



“Q&A: Is Tithing for Today?”

Kevin Presley

Today, we'll address a series of questions sent to us by a viewer about tithing. You hear many church leaders and preachers talk about tithing; most of them encourage their flock to tithe to the local church. But, our viewer David asks the following questions:

- 1) Does the fact that Abraham and Jacob paid tithes not by commandment but out of their hearts mean that it is a requirement for the New Testament church to also pay tithes?
- 2) Weren't tithes *produce* as opposed to *money*? Abraham was wealthy, but he tithed produce instead of silver and gold. Weren't tithes and offerings different things?
- 3) Does the Bible teach that preachers should be given a salary by the church?

Those are good questions, David, and they do go together. We'll also tackle the question, *is tithing as taught in the Old Testament for New Testament Christians?* We'll get our answers from God's word. To begin with, there was a difference under the Old Testament law between tithes and other various offerings.

Malachi 3:8 “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”

God went on to issue a curse upon the people for this crime against heaven. The word *tithe* here simply means *a tenth*. It refers to the practice of people under the Old Testament giving a tenth of their property to God and His work. It was a very serious thing under the law NOT to do that. We first read of people voluntarily tithing before the law of Moses was ever given. In fact, the first instance recorded in scripture is found in **Genesis 14** when Abram returned from battle against those kings who were holding his nephew, Lot, captive. He won the battle, returned with the spoils of victory, and the Bible says he praised God for winning the battle.

Genesis 14:20 “And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.”

That is, he gave a tenth of the spoils to the king of Salem, Melchizedek. Then we read of a similar incident in the life of Abram's grandson, Jacob. You may recall when he spent the night at Haran, making

himself a pallet out of stones. He had that famous dream that we call *Jacob's Ladder*, wherein he saw a ladder let down from heaven with angels climbing up and down it. The Lord spoke from heaven and confirmed the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob; that he would possess the land where he was sleeping, and his numerous descendants would be favored and protected by God.

When Jacob awoke from that dream in amazement, the Bible tells us that he vowed to be faithful to God.

Genesis 28:22 "And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

He too, promised to give God a tithe (or tenth) of his property in response to God having blessed him.

As far as we can tell from scripture, both of these instances were voluntary. There is no record of either man being commanded by God to tithe. Rather, this was simply their own response to God's goodness and provision in their lives. But, hundreds of years later when the law of Moses was given to the Israelites, it became a different matter. We don't find any command to tithe under the patriarchal age, but we DO when we get to **Leviticus 27**, when the law was in effect.

Leviticus 27:30-32 "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. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD."

Under the law, God required tithes of His people in addition to various offerings that they were commanded to give at certain times. There were actually three different tithes imposed on the Hebrews, and all three of them consisted of a tenth portion of their crops and animals.

- 1) The Levitical tithe: this tithe was collected for the tribe of Levi, to support the priests. (**Numbers 18:21-24**)
- 2) The festive tithe: this tithe was to be saved back and eaten by the giver of the tithe along with his household and the Levites.
- 3) There was a tithe given every three years for the poor.

All of these consisted of food, and apart from this third tithe, they had to be taken to Jerusalem and offered. They were stored there in the temple. This was not like a collection of money; they actually brought a tenth of the fruit of the land and of their herds to Jerusalem and it was given to the priests. Like other aspects of the law, the people weren't always consistent to obey the commandment to tithe, and the spiritual state of the nation was sometimes reflected by whether or not they were tithing like the law required.

During the reform of Hezekiah (**II Chronicles 31**), the king ordered the people to begin tithing again so that the priests and Levites could devote themselves to the work of the Lord. They were once again commanded to come to Jerusalem in order to offer their tithes. Again, it was not a collection that was taken up in various places; it was given at a specific time and place, in Jerusalem, at the site of the temple.

