

Tithes and Offerings:

*The Right Relationship between a Pastor and His
Congregation*

John David Clark, Sr.

Based in part on the gospel tract
“Tithes and Offerings”
by George C. Clark, Sr.

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For information on this book, write to:

Books - Tithes and Offerings
PO Box 99
Burlington, NC 27216-0099

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Foreword

This is not a book about money. It is a book about the proper relationship of a pastor and his flock, both his responsibility toward them and theirs toward him. How to deal with God's money is a necessary element of the discussion, but the more important issue is, how are we to deal with each other?

My wise father taught me that the intimate, physical part of marriage is, in the big scheme of things, a minor matter. At the same time, he stressed that if the intimate part of a marriage is not in order, every other part of that marriage will be adversely affected. The same can be said about tithes and offerings. In the big scheme of things, the issue of tithes and offerings is a minor matter, as Jesus himself said (Mt. 23:23). At the same time, if the tithes and offerings part of our spiritual life is not in order, every other part of our spiritual life is adversely affected.

Upon reading this manuscript, one lady commented, "Every sentence will be a new thought to God's people." That may not altogether be the case, but many of the sentences in this book certainly will bring new thoughts to those who read them. The truth about tithes and offerings will help to heal the current mass confusion concerning the issue. But be warned; the truth of the matter will challenge your heart with light which, to my knowledge, is shining nowhere else.

Do you* not know that those who labor in the temple eat from the temple *and* that those who tend to the altar partake *of the sacrifices* with the altar? Just so, the Lord has also ordained that they who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14

* In English, there is no difference in spelling of the singular and plural forms of “you”. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the difference is obvious. Therefore, to make the biblical writer’s message clear, for all scriptures in which a form of “you” appears, I have made a distinction between singular and plural forms by italicizing the “y” of all plural forms: you, your, yours, yourselves.

CHAPTER 1

TITHES AND OFFERINGS: THE DIFFERENCE

Honor the LORD with your substance,
and with the firstfruits of all your increase.

Proverbs 3:9

TITHES

Tithes and offerings are mentioned as two distinct things throughout the Bible, and the Lord requires His people to honor Him with both of them. The words that are translated “tithes” in both the Old and New Testaments are based on Hebrew and Greek words that mean “ten”. So, “tithes” refers to the tenth part of the worldly “increase” that God gives us.

The word, “increase”, in this context refers to any increase in the amount or value of our earthly possessions, whether those possessions be earned income or unearned gifts. In business, the “increase” is what is called “profit”, or “net income”. It is gross income, minus business expenses, and the amount of tithes owed is based on that profit.

As you will see, the Bible consistently maintains that the tithes are God’s money, not ours. Since the tithes of our income are not ours to give, it is impossible for us to “give” tithes to God, for in paying tithes, we are merely bringing to God what already belongs to Him. Therefore, it is more accurate to speak of “paying” or “rendering” tithes to God than “giving” them to Him. Without understanding this truth about the tithes, our relationship with God and with His ministers cannot be as it should be because it is truth that helps put our feelings and thoughts into divine order.

OFFERINGS

Beyond the tithes, God’s law required offerings from His people’s increase. The offerings belonged to God just as the tithes did, and God considered it robbery not to bring them to Him (Mal. 3:8). At the same time, God’s people were not hounded for donations by money-hungry ministers as long as the law was kept. God strictly limited the number and kinds of offerings, and anyone who asked for an unauthorized offering from His

people brought upon himself fierce wrath. Even the much-loved King David was severely punished by God for taking a census of Israel (2Sam. 24; 1Chron. 21) because his motive, or one of his motives, was to collect the offering which each man in Israel was required to pay when he was counted (Ex. 30:12-14). God was adamant that His people not be begged for money, and when His way is put into practice, they are not. The following are the only offerings allowed by God in the Old Testament:

1. **Firstfruits.** This was an offering from the first of one's ripening crops. The amount of firstfruits to be brought was never specified (Ex. 23:16, 19), and so, some discretion was allowed in deciding how much of one's ripening crop to bring.
2. **Firstborn of Animals.** The firstborn of all animals, clean or unclean, was God's. He said, "All that opens the womb is mine" (Ex. 34:19-20; 13:12).¹
3. **Firstborn of Children.** The firstborn in every family in Israel belonged to God (Ex. 13:1-2). However, instead of taking the firstborn child itself, the Lord allowed the Israelites to substitute a small amount of money for the child (Num. 18:15-16).
4. **The Census Offering.** A census was rarely taken in Israel, but whenever one was taken, each male, from twenty years and older, was required to bring to God a very small offering (half-shekel of silver - Ex. 30:14-15; 38:25-26). The poor could not offer less, and the rich could not offer more. This offering was set aside for the work associated with the house of God and served to make an atonement for the souls of those who gave it (Ex. 30:16).
5. **The Three Feasts' Offerings.** Every male in Israel was required to present himself before the Lord three times each year, at the three major Old Testament feasts (Ex. 23:15-17). At each of these feasts, when the men of Israel presented themselves to the Lord, God required each of them to bring an offering "as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD" (Dt. 16:17).²
6. **Meal and Wine Offerings.** With each animal sacrifice, God required a small offering of flour and wine.³
7. **Thanksgiving Offering.** For His people who were especially happy and thankful to belong to God, a thanksgiving offering was allowed to be brought to the priests (Lev. 22:29).

¹ If the firstborn animal belonged to the category of "unclean animals", it was not offered as a sacrifice; nevertheless, it still belonged to God, and a lamb was brought to God as a substitute (Ex. 13:13a; 34:20a). If the owner was unable to replace it with a lamb, the unclean animal's neck had to be broken (Ex. 13:13b; 34:20b), for no one could keep for himself what belonged to God.

² The amount of offerings given by individuals at the feasts would have differed greatly, depending on the degree of each person's wealth and devotion to God.

³ The larger the animal, the larger the required flour and wine offerings (Num. 15:4-5).

8. **Special Occasions.** On very rare occasions, and for specific reasons, God's ministers collected a special, one-time offering, such as when Moses passed on to the people God's call for an offering for the construction of His tabernacle (Ex. 25:1-9). When the tabernacle was erected, God required from each tribe a special offering for the dedication of the altar, and in this instance, it appears that God was very specific about how much of an offering each tribe could bring (Num. 7:10-83). About 700 years later, another special offering was called for by King Joash for the repair of God's damaged temple in Jerusalem (2Kgs. 12:4-12). To these extremely rare calls for a special offering, God's people responded with overwhelming generosity. In Moses' case, the people brought so much that Moses had to tell them to stop (Ex. 36:5-7). Moreover, God insisted that all these offerings be voluntary (Ex. 25:2; 35:5); He said nothing about it being sinful if someone was too poor to donate, or even if someone did not want to donate.

You are mistaken if you think this list of eight offerings means that Israel was burdened down with heavy demands for offerings. That was not the case at all. The purpose of the list was to limit the number of offerings that God's people could be asked for. It served as protection for God's children, not as a burden to them. Suppose, for example, a man in ancient Israel was a carpenter or musician. That would mean he grew no crops, and so, he would never be required to bring to the Lord an offering of firstfruits. And if he owned no animals, or the animal he owned never had offspring, and if he had no wife, or his wife never had children, then he would never be required to bring a firstborn offering of any kind. Moreover, if in his lifetime, no census was taken in Israel, which was true for most generations of Israelites, he would owe no census offering. And finally, if he had no occasion to offer animals in sacrifice, including the Thanksgiving Offering, then he would never be required to bring a flour and wine offering. That eliminates, for such a man's lifetime, seven of the eight kinds of offerings on God's list!

The only offering required of every man in Israel was the Feast Offering made each year at the three major feasts, but even then, the amount of those offerings was left completely to that man's discretion! Furthermore, since those Three Feasts' Offerings were required only of men, it is conceivable that there were women in Israel who never in their lifetimes were required to bring a single offering to God!

In the Bible, the word "oppression" is most often associated with money. For example, a king who overtaxed his people was considered an "oppressor" (Prov. 28:16). No one who knows the details of the law which God gave Israel would say that God's law was oppressive. On the contrary, it was a law of great compassion and generosity because that is the kind of God it came from.

God's people were, and are allowed to bring offerings beyond what is required, if they have it in their hearts to do so, but when they do, God's ministers are not required to accept them. I have refused a few such offerings because I knew that the children of God

who offered them to me were being too zealous for their own good. No faithful servant of God will take advantage of anyone's enthusiasm for Christ. Young saints, especially, can be overly enthusiastic and give more than what is good for them to give, and when they do, their excessive offerings must be gently refused, lest they later become bitter when they realize they needed that money. They must be protected from their own exuberance until they mature in Christ and learn to express their thanksgiving and joy with sufficient temperance and discretion.

It is true that because God is holy, He will not accept anything *less* than what is right for us to bring Him, but it is also true that because He is good, He will not accept anything *more* than what is good for us to bring. A servant of God must be close enough to Him to know the difference.

THE PRIESTS' PORTION

Though the people of Israel were commanded to bring their offerings to God's priests, they were not allowed to bring their tithes to them. Instead, the people were directed to bring their tithes to the Levites, the priests' servants (Num. 18:24). The Levites, in turn, were commanded to bring to the priests a tithe of the tithes which they received from the people (Num. 18:26). The priests were also given a portion of most of the sacrifices made on God's altar (e.g., Lev. 7:6). Sometimes, the portion could be shared with their wives and children (Num. 18:11), and sometimes, it had to be eaten in the tabernacle, in God's presence (Lev. 6:16, 26). (A priest eating part of the sacrifice was understood as him eating a meal with God, as Paul pointed out in 1Corinthians 9:13.) God also commanded that when cattle were sacrificed, the hide was to be given to the priest who performed the ritual (Lev. 7:8). In that way, the more a priest worked, the more he earned.

So, under the law, the priests were well taken care of, receiving the offerings of the nation, the tithes of the Levites, and portions of certain sacrifices they made on God's altar. As long as God's people were obedient, His priests had all their needs supplied, and more, so that they could devote themselves to the service of God, for Israel's good.

ALMS

Charitable giving is what the Bible refers to as "alms", or "almsgiving". Alms are what God's people freely give to the needy *after they honor God with their tithes and offerings*. No provision is made for God's ministers to receive alms because under God's system of tithes and offerings, they never need charity. When God's people obey Him in tithes and offerings, His ministers are among those who *give* alms, not those who need them.

Solomon said, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD" (Prov. 19:17), and "He honors God who shows mercy to the poor" (Prov. 14:31). God is a charitable God, and He creates compassion in the hearts of His people for the poor and needy, but that is not what is happening when they pay their tithes and offerings. Charity, or almsgiving,

has nothing at all to do with either tithes or offerings. God's ministers do not live on charity; they work for God and live on the salary that *He* gives them.

Concerning almsgiving, Jesus simply said, "Give." And he promised that God would especially reward abundant giving: "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, men will give into your bosom. For with the same measure with which you measure, it will be measured back to you" (Lk. 6:38). Paul said the same to the saints in Corinth when he wrote them about giving alms to poor fellow believers: "But *remember* this: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. *Let* each give as he has determined in *his* heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2Cor. 9:6-7).

I have known saints who possessed the spiritual gift of giving that Paul mentions in Romans 12:8. Though poor, those charitable saints found ways of giving which wealthier saints often overlooked. How sweet it was to watch them and to share this life with such generous souls! They gave unceasingly and in various ways, without thought or care, freely and joyfully. It was their gift from God, and I never saw any one of them in need.

Jesus told his disciples to keep it strictly to themselves when they gave alms to the poor:

Matthew 6

1. Be sure not to do your alms before men to be seen by them; otherwise, you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
2. So, when you give alms, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and alleyways, that they might be honored by men. I assure you, they have their reward.
3. **When you give alms, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,**
4. **so that your alms be in secret,** and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Jesus said no such thing about paying tithes and offerings. They are not to be paid secretly, for paying them is a part of one's testimony. God wants it known that His children honor Him with their tithes and offerings, and when certain of His children are very poor or very rich, their testimony, their faithfulness to God in tithes and offerings, is especially effective. By faith, the poor can overcome their poverty, and by faith, the rich can overcome their abundance, and their faithfulness in tithes and offerings is a confession to the world that God's children reverence Him regardless of their earthly conditions. Faithfulness in tithes and offerings is not about tithes and offerings; it is about faith. It is about God's people honoring God in spite of everything in this world, and it qualifies as one of those "good works" which, according to Jesus, should be seen by men, for when they see it, they will feel greater respect for God (Mt. 5:16).

Those who “blow a trumpet” to bring attention to their charitable giving are only after the praise of men, and they know they will receive it because everyone on earth admires those who give charitably. But beware of self-serving almsgiving. Jesus said that if you make your almsgiving known, the praise of men is the only reward you will ever receive for it.

Many make the mistake of assuming that their obligation of rendering to God their tithes and offerings is fulfilled by donating to a worthy cause or by giving aid to the needy. But if a man were to steal ten dollars from me, and then give a needy person five dollars of it, we must say that he has given that needy person a gift, but we must also say that he is a thief. He is giving away my money, not his own. This is how it is with God’s tithes and offerings. If a man’s tithes are ten dollars, and instead of bringing it to God, he gives five dollars to a poor widow, he is certainly giving her a gift, but he is just as certainly a thief. The money he is giving away is not his own; He is giving away God’s money, making himself look good at the expense of the gospel of Christ.

So, while we are given liberty to help others with money that is ours, the tithes and offerings of our increase are not ours; they are God’s. We have the authority to decide what to do with what is ours (Mt. 20:15a), but we have no authority to decide what to do with what is God’s. Tithes and offerings are God’s portion of our increase, and He has always told His people to bring them to His servants.

HOW WE HANDLE TITHES AND OFFERINGS

No one is born knowing how to serve God. We must hear from Him and follow His instructions if we hope to please Him. Nevertheless, ignorance of how to serve God acceptably has never prevented people from serving Him. The whole world has offered worship to God from time immemorial. Still, only a small percentage of man’s worship has ever been acceptable to God, for only a small percentage of it has ever been according to His will. Paul said that his mission in life was to “minister the gospel to the Gentiles” so that their worship “might be acceptable, being sanctified by the holy spirit” (Rom. 15:16). Paul did not have to persuade the Gentiles to worship. They were already worshiping, whether in sophisticated Rome or on remote islands populated by barbarians. Paul’s mission was to persuade the Gentiles of *the right way to worship*, so that the worship they offered to God would be acceptable to Him. That is what we hope to do with this book; namely, to help those who love God enough to bring Him His tithes and offerings may learn to do so according to His will.

The vast majority of those to whom God gave His law in the Old Testament did not keep it (e.g., Isa. 1:9; Jer. 5:1; 7:28) because they followed men who did not keep it. But their disobedience did not make God’s law unholy. God’s law remained “holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12) even though very few in Israel ever kept it. Likewise, God’s way of the Spirit is “holy, and just, and good,” even though few to whom God has given His Spirit walk in it. The body of Christ, as a whole, has no

knowledge of God because they are following leaders who have no knowledge of God. There is no better proof of this than the multitude of conflicting traditions and doctrinal divisions that now exist among believers. Jesus did not suffer and die to produce such mass confusion as reigns over his people today; his purpose was, and is, to unite us in the “one faith” of the gospel (see Jn. 17:20-23; Eph. 4:5). The truth, again, “has perished” from among God’s own people (see Jer. 7:28), and souls who desire now to walk in truth, including the truth about how to handle tithes and offerings, cannot discover the right path by following those who profess to believe in Christ. Which sect, or which tradition would those hungry souls follow, anyway? Our only hope of discovering the right way of God is for Him to have mercy on us and to reveal it to us; it certainly cannot be discovered by embracing the traditions and doctrines of the confused and divided body of Christ.

Every believing student of the Bible knows that the Old Testament forms of worship were figures of the “new and living way” of the Spirit in Christ Jesus (Col. 2:17). But what were the eight kinds of Old Testament offerings figures of? The ceremonial aspects of those offerings are certainly not a part of this covenant, even though the giving of offerings is. None of the books of the New Testament deal with this subject; so, the wisest thing we can do is to recognize that God required offerings along with tithes, and then in that light.

The saints who gather at my house simply add an offering to every tithe they bring to the Lord. Each person determines for himself how much offering to add to his tithes, and each one does so “as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD.” We feel that in doing this, we will surely satisfy the Lord’s requirement of offerings from New Testament saints, even if we do not yet fully understand His Old Testament pattern. And as with all things, we remain open to a more perfect understanding of how to deal with offerings if the Lord ever shows us a “more perfect way”.

