiced tithing hundreds of years before the days of Moses. And Mr. Babbs quotes: "Instances are mentioned in history of some nations that did not offer sacrifices, but in the annals of all times none are found who did not pay tithes." At least 400 years before the giving of the law through Moses, Abraham paid tithes, and at least 300 years before the law was given Jacob agreed to pay tithes. See Gen. 14: 20 and 28: 20-22. The custom was generally observed and they were familiar with it.

2. God says the tithe belongs to him.

In giving the law from Mt. Sinai the very first mention of the tithe is the simple announcement that it is God's. See Lev. 27: 30—"And all the tithe of the land . . . is Jehovah's: it is holy unto Jehovah." He does not say, "Be it enacted that the tithe shall be the Lord's." He simply announces that it is his. The people already understood tithing, and when this announcement was made they readily understood it.

3. God gave the tithe to the ministers of religion.

The tribe of Levi was set apart to keep up the services of the sanctuary. Tithes were to be paid to them in return for this service. "And unto the children of Levi behold I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the tent of meeting"—Num. 18: 21. The tithe belongs to God and he directed that it be paid to ministers of religion.

4. To keep back the tithe was called robbery, and it brought a curse. Malachi 3: 7-12.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Remember that the New Testament was made in the midst of circumstances and religious customs that come from the Old Testament. What about tithing in the New Testament?

1. It was thoroughly known and carefully practiced on all sides.

The Pharisee said: "I give tithes of all that I get"—Luke 18: 12. They were so careful about it that they tithed small garden vegetables—"Ye tithe mint and anise and cummin"—Matt. 23: 23.

2. Proportionate giving.

The New Testament clearly teaches "proportionate" giving. Each man's giving is to be "as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16: 2), and it is acceptable "according as a man hath, not according as he hath not" (2 Cor. 8: 12). See also Acts 11: 29 and Matt. 22: 21. When tithing was already being practiced on every side and the only "proportion" that had ever been generally recognized was the tithe, would not the people understand "proportionate" giving to mean tithing—unless, of course, the contributions were in addition to the tithe?

3. The tithe clearly implied.

In arguing the right of preachers to receive a support Paul said: "Know ye not that they that minister about sacred things eat of the things of the temple, and they that wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar? Even so did the Lord ordain

that they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel"—1 Cor. 9: 13, 14. The principal support of those "that ministered about sacred things" was from the tithes. Preachers are to be supported "even so." If that does not teach tithing, the tithing custom fits it mighty well.

4. Jesus praises tithing.

Jesus said: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe"; and in the very same speech he said to them: "Ye tithe mint and anise and cummin . . . these ye ought to have done"—Matt. 23: 2, 3 and 23. This is certainly strong endorsement, for the scribes taught a great deal about tithing.

5. Tithing was never abolished.

The custom was thoroughly established and regularly practiced. If it was to be entirely set aside it would seem necessary that it be so stated. No such setting aside is recorded.

Is there any reason

WHY THE LORD SHOULD ABOLISH TITHING?

The tithe belongs to the Lord. He alone has a right to abolish the tithing custom. On what grounds would the Lord care to abolish tithing?

1. To provide for giving more than one-tenth?

That was already provided for. The tithe was always only the minimum below which people were not to fall in their giving. They were always free to give as much more than that as they wished. No such rule as "the-tenth-and-no-more" ever was heard of, in the Old Testament or the New Testament teaching.

2. Because all our possessions belong to God?

That was just as emphatically true in Old Testament times as in New Testament times. In the Old Testament we read: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine" (Ezek. 18: 4); "The world is mine and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 50: 12); "The silver is mine

and the gold is mine" (Hag. 2: 8); "Jehovah thy God . . . giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8: 18); "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 29: 14).

3. In order that giving may be voluntary?

It was voluntary under the Old Testament system. Payment of tithes was never forced. With one possible exception, and then only for a short time, they were never collected by officers as taxes were collected. The Lord had no greater fondness for forced contributions in Old Testament times than he has now, and the payment of tithes was always voluntary.

4. Is it in order that love may be the fulfilment of the law?

Love is the fulfilment of the law when it leads us to do all that the law requires or more than it requires. Otherwise, love would be not the fulfilment of the law, but the destruction of the law. Also, love could not be the fulfilment of a law that does not exist. If God abolishes the tithe, then the tithing law would no longer exist and love could not fulfil it.