When the monarchy was established, the Israelites had to give another tenth to support their new government (**I Samuel 8:15-17**). The Jews were also to leave their land idle for one year out of every seven, and they were to forgive all their debts every fifty years during what was called 'the year of jubilee.' They were also to leave the corners of their fields for the poor to come and glean from them. Besides all that, they regularly offered their livestock for special sacrifices ordered under the law. So, it wasn't just tithing. If you add up what the Israelites were required to give at certain times, you can figure as much as half of everything that belonged to a faithful Jew ended up in one way or another being returned to God.

Well, what does that mean for us today? Are all of those laws applicable to the Christian? Specifically, what about tithing? Surely, we can see that offerings for the purpose of sacrifices offered under the old

law have no literal application to us today; we don't offer animal sacrifices to the Lord. Jesus is our sacrifice. But, what about tithing? Contrary to what many preachers want you to believe today, there is NO commandment in the New Testament for Christians to tithe. Tithing before the law of Moses was voluntary, and the law that later commanded tithing was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way.

Colossians 2:14 "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"

Romans 3:28 "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Also, if tithing as commanded under the Old Testament is binding upon Christians today, which of the three tithes are we to offer? Why wouldn't the procedures and stipulations of the Levitical tithe, for example, be required of us as well? Such as farmers bringing their produce or livestock to Jerusalem to offer for the priests? Well, there is no temple in Jerusalem, and no Levitical priests. That was all done away in Christ.

There are several objections that are usually raised, including this one which comes from **Hebrews 7**. Here, the Hebrew writer makes reference to Abram paying tithes to Melchizedek when he returned from war.

Hebrews 7:4 "**Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.**"

It is argued that Abraham is here presented as a type of a Christian today, and Melchizedek as a type of Jesus Christ, our King and High Priest. Supposedly, the Hebrew writer is showing us that Christians should give tithes to Jesus today, just as Abram tithed to Melchizedek. But that's not the point the writer is making at all. He wasn't proving that Christians are required to tithe, because the tithe that Abram gave to Melchizedek was voluntary.

One may say, *but Abram's tithe was given before the law of Moses, so that would mean that tithing transcends the Mosaic law and applies to believers in every age.* However, remember that Abram's tithe was, first of all, voluntary. Not only that, but the law of Christ that we have in the New Testament includes many of the same principles and commands as were in place in former dispensations; they're restated by Christ and the apostles. Therefore, they became a part of His law, yet there is no command or example of New Testament Christians tithing or being told to tithe to the church, to preachers, or anybody else.

One might say, *What about Matthew 23:23?* Let's take a look at that passage.

Matthew 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.**"

You see, they were paying tithes in Jesus' day, and He is saying, you should pay tithes, PLUS you should attend primarily to the weightier matters of the law. Yes, they were paying tithes, but they were also Pharisees making an attempt to keep the law of Moses. They were still living under that dispensation; they weren't living under the New Covenant because it didn't go into effect until Christ died.

Well, what about **Matthew 5:20**?

Matthew 5:20 "**For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**"

Some argue that since the Pharisees tithed, that we're required to tithe, and then some if we want to be saved. That is a gross misunderstanding and misapplication of this particular text. Surely Jesus is not saying that unless we are more successful at keeping the law of Moses than the Pharisees were then we cannot be saved. The Bible teaches that we are NOT to keep the law of Moses; we've been freed from that law.

Romans 3:20 "**Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight:**"

The Pharisees were trying to justify themselves through their own standards of so-called righteousness. Paul later spoke of how the Jews tried to establish their own standards of righteousness:

Romans 10:3 “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

The fact is, the righteousness of the Pharisees was a self-righteousness and was their attempt at self-justification. Jesus brought a different system of righteousness into the world, and that is God's system of justification through the gospel. Without that kind of righteousness, no person can enter into the kingdom. That is really the point of what Jesus was saying in the 'sermon on the mount.'