As for tithes, I can think of but one problematic issue; namely, the question of whether we should pay tithes from our income before or after taxes are paid. For most people in this culture, taxes are deducted from their paychecks before they receive their pay. Some believers treat that reduction in their pay like a business deduction, and they then pay their tithes based on the amount remaining after taxes are taken out. I understand their logic and will not argue against it. Many years ago, however, before I knew the Lord, the saints who taught me Christ decided they would render their tithes based on the income they earned *before taxes were taken out*.⁴ That is the path which I and the congregation with me continue to follow because, it seems to us, doing it that way honors God first, even before the earthly government under which we live. This seems to me to be one of those areas in which the saints have some discretion; however,

⁴ We do deduct from the amount considered “increase” any money taken out for retirement accounts, including Social Security. Later, when retirement benefits are received, tithes and offerings will be paid on them.

whichever course is taken, the congregation as a whole should agree and walk by the same rule, for “we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices.” We know he will exploit every difference among us to stir up envy and strife.

ONLY FOR BELIEVERS

As a final note, it should be emphasized that God’s law, with all its commandments, was given only to those in covenant with Him. No one outside of God’s covenant was commanded, or even allowed, to bring tithes and offerings to God’s ministers. God’s will concerning tithes and offerings has nothing to do with the world or the people in it. The privilege of bringing tithes and offerings to God’s ministers is a privilege reserved solely for God’s children. This is why Cornelius, the first uncircumcised Gentile that God chose to receive His holy Spirit, could only pray and give alms to God’s people (Acts 10:1-4). Being outside of God’s covenant, he was not allowed to bring anything to God’s ministers.

Ministers who take donations from those outside the family of God, or even from those who are ungodly within the family, misrepresent God. I understand why they do it (more about that issue later), but the fact remains that their mind concerning money is not the mind of Christ, and their relationships with God and His people are skewed because of it. God is not a beggar, and faithful ministers do not act as if He is.

CHAPTER 2

WRITTEN ON THE HEART

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant. . . .

This will be the covenant that I will make:
I will put my law within them and write it on their heart.

Jeremiah 31:31, 33, excerpts

MORE IN EFFECT THAN EVER

When God gave His law to Israel at Mount Sinai, He did not give them something bad; He gave them something that was from His heart. Even after Christ came and fulfilled that law, the apostles and all the saints still revered it. Paul told the saints in Rome that “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). And long after the day of Pentecost, the apostle John was still defining sin as anything contrary to Moses’ law (1Jn. 3:4).

When the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the new knowledge of good and evil that it brought was not contrary to the law of Moses; rather, it confirmed that the law was of God, and then took men beyond it. On that day, the law was written, by means of the Spirit, on men’s hearts by the same God who wrote it on stone with His finger at Mount Sinai (Ex. 31:18). The “baptism of the Spirit” caused men to experience God’s law, to feel it within, and that experience gave them a much deeper and richer understanding of both the law and the God who gave it. In other words, at Pentecost, God wrote on *man’s* heart what was in *His* heart.

The author of Hebrews was quoting Jeremiah, an Old Testament prophet, not a New Testament apostle, when he described what the holy Spirit did when it came:

Hebrews 8 (Jer. 31:33)

10. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put my laws into their mind, and I will write them on their heart. . . .**

The law that God writes on hearts in this covenant is not different, in substance, from the law that God gave Israel through Moses. The difference between the Old form

of the law and the New is only that in the Old Testament, God wrote His law on things outside of people, such as stone and paper, instead of on people's hearts. That single difference makes the New Testament supremely superior to the Old because when God writes His law on our hearts, the experience changes our nature. We are re-created by the entrance of His law into our hearts. Jesus described it as being "born again" (Jn. 3:7), by which experience we become children of God with His law in our hearts, just as it is in His heart. This means that God's law is still in effect within those who have received His holy Spirit. Indeed, for them, His law is more in effect than ever. Notice how Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, confirmed that Moses' law was good, while pointing out that there was something better beyond it:

Matthew 5

21. You've heard that it was said to those of ancient time, 'You shall not murder,' and '**Whoever commits murder** will be liable to the judgment.'
22. But I say to you that everyone will be liable to the judgment **who is angry with his brother without cause.**
- ...
27. You've heard that it was said, '**You shall not commit adultery,**'
28. but I say to you that **every man who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery** with her in his heart.

Seeing, then, that God's law is still, very much, in effect for those with His Spirit, we should ask, how does this apply to the laws related to tithes and offerings? For that answer, we need to examine the law of Moses a little more closely.

CIVIL, CEREMONIAL, AND MORAL

Within the law of Moses, there were three kinds of commandments, each dealing with a particular aspect of life:

- (1) Civil commandments - for the rulers only
(*examples: punishment of criminals; military action*)
- (2) Ceremonial commandments - for priests and worshipers
(*examples: animal sacrifices; holy days; physical circumcision*)
- (3) Moral commandments - for everyone in Israel
(*examples: respect for elders; honesty in business dealings*)

CIVIL COMMANDMENTS were restricted to the area of political and military administration. That is why they were given only to the rulers of Israel. In this New Testament, it is still the will of God that there be civil government among men, but until Jesus returns to reign on earth, God has placed civil authority in the hands of sinners. That is why Paul called some sinners "ministers of God" (Rom. 13:4). Paul recognized that the authority of earthly rulers comes from God, and he warned children of God that

whoever resists those authorities will be damned (Rom. 13:1-3). Believers have no worldly authority to do such things as impose taxes, physically punish criminals, or wage war against nations, but when Jesus returns, civil authority, the authority to rule the world, will again be turned over to the saints (1Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4-6).

CEREMONIAL COMMANDMENTS of the law dealt, of course, with ceremonies. The ceremonies of the law, including the ceremonial observance of sabbaths and holy days, were prophecies acted out rather than spoken. Knowing this, Paul described the law's ceremonies as "shadows" of spiritual realities in Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

In this covenant, God's ceremonial laws are still in effect, *but in a changed form*. For example, beginning with Abraham and throughout the Old Testament, physical circumcision was a basic requirement of God's people (Gen. 17:11, 14). And in Christ, circumcision is still required, but *only in a spiritual form*. Paul called this new form of circumcision, "circumcision of the heart by the Spirit" (Rom. 2:28-29). Baptism is another example. John the Baptist's baptism with water was required under the law, and baptism is still required, but now, it is Jesus' baptism of Spirit that washes the soul instead of John's watery baptism that washed the flesh (1Cor. 12:13; 1Pet. 3:21). Feasts, too, are still required, but now, we eat and drink with God in spirit, not with physical food and drink (Jn. 6:54, 63; Rom. 14:17).

MORAL COMMANDMENTS of the law are also still in effect, but in a more intense and real way than they were under the law. In the scriptures cited earlier, when Jesus was using his famous "you have heard . . . but I say" comparisons, he was speaking of Moral commandments. For example, under Moses' law, it was a capital crime to commit murder, but in this New Testament, it is a capital crime for God's people merely to want to murder someone. This internalizing of the Moral laws, having them written on our hearts, did not do away with them; rather, it proved that they were truly of God and intensified them (Rom. 3:31). This is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples not to think that he had come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17).

WHAT KIND OF COMMANDMENT IS TITHING?

The commandment to tithe was given to all the Israelites (except the priests), not just to the rulers of Israel; therefore, to pay tithes was not a Civil commandment. Nor could tithing be Ceremonial, since Ceremonial commandments were physical acts symbolizing some spiritual experience in Christ, as the Passover lamb symbolized Christ as the Lamb of God, and as John the Baptist's water baptism symbolized Jesus' spiritual baptism. There is no such thing as "spiritual tithing" mentioned in the New Testament, as there is a spiritual baptism (Mt. 3:11; 1Cor. 12:13), spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15-16), and spiritual circumcision (Phip. 3:3).

The ancient prophet Malachi (3:8) showed that tithing was a Moral commandment when he was sent to God's people with this holy complaint:

"Will a man rob God? Yet, you have robbed Me . . . says the LORD of hosts!"

This statement was received with skepticism by God's people, and they responded, "How have we robbed God?"

"In tithes and offerings," came the terse reply.

So, according to the word of God that came through Malachi, to fail to bring God's tithes and offerings to Him is to steal from God, and by anyone's measure, the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is a Moral commandment. What should it say to us that God is so serious about His tithes and offerings that He considers His children to be thieves if they fail to pay them? It has been said that the tithe is the basket in which God gives us the money we need and that if we fail to bring Him the tithes that are His, we have stolen the basket. This is a true statement.

Many years ago, someone asked my father, an old-time holiness preacher, if a child of God would be saved in the end if he refused to pay His tithes and offerings. My father replied, "God said that such a person is a thief; so, whatever hope of salvation a thief has, he will have." The following is an excerpt from a gospel tract he wrote, titled, "Tithes and Offerings":

One of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt not steal." Should we construe that commandment to mean, "Thou shalt not steal, except from the LORD?" The answer is obvious. We should, in fact, be more afraid to steal from God than to steal from anyone else. Besides, stealing is stealing, no matter who the victim is. If the money in your possession is not rightfully yours, then it is stolen money. Listen to Jesus: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Taxes rightfully belong to earthly governments (Caesar), and the tithe of your increase, along with offerings, belongs to God, and we break one of God's moral commandments and make ourselves thieves if we refuse to bring to God what is His.

Since the commandments concerning tithes and offerings are Moral commandments, they are more in effect than ever, being written on our hearts by the Spirit. And since they are Moral commandments, anyone who steals God's tithes and offerings must be condemned as immoral. It is unwise to put trust in such an immoral person, for if he would steal from his own Father, there is nothing he would not do to a fellow creature, under the right circumstance.

But now, let's go back in time, before God gave Moses the law, and see what we can learn about tithing from Melchizedek, Abraham, and Jacob, men who lived long before Moses and who were especially close to God.

MELCHIZEDEK

Through David, a thousand years before Jesus was born, God swore that He would raise up another priest like Melchizedek. David prophesied, concerning Jesus, "The

LORD has sworn, and will not repent, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps. 110:4).

But what do we know about Melchizedek? What did he do, and how is Jesus like him? There are over 31,000 verses in the Old Testament, but other than the above brief reference from Psalm 110, the mysterious Melchizedek appears in only three of them (Gen. 14:18-20). So, the Bible offers us almost no information about Melchizedek, nothing at all about his background and early years, and only minimal information about his ministry.

We do know that Melchizedek was not from the tribe of Levi, the tribe in Israel which God chose for the priesthood, because Melchizedek lived centuries before the tribe of Levi even existed. So, since Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, and Melchizedek was not an Israelite at all, the first way in which Jesus is a high priest like Melchizedek is that neither of them came from the priestly tribe of Levi. The author of Hebrews makes much of this similarity. He stresses the fact that both Jesus and Melchizedek were priests *only because God chose and anointed them to be priests*, not because either of them was born into a priestly family (Heb. 7:13-17).

But Jesus’ priesthood entails more than merely being made a priest the same way that Melchizedek was made a priest. It also means that Jesus, as a priest, is doing now what Melchizedek did then. However, when we look for what Melchizedek did, we find that there are only two deeds attributed to him:

- (1) Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham (Gen. 14:20).
- (2) Melchizedek fed and blessed Abraham (Gen. 14:18-19).

That’s all that Melchizedek ever did, as far as the biblical record is concerned. So, since God made Jesus a high priest like Melchizedek, wouldn’t it be strange if Jesus does not do the only two things that Melchizedek ever did? It is only reasonable to expect Jesus to (1) feed and bless righteous people, like Melchizedek did, and (2) receive tithes from those righteous people, like Melchizedek did. How else could Jesus possibly be “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”?

ABRAHAM AND JACOB

From the examples of both Abraham and Jacob, we learn that tithing is not a commandment found only in Moses’ law (Gen. 28:20-22). Abraham and Jacob lived hundreds of years before the law was given, and they both rendered tithes to God. Both of those men were righteous, and righteous people have a sense of what is good in God’s sight, law or no law. As far as we are told, there were no laws or commandments of any kind written down for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and yet, they did the will of God. Somehow, they knew God’s voice, and they obeyed Him as if there was a written law, telling them what God wanted them to do. Men such as Abraham and Jacob, Paul wrote, were “a law unto themselves” because they loved righteousness. Therefore, although they lived hundreds of years before the law was given to Israel, they did what was right in

the sight of God. When Paul said, “The law is not made for a righteous man” (1Tim. 1:9), he was saying that godly people do not need a hand-written law in order to know what is right.

But there is even more that we may learn from Abraham’s ancient connection with Melchizedek, for Jesus told certain men that if they really were the children of Abraham, as they claimed to be, they would do what Abraham did (Jn. 8:38-40). What Abraham did in Genesis 14 was to render tithes to God’s servant, and so, according to Jesus, Abraham’s children will do the same.

“MEN WHO DIE RECEIVE TITHES HERE”

When Melchizedek received Abraham’s tithes on earth, they were also received by God in heaven, but that is true only because Melchizedek was ordained by God to receive them. It was a minister of Jesus Christ, the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews not an Old Testament man of God, who taught us this principle. He is the one who said that when anointed men receive tithes on earth, Jesus receives them in heaven:

Hebrews 7

8. On the one hand, men who die receive tithes here, but on the other hand, there, he [Jesus] receives them, of whom is witness given that he is alive.

In the verse above, the writer said, “receive them”, not “received them” because he knew that God’s commandment to tithe was still in effect. His words could be translated like this: “On the one hand, men who die **are receiving** tithes here, but there, **he is receiving them.**” There is no hint in this New Testament author’s words that he viewed tithing as a thing of the past. Quite the contrary, the present tense verb he used indicates just the opposite, that tithing is an ongoing activity in the kingdom of God. God’s system of tithes and offerings is still in effect because Jesus is “a priest **forever**, after the order of Melchizedek.”

PART OF A HOLY LIFE

Jesus once rebuked certain scribes and Pharisees, saying, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin [kinds of spices], but you have omitted the weightier matters of the law, *such as* justice, and mercy, and faith” (Mt. 23:23a). Jesus’ rebuke is sometimes misconstrued to mean that it was wrong for these men to pay tithes on every little thing that was “increase” to them, but that is not what he said, for Jesus went on to say to them, “**You must do these things** and not leave off the others” (Mt. 23:23b). The sin of the scribes and Pharisees was not that they paid tithes on all their increase but that they neglected the weightier matters of righteousness, mercy, and truth, thus making their tithes and offerings unacceptable to God (Mt. 15:8-9).

Tithing is acceptable only as part of a godly lifestyle. The blessings that come from tithing come because of the kind of life lived, not because of the money given. I knew

one young man in college who made money by selling illegal drugs. He had been taught as a youth to tithe on all his increase, so he brought tithes from his drug money to my father, but when my father discovered the source of those tithes, he refused them. That is the way God is. Moses told the priests of Israel not to allow any money earned by harlots or sodomites to enter into God's temple. He said, "You are not to bring the hire of a whore or the price of a dog [homosexual] into the house of the LORD your God for any vow, for these both are an abomination to the LORD your God" (Dt. 23:18). The young man had sought to mollify his aching conscience by rendering tithes on his illegal drug profits, but he was foolish to think that God would accept such money. Man of God, beware! If God does not accept someone's tithes or offerings, don't you receive them! Wait for that person to repent and be washed by the blood of Christ so that he, with his offering, is acceptable to God. But when you follow God's lead and refuse a sinful person, be prepared, for if their heart is set on evil, you may provoke a cruel reaction, as in the case of Cain.

Cain and his brother Abel brought the first two offerings to God recorded in the Bible (Gen. 4:3-4). God rejected Cain and his offering, but He accepted Abel and his offering:

Genesis 4

3. In the process of time, it happened that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the LORD.
4. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of its fat. And **the LORD had respect for Abel and his offering,**
5. **but for Cain and his offering, He had no respect.** And Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell.

Shortly afterward, Cain murdered Abel, but the reason needs to be explained. The apostle John gave us this reason:

1John 3

11. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,
12. not as Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And **why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.**

What John said is true, but it needs to be explained. It was not just because Cain's deeds were evil that he murdered Abel, for Cain had been doing evil long before he murdered him. Cain murdered Abel because God *exposed* his sinfulness by rejecting his offering while accepting Abel's. Sinful people do not mind being sinful, but they hate being exposed, and they hate those who expose them. God afterward explained to Cain that if he would do what was right, he would be accepted (Gen. 4:7), but instead of

changing his ways, Cain decided, in the strange logic of sin, to get rid of his brother so that the difference between them would no longer be seen.

By following God's example of making a difference between the righteous and the wicked by accepting or rejecting certain tithes and offerings, ministers often make themselves targets of slander. A little later, I will give examples of my experiences in this regard. But all things considered, suffering abuse is a cheap price to pay for the honor of being like Jesus.

When a person with an evil heart sings hymns, that singing is sin. When a hypocrite offers praise to God, it disgusts Him. Every act of worship is sin if the worshiper is a sinner. Solomon told his son that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 15:8) and that if anyone turns away from God, "even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28:9). James (3:14) sternly warned the saints not to "lie against the truth" by worshiping God in the assembly of saints when there was secret sin in their hearts. Paul gave the same warning to God's children when he told them not to drink of the Spirit "unworthily", lest they drink damnation into their souls (1Cor. 11:29).