5. Because the Lord expects less from Christians?

But Christians are to do more than others, not less. See Matt. 5: 20, 46, 47.

6. Because Christianity is to have less value or less power than Old Testament religion?

The very suggestion is ridiculous.

7. Because the money will not be needed?

In Old Testament times for ages after the giving of the law there was only one house of worship for the whole nation and they never did have any foreign mission enterprise. Will there be need for less money to provide for the worldwide enterprise of Christianity than for the Jewish work in their own homeland? Really, is there any reason at all why the Lord would care to abolish tithing? If not, and if there is no record showing that it was ever abolished, is it not most likely that he is pleased for us to practice tithing?

WHY SO LITTLE ABOUT TITHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

A sufficient answer to this question would be: If Christians are not to practice tithing why does not the New Testament specifically set aside tithing? If Jesus intended that his followers should disregard the custom of tithing why did he give a strong endorsement of the custom (Matt. 23: 2, 3, and 23) and not say one word about discontinuing it?

We suggest a few possible explanations of the fact that there is very little in the New Testament about tithing:

1. It was already understood and recognized.

There was no more need for a specific command to practice tithing than for a specific command to tell the truth.

2. To avoid misunderstanding.

If Jesus had taught plainly that tithes were to be paid for the support of Christianity it would have brought needless conflict with the Jewish rulers and would have required endless explanations.

3. The tithe was not needed at that time.

In the early days of Christianity, before there was any great organized enterprise, and when the Christians were not building separate meeting houses, they would hardly need the full tithe.

4. The disciples paid the Jewish tithes.

So long as Jesus was on earth, and for several years after his crucifixion, practically all of the disciples were Jews, and as such they must pay the Jewish tithes. This was right, because they still worshiped in synagogues and temple. If they had been required to pay tithes for the support of Christianity they would have paid two tithes; and, as seen above, the Christian enterprise did not then need the tithe.

5. The liberality of the early disciples.

They needed no urging. Soon after the day of Pentecost they brought all their possessions and laid them down at the apostles' feet. When they are going so far beyond the minimum, why urge the minimum?

HOW REGARD THE TITHE?

1. It is a standard.

If there were no standards of conduct we could never know whether we had done our duty or not. If there were no standard for measuring our giving, then a man of great wealth might say that he had given "according to his ability" when he had given only one per cent of his income, while a poor man might feel that it was necessary that he give 25 per cent. But the tithe is the standard in such matters, and no one can claim to be a standard Christian in the matter of giving unless he gives a tenth.

2. It is the minimum.

It always was that. In Old Testament times no Israelite who gave less than a tenth could claim to be "standard." They could always give more than that, and frequently they were required to give more (if they did their duty). They must never give less. We should practice tithing in the same way today.

3. Not an excuse for covetousness.

Many a person who has a large income ought to give much more than a tenth. Such persons can not discharge their financial obligations to the kingdom of God by giving only a tenth. Many of them could give nine-tenths more easily than people in humble circumstances can give one-tenth.

REASONS FOR TITHING

1. It is the universally recognized standard.

2. It is "proportionate" giving.

3. The Cause needs it, and I am under obligation to support the Cause.

4. Pious Jews did, and still do, pay tithes. This record is already established and nothing can get rid of it. I am ashamed to let them out-do me in the support of religion.

5. The New Testament standard is "more." Unless I pay tithes I cannot claim to measure up to this standard—and I could never know that I had

measured up to it unless I knew that I had given at least a tenth.

6. I cannot justify myself in refusing to tithe. Consider these facts: The tithe was declared to belong to God; it was never abolished, and we can think of no reason why the Lord should wish to abolish it; the New Testament teaches "proportionate" giving, and that when people understood and were practicing tithing; Jesus strongly endorsed the practice of tithing and never did say one word against it. In view of these facts, it would require very strong considerations against tithing to justify any Christian in disregarding it. The burden of proof is on the one who refuses to tithe.

In conclusion, we would ask the person who refuses to tithe: Do you believe it is your duty to give money for the support of religious work? Do you believe such giving ought to be "proportionate"—"every man according to his ability" and "as he may prosper"? If so, why do you not practice tithing? Honestly, if you should throw away all considerations of stinginess or covetousness would you not get rid of all that is keeping you from tithing? Will you get on your knees before God and tell him that you refuse to tithe and tell him why you refuse?

If tithing will displease God, by all means let us not practice it. If it will please him, then let us do it.