Still others will say, *but God blesses those who tithe and curses those who don't, according to Malachi.*

Malachi 3:8-10 “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. 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 you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Friend, the context clearly shows that God is dealing with the sins of the Jews as a nation here. *Even this whole nation (vs.9)* refers to the nation of Israel--the Jewish people. The *storehouse* is a reference to the temple and the place built there to store their tithes of grain, produce, and so forth. The rest of the context shows the same thing. Christians today are not cursed for not tithing. This particular warning was written to wayward Jews--God's people who were failing to keep the covenant with God.

But don't get the idea that this lets Christians off the hook. To say that Christians are not expected to tithe is NOT the same thing as saying that Christians are not expected to give. God does not include tithing in the New Covenant, but He did, in a similar manner provide for the work of His kingdom to be funded by the generous giving of the members of His church. There is one and only one requirement outlined in the New Testament concerning how and when Christians are to give to the work of the kingdom.

I Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 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.”

There were needs that arose among the churches from time to time, due to famines, and so forth; in this case, the poor saints in Jerusalem were in great distress. Paul orders the churches to come to the aid of these faithful members in Jerusalem by sending money from their treasury that they had saved up. How was this treasury built up and maintained? Upon the first day of each week, each Christian was to set aside a portion of his income, and it was to be treasured up by each local church so that it would be ready and available, and no gatherings would have to take place at the time of need. He's saying more than to just set aside a little money in your home and have it ready; he says to lay by in store and do it in such a way that there be no gatherings when he came there. That tells us that the church kept a treasury of these offerings that their members brought on the first day of the week.

Just as the churches used this treasury to aid destitute saints, they also, as a congregation, supported those who had dedicated themselves to the ministry.

Philippians 4:15 “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.”

In other words, Paul took wages from them. He took financial assistance from them for his work in the gospel. He took wages from various churches to support him while he was working among the churches in Corinth.

I Corinthians 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.”

First, Paul refers to the system that God had under the Old Covenant: *they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar*. Then, he compares that with the Lord ordaining *that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*. In other words, as the tithe supported the Levitical priest, so the offering that Christians give on Sunday is used to support those who preach the gospel. But the latter is not the same as the former. You'll find the difference in this next passage.

II Corinthians 9:6-7 “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

This offering is to be given by Christians and it is not a compulsory amount, as the tithe was. It is *as the believer purposes in his heart*. He is to give liberally and *cheerfully*; not by compulsion. While I don't believe that tithing is in any way a part of the New Testament church, giving every first day of the week certainly IS.

It is hard for me to imagine that if the Jew who lived under the law gave up to half of his income in compulsory tithes and offerings, that a Christian benefited by the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ can just throw a few dollars in the plate that require no sacrifice, no real forethought and no real planning, and say that he has offered to God and shown proper zeal and concern for His kingdom. We need to be generous with that which God has blessed us. We need to sow things of the spirit, as opposed to things of the flesh if we want to reap accordingly.

Galatians 6:8 “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

Can you imagine how the kingdom of God could advance if every member of every local church gave the first portion of his/her income back to God's service?

With that said, I want to point this out: in over twenty years of preaching on television, I have never appealed to a single viewer of this broadcast to send one dime to me, to the broadcast, or to the church I represent. And I never will. We are not interested in your money, dear friend; we're interested in your soul.

Now, if you are a Christian, a member of Christ's church, where you need to be giving is not to “television ministries,” but rather, you need to be giving to your local church every first day of the week because that is the Lord's way of providing for His work. This broadcast is paid for in full by the local church, and not our viewers because that is the scriptural way of funding the Lord's work. We don't hold rummage sales, bake sales, cake walks, or any other manner of fundraisers because that is not what the Lord told us to do. We support the work of each local church by each church taking a collection on Sunday from its own members to be used in the work that God has prescribed for the local church to carry out.

That is the Lord's simple plan: *upon the first day of the week, lay by in store. And do so as each one purposes in his heart. Do it liberally and cheerfully.* That is God's plan for giving in this age of time.

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