It is an honor to us if God accepts our worship, even when we do well. He is so holy that the heavens themselves are unclean in His sight (Job 15:15); He condescends to even look at them (Ps. 113:5-6). He is so wise that He considers the wisest of men, and even angels, to be foolish (1Cor. 3:19; Job 4:18-19). He is very merciful and kind to accept worship from anyone, whether in heaven or earth. Because of His holiness, animals sacrificed in the Old Testament had to be without any physical blemish (e.g., Lev. 1:3). When God's people offered Him sick animals, or animals with missing eyes or broken legs, or any other blemish, the Lord challenged them to offer those animals to their earthly governors, to see how pleased those rulers would be with such sorry gifts. He said, "When you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and diseased, is it not evil? Offer it now to your governor. Will he be pleased with you?" (Mal. 1:8). These things were shadows of spiritual realities in the New Testament, and the child of God who comes to God now with praise, or tithes and offerings, or anything else, must be without spiritual blemish if he wants God to accept him and what he offers in worship.

The ceremonial forms of worship that God required in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ and are no longer practiced. We no longer offer animals in sacrifice, and God's ministers no longer do such things as number His people and collect from them a census-offering. However, as we have shown, God's will concerning Moral commandments has never changed, and in His judgment, taking care of the needs of those who do His work on earth is a moral issue.

God still has ministers, and they and their families still need food, clothes, and shelter. God's system of tithes and offerings fully meets those needs, but not only that, for when believers handle their tithes and offerings God's way, the whole body of Christ reaps the benefits, not just God's ministers. Blessings always follow obedience to God's

will, and when His will concerning tithes and offerings is obeyed, spiritual health and unity among the saints will follow. I have never known anyone with a pure heart to deny that truth or fail to walk in it.

CHAPTER 3

LESSONS

Call upon me, and I will answer you,
and I will show you great mysteries that you do not know.

Jeremiah 33:3

MY ORDINATION

In the early 1990s, the people in my home fellowship and I were wrestling with the issue of determining a salary for me. I considered finding a job so that we could use all the money brought in as tithes and offerings for such things as supplies and equipment for the ministry, and none of the money for myself and my family. At the same time, I saw that if I did find another job, it would take valuable time away from the work which the Lord had given me to do. It was difficult for me to justify making the choice to “leave the word of God and serve tables” (Acts 6:2).

Finally, aware of the scripture that says, “those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1Cor. 9:14), we prayerfully set about determining what portion of God’s money should be set aside for me and my family. The good men who were in charge of making the final decision felt uncomfortable having to determine the monetary value of their pastor, but it was a decision that we all, at the time, thought we had to make. Thankfully, the Lord made it for us.

We were, as a body, trying to go about God’s work, using Christianity’s pattern of a congregation having a salaried pastor, hired to do the job. As we were to learn, however, that is not the way of Christ. One day as I was working in the yard, thinking of nothing but the mundane task at hand, the word of the Lord came to me and said, “**Every dime that comes into this work is for you and your children.**” This word from God came as a surprise. But then, God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, and so, it should not surprise us that His word often surprises us!

I shared with the congregation what the Lord had told me, that “every dime” of their tithes and offerings was intended by God for me and my children. Then, we, as a body, began to reconsider the issue in an entirely new light. Of course, from the day Jesus told me that the tithes and offerings of my congregation were for me and my children, we all

knew that some would be skeptical about it, but the relief and blessing that his word brought to us all made the criticism worth enduring.

As for me, from the day God's word came to me, I was relieved of my embarrassment at taking money from His children, and what relieved me was the new understanding that from the beginning, God had ordained tithes and offerings *for nothing but the provision of the needs of His servants and their families*. If the original and only purpose for God's tithes and offerings was to provide for His servants' earthly needs, what was there for me to be ashamed of? I felt the comforting assurance of God's word. It comforted me because I knew now that it was not only acceptable to God for me to receive His children's tithes and offerings but that He *intended* for me to take them because they were mine, from Him.

At the same time, however, because they were mine to do with as I saw fit, I was also free not to accept them if doing that was best for the congregation, as it was when Paul refused to receive money from God's saints in Achaia:

2Corinthians 11

7. Did I sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, in that **I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?**
8. **I robbed other congregations, taking wages from them in order to serve you.**
9. And when I was there with you, and in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for **when the brothers from Macedonia came, they fully supplied my need, and I kept myself in every way from being burdensome to you,** and I will keep myself.
10. As the truth of Christ is in me, **this boasting of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.**
11. Why is this? Because I do not love you? God knows.

I was liberated by the word of God to receive or not to receive God's money from my congregation, just as Paul was free to receive or not to receive God's money from his congregations. The choice was entirely mine because the tithes and offerings from the flock under my care were entirely mine. Hearing from Jesus on this issue was truly an enlightening, humbling experience, one that created within me a deeper sense of both the love and the fear of God.

It always happens that after God has spoken, understanding grows as we walk in the light that He has given. So, as we changed our course to walk on the path He had revealed, we grew in knowledge of how God wanted His tithes and offerings to be handled. We understood some things from the start, but it took us years to learn others, and without fail, whenever a new and better understanding came, it answered questions and brought a refreshing to our spirits. What follows are some of the most important

lessons we learned as we walked with Jesus and grew in knowledge of what he had said to me.

LESSON 1: GOD’S PURPOSE FOR TITHES AND OFFERINGS

Beginning at the dawn of the Old Testament, God made His purpose for tithes and offerings abundantly clear: they are for His ministers and their families, to meet their physical needs. At Mount Sinai, when God revealed to Israel that the tenth of their income was His, along with certain offerings, and that they were to bring His portion of their increase to His ministers; that is, the priests and their helpers, the Levites. He then spoke to Aaron, Israel’s high priest, and made certain that he, too, understood what tithes and offerings were for:

Numbers 18

8. And the LORD said to Aaron, . . .
9. **“This will be yours from the most holy things, kept back from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, every sin offering of theirs, and every guilt offering of theirs, which they return to me; it shall be most holy for you and for your sons.**
10. You shall eat it in the most holy place; every male shall eat it. **It shall be holy for you.**
11. **And this is yours:** the wave-offering of their gift, along with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel. **I have given them, as a statute forever, to you, and to your sons, and to your daughters who still live with you.** Everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it.
12. All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and their firstfruits of wheat which they give to the LORD, **them have I given to you.**
13. And all the firstborn in the land, **which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours. Every one who is clean in your house shall eat of it.**
14. **Everything devoted [to Me] in Israel shall be yours.**
15. **Every creature that opens the womb, which they bring to the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be yours. . . .**
 . . .
19. All the wave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, **I have given to you, and to your sons, and to your daughters who still live with you, by a statute forever.** It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD unto you and to your seed with you.”
20. And the LORD said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land; neither shall you have any part among them. I am your part and your inheritance among the children of Israel.

21. And, behold, **I have given to the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance because of the work which they do**, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

To the end of Old Testament history, the attitude of righteous people concerning tithes and offerings did not change. Nehemiah was furious when he learned that God’s people were not bringing their tithes and offerings to the temple to supply the needs of God’s servants:

Nehemiah 13

10. **And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them.** And every one of the Levites and the singers, the ones who did the *LORD’s* work, fled to his field [to provide for their families].
11. Then, I contended with the rulers, and said, **“Why is the house of God forsaken!”** Then, I gathered them together, and I made them fulfill their office.
12. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, and of the new wine, and of the oil to the treasuries.
13. **And I made treasurers over the treasuries . . . and their duty was to distribute [the tithes and offerings that had been gathered] to their brethren.**

The way of Christ is simple and pure, and it works. He first raises up a man to represent him and to be a shepherd of souls. Then, he gives that shepherd a flock over which he is to watch and for which he must give account to God. To keep the shepherd free to do his work without unnecessary worldly distraction, the flock supplies the shepherd’s physical needs, while he supplies their spiritual needs. Paul used an Old Testament law to explain this concept:

1Corinthians 9

9. In the law of Moses, it is written, “Do not muzzle an ox when he is treading out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned,
10. or does it actually say this for us? For our sakes it is written, so that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope ought to partake of his hope.
11. **If we have sown spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?**

In verse 10, above, when Paul said that the servant of God who labors for the Lord “should plow in hope,” the hope which Paul had in mind was not the hope of the resurrection. He was referring instead to a minister’s hope of receiving enough money from his labor in the Lord to supply the physical needs of himself and his family. There is nothing wrong with a man wanting to have enough money to pay his bills.

A Biblical Example

Young Hezekiah's first priority when he became king of Judah was to restore the knowledge of God's law to the nation, and Hezekiah knew how to go about it. He gathered God's priests and Levites and spoke kindly to them, exhorting them to do the work for which they were anointed (2Chron. 29:1-11). That done, he commanded the people to come to Jerusalem to worship their God. The people responded with such zeal that there were not enough priests to prepare the great number of sacrifices that were brought. So, the priests' assistants, the Levites, were recruited to help in that task (2Chron. 29:32-36). But critical to this revival was Hezekiah's command that God's people should no longer give their tithes and offerings to other gods but that they should bring them to God's servants instead (2Chron. 31:4), so that His servants "might be encouraged in the law of the LORD." The people responded by bringing so many offerings to the temple that special chambers had to be prepared to store them:

2Chronicles 31

5. As soon as the commandment was broadcast, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, and oil, and honey, and all of the increase of the field. **And they brought in the tithe of all things abundantly.**
 . . .
11. **Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD,** and they prepared them. . . .
12. And they faithfully brought in the offering and the tithe

Thus began a time of happiness and blessing, in the midst of Israel's difficult history, and this time of refreshing came because there was a man on the throne who commanded the people of God to do what God said to do with their tithes and offerings. The whole nation benefitted by bringing God's tithes to His priests and Levites because when the physical needs of those men were provided for, they were free to devote themselves to teaching the people how to please God and be blessed.

The priests and Levites were "encouraged in the law of the LORD" by having God's tithes and offerings brought to them, but their being encouraged does not imply that they were covetous. A man can be encouraged in the Lord by having enough money to provide for his family's needs without being greedy.

Blessing or Cursing

God's purpose for giving commandments, including commandments related to tithes and offerings, is to guide us into a life that is blessed. He is grieved when His children sow seeds of confusion by taking His tithes and offerings somewhere other than to His ministers. He is not grieved because He needs the money but because (1) His ministers need it in order to stay constantly available to Him and (2) His ministers need it in order

to stay constantly available to God's children. By taking God's money to the wrong place, His children encourage the wrong men, and reap their own ruin. Here is an excerpt from one of the Lord's heart-rending complaints against ancient Israel:

Ezekiel 16

17. You take your beautiful vessels, made from my gold and my silver that I gave you, and make images for yourself . . .
18. and you take your embroidered garments and cover them, and you set my oil and my incense before them.
19. My bread also, which I gave you, fine flour, and oil, and honey, with which I fed you, you also set it before them for a sweet aroma.

Through Isaiah, God pleaded with His people to stop wasting their tithes and offerings:

Isaiah 55

2. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.
3. Incline your ear, and come to me! Obey, and your soul will live!

Isaiah was referring to the fact that God's people were carrying His tithes and offerings to priests and prophets of other gods. As a result, God's true servants, instead of being encouraged in the work of the Lord by God's people, watched false prophets and idolatrous priests prosper with tithes and offerings which should have been brought to them, and grieved helplessly as those blind men led the nation into disaster.

It is, in part, because God's system of tithes and offerings remained in effect in the New Testament that false teachers infiltrated the body of Christ in the days of the early apostles, and still do. It is the money as well as the status which attracts them, not God's righteousness. Knowing that the love of money motivated "false apostles" (2Cor. 11:13) to proclaim a false gospel (Gal. 1:6) about a false Jesus (2Cor. 11:4), Paul challenged them to minister to the saints in Corinth for nothing, as he did (2Cor. 11:7-13), for up to year and a half at a time (Acts 18:8-11).

After the Son of God came to earth and initiated this New Testament, Satan "transformed himself into an angel of light" (2Cor. 11:14), and men of the same covetous spirit followed Satan's lead and "transformed themselves into ministers of righteousness" (2Cor. 11:15). Satan coveted the glory that belongs only to God, and Satan's ministers covet the money that belongs only to God's servants. Over the past two thousand years, Satan and his ministers have largely succeeded in stealing God's glory and robbing His ministers, and the family of God on earth has suffered terribly because of it.

From the beginning, God's children have played a crucial role in their own well-being by what they do with their tithes and offerings. They can use God's money to hire

ministers to teach them what they want to hear, and be cursed, or they can use it to encourage the ministers sent by God, and be blessed. Sometimes in ancient Israel's history, but only sometimes, a wise king like Hezekiah would ascend to the throne and bless the nation by enforcing God's law. The very few times that happened, God's people took God's tithes and offerings to the right people, and then, God's ministers were encouraged in the Lord's work, the way of the Lord was taught, and blessings were restored to the nation.

It is just as rare an event in the history of this New Testament for God's people to take their tithes and offerings to the right men, and the results of their support for ministers not sent by God have been disastrous for the body of Christ.

LESSON 2: GOD IS THE EMPLOYER

In order for the relationship of a pastor and his flock to be in order, it is essential that all parties understand that *God is the one giving the tithes and offerings to His servants!* Without that knowledge, nothing can be as it should be in a body of believers. The dear children of God here with me understand that in bringing God's tithes and offerings to me, they are not paying me to do anything. I am not their employee; I am God's, and the tithes and offerings they bring me is my pay *from Him*, not them. They are only doing what God wants them to do with His money, and since God is really the one giving me the money, I do not thank them for it. Instead, we all thank God; I for them; they for me; and all of us for Jesus, through whom we have obtained this grace.

God is an absolute ruler, and in His kingdom (**which does *not* include the religious system of Christianity**), there are no debates or voting on pastors' salaries. God alone, as the employer of His ministers, determines how much each of His ministers will be paid. If in His wisdom, God determines it is best for one of His ministers to have just a little money, then He will decrease the overall income of the congregation, or decrease the number of people in the congregation itself. On the other hand, if God determines that one of His pastors should have an abundance, then He will increase the income of the congregation, or increase the number of people in it. When God is recognized as the sole employer of His ministers, the relationship of a pastor with God, and with his flock, and the flock's relationship with God and with one another is put on more solid ground. How can a man preach the gospel of God without fear to a group of people when in his heart, he is wanting them to increase his salary? And how can a congregation hold the man of God in as high esteem as they should (see 1Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17), when they have the power over him, to judge him, and possibly fire him for poor job performance?

Supervision

In the Old Testament, when God directed His people to bring their tithes "to the storehouse" (Mal. 3:10), it was not to just any storehouse; it was to the sanctified chambers in God's temple designated for the storing of tithes and offerings. The "storehouse", from which the priests and their families were fed, was in the holy place of

the temple, and holy places were forbidden to all but God's ministers. So, strange as it sounds, in commanding His people to take their tithes and offerings to a place they could not go, God was commanding them to do something they themselves could not do. The only way they could obey God's command to bring their tithes and offerings to His storehouse was for them to hand their tithes and offerings over to men who *could* take them there. Then, once the tithes and offerings were taken there, the oversight of them was the responsibility of the ministers to whom the tithes and offerings were brought, not of the people who brought them. The people could return home, confident they had done the will of God, once they had handed their tithes and offerings over to the men ordained to carry them into the storehouse. Having fulfilled their obligation to bring God's tithes and offerings to His servants, they were free to rejoice with a clear conscience, in hope of God's favor. What happened with God's tithes and offerings beyond the point of their bringing it to God's ministers was not their business.

Where the relationship is right between a pastor and his flock, God's children will feel welcome to offer the pastor some financial advice, as one would offer advice to a friend, but the man of God is still perfectly free to take or not to take financial advice. I would strongly advise every pastor to seek counsel from those in his congregation who have wisdom in the area of finance. I certainly have benefitted from the advice given to me. But the point is that in God's kingdom, no congregation has supervisory authority over how a man of God uses the tithes and offerings that God gives him for his labor.

I have always used a significant portion of my salary from God to provide for the well-being of the saints under my care, every one of whom I know well and love dearly. I count it as my responsibility to provide a place for our gatherings as well as its maintenance, the furnishings, teaching materials, etc. The congregation is never asked to help pay for those things because, since they obey God in tithes and offerings, I have enough money to do it. Beyond this, their hearts, as well as mine, are committed to edifying our brothers and sisters in Christ in other places with our music, tracts, books, etc., as well as with multiple edifying websites -- and they are never asked to help pay for any of that, either, and for the same reason. Because of their obedience to God, I have more than I and my family need, and I gladly spend it for "things which make for peace and joy" among the saints here and abroad. It would be sin for me to ask these saints to have a "bake sale" or some other money-raising event when they are already doing all that God requires.

I am open with my congregation concerning what I do with the money, but I am not required to be as open as I am. There are, in fact, occasions when I see no value in sharing with them what I am spending my money on, but whenever that happens, I wrestle with no guilty feelings because it is none of their business, anyway. Besides, I live for my sheep, and nothing I do is bad for them, even if they don't know what it is.

God has never laid on His sheep the burden of overseeing their shepherd's expenditures. The shepherd's money is his, personally, and he may spend it as he likes.

The only burden the sheep have is to make sure they honor God with their increase; after that, they can rest from concern about what happens with the money. Besides, a shepherd of God's flock has something more terrifying to face than the sheep's displeasure, should he misuse the money given to him. (I have never heard of a shepherd who was afraid of sheep, except when the pastor is hired by the sheep to do his job.) Whoever feels a need to supervise the pastor's use of God's tithes and offerings does not trust that pastor enough to bring God's money to him. In such a case, he should hold on to his tithes and offerings until God gives him a pastor that he can trust.

In the Old Testament, God required His priest to offer daily sacrifices on His altar, one lamb in the morning and one in the afternoon (Ex. 29:38-39), as well as monthly sacrifices, and sacrifices on holy days. But He said nothing about His people bringing them to the priest. In fact, He never says where those required sacrificial animals were to come from, or the meal and wine offerings that had to be included with the sacrifices. I assume that the priest who ministered at God's altar had to provide them from his own flock. That would also be true for the ingredients of the holy anointing oil and the sacred incense, the materials needed for holy garments, and the general maintenance and repair of God's temple. God's people were not responsible for providing any of those things, and yet, the priests needed them.

The reason we can only *assume* that the priests provided all those things for their ministry is that God never said they had to use their own animals and their own money for those things. He never explicitly stated that His tithes and offerings were to be used for ministry. However, since it is impossible to separate a servant of God from his life's work, any true servant of God will use the resources available to him to do his work, but the idea that God's tithes and offerings must be set aside and spent only on the ministry is as foreign to God's mind as is the idea that the Sabbath is to be set apart for worship. The weekly Sabbath day was ordained by God *only* for His people, their slaves, and even their animals to rest (Ex. 20:10-11). False prophets and priests came along and perverted people's understanding of the Sabbath by teaching that the Sabbath is to be set apart as a holy day of worship. The fact is, the Sabbath day was created only as a holy day of rest, but false teachers cannot understand how "rest" can be a holy thing. To the worst of them, a day of rest for God's people is a day of money collecting, lost.

Likewise, false teachers have perverted men's understanding of tithes and offerings by teaching that it is holy money, set apart solely for "charitable purposes" and that any man who uses it for himself and his family has erred. Nevertheless, according to everything God actually said about tithes and offerings, His entire purpose for them was to supply the needs of God's servants and their families.

Technically, if I spent every dime of my money on me and my family, and nothing on ministry, I could justify myself, biblically, in doing so because God never said otherwise. But technical self-justification is itself sin; that's how the wicked in this world operate, justifying their sin with legal technicalities. God expects me to live my life for

His people, just as Jesus does, and I know that I cannot do that if I spend all the money I receive on myself. I have precious relationships in Christ to nurture. In order to accomplish God's purpose in my life, I must use what His people bring me for their good as well as mine. They are, after all, my family in Christ.

“In Christ's Stead”

It is unwise to assume that God is pleased with us simply because we are tithing. He may be grieved because we are tithing. God is pleased with our tithes and offerings only when we have brought them to men whom He has ordained to receive them. Paul once said, “We beseech you in Christ's stead”. If God has not anointed and sent a man to do what he is doing and to say what he is saying, he cannot be doing or saying anything “in Christ's stead”. So, what good purpose is served by bringing God's tithes and offerings to such a man? And by what authority would such a man receive them? A lofty, religious title granted to him by a religious institution or sect does not to the least extent qualify him to be given God's money. **It is the one to whom tithes and offerings are brought, not the mere bringing of them, which makes them acceptable to God.**

Even if a priest in Israel was an ungodly man, as some were, if anyone in Israel refused to bring to him what the law required them to bring him, that person was sinning. Every wicked priest was heaping damnation on himself when he touched holy things while in a sinful state, but his judgment had to come from God, not from the people. Sometimes, Israel's priests were so wicked that God's people dreaded coming to worship before Him (e.g., 1Sam. 2:17); still, if those people had taken it on themselves to worship in a place other than the holy place God had chosen, or if they had ordained their own priests to replace the men ordained by God, they would have been condemned as transgressors. Their tithes and offerings were acceptable only when they brought them to God's ministers, even if His ministers at that time in their life were so wicked that God wanted them dead (1Sam. 2:25; 4:10-11).

This is the basic problem with God's tithes and offerings being given to a religious organization. Doing that is far worse than bringing them to a wayward servant of God, for God has never anointed a religious institution to take His money. Tithes and offerings must be brought to a man whom God has chosen and ordained, not to a man ordained by an institution, and certainly not to an institution itself. If tithes and offerings are given to an institution, they are wasted because God does not anoint institutions; He anoints people to carry His gospel. Jesus was referring to institutionalized religious systems when he warned his disciples that “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:15). When God's own people join with the world and “highly esteem” what is an abomination to God, they become confused and divided. That is why I say that believers who donate God's money to religious organizations are paying for their own poison. God's tithes are holy, and they must be taken to someone ordained by God to receive holy things on His behalf. In our culture,

most of God's children bring their tithes and offerings to a religious organization, such as a church, instead of rendering them directly to an anointed man of God, but in doing so, they are financing their own worst enemy.

God attached a number of blessings to obedience in tithes and offerings. The most well-known verses in this regard are those from the prophet Malachi:

Malachi 3

10. Bring all the tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house! Test me with this, says the LORD of hosts! *I will give myself over to death*⁵ if I do not open the windows of heaven to you and pour out such a blessing on you that there will not be enough room to receive it.
11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he will not destroy the fruit of your ground. Neither will your vine in the field lose its fruit, says the LORD of hosts.

These promises are not for everyone who pays tithes and offerings. They are for God's children who take their tithes and offerings to the place God says to take them; that is, to a man whom God has anointed. God's promises are predicated upon paying your tithes and offerings *the way* God says to pay them, *when* God says to pay them, and *to whom* God says to pay them. If you do not know a man truly anointed by God, it is better to store up your tithes and offerings and wait on Him to send a shepherd to find you than to subsidize a religious institution or a minister who is not of God.

Trouble

Jesus once said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). There is a very real and very profound connection between our hearts and our riches, both our natural and spiritual riches. Our hearts and our relationships are greatly affected, for good or for ill, by what we do with our money, especially our tithes and our offerings. As the story of Abraham and Melchizedek demonstrated, the act of rendering tithes and offerings to God's servant is an act of submission to one's superior in the kingdom of God. And in the act of submission to a superior in God's kingdom, the door of one's heart is opened in a special way to the influence of that person. Jesus promised that those

⁵ The Hebrew construction here is part of a well-known form for a curse of the greatest magnitude, used only in matters of extreme importance. It is the ultimate oath that could be expected or required of anyone because the one making the oath is swearing before God on his own life, putting everything on the line to show his full commitment to doing what he has sworn to do. It was so dreaded a curse that the curse itself was left unspoken. Anyone who broke such an oath betrayed a very sacred trust and was worthy of damnation. In fact, the silent part of the oath could, in some cases, even be understood as, "*I will damn myself if . . .*", thus giving the unstated portion of the oath maximum impact.

With the use of this kind of oath, God is giving supreme assurance that He is committed to doing what He promises to do. There was no way for Him to make a greater promise - until He sent His Son to die for our sins.

who supply the needs of his ministers share in a minister's reward (Mt. 10:41); however, even before that eternal reward is given, the children of God, while still living in this world, share in the spiritual substance of the man of God with whom they have shared their earthly substance.

It is also true that if God's people take His tithes and offerings to someone whom God has not anointed to receive them, bad things happen to everyone involved, even to God, as far as His reputation on earth goes. For instance, in the Old Testament, God told His people that *they had defiled themselves* by taking their tithes and offerings to idolatrous priests (Ezek. 20:31). Using God's money, they had submitted their souls to the influence of ministers who served demonic spirits. Beyond that, God told them that because they had given those priests what should have been given to His ministers, they *had polluted His name* before the heathen by making it appear that He, their God, partook of those ungodly spirits with them (Ezek. 20:39).

There are few ways that God's children can better please God and put themselves in a position to receive His greatest blessings than to render their tithes and offerings to one of His anointed servants. By the same token, there are few errors that God's people can make which have more potential for harm than for them to take their tithes and offerings to the wrong man, or to an institution. As evil as it would be to do so, it would cause less harm if they just stole God's money and spent it on themselves than if they used it to encourage a man whom God has not anointed, or a minister merely ordained by an institution.

Above, I said that when tithes and offerings are taken to the wrong person, "bad things happen to everyone involved." If that statement is true, then the one who receives those tithes and offerings is also damaged, and the biblical record proves that to be the case. Bringing God's holy tithes and offerings to an unordained man harms the man who receives them in several ways. First, it encourages him to continue to believe a lie and think that he is someone he is not. Secondly, it enables him to maintain an appearance that misleads people into thinking that he is someone he is not. But worst of all, it can bring upon him a curse for touching holy things that do not belong to him. In the Old Testament, Uzzah touched the holy ark of God and was struck dead for his indiscretion. Moses' cousin Korah and more than two hundred other princes of Israel were burned alive by God for trespassing into the holy precinct. And even good King Uzziah was stricken with leprosy when he trespassed into the temple and offered incense on God's golden altar. These men were not ordained to touch God's holy things, and they suffered terribly for assuming they could. They all knew that Moses taught Israel that "all the tithe of the land, from the produce of the land to the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy unto the LORD.... And all the tithe of the herd and of the flock, all that pass under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy unto the LORD" (Lev. 27:30, 32). And they all should have known that it is forbidden for an unauthorized person to touch what is "holy unto the LORD."

To whom, or to what, have you been giving God's tithes and offerings? If to a religious organization, then you have been supporting a religious system that is contrary to Christ. If to a man not anointed by God, then you are hurting him by leaving him with the false impression that he is worthy of God's tithes, and you are helping to puff up a mere human against Christ. In either case, you should repent and wait for the Spirit to guide you to the right man. God's money belongs to God. It is holy, and it must be brought to one of the "earthly vessels" who have been sanctified by God to receive holy things. Only then will your tithes and offerings be accepted in heaven.

Idolatry among God's Old Testament people greatly diminished the influence of God's law among them. But idolatry prospered in Israel because God's own people trusted and financially supported idolatrous priests and prophets, who slandered God's true servants and stole the hearts of the people. (Once the idolatrous priests had stolen the hearts of God's people, it was easy to steal their money.) As a consequence, the very foundation of the nation, the law of Moses, was undermined. David once lamented, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps. 11:3). The answer is that the righteous can do nothing if the foundations of the faith are destroyed, and historically, they were destroyed by God's own people when they took God's money to men whom God had not anointed.

If Jesus sends a man to speak "in his stead", then that man is a safe place for God's children to bring their tithes and offerings, for he really will be receiving them "in Christ's stead", and he will have the same love for them that Christ has. Of course, soon after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, just as Jesus foretold, deceivers came who claimed to minister "in Christ's stead" (Mt. 24:5). But no one can truly speak "in Christ's stead" unless Christ anoints and sends him. Being granted the title and position of pastor, or bishop, or priest by a religious organization does not make a man a pastor, bishop, or priest, or anything else that counts with God. Stay away from a man with a title but no anointing, and stay out of trouble.

Control

The chief benefit in God being the employer of His pastors is that, being their employer, He has the greatest influence over them. It is simply a fact of life that whoever pays the pastor controls him. When God's tithes and offerings are given to an institution, such as a church, instead of directly to a man, the institution determines the salary, the conduct, and the message, of the man it pays. Because I am paid by God, not by the congregation, the congregation has no authority to determine what I teach or how I go about doing any of God's business. As I said previously, when the pastor/flock relationship is right, the sheep will feel welcome to ask questions of their shepherd and to say how they feel about anything to him -- and believe me, these sheep do -- but they cannot lead their shepherd; God has appointed me to lead them.

As long as a person has any degree of control over how his tithes and offerings, after he pays them, are used, he has not really released them to God. If a believer donates his tithes and offerings to a religious organization of which he is a member, such as a church, he has not rendered them to God at all. Instead, he has given his tithes and offerings to himself and his fellow members. They then determine whom they will hire to act as pastor (emphasis on the word “act”), how much to pay him, and what duties to assign to him, including what doctrine to teach. Such a pastor is more a servant of the institution than he is a servant of God, and he will be more concerned with how the institution feels about his work than with how God feels.

Such control works against a minister’s integrity. It makes him dependent upon and obligated to the institution for his livelihood, and if God speaks to him in a way contrary to what the congregation wants to hear, it is unlikely that he will faithfully proclaim what he has heard from the Lord. Paul saw this coming, and he prophesied that God’s people would begin to hire ministers, or as Paul said it, “heap up men” to be their spiritual leaders:

2 Timothy 4

3. For the time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, having itching ears, **they will heap upon themselves teachers;**
4. and they will turn a deaf ear to the truth, and then they will be turned over to myths.

I have spoken with such hired men, and their predicament saddens me. God’s way of handling tithes and offerings would set them free to hear from God and speak the word of God fearlessly to everyone. But laboring within a religious system where there is no knowledge of God’s will concerning tithes and offerings, they cannot.

My sheep cannot fire me because they did not hire me. I did not audition for the job of pastor by demonstrating my orthodoxy and showing off my rhetorical skills by delivering a “trial sermon” to them. The very idea of a “trial sermon”, common among Christians, is repugnant to the Spirit. God anointed me and raised me up, and then, over time, sent me these children of His, one or two at a time, for me to guide and to watch over. That is how God works, and because we have obeyed His voice, God has made me and my congregation a model of the right relationship between the pastor and his flock. In the development of this relationship, the right handling of God’s tithes and offerings has been crucial.

Without doubt, there are many ministers laboring within Christianity who have been anointed by God and who sincerely love the Lord and want to please him, but they are trapped in the system; they must conform or be fired. These are more in bondage to the system than the people who sit in their congregations. They are hired, not to hear God’s voice and to speak His word but to promote their sect’s doctrines and traditions, and they

know the consequences of failing to do that. How would they pay their bills and support their families if they were to be fired? I have had ministers confide in me about things they have heard from God and about experiences they have had with God which would cost them their jobs if they testified of them to their congregations, and I am persuaded that their predicament is not a rare one. The religious system in which they labor is a terrible trap into which many sincere ministers have fallen. We pray that God will give them faith to escape! If ever they summon the courage to trust God and do things His way, He will help them escape it, and if they escape, some of God's sheep will follow them.

LESSON 3: A LIFE-LONG RELATIONSHIP

The typical Christian system of hiring and firing ministers is as contrary to the Spirit of Christ as anything on earth. God's people have no authority whatsoever to conduct interviews for the job of pastor and then to hire someone to do the job. Being a pastor is not a job; it is a calling for a specific man over a specific flock, and it is for life. The truth is that **if a congregation had the wisdom to know who should be their pastor they wouldn't even need him.**

One of Jesus' titles for those who act as pastors without being anointed by God to be pastors is "thieves and robbers" (Jn. 10:1, 8-11). That title is appropriate because, like thieves, such ministers will take whatever money they can get. Their covetousness explains why they do not teach the truth concerning tithes and offerings and why they will persecute those who do. If God's people ever come to understand the truth about tithes and offerings, and put it into practice, those men will not get any money from them at all.

True men of God take nothing except what the Lord gives them. They will not take a lesser amount from those who will not give all that God has commanded, and they will not take more from those who would give more. But those whom Jesus called "thieves" will take every dollar you have, and they will use virtually any tactic they can to persuade you to give it, including promising you rich blessings from God. But men of God will refuse to receive any part of your increase that belongs to you; they will beg for nothing; and they will turn down anything that anyone tries to give them if God does not approve of it.

Another title that Jesus gave to those "thieves and robbers" is "hirelings", for they are hired to act as religious leaders (Jn. 10:12-13). In effect, they rent themselves out to do a job, like harlots, and naturally, then, they will want to please their customers. However, a true man of God seeks to please God instead of people, as Paul did:

Galatians 1

10. Do I now appeal to men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I would hardly be a servant of Christ.

Paul then explained how it was that he came to be a servant of Christ instead of men; namely, he was not hired by men to be their minister but was chosen by Christ to be his:

11. I'd have you to know, brothers, concerning the gospel delivered *to you* by me, that it is not of man.
12. I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came by a revelation from Jesus Christ.

I love the wisdom revealed in the following brief conversation which took place long ago between a true man of God and "Joe", a member of his flock who was reprimanded and did not like it. Joe smugly asked his pastor, "What are you going to do if I stop bringing you my tithes?" To which the unperturbed man of God responded, "What are you going to do if I stop taking them?"

That was the end of the conversation, a conversation that could not have taken place within the hireling system of Christianity. Joe knew that his pastor was a true man of God and that God had put him under that pastor's care. There was nowhere for Joe to go, and they both knew it. When things are done God's way, there is only one pastor for any one flock, as long as they live. Even under Moses' law, although the servants of the priests, the Levites, could retire at age 50 from their service of the tabernacle (Num. 8:24-26), God's priests and prophets continued as His priests and prophets until they died.

Once God has created a pastor/flock relationship, it is permanent, and it is rebellion against His order for any sheep to leave the shepherd whom God has given him or for any shepherd to leave his flock. Joe was "stuck" with the pastor God had given him, and his pastor was "stuck" with Joe. So, Joe made no more foolish threats, humbled himself, and he and his pastor (whom he loved) continued together from the time they met, in 1932, until the pastor's death in 1989.

No pastor from God ceases to be pastor for any reason short of death. A pastor in God's kingdom retires when he takes his last breath. God's anointing can continue to function through His pastor, regardless of his physical condition. My pastor was still encouraging me, and reprimanding me, when he was on his deathbed, hardly knowing at times that he was still here in this world. One day, I came into his hospital room burdened, and a little ashamed at my inability to lead certain people to the light. My pastor was too near death for me to discuss that situation with him, but as I stood by his bed, an unexpected comment came from his lips that completely lifted my burden, for it explained to me why those people's hearts were so dull. It was the anointing of God, still using my dying pastor to minister to one of his sheep. A day or so later, I came again into his room, but this time feeling a little condemnation for taking too large a part in a vain conversation with a backslidden sister. Again, I stood quietly by my pastor, his body so weak that he did not even open his eyes. And again unexpectedly, he said very softly,

without any knowledge of the conversation I had just had, “The way you get into the truth is, you don’t play both ends of the line.” It was a reproof from the same anointing that had previously comforted me, a reproof which reminded me that “the friendship of the world is enmity against God.” My pastor was still watching over me, even with his eyes closed.

Ministers who are hired to do the job cannot be as bold as was Joe’s pastor, and mine, because they cannot risk provoking those who hire them. Ministers who are hired by an organization to act as pastors have no authority over the flock, such as Joe’s pastor had, to discipline and to teach them “with all authority” because the flock does not belong to them; it belongs to the organization. It would be like spanking someone else’s child. My flock is a part of me, not of an organization, and I am a part of them. If I do them good, I do myself good, and if I harm them, I am harmed.

Tithe or Bribe?

If your minister receives tithes and offerings from you even when he knows that you are living in sin, then what you are really doing is bribing him to keep his mouth shut. On his part, he is “on the take”, and on your part, you are using his vain assurances to hide from God’s conviction. That man is killing you with phony mercy, and you are killing him with phony devotion to God. Both of you should repent. You should stop putting God’s tithes into the hand of a fool, and he should stop receiving God’s tithes from the hand of another one.

Those who bring money to the Lord can be divided into two groups: tithe-bringers and bribe-bringers. The tithe-bringers are doing only what is their new nature in Christ to do. It is the nature of righteous people to bring to God what is His. The bribe-bringers, on the other hand, are doing only what is in their fleshly nature to do: they are trying to mask a sinful heart with deeds that appear godly. Their kind of giving is sin, and it would be better for them not to give at all. They would be better served to simply steal that money and buy a car or pay their rent with it than to use it to play the hypocrite. These foolish believers do not yet understand that “God is not mocked.”

The Hireling Will Flee

Everybody knows the real situation in Christianity, even if nobody is talking about it. If a congregation’s economic condition changes for the worse, or if great conflict arises among the congregation -- in other words, if donations significantly decrease -- the pastor who is hired will leave to find a better job. Jesus said so:

John 10

11. . . . The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
12. But the man who is hired, and is not a shepherd, whose sheep are not his own, sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees, and the wolf carries them off and scatters the sheep.

13. The hireling flees because he is a hireling, and it does not matter to him about the sheep.

Note that Jesus said the reason a hireling leaves the flock is simply that the flock does not belong to him. It is not necessarily the case that the man's heart is wicked. The problem is only that the sheep are not his, and a hired shepherd cannot feel a holy, life-long commitment to them. However, when a man of God is watching over his own flock, he will never abandon them. They are his, and their welfare is his purpose in this life. They are souls entrusted to him by God, and he must someday give an account of them to God. He feels about them the same way Paul felt about his converts:

1Thessalonians 2

7. We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother might cherish her own children.
8. And having that kind of longing for you, we delight in imparting to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives because you are dear to us.

1Corinthians 7

3. You are in our hearts, to die or to live with *you*.

A pastor from God cannot run away and leave his flock when trouble arises or if they fall into poverty because his life is bound up in theirs. His sheep can neither be blessed nor be in trouble without him. As Jesus said, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." His life is entwined with his sheep as no one else's can be *simply because they are his*. No one else can know them or love them as he does because God creates within each one of His pastors a special understanding of and love for the sheep that He places in their care.

It is unimaginable that a pastor who is truly of God would ever leave his sheep to interview for a job of shepherding a different flock. There is no such thought in the minds of pastors in the kingdom of God. Nor would his heart let him be part of a religious system that would remove him from his sheep to make him pastor of a flock of strangers. But that abominable practice is the norm in Christianity's hireling system, and it is as great a wickedness as exists on the earth. In such a system, no life-long pastor/flock relationship is allowed to develop, and both the shepherds and the sheep live in confusion. The sheep, for the most part, do not belong to the man acting as their pastor, and they know, just as he knows, that if they fall onto hard times or if the institution decides the pastor has been there long enough, or if he is offered a more prestigious and better paying job somewhere else, then he will leave them. And since the pastor is supposed to be ministering to them "in Christ's stead", what does it say to them about Jesus, that their pastor might forsake them at any time? Jesus, "the chief shepherd", told the sheep who were under his care, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Ought not a pastor follow his example? I contend that every faithful pastor does.

“Never Teach My Gospel for Filthy Lucre Again”

I was a hireling once and didn't even realize it. It happened when I made some calls to local ministers to let them know I would be teaching an Old Testament course at the local community college. One of them, Pastor “Mac”, was very interested and called me back later to ask me if, instead of teaching at the community college, I would be willing to teach the Old Testament once a week at his church instead, and after some discussion, I agreed to do it. The subject of money never came up.

The class went very well for several months. The better I came to know Pastor Mac, the more I respected him in the Lord. There was excitement and joy in the large group that began the class with me, and several members of that church became dear friends of mine, to this day. And each month, although nothing had been said about me being paid for teaching the Old Testament at his church, Pastor Mac gave me a check for the work I was doing.

Near the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is telling Israel that when God gave them His law at Mount Sinai, He gave them all they needed in order to live a righteous life and meet God in peace. The night we read this in our Old Testament class, I pointed out that Paul those words from Moses in Romans 10:6-8, when he told the saints that when they received the Spirit of Christ, they had received everything they needed to serve God acceptably and be saved in the end. Pastor Mac was highly displeased with me for pointing out that Romans 10:9-10 was not written as a formula for “getting sinners saved” but as a reminder to the “brethren” (Rom. 10:1) that, in Christ, we have all we need to live a holy life and be saved in the end. Pastor Mac had used those verses many times on his radio program and church services to “get sinners saved”, and what I taught about those verses made it obvious that he had been misapplying them all along.

Pastor Mac asked me to come to his office the following Saturday morning, and during that lengthy meeting, he angrily denounced what I had taught his congregation about Romans 10:9-10. I tried again to explain what both Moses and Paul were really saying to God's people, but he would have nothing of it. His assistant pastor, who was there, summed it up by saying, “If we teach that [what I had explained to them], we will dwindle down to 25 members!” And then he added this remarkable statement: “That may be ‘respect of persons’, but if it is, so be it!”

But it was the statement Pastor Mac made, at some point in the conversation, that kept echoing in my mind after I left. He said to me, “You're just a hireling! You can come make all these people confused, and then leave, and I am left to straighten it all out.” As I drove home, those words stood out to me, and within myself, I argued against them. Yes, checks were given to me, but I had never said the first word to Pastor Mac about being paid for teaching the class. That's when Jesus spoke and let me know that he agreed with Pastor Mac, and he sternly gave me this commandment: “Don't you EVER

teach my gospel for filthy lucre again!” It was frightening. If Jesus agreed with Pastor Mac about me being a hireling, then Pastor Mac’s assessment of me was right, and I had no choice but to repent.

In a human court, no jury would have convicted me of being a hireling, for I had never contracted with Pastor Mac for a job, nor even mentioned the subject of money. But Jesus is a perfect judge of “the thoughts and intents of the heart”, and when he declares to us what our real motives and intents are, he is never wrong. Like it or not, I had to confess that, even if I did not realize it, I had been teaching for the money. And since that was true (I hated to see this about myself), then it also had to be true that if brother Mac had not paid me, I would have found an excuse to stop teaching the Old Testament at his church. If anyone but Jesus had told me those things about myself, I would never have believed it.

But Jesus did tell me those things, and his harsh command for me never to teach his gospel for money again frightened me so much that, to this day, I have not taken any more money for teaching a Bible class. When, after that experience, I taught the Old Testament at the community college, I asked that the school donate the money I would have been paid to a charity instead, and the administration kindly assented to that request.

The Relationship Must Come First

If a servant of Christ receives money from someone before God creates a shepherd/sheep relationship between the pastor and that person, trouble usually follows. That is why I accept no money from any source outside the group of saints that meets in my home, and a very few others. They are the ones God has sent to me, and in Christ, we share a deep, personal bond.

When I was a young minister, Jesus gave me another weighty commandment which I have endeavored to keep. In his inimitable way, gentle but not in the least weak, Jesus commanded me, “**Neither expect nor desire any big thing; but make your work perfect.**” I do not believe that Jesus invented that commandment for me; I believe he gives that commandment to every one of his pastors, for there can be no pastor/flock relationship between one pastor and a congregation of thousands. In big churches, there is no requirement of a personal relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Such churches are institutions, run more like businesses than close-knit families in that they accept money from virtually any source. The institution demands money, and it expects its ministers to bring the money in, even if they do not so much as know the names of the people making the donations, just as pimps expect the harlots who work for them to bring in whatever money they can get. Harlots know, just as hired ministers know, that unsavory consequences will follow a failure to do so.

Of course, if pastors follow my example and become pastors only to those with whom God creates that special, spiritual, life-long relationship, their congregations will not be very large, for no man can have that profound, heavenly, pastoral connection with

a multitude of people. But pastors having small flocks and meeting in private settings is the way God intended local bodies of believers to function. It certainly is the way that we find the body of Christ functioning in the book of Acts and beyond, and for good reason. It is impossible for any pastor to personally know and to nurture each soul in a multitude of people. Evangelists and others, such as those sent to heal the sick, can deal with large numbers of people without knowing them personally, but not a pastor. A true pastor is somewhat like God, who is “a very present help in time of trouble.” No appointment is needed with either God or a true pastor.

Richard’s Example: A Determined Heart

The Lord once told me to offer a money-back guarantee to everyone who contributed to my work. If for any reason, he told me, any person decided that they no longer wanted to be a part of my flock, I was to offer him a refund of what he had donated.⁶ Jesus does not want anyone’s money who regrets having given it, and neither do his faithful servants.

As it turned out, there have been many more people whose money I refused to begin with. Some of them assumed that I would take their money, even though they were living in sin, and they were stunned when they found out they were wrong. Others became angry and acted as though I had mistreated and misunderstood them when I refused their tithes. All of them had the option of repenting and making their tithes and offerings acceptable to Jesus, and thankfully, a few, like “Richard”, did.

Richard was a young man who had fallen away from Christ, but after some years in sin, he felt the conviction of God and wanted to repent and live a godly life again. When he visited us from his home on the west coast, I was very happy to see his restored zeal for righteousness. However, when he offered to start paying his tithes and offerings again, I turned him down. Knowing that he had wrestled in the past with the love of money, I told him to put his tithes and offerings in a savings account and watch it grow for a year. I wanted him to see God’s money multiply, to have control over it, and to have time to think about all the worldly things he could spend it on. If after a year, he was still determined to serve God and pay his tithes and offerings, then we both would know that he had overcome that fault, and I would accept his tithes and offerings. We stayed in touch, and at the end of that year, he showed up at my house with a check (for more than

⁶ For legal reasons, there had to be some conditions. We were still operating as a government-recognized charitable organization at that time, and the people were still using their contributions as a tax deduction. Obviously, I could not return money that people had already used as a deduction on their tax forms. So, the money I could return was limited to that current year’s contributions.

Not long ago, in one especially egregious case of wickedness, I made an exception. I was so appalled at what the brother had done that I expelled him from this assembly and told my secretary to find out how much tithes and offerings he had *ever* brought to me. The total was over \$30,000. And then, instead of sending him the money, as I normally would do, I decided to use it to pay for the tens of thousands of dollars in damages that his sin had cost innocent people, including restoring his little boy’s college fund account, which he had plundered to satisfy his own foolish lusts.

\$22,000!), and he was just as determined to serve God with all his heart as he had been the year before. From that time, he has walked uprightly before the Lord without wavering, and God has richly blessed him.

So, there are some success stories. But refusing people's money does not usually work out so well because the people whose money Jesus refuses usually are in such bad spiritual condition that they do not respond in a godly manner, as Richard did. And it does not matter whether the pastor who refuses the money is harsh or kind when he refuses it. It is the refusal of the money, not *the way* it is refused, that exposes the sin and forces the sinner to deal with it. He can face up to it, as Richard did, and overcome it, or he can deny it and attack God's servant, as the woman in the following story shows.

Lisa's Example: "Every Kind of Evil"

Jesus said that we are blessed when, because of our obedience to him, people begin to speak every kind of evil against us:

Matthew 5

10. Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11. Blessed are you, **when people revile and persecute you, and say every kind of evil against you falsely, for my sake.**
12. Rejoice, and be glad! Your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

By experience, I can tell you that it is very difficult to "rejoice, and be glad" as if you are being blessed when this happens to you. It feels more as if your heart is being torn out. Jesus remembers how it felt while here among us, being himself "despised and rejected of men" (Isa. 53:3), and he knows how much we need his strength to deal with the abuse and hatred of wicked men. With his exhortation for us to remember the "great" eternal reward which awaits us, he was providing us with a counterbalance to the cruelties that are heaped on those who live a righteous life. The following is an example, from my own experience, of the kind of public abuse that Jesus was laboring to prepare us to overcome.

Sister "Betty" once made a trip to visit and comfort "Lisa", the daughter of an old saint who had died earlier that year. Betty's grown daughter went with her, and they also took my teenage daughter and a friend of hers. During their visit, when Lisa and Betty were alone, Lisa excitedly told Betty she wanted to show her something, and then pulled from a shelf a folder containing some recent family photographs. What she showed Betty were pictures of Lisa's oldest daughter, *taken by Lisa herself*, which could only be described as pornographic. She was not in the least ashamed of having taken such wretched pictures; on the contrary, Lisa enjoyed showing them off. Betty was stunned, and when Lisa started out of the room to show the pictures to the young people who had

come with Betty, Betty tried to stop her. Lisa just laughed, and went out to share the pictures with them, which she did.

They made it through the rest of the visit, and when they got into the car to return home, Lisa came out into her front yard to see them off. As Betty backed out of the driveway, to everyone's surprise, Lisa suddenly whirled around to face the house and pulled up her dress, exposing her utter nakedness to them. They turned their heads, and Betty drove away, speechless. We all knew that Lisa was not a believer - I had known her since I was born - but she had never before acted that way around us. Perhaps her saintly mother had been a restraining influence on her while she lived.

When my daughter returned from the trip that evening, she told me what had happened. She had thought she was making a trip to visit friends who were grieving, and she was sick at heart over having such filthiness foisted upon her. She was so disgusted and hurt by the experience that she did not want the check for twenty-five dollars that Lisa had given her to spend while at college, and she asked me what she should do with it. My advice was for her just to throw away the check and try to forget about the whole episode, and that is what she did. I thought that was the end of the matter, and in the weeks following, I actually forgot about it.

Apparently, however, Jesus was not satisfied with my plan to sweep it all under the rug.

About a month later, I was working late in my office when the phone rang. It was Lisa. She was calling to ask if my daughter had forgotten about the check she had given her, for it had not cleared the bank. I was completely caught off guard. I had not considered that if Lisa saw her bank statement, she would realize that her check had not been cashed.

Assuming that Lisa would be humiliated if she found out that I knew what she had done, and not wanting to embarrass her, I struggled to come up with some excuse other than the real one for my daughter not depositing the check. I managed to gather my wits enough to tell her that my daughter was grateful for the offer but that she really did not need the money, and that she felt bad about taking money from her when she didn't need it. Lisa would not hear of that; she insisted that my daughter take her money. But knowing that my daughter would not, I reiterated that my daughter just could not in good conscience take money she did not need.

Finally convinced that my daughter would not take the money, Lisa then forced me into the position that, in retrospect, I think Jesus wanted me to occupy all along; namely, the position of having to make "righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24), as every servant of Christ ought to do (Eph. 5:11), and to partake of his sufferings for doing so (Jn. 7:7). Lisa forced me into that position by saying that, since my daughter would not take the money, she would donate the twenty-five dollars to my ministry instead! Again, I was completely taken off guard. There was no way on earth that I could take her money when my daughter's wounded heart would not let her take it (not that I would have taken it

anyway, under the circumstances). What kind of testimony would that be to Lisa, and what kind of comfort would that be to my daughter? But how could I turn Lisa down without broaching the subject of her disgraceful behavior?

The only reason for turning her money down that I could think of at that moment was that God had blessed us so much that we didn't need the money, either. But that answer didn't work at all. Lisa insisted that I take the twenty-five dollars. That is when I knew that there was no way out and that I had to let her know why I would not take her money.

God is my witness, and so is Betty's daughter, who had walked into in my office that evening and heard me talking to Lisa, that I spoke as gently as I possibly could. There was nothing in me that wanted to embarrass or hurt Lisa. I just knew that she was going to be humiliated and begin to beg for forgiveness, and I was ready, even eager, to forgive her if she asked me to. So, I very humbly explained to Lisa that in the way of holiness, a servant of God cannot accept money from someone who did such filthy things as she had done.

I waited an awkward moment for the expected apology, eager to get this behind us. Instead of that, to my utter surprise, she burst out with a tearful tirade, saying that what she had done was not filthy, that I did not know her heart. She then said that she really wanted to get right with God and didn't understand why it didn't happen, and that I was throwing her away just as I had thrown others away, and a few other such things. I was astonished. Nothing could have prepared me for this. She had done all the wrong that had been done, and yet, she was now making me out to be the bad guy, while playing the role of an innocent victim!

I don't believe it is possible for anyone to try harder to avoid bringing up the sin of another. I would have just put it aside and let the relationship continue as it was. But in response to my earnest effort to make it easy on her, once I had to speak, I was condemned as a self-righteous, spiritual bully, throwing her away because she wasn't holy enough for me. As I said, it does not matter whether God's servant thunders at a sinner or weeps with him, it is merely the turning down of the money that forces the transgressor either to deal with his sin or to attack.

Since that night, instead of confessing and repenting, Lisa has slandered me at every opportunity. Ten years after Lisa called me that night in my office, she got in touch with a reporter for our local newspaper and told her that, for no reason, *I* had called *her*, told her she was evil, and severed all ties with her and all my earthly family. Not one word of what Lisa told the reporter was true, but she must have sounded convincing. The editor of the newspaper decided to print that slander on the front page of the paper, in an article filled with other slanderous accusations *made by Christian ministers!* They claimed that I try to break up marriages and that I teach that the only way anyone can escape eternal damnation is to move to North Carolina! And that is not all. Within a few days of that front-page article, another Christian minister, a popular local one, denounced me in his

weekly newspaper column for teaching that the only people that God has on the earth are those who gather in my home for prayer meetings! I had never even thought such a thing, much less taught it, but those cruel and false accusations are now a permanent part of the public record, for all the world to see. When Jesus said that the ungodly would say “every kind of evil” against those who truly love and obey him, he meant it!

I can believe that Cain killed Abel after God refused to accept Cain and his offering. And if their tragic story were to be published today, some newspapers would no doubt depict Abel as a self-righteous troublemaker who got what he deserved at the hands of his heartbroken, misunderstood brother. In a sermon many years ago, my pastor said this about slander, “You can murder someone without a gun. Slander is a murderous spirit.” He cautioned us that if we, with slander, kill a person’s influence, we have killed that person in a very real way, for we have brought an end to the relationship he once had with those around him.

It was with good reason that Jesus warned us to weigh the cost of obeying the will of God and of maintaining His standard of holiness. Many in this world hate obedient children of God with murderous hatred because godly living sheds an unfavorable light on their lives. That murderous hatred can be expressed in various ways, but it is always painful. So, if you have a mind to serve the Lord, you should take Jesus’ warning very seriously, and do as Peter told the saints in his time to do: “Gird up the loins of your mind”, and prepare your heart for the onslaught.

If you do not know that slander and persecution come against those who surrender themselves to the will of God, then you, yourself, have not yet surrendered. Spiritual warfare is warfare of the most vicious kind, and it can become very ugly, and every person who does the will of God learns by experience how true that statement is. Am I right, Paul? “Yes. All who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Tim. 3:12). The false accusations against me which I mentioned above are not at all the most cruel that I and my family have endured, and I expect more of such slander in the future if we are faithful to Christ. My intention is only to live such a life before God that any future accusations against me will be as “false, and for [his] name’s sake” as the previous ones have been.

Of course, there is nothing I can do about people’s reactions to my obedience to Christ, whether favorable or not. What others do is their business. My business is simply to do the will of Him who took me from the trash can of sin and made me His servant. He created me out of nothing to serve Him, and my allegiance is solely to Him.

LESSON 4: TWO EVILS

There are two principle evils which prevent people from paying their tithes and offerings. Of course, various excuses for disobedience are offered, but in reality, these two evils consistently stand out as causes for failure to pay God His tithes and offerings: covetousness and rebelliousness.

The First Evil: Covetousness

One of the unsung benefits of God's tithe and offering system is that it works against the flesh's natural tendency to be greedy. It disciplines God's children to be like God, who is greedy of nothing and gives liberally to all. It trains us to think of others before ourselves by requiring us to think of God's ministers first. But covetous people cannot think beyond the things they want for themselves. They simply do not want to part with any money they get their hands on. Because of covetousness, they have difficulty admitting that the tithes and offerings they hold in their hands do not belong to them. Instead of being thankful for the many earthly blessings they have, they envision the many other earthly things they could have if they keep God's money for themselves. How foolish they are! Some people tell themselves they earn too much money to render to God His tithes and offerings, while others tell themselves they don't earn enough. Neither group is telling the truth. Nobody earns too little or too much money to do the will of God.

Some years ago, one of the richest men in our city was attracted to one of the sisters in our congregation. Being a "mover and shaker" in the community, as the saying goes, he was used to being admired everywhere he went. Whenever he entered into our little home prayer meeting, he strode in with an air about him that said very loudly, "It's going to be okay, now, everyone. I am here." He had no awareness of how much of an honor it was for him, a sinner, to be in the presence of God's people, even if they were few and relatively poor in this world's goods.

After several months of patiently enduring his condescending attitude toward my little flock and me, it became obvious that he needed help in overcoming his pride. So, one evening after he entered into our prayer meeting with his usual air of superiority, after some singing, I talked to him about it, in front of the whole congregation, explaining to him that neither God nor we needed him or his money, but that he needed God and us. It was a blunt but loving and necessary lecture for that proud, rich man. In a private conversation, I also let him know that the standard of holiness which Jesus had given to us was not going to be lowered for him and that God would not sanction a marriage to our sister unless he repented of his sins and received the holy Spirit.

It worked. When he was convinced that I was not going to alter God's standard of holiness to accommodate him, he began to seek the Lord in earnest. He even told someone that my open rebuke was one of the best things that had ever happened to him. Not long afterward, Jesus baptized him with the Spirit and gave him the sister he wanted to marry. Unfortunately, within a year or so, an international incident took place which he perceived as a threat to his income. Instead of trusting God, he gave his whole mind and soul again to his business, to secure its continued success. His budding relationship with God, and with his wife, withered as he returned to his old ways and thoughts.

One of his thoughts, which he never completely surrendered to Christ, was that he earned too much money to render God's tithes and offerings to me. What would I, a

relatively poor and socially insignificant preacher, do with all that money, anyway? The wife that Jesus had given him was deeply concerned about the change in his attitude and behavior, and she meekly asked him one evening if he planned to fulfill his promise (made to her before they married) that he would render his tithes to God. He responded bluntly that he would never put his money where he had no control over how it was spent. And since by that time in our relationship, he knew that he would never control me, she understood his meaning.

God had given this rich man his heart's desire. He had washed him from his sins, blessed him with the promise of eternal life, and given him a good and faithful wife, and a sweet family in Christ, but the rich man "returned, again, to his vomit" and was consumed, again, with the love of money. He never once paid his tithes and offerings as he should have, which was an accurate reflection of his poor relationship with God, and with the body of believers into which Jesus had put him, and with me. It was a sad time for us all.

Years passed, and his disappointed wife struggled to keep her joy. She was living with a man who had drifted away from the path of righteousness and had begun again to see himself as superior to the congregation to which Christ had joined him. He was nearing the point of permanent departure when he boasted to his wife that, now that he was one of us, he would show us how to really live. She knew what he meant; he would show us how to live *with* a lot of money instead of having to live with just a little. He was consumed again with self-importance, and he reveled not in Christ but in his social status and the admiration of men, as much or more than he did before he came to the Lord. In the end, having "lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation", he went his own way. Such is the eventual end of many who think they earn too much money to bring God His tithes and offerings.

On the other extreme was a very poor brother, "Cory", who had learned the truth about tithes and offerings as a young man, but he thought he earned *too little* to bring them. After attending our prayer meetings for a while, being convicted in his own conscience, Cory told me he planned to start bringing his tithes and offerings as soon as he "got some things straightened out." Over the course of a few months, he repeatedly made that unsolicited promise, but the Lord was displeased with that. I felt the Lord's "hot displeasure" when He spoke to me and said, "You [meaning all of us humans] do not get to decide when you will start obeying me." He then told me to say nothing to Cory about his tithes until the day he brought them to me and that when he brought them, I was to refuse his money and then repeat to Cory the words that God had spoken to me. So, I waited.

Over the next few months, Cory reiterated his promise, once or twice, that he would start paying his tithes as soon as he got some other things paid. I would say ok, give him a hug, and wait. Finally, after a Sunday morning meeting, Cory walked up to me and handed me a check. I looked at it but then told him something close to this, "I'm sorry,

Brother Cory, but God won't let me take it. We don't get to choose when we will start obeying God. We have to obey God when He speaks to us, not when we think we can fit it into our schedule." Brother Cory, whom we all loved, was stunned and hurt. To deliver that message from Christ to him was not a pleasant duty. But I am not my own; I have been purchased, and I could do nothing but tell Brother Cory exactly what my Master commanded me to tell him. Cory stopped attending our meetings after that, and we didn't see him again for over a decade. When we did see him, he was still struggling financially, his life full of trouble, and by every indication, he still was not paying his tithes and offerings.

But there are also stories of rich and poor men who proved to be wise! For one example, there is the story of "Bob", a man who was barely making ends meet, even though both he and his wife had good jobs. Then, his wife abandoned him, and he was left with all the bills, including the mortgage and, now, child support payments for their son. That's when I met Bob.

When this broken man learned the truth about tithes and offerings, he told me one evening that it was mathematically impossible for him to keep his home and pay tithes and offerings. The numbers just did not add up. He asked me what I would do, and I told him, "I would have never gotten myself in that position to start with. I would pay God His tithes and offerings before I bought my food."

Something about that comment sparked faith in Bob, and he made up his mind to bring God what was His, regardless of the consequences. Beginning with his next paycheck, Bob brought God His tithes and offerings first, before he paid any of his bills. But to his amazement, he was able to pay his bills, and from that day, he has never missed a payment on anything, and God has blessed him with a business that has grown beyond all his expectations. To this day, no matter how much or how little his business brings in, God is still first on Bob's list. He proved to be a wise man when he was poor and in distress, and he did not forget God when God blessed him with prosperity.

"Remember the Tithe"

As I write these things, I am reminded of an incident that happened in 1976, when I was a seminary student, earning money during the summer by painting houses. In a run-down section of my hometown called "Flint Hill", there lived a poverty-stricken woman who needed her front porch painted. She really needed her whole house painted, but being unable to afford that, she asked me how much I would charge to paint her front porch. Seeing her need, I gave her a price of ten dollars. Surprised that she could afford to have her porch painted, she agreed to hire me, and I was soon at work.

I thought the job would take one day, but at sundown, just enough work remained to require me to return. When I knocked on her door to tell her I didn't finish and would have to come back, she unexpectedly gave me nine of the ten dollars she owed, promising to give me the other dollar when I finished in the morning.

That night, the Lord put it on my heart to surprise the poor woman when I went back. He told me that when she handed me the one dollar, I was not to take it, but to return the nine she had already given me. The job would be done for free! In the morning, knowing how happy that poor old soul was going to be, I went to work very excited. What I did not know was that the Lord planned a surprise for me, not her.

Before noon, I finished the job, hurriedly cleaned up, and packed my tools in the trunk of my old car. Then, with the nine dollars in my hand and a smile on my face, I walked up to the screen door and knocked. Nothing happened. I called her name. "I'm finished!" She called back from inside her house, "OK. Thank you." She and I both knew that she was refusing to bring my one dollar to the door.

I stood there, unsure of what to do. The Lord had not told me the woman would do this. I fingered the nine dollars. If she would only come to the door and give me the one-tenth of the price that was mine, I was ready and eager to give her all the money. But she just sat in her kitchen, half-hidden behind the doorway, clinging to that one dollar, when I was standing at her door, holding the nine dollars in my hand, wanting so much to put them into hers!

There was nothing I could do. It was in her hands to make the blessing happen or to keep the dollar and congratulate herself for getting her porch painted for nine dollars instead of ten. My heart was so heavy as I returned to my car and drove away. I can still feel that sadness for her, after all these years.

But as I drove away from her house, I got my surprise. The Lord suddenly gave me a vision of multitudes of His people who are refusing to answer His call, clinging to the one-tenth, refusing to bring it to Him, when He is standing at their door, wanting so much to surprise them with a blessing. Then, in a very soft, but serious, tone, He said to me, "Remember the tithe." It was, in substance, the same warning God gave to ancient Israel after He had commanded them to bring their tithes to the Levites:

Deuteronomy 12

19. Take heed to yourself, that you forsake not the Levite as long as you live upon the earth.

God Is Good

When God sent Moses to Egypt, to bring His people out to meet with Him at Mount Sinai, neither he nor the Israelites knew God well enough to know what to expect from Him. At Moses and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh, they told the Egyptian king that God might strike the Israelites with a plague or some other disaster if they did not go out to worship Him (Ex. 5:3):

Exodus 5

3. We will go, please, three days' journey out into the wilderness and make sacrifice to Jehovah our God, lest he fall upon us with a pestilence, or with a sword.

Moses and the Israelites also did not know how God would require them to worship, including what He would demand they offer in sacrifice to Him. The gods of the Gentiles, including Egypt's gods, were oppressive in their demands of people, even to the point of demanding that they sacrifice their children, and Moses did not know if Jehovah would do the same. (After all, had not Jehovah once commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, even if, at the last moment, He stopped Abraham from doing so? - Gen. 22). So, Moses would not agree to Pharaoh's proposal that the men of Israel go meet with God without their children (Ex 10:8-11). Then, after two plagues from God struck Egypt, Pharaoh agreed to let the children go, but not the Israelites' flocks and herds (Ex. 10:24). Moses rejected this proposal as well:

Exodus 10

24. Pharaoh called Moses and said, "Go, serve Jehovah, and your little ones may go with you. Only your flocks and your herds will remain here.
25. But Moses said, "You must give us sacrifices and offerings, that we may offer them to Jehovah our God.
26. Our cattle must go with us. Not a hoof will be left behind, for we must use them to serve Jehovah our God, and we will not know how to serve Jehovah until we get there.

Of course, after God sent the last of His devastating plagues upon Egypt, mighty Pharaoh did more than consent to Moses' request; he begged the Israelites to leave his country (Ex. 12:31-32).

When the Israelites approached the base of fiery, thunderous Mount Sinai, "the mountain of God", they were terrified at God's mighty presence. Moses himself trembled at the sight (Heb. 12:21). Then, when the climactic moment arrived, and the Almighty gave Moses His commandments for Israel, the Israelites must have been astonished at how little God demanded of them. They had brought with them all that they possessed, wondering what He would demand, but, in sum, all that God demanded of Israel was that they should love Him and love one another (Mt. 22:35-40). For Himself (actually, for His ministers), all that God demanded was a mere tenth, not of all they owned but only of their "increase", and a few offerings. Not many people know the Old Testament well enough to realize that God's Old Testament people went astray, not because God was so heavy-handed and cruel but because He required so little of them! Israel simply did not have the faith to believe that what God demanded of them was all there was to it; so, they added to God's commandments, and the nation fell into ruin. In short, they could not believe that God is as good as He is.

It is important to note that Moses was humbly prepared to surrender to God everything he and the Israelites possessed. The Israelites had brought all they owned with them out of Egypt, and it was all waiting at the base of Mount Sinai for God to do

with as He would. But God only demanded what was good for them to bring Him, which was only enough for His ministers to prosper, for their sakes. Moses' love for God was expressed in his willingness to give all, and God's love was expressed in His willingness to demand just a little.

Strange as it sounds, the fundamental reason that Israel failed in her walk of faith was that she was more religious than God was. The "one place" of worship that He required was not enough to satisfy the Israelites. One God, as it turned out, was not enough, either. His one altar and His few, simple ceremonies were not enough to satisfy Israel's superstitious fears. While it is true that the greatest men and women of faith who ever walked the earth were from Israel, the nation as a whole never believed that God was as good as Moses' law revealed Him to be.

God is good. He could have justly required of His people half of all they owned, or more, and even that would have been merciful of Him, for even that much would have been less than He deserves. God is the Creator of the universe; everything is His. He held their very breath in His hands, and yet, He demanded that Israel honor Him with just a tithe of their increase, and if they had no increase, they owed Him nothing at all, and He would still love and protect them!

The goodness of God can hardly be expressed or appreciated. The very command to bring to the Lord a tithe of our increase carries with it an implied promise that He will give us an increase from which to tithe! And since everything in creation already belongs to the Creator, when He tells us that the one tenth is His, that means He is freely giving us the nine tenths. And then, if we obey Him by returning His one tenth, He even blesses us for doing that. He doesn't need for us to bring our tithes to Him; He could take them by force. But in love for us, with tithes and offerings, He has made a way for us to bring Him something as if He didn't already have it, so that He could have a reason to bless us even more! God is very great in goodness and love.

In spite of God's great generosity, however, the heart of the covetous will always feel that a tenth is too much, or they will deny that tithing is a part of the New Testament at all. It is greed, not a lack of scriptural evidence, which motivates many modern believers to conclude that tithes and offerings are not a part of the New Testament, in spite of the fact that Jesus is "a high priest forever, like Melchizedek."

The Second Evil: Rebelliousness

The second major spiritual fault that prevents people from rendering to God His tithes and offerings is a rebellious, government-despising spirit. The act of bringing tithes and offerings to a man of God is an acknowledgement of the government God has ordained among His people; it is earthly submission to heavenly authority. To an unruly heart, such a humble act is repugnant. It is much easier for a proud, self-willed man to render tithes to an institution, especially if he is recognized for doing it, rather than to humble himself to bring them to a fellow-creature.

People are respected by other people for giving money to religious organizations, but (as we have learned by experience) those who obey God and bring His tithes to God's servants instead are subject to scorn and suspicion. Nevertheless, God's children are commanded to render their tithes only to those who are, "over them in the Lord"; that is, to men who "rule" among the saints (1Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). In God's kingdom, men rule by the same authority by which Melchizedek and Christ were ordained *by God's choice*, not by ecclesiastical appointment. What the proud have difficulty admitting is that God has chosen another to rule instead of them. It is distasteful to rebellious people to confess, by bringing their tithes and offerings to a man of God, "You are over me in the Lord."

Confession that there are rulers among God's people is one of the basics of true faith. There is order in Creation, levels of authority in both the invisible and visible spheres. (What does the fact that there are angels *and* archangels in heaven tell us, except that some angels occupy higher positions than others?) And with those levels of authority comes an anointing to make judgments, to teach, and to give commandments. Those in Christ whose gift it is to rule (Rom. 12:8) are worthy of God's tithes and offerings because God has anointed them, and the rendering of tithes is an acknowledgment of that anointing and their authority.

When Abraham brought to Melchizedek the tithe of all that he had recovered from the slaughter of the kings (Gen. 14), Abraham was making a confession that Melchizedek was higher up on the spiritual ladder than he. The author of Hebrews points this out by reminding his readers that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, not vice versa, and that "without all contradiction, the less is blessed by the greater" (Heb. 7:7). My friends, if you are bringing your tithes and offerings to a man who is not able to bless you, then you are bringing them to the wrong person; you are not bringing them to someone who is "greater" than you in spirit, as Abraham did. Be wise. If a man is not able to bless you with something from God, why would you even consider giving him God's tithes and offerings? Abraham would not have done that; he was submissive to the man who was over him in the Lord, not to the closest available man with the title of "priest".

Bringing God's tithes and offerings to a man who is not of God is a form of rebellion against God, and against the man He has put in authority to receive them. To pay tithes to the wrong man is, in effect, not to pay them at all. Instead of finding yourself guilty of rebelling in ignorance against the government of God, you should store up your tithes and offerings until you find a man close enough to God to be able to "bless you in the name of the Lord." Why would you do anything else with God's money? It makes no sense whatsoever to give God's money to a man whose judgments you doubt, whose teaching you reject, and whose commandments you will not obey. Why would you hand over God's tithes and offerings to a man whose doctrine and whose judgment you do not believe to be authoritative in Christ? That was the attitude of "Randy", who

was altogether willing to pay his tithes and offerings if he could just find the man to whom God wanted him to pay them.

Looking for a Home

Years before I met “Randy”, the Spirit had led him to store up his tithes and offerings. He was neither covetous nor rebellious; on the contrary, everyone who knew Randy knew him to be very generous and far from rebellious. His employer considered him to be one of the best employees in the company, willing to follow their directions and take on any task given to him. But his chief goal in life was to find a spiritual home, and the man to whom God wanted him to bring His tithes and offerings. Randy visited many churches in the community, and everywhere he went, he was liked. A few criticized Randy for “church hopping”, but he just could not find that special place God had prepared for him as his spiritual home. That “still, small voice” kept telling Randy that he had not yet found his pastor and spiritual family.

After some years of saving his tithes and offerings, it happened that Randy was blessed by something he saw on a religious television program, and thinking that he had found the person whom God had chosen to receive his tithes and offerings, he mailed them to that televangelist. As soon as he had done so, however, he knew in his spirit that he had made a mistake. So, he began storing them up again.

A few years later, a mutual friend met Randy and suggested that he come visit me, which he did. After that initial meeting in my home, Randy and I spent much time praying and studying the Bible together. I knew almost nothing about his personal life at the time, but it was obvious to me that Randy had spent many days and nights searching the Scriptures and striving to determine the will of God for his life. His hunger for the knowledge of God was enormous. He began attending our prayer meetings and visited my home often, always full of questions.

Randy’s testimony of his lonely search for God still ranks as one of the most moving that I have ever heard. He told it to me privately one day in my home. He told me of the miserable months of desperation after his wife told him she didn’t love him any more. He spoke of whole nights spent driving along lonely country roads, weeping until he had no more tears to weep. Somehow, although he had not been reared in a godly home, he came to the conclusion that God, and God alone, could help him, and a burning desire to know Him soon consumed his grief and replaced it with an overwhelming “hunger and thirst for righteousness”. When he came to the point in his story where he met my friend, then me, and then the people in my home prayer meetings, the relief that he had felt at that time was so great that in re-telling the story, he experienced it anew, and his whole countenance changed. He had searched so hard for God that, at times, though he was a very level-headed person, Randy wondered if he was losing his mind, pursuing something that didn’t even really exist. The power of the peace Randy felt, and the joy and rest it brought him to find his home, was so great that it moved us both, deeply, as we

stood there in my kitchen. It convinced me that God had loved Randy so much that He kept Randy dissatisfied with every place he went until he found the one spiritual home that was prepared for him.

Then, all of a sudden, Randy decided to stop attending our meetings. For several months, he stayed to himself, praying and seeking the Lord. He had begun to feel things he had never felt, and he wanted to make sure, this time, that what he was feeling was really from God and not something that would pass. Occasionally, Randy would drop by the house to visit, and my wife and I, and our children, were always happy to see him. But he said that he just wanted some time alone with God to make sure of what was happening. I knew Jesus would take care of him, and reassure him that he had found his home, and Jesus did.

The new thing which Randy was feeling was the holy bond of fellowship which only Jesus can create, the bond of a pastor and one of God's sheep. Randy had found his home, and for children of God who have never known anything but the religious system of Christianity, that can be an overwhelming experience. Randy was soon comfortably at home with us, and he became a man whom I loved and respected in the Lord. Even though during his long, lonely search for his place in God's kingdom, some accused Randy of being rebellious because he could not bring himself to join any of the many churches he visited, Jesus knew, and Randy knew, what he was really looking for was the pastor to whom he was supposed to submit both himself and God's money, and he did that, gladly. He had been looking for his spiritual home. And once Randy found it, he found the deep peace that is known only to those who, like him, find their place in God's kingdom.

God and Caesar

Peter said that God "knows how to reserve the unjust for the day of judgment to be punished, but chiefly those who despise government" (2Pet. 2:9-10). This means that children of God who despise the government which God has instituted in the body of Christ will be the first to receive damnation, for "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1Pet. 4:17). Having been washed from sins by the blood of Christ, believers are the most blessed of all people; still, Peter's warning is that those who rebel against God by rebelling against those whom He anoints to govern are, of all people, most deserving of damnation.

In Matthew 21:21, Jesus told God's people to render to Caesar, through his representatives, the things that are Caesar's (taxes) and to God, through His representatives, the things that are God's (tithes and offerings). There has never been an earthly government so foolish that it tolerated people's refusal to pay their taxes. Such people are societal leaches; they are freeloaders, dumping their own civic duty on their fellow-citizens. Every government understands that citizens who withhold their taxes are enemies from within; they are undermining the very government that is protecting them,

using finances, instead of military power, to bring it down. No society on earth can hold together without government, and no government can continue without receiving taxes from its citizens. Likewise, those in the body of Christ who refuse to pay tithes and offerings make themselves the enemies of God's kingdom and government. If earthly governments are wise enough to recognize that rebellion against taxation is a threat to the security of the nation, shouldn't we be wise enough to recognize that children of God who fail to render tithes to those whom God has anointed to rule among them are a threat to the fellowship and peace of the body of Christ? They are rebellious freeloaders and leeches, enjoying the blessings that come on the whole body because of the obedience of others.

Tipping God

Some of God's children do what Jesus said he hates most (Rev. 3:14-15). They occupy a middle ground between obeying God and disobeying God. They don't have the faith to bring all of God's tithes and offerings to Him, but they are ashamed to give nothing. So, they give just enough to mollify their aching conscience and maintain appearances. But that middle ground, that lukewarm commitment to Christ, is the worst of all choices. It would be better simply to refuse to obey God and give nothing than to disguise rebellion by making a show of giving just a part of what He has commanded. Making occasional donations instead of paying God His tithes and offerings amounts to nothing more than "tipping" God, and it makes His ministers look like struggling waiters, forced to live on whatever tips people choose to give them. Some pride themselves on being bigger tippers than others, of course, but if what they bring to God is not His full tithes and offerings, then those tippers are still thieves, no matter how large a tip they leave.

When God revealed to His people that ten percent of their increase was His, along with the offerings He required, He was not negotiating a deal with them, demanding ten percent but really hoping to get them to donate something else. God's words are pure and true. He means exactly what He says, no more and no less. We humans are so used to doing business with deal-makers who don't really mean what they say that it requires faith for us to believe that God is not like them when He gives commandments.

God does not allow His ministers to receive less than what He commands His people to give. Therefore, any pastor who debases himself to accept less than what God has commanded distorts his congregation's perception of God, and their relationship with God is damaged as a result. A minister who accepts less from people than what God has commanded them to give is doing as much evil as the minister who takes more from them than what God has commanded them to give, and he will be judged accordingly. Paul said that ministers of Christ are "stewards" of the mysteries of Christ and that, as stewards, they are required to be faithful (1Cor. 4:1-2). Ministers who allow people to

give less, or more, than what pleases God are being unfaithful in the commission to guide the flock of God in righteousness.

Of the money that God brings into your hand, all that His faithful ministers will receive from you is God's portion. That tenth, and your offerings, is not too much for anyone's budget, though it will always seem to be too much to those who don't want to give it, as it will always seem not enough to ministers who would take it all. God wants you to use the "increase" that is beyond your tithes and offerings for yourself and your family, just as He wants His ministers to use your tithes and offerings for themselves and their families. The portion of your income beyond God's portion is *your* money from God. He has given it to you *for you*. He is not pleased with you wasting it or being talked out of it. If you stay close to Jesus, he will protect you from thieving ministers who would take what God has given you for yourself and your family, and He will lead you to one of His ministers instead.

Jesus wants us either to be hot or cold (Rev. 3:15). He would prefer that we either obey God and bring His servants all our tithes and offerings, or just admit to ourselves that we are rebels, and go away and leave Him alone. It is sin merely to bring to God's servant a "contribution" now and then. It is sin to bring to God's minister \$100.00 when our tithe is \$150.00. It is sin to bring God's minister a million dollars if our tithe is a million and fifty dollars.

Don't be foolish. It is not about the money; it is about a right relationship with God. If you will not bring God all His tithes and offerings, do not insult Him by "donating" a part of what you are stealing from Him. God doesn't need your pity, and He has not designed His kingdom so that His servants must live on hand-outs from stubborn, disobedient saints. Nothing is right and holy except what God says is right and holy. Nothing but doing His will is doing His will, and nothing but doing His will is acceptable to Him.

Jesus taught his disciples that if they truly loved him, they would keep his commandments (Jn. 14:15). He also taught them that they would know who else loved him by who else kept his commandments (Jn. 14:21). John, one of the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking that night, later passed that message on to others:

1John 5

3. This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

This is an unchangeable, eternal truth. Those who disobey God do not love God, and those who obey Him do love Him. Paul taught that if such genuine love for God is not our motivation, then no "good" deed will profit us, including the often-praised "good deed" of stealing God's tithes and offerings and then using that stolen money to help the poor. Without the love of God, it does us no good even if we give all we possess to the poor (1Cor. 13:3). If love for God, which is obedience to God, does not come first in the things we do, and guide us in the doing of them, then nothing we do is worth doing at all.

CHAPTER 4

A MATTER OF THE HEART

Then I heard another voice from heaven, saying,
 “Come out of her, my people, so that you do not participate in her sins,
 so that you do not receive of her plagues, for her sins are piled up to heaven,
 and God has remembered her unrighteous deeds.”

Revelation 18:4-5

“MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO.”

Paul said that Jesus had persuaded him that “there is nothing unclean of itself” (Rom. 14:14). The opposite is also true. There is nothing clean of itself, either. It is all a matter of the heart. Solomon said that the sacrifices of people who had wicked hearts were an abomination to God (Prov. 15:8). Prayer itself can be sin (Prov. 28:9). The very “thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 15:26), much less their worship of Him. It is *God’s way of doing things* that is holy and acceptable, not the mere doing of those things. So, it is not the mere paying of tithes and offerings that is holy and acceptable, but *God’s way* of paying them.

The way that most religious leaders handle tithes and offerings is unacceptable to God because their ways are both oppressive and self-serving, and it is nothing new. Even in ancient Israel, God lamented how Israel’s priests constantly pressured the people for more money:

Hosea 4

18. Her rulers shamelessly love *to cry out*, “Give!”

The pressure that ungodly prophets and priests exerted on God’s Old Testament people to give more than God wanted them to give is matched by the pressure that many Christian ministers exert on modern believers. It is a common practice today for Christian ministers to send ushers out into the congregation with their begging plates, while reminding the congregation of how much they owe to Jesus, implying that it would be sinful not to give them money -- and we all know what God will do to sinners. This practice is, in a word, extortion. In ancient Israel, idolatrous priests and false prophets also threatened with divine retribution those who refused to give them money:

Micah 3

5. Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who make my people to err, who bite *them* with their teeth, and cry out, “Be blessed!” And whoever does not give what they demand, they declare holy war against him. . . .

False teachers still wage a subtle “holy war” against God’s people by suggesting that they will lose God’s favor and blessing if they do not contribute. Nothing intimidates God’s children more than the thought of a life without God’s favor. When false teachers came to Paul’s converts in Galatia and threatened them with loss of fellowship with God unless they submitted to circumcision, it so angered Paul that in Galatians 5:12, he expressed a wish that those false teachers would be “cut off” from Christ. In other words, he prayed for their damnation. To be “cut off” was the ultimate Old Testament curse, worse than death itself because it meant being “cut off” from God and His priests, with no hope of forgiveness.

If false prophets and teachers had no supporters, they would be forced to find some other way of making a living. But false prophets and teachers have never lacked supporters because people, by nature, want to be lied to. This sounds preposterous, but it is true, and only with help from God can we understand how much humans prefer the oppressive ways of men to the generous way of God:

Jeremiah 5

29. Shall I not visit for these things? says the LORD. *I will give myself over to death*⁷ if my soul does not avenge itself on such a nation as this.
30. An appalling and disgusting thing is done in the land!
31. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule their own way. **And my people love to have it so!**

When David and other righteous people loved God’s law, they loved it because they loved the God who gave it to them. What the false prophets and covetous priests loved were the parts of the law they could use for personal gain, such as the commandments concerning tithes and offerings:

Amos 4

4. Come to Bethel [*one of Israel’s greatest places of false worship*], and transgress! At Gilgal, multiply transgression! [*They thought they were multiplying worship.*] **And bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes every three days.**
5. **And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings! For this is what you like, O children of Israel,** says the Lord GOD.

⁷ See Chapter 3 Footnote 4.

It seems impossible that people would love to be begged for their money, but when people with social stature, such as Christian ministers, make public pleas for help in rescuing the work of God on earth, it adds pressure on people to donate to such a worthy cause, and it makes them feel important when they do. The problem is that no such cause exists. God saves us; it is not the other way around. Money cannot save God's work. The Spirit of God does not use money; God's ministers do, and that is what tithes and offerings are for, to help keep God's ministers available to be used by the Spirit God for the good of His people. The gospel of God is in power (1Cor. 4:20; 1Thess. 1:5), and God's power needs nothing from man. God can work through any chosen vessel, regardless whether that vessel is rich or poor, male or female, young or old.

After watching a Christian money-raising "telethon", a beloved elder whom we called Uncle Joe once said to me, "To hear those people pleading for help to 'save their ministry', one would think that the devil was about to win, after all." The impression left by begging ministers is that the kingdom of God is about to be overwhelmed by the forces of evil because they don't have enough money. What fraud! It is not their lack of money that is the problem; it is their lack of power with God. Listen to this word of wisdom, from a sermon by my father, nearly half a century ago: "The Bible says that Jesus and Paul were both poor but that they made many rich. If we think we have to become *rich* in order to make others rich, we had better start praying." Neither Jesus nor his apostles ever made pleas for financial support to save their ministries. They trusted God to send them sheep to supply their needs as they ministered the eternal gospel that has no need.

Early in my walk the Lord, he gave me a dream in which I and other children of God were imprisoned in an old school house. In the room where I was, two elderly saints were weeping and praying. They wrung their weary old hands and cried, over and over, looking up to heaven, "We want to get out of here! Oh, to get out of this place!" Somehow, I obtained a pistol, and hiding it in my pocket, I thought, "I'll get us out of here!" The dream continued, and when the guard turned away from us, I pulled out my gun, shot him in the back of his head, and started running toward the door at the end of the hall, yelling, "Come on! Come on! You can get out now!"

But when I turned to see if those two desperate old souls were coming, I saw that they would not even step out into the hallway. They were sticking their heads out of the door of their cell, open-mouthed, and were glaring at me with looks of utter disbelief that I would really try to leave. The mixture of shock, fear, and surprise which wrinkled their faces is indescribable. They were utterly astonished that I was really leaving.

The dream came to pass just a few months later when Jesus revealed the truth to a couple of elderly saints I knew, but they would not follow him into "the liberty of the sons of God." Jesus used that dream and my experience with those two saints to teach me that it is impossible for us to know who really wants to be free by hearing what people *say* they want. He taught me that people love to be seen doing such things as

praying earnestly for “more of God” because they know that others will praise them for their public display of devotion to the Lord. Those who *seek* God are always praised, as long as they never *find* Him. Those who find Him are despised and persecuted, and it has always been that way (see Mt. 5:10-12). Those who are committed to vain religious traditions and “love to have it so” will not follow the souls who dare to really kill “the old man” and leave captivity behind. Instead, they will return to their prison cells to weep and pray aloud for “more of God”, and heap praise on one another for seeking Him.

Fornication with the World's Rulers

In this country, the rulers grant the favor of a tax deduction to those who make donations to government-recognized “charitable organizations”, which includes churches. To maintain their tax-exempt status with the government, those charitable organizations must use the donations they receive in ways specified by the government. But worldly rulers, valuable as they are in their place, have no knowledge of how money should be handled in the kingdom of God. His ways are not their ways.

As has been said, God’s tithes and offerings are to be brought to an anointed man. However, our rulers grant the favor of a tax deduction only for money given to an institution, not to an individual, and they give equal respect and benefits to all religious organizations. If our rulers were truly wise, they would not do that. They would honor only the way of true holiness. As it is, however, the way of God is something that “none of the rulers of this world have understood, for had they understood *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1Cor. 2:8).

When Jesus called us out of the government’s system of rewards for donating to a “charitable organization”, we went through a time of frustration because, as the accountants and lawyers who counseled us all agreed, tithes and offerings that are brought directly to me cannot be used as a tax deduction. We were unhappy that the government did not consider our faith as worthy of its favor as other faiths, but then Jesus, as he often does, completely reversed our thinking. If anything, he had been unhappy with us while we were still “in bed with” the government, satisfied with its favor. The rulers of this country will show equal official favor to any religion in this world because, as Jesus told his disciples, the world loves its own (Jn. 15:19). But Jesus and those who love him are not of this world (Jn. 17:16), and we should rejoice in that, not be sad about it. We should neither desire nor expect the world’s favor. When the Son of God walked among us on earth, he refused honor from men (Jn. 5:41), and he still refuses honor from men, being “the same yesterday and today, and forever.”

I am thankful I was born in this country. I pray for its leaders, and I willingly “render to Caesar” the taxes required of me by the law. I am no rebel, and no revolutionary. When I first realized that Jesus does not accept the honor of a tax deduction from the rulers of my country, it seemed sad to me because I do love this

country, even if it is destined to pass away, along with heaven and earth (Mt. 24:35). But I knew Jesus was right.

The reason that we mishandled our tithes and offerings for so long is that we did not know God well enough to know how to use them in a way that truly honored Him. Knowing Him only in part, we honored Him only in part. In speaking to me about tithes and offerings and setting us on the right path, He was revealing Himself more fully to us, not just feeding us information, and knowing Him more fully enabled us to serve Him more perfectly. So, with God's help, we matured enough in spirit to feel no more frustration at being considered unworthy of the government's favor. Jesus led us out of the world's "charitable donation" system and made us more like him. What more could we have prayed for?

And what more could the government ask for, from us? It receives much more money from us, now that we are no longer "having an affair" with it. Nobody here seeks a tax deduction for obeying God in tithes and offerings, and I pay taxes on the tithes and offerings brought to me. We have no government-approved "charitable organization" to use to avoid taxes, for we have learned to trust in Jesus alone to reward us for obeying God.

In spite of their ignorance of God, however, this country's rulers agree with Him in at least one thing concerning tithes and offerings; namely, that **tithes and offerings which God's people bring to God's ministers do not qualify as a "charitable donation"; rather, they are earned income for the ministers.** This is true. God's servants do not live on charitable donations. Tithes and offerings are compensation from God for the labor of His ministers, and as such, taxes must be paid on them. Furthermore, this earned income is the only money that a man of God has standing authority to take for his labor. Being one of His servants, and knowing that I am accountable to Him, it frightens me even to think of taking money from any other source. That is why I have made it my policy not to accept gifts or "donations" from anyone, whether in the faith or not, though I have sometimes been offered that kind of money.

Governmental favor, shown to those who operate within the bounds of what the government deems legitimate religion, is a clever trap laid by Satan for God's people, and the apostle John prophesied that the body of Christ would fall into it. In figurative language, he foretold of the saints falling from the purity of the faith and "getting into bed" with earthly governments to commit spiritual fornication:

Revelation 17

1. Then one of the seven angels who had the seven vials came and spoke to me, saying, "Come. I will show you the judgment of **the great whore** who sits upon many waters,
2. **with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication**, and by the wine of her whoredom are the inhabitants of the earth made drunk."

The religious system of Christianity is this “great whore”, and governmental favor for Christian churches is part of the “fornication with kings of the earth” of which the angel spoke. This appealing, money-saving favor is an essential element of Satan’s seduction of the saints into ungodly intercourse with the world, and it has succeeded greatly, leading to widespread neglect of God’s true ministers. The world’s official favor, especially the favor of taking away less of the people’s money, tempts the saints to look to the government, not to God, to reward them for their religious activity. But Jesus’ warning applies here:

Matthew 6

24. No one can serve two Masters; either he’ll hate the one and love the other, or he’ll be devoted to one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and Mammon.**

Whose reward do we seek for obeying God? Do we desire God’s promise of care for us in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, or do we desire a yearly tax deduction for donating to one of the government’s officially recognized religious organizations? How does the favor which worldly governments bestow for proper religious activity compare to the promises of God for the upright? We long for the day, and labor to hasten it, when God’s people come to understand His will concerning tithes and offerings and put it into practice, for when they do, God’s storehouses will be full, and Christianity’s warehouses will be empty.

Let’s examine now a few of the most familiar tactics used by ministers who belong to the “great whore” to persuade people to support her.

TACTIC #1: “TAKING UP A COLLECTION”

It is not good for one to give with half a heart or with a double mind. In time, such a giver will regret that he gave at all, and there is no reward from God for that. It is also worthless to give because one is afraid not to give, or out of a sense of guilt. Even under the Old Testament law, God accepted only voluntary sacrifices (Ex. 25:2; Lev. 1:3). Implied in God’s insistence that all offerings be voluntary is a prohibition for His priests to manipulate people into offering to God what they really did not want to offer. But that did not stop the manipulation, and it has not yet stopped. There are many crafty tactics used by Churchmen today to pressure people to give when they may not want to give, or even when they should not give. As a result, many who are persuaded to give contrary to their hearts’ desire later regret that they gave, and often they become bitter against the ministers who talked them into it.

One of Christianity’s best-known tactics for pressuring people to give is the Church ritual of “taking up a collection”. The usual routine is for the minister to solemnly remind the congregation of how much Jesus has given them, and how much they owe him, quoting a scripture or two about giving. One favorite verse of “thieves and robbers” is “God loves a cheerful giver,” for with it, the subtle threat is made that if the

congregation does not cheerfully give to that thief, God will not love them. Then, with the people appropriately softened, he sends the ushers down the aisles with collection plates, while a somber hymn or, depending on the kind of church it is, peppy praise music is played in the background. Sometimes, the ritual is repeated several times in one church service, to take up collections for different purposes. I was visiting a church once when the minister took up *seven* such collections in one Sunday morning meeting!

God's children are the most generous people on earth. That is what makes them such easy targets for covetous practices. The covetous practice of "taking up a collection" is potentially the most dangerous of them all because it has the potential of training God's children to give only when the ritual and the begging begins. In other words, it trains them not to listen to the Spirit but to give when the proper religious signal is given.

One brother, "Jim", grew up in a church where the begging ritual was a regular feature of every church service. Jim was a generous soul, but he was also shrewd. When God touched his heart and he started attending our prayer meetings, the Lord showed me that Jim had, unconsciously, come up with a clever way of dealing with the constant begging. In his lifetime in church religion, he had learned to estimate how many collections to expect at each meeting. So, he would put into the first collection plate just a part of what he really wanted to give, another part in the second plate, and so forth. I am sure there were times when Brother Jim was surprised with an extra collection that he had not anticipated, but then, there would have been other times when there were not as many collections as he expected. So, it worked out about right. I was impressed, both with Jim's sincere desire to render to God his tithes and offerings and with his ingenuity in finding a way not to be robbed in the process.

The Lord would not allow me to explain this to Jim; he wanted to teach Jim himself. He told me that if I left Jim alone, in time, Jim would be convinced that he was free to listen to the Spirit and bring to me all what God wanted him to bring. Jim had been trained from childhood to wait for the begging to begin before paying his tithes and offerings, and so, Jesus was very tender and patient with him. It took Jim about a year to be fully convinced that I was never going to beg him for money. During that year, it was sweet to watch the love and faith of Christ, which was already in Jim's heart, blossom and bear fruit. Each month, the offerings Jim brought with his tithes would increase a little, until he at last was giving exactly and only what he and Jesus wanted him to give. Jim's understanding of God was corrected, and his relationship with Him was established. **Since then, whenever Jim and his wife have tithes and offerings to bring, they put it all into one check and drop it in the basket by the door when they come into the meeting place. Then they go about their lives, happy and free.**

God is not a beggar; therefore, no minister who begs for money is faithfully representing Him. The Christian ritual of "taking up a collection" was designed by "thieves and robbers" not simply to provide God's saints with an opportunity to bring

their tithes and offerings to the Lord; a designated receptacle would suffice for that. “Taking up a collection” is a tool of oppression which sprang from the envious heart of Satan, who was crafty enough to understand that if he made the act of giving a public ceremony, he would get more money for his institution and its ministers.

A Penny for Your Thoughts

One of the most crafty and cruel tactics for increasing how much was put into the collection plate is a tactic witnessed by Brother Tim and his wife Bess, in a Christian convention they attended in Oklahoma, several years before I met them. Before the collection buckets (no mere plates for this congregation of thousands) were passed around, the nationally-known minister had the ushers to carry pennies out into the congregation to give to any person who claimed they did not have any money to donate. His explanation was that to give to his ministry was such an opportunity to receive a blessing that the minister did not want to see anyone miss their blessing by not being able to give something.

What a clever rascal! There wasn't a person in that building who could not give at least a little money if they wanted to, and he knew it. Where was his faith in God's ability to lead His people to give as *He* wanted them to? The minister's phony concern for the non-existent destitute people in the audience, people so poor they could not even give a penny to Jesus, was a thin disguise for his desire for their money.

In that auditorium, there was a giant screen on which the meeting that night was being displayed. So, ask yourself, how many people in the audience were going to raise their hands to ask for one of those pennies, in full view of their neighbors and friends, and thousands of others? And how many more were going to reach into their wallets and donate dollar bills who would not have done so if they had not been shamed into doing it? The kind of wisdom used against that congregation that day was beyond human wisdom; it was demonic. It ranks alongside the Catholic Church's selling of indulgences for sin and prayers for the dead as among the most evil of manipulative tactics yet invented by Christian ministers for pressuring people to hand their money over to them.

I said in the Introduction to this book that in the big scheme of things, the matter of tithes and offerings is a relatively small matter. But the emphasis that Christian ministers put on money, especially in making the act of giving a ritual or by teaching that donated money can reduce someone's penalty for sin, transforms this small matter into a giant one. The ritual of “taking up a collection”, no matter what form it takes, is exposed as evil wherever the true gospel is preached. Wherever ministers feed God's sheep the “unadulterated word of God” and watch over their souls with love and wisdom, it is the natural response of God's children to bring their tithes and offerings to the pastor God has sent to them. To do so is part of the law that is written by the Spirit on their hearts, and God's wiser children do not “love to have it so” when pressured by crafty ministers to

give them money. On the contrary, they are repulsed at the suggestion that what God has put in their hearts to do has to be begged for.

I am thankful that Jesus never allowed me to “take up a collection”, even during the years that I was ignorant of much that is in this book. By his example, my father taught me never to dishonor Jesus by begging for money, and then, after his death, Jesus himself told me that the tithes and offerings of my congregation were for me and my children. By the grace of God, I believed them both. I have avoided the evil tactic of “taking up a collection”, not because I am so wise, but because God gave me, first, a pastor who knew Him, and second, because He continued to help me after He took my pastor home.

A poor minister in the mountains of Virginia, where I was visiting, once delivered a sermon on ministerial beggars during his Sunday radio broadcast. He told his listeners, in no uncertain terms, that if they wanted to please God with their giving, then the very last place they should put their money was in the hand of a minister who was begging for it. The old preacher’s grammar was poor, but his counsel was rich with God’s wisdom and love. I would summarize his main point with this: If a man’s ministry depends on money, then money is that man’s god. Do not give him any of yours; it will only make his god seem greater to him.

Pay attention, and you will see that ministers who beg for money never have enough of it to satisfy their ambitions; they are a bottomless pit of greed. Their insatiable, covetous spirit prevents them from ever doing as Moses did in the wilderness, when he told God’s people that they had given enough (Ex. 36:3-6). Moses would not allow God’s people to give too much and then come up with new projects on which to spend their money; no, not even to spend it on a missionary venture to win heathen souls to Jehovah.

TACTIC #2: FAME

A most obvious and distasteful tactic used to persuade people to “cough up the cash” is to promise them earthly glory for doing so. This promise is usually fulfilled by displaying the names of donors in prominent places. The names may be engraved on a metal plate and attached to the end of a church pew, or put on a plaque and hung on a wall, or drilled into bricks and included in a walkway or wall. Donors of large amounts are sometimes honored by having their names made part of the stained-glass windows of the church, or they may even have the church itself named after them.

Then there are various “clubs” into which one may buy, clubs such as the King’s Club for donors of ten thousand or more, the Prince’s Club for a thousand, the Statesman’s Club for five hundred, and so forth. Special favors and privileges may also be given to the donors, but it is the hope of one’s name being permanently on display that is most effective.

The love of recognition, or “fame”, is, along with the love of money, a root of all evil, and religious professionals know how to dangle it before people in order to raise money.

TACTIC #3: “HURRY! HE’S COMING”

Solomon said, “He who hurries with his feet sins” (Prov. 19:2). To get God’s people to make a quick decision can cause them to ignore the caution of the Spirit and to give when it is not wise to give. A most effective tactic used to persuade believers to give quickly is to tell them that Jesus may come at any moment, and so, immediate action is required. After all, *you* wouldn’t want souls to go to hell because you failed to give, would you?

During her radio broadcast, a Christian minister on a local radio station urgently pleaded