TITHING

The *tithe* is one of the foundational principles of our financial stewardship. The '*tithe'* literally means '*a tenth*'. We do well to understand that our God is a god of method, order, and law; nothing is done indiscriminately by God, laws govern every sphere of His universe. He is the God of cosmic law: the planets move in orbit with precision. He is the God of natural law: the seasons, without flaw, produce everything after its kind. He is the God of physical law: the pull of gravity is evident all around us. He is the God of moral law: the *Ten Commandments* are the basic moral foundation of any well-ordered society. He is the God of redemptive law: for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. Do we suppose that such a God has left the stewardship of our finances haphazardly to whim or chance? Absolutely not, and the foundation of our stewardship is the basic principle of the *tithe*, and the Bible says…

"...it is holy unto the Lord." ***–Leviticus 27:30b***

"Bring ye all the tithes..." ***–Malachi 3:10***

However, *tithing*, as we practice it, is not based on the ceremonial law.

Let's look at the origins of *tithing*. Contrary to what many suppose, the *tithe* did not originate with the law, though the law offered specific definition and regulation. Throughout the ages, man has recognized his duty to give back to God. In fact, ancient history reveals some didn't practice blood sacrifice, but there were none who didn't practice the *tithe*. In the Bible, it is mentioned from the very outset. In *Genesis 4* the first brothers, *Cain* and *Able*, brought offerings to God in recognition of His ownership and their stewardship. This is the first reference made of an offering in the Bible. The first mention of the *tithe* in the Bible is the account of *Abraham* paying *tithes* to *Melchizedek* in *Genesis 14*. To those who suppose that *tithing* is only an old Jewish custom, remember, *Abraham* lived four hundred years before the law. Moreover, we know that *Abraham* was a prototype of the man who walks by faith and *Melchizedek* is a type of *Christ*. The man who walks by faith will do as *Abraham* did. We also read that *Jacob* recognized this timeless principle when he said in...

"...of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." ***–Genesis 28:22***

Thus, we see that *tithing* was practiced by the *Patriarchs* long before the covenant of law.

The *tithe* then, is a basic universal principle. God is not the author of confusion. Do we suppose God would ordain laws to regulate every phase of His universe and yet leave to chance the matter of His ownership and our stewardship? In regards to material possessions, God has given us a trust agreement we call stewardship. The basic element in this trust agreement is the *tithe* (*it certainly is not the end, but beginning of our obligation to give*). This one tenth tests our legal obedience to God. The remaining nine tenths proves our love. As is self-evident, if you don't plan to pray, you won't, likewise if we don't systematically plan to give we rarely will. Now, some insist that the *tithe* is an O.T. custom and does not apply to Christians. They commonly say that we are not under law, but under grace. However, we see that the *tithe* predates the law. Indeed, I agree, we are not literally under the *law of the tithe*, but we are persuaded that the *Holy Ghost* will not inspire less than ten percent. The Scriptures only speak of two fundamental amounts in regard to a disciplined, habitual plan of giving: (1) the TITHE *(Matt 23:23)* and, (2) and ALL *(Lk 21:1-4; Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-37)*. Moreover, seeing that every believer is urged to bountifully purpose in his heart to give, not grudgingly or of necessity *(but as he chooses as led by God's Spirit and governed by His Word)* because God loves a cheerful giver, we believe the Holy Ghost will inspire true believers to give somewhere between 10% and 100% of their total income, nothing less *(2 Cor 9:6-7)*.

What about *Jesus* and the *tithe*? The charge that *Jesus* did not teach *tithing* will not stand up under careful scrutiny. To His disciples on one occasion He said...

"Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: 3All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." ***–Matthew 23:2-3***

What did *Jesus* teach about *tithe*? First of all, He sanctioned it...

"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." ***–Matthew 23:23***

Secondly, we know He practiced it (*we know this because the Bible says He perfectly fulfilled the law*). Moreover, *Jesus'* enemies criticized Him at every turn. The

Pharisees *tithed* meticulously, yet not one note of criticism about tithing is directed against *Jesus*. And remember, *Jesus* never lowered O.T. standards; He always raised them.

Interestingly, one out of every six verses in the Gospels deals with stewardship. *Jesus* repeatedly taught that we are to regard all our possessions as a trust from our heavenly Father, for which we will give an account. So, we see that the *tithe* is not a scheme invented by the *Levites*, but rather, is a basic *giving principle* in God's Kingdom.

The *tithe* belongs to God.

"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." ***–Leviticus 27:30***

The *tithe* is the Lord's. This suggests that I haven't really given anything until after I've paid my *tithe*. When we go beyond the *tithe* then giving begins. We ought to render to *Caesar* that which is *Caesar's*, and to God that which is God's. Some may wonder, "How can I *tithe* when I find I have nothing left after my bills are paid?" The answer is simple: one does not *tithe* from what he has left, He *tithes* first.

"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase..." ***–Proverbs 3:9***

Yet, this should be the natural conduct flowing from a heart that has been redeemed. All Christians *tithe* (*perhaps the exception would be a young, uninformed believer*). However, we don't *tithe* to be saved, we *tithe* because we are saved. Notice the following verse..

"And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law..." ***–Hebrews 7:5***

Now look at the next verse...

"But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises." ***–Hebrews 7:6***

These verses make a distinction between two types of *tithing*.

Under the law, the tithe was '*taken*' by an outward compelling, but under the new covenant, they are received, freely-given by an inward inspiration. Thus, we believe in the New Testament standard of giving, namely, as the Holy Ghost leads, somewhere between 10% and 100% of a believer's overall gross income.

—B.W.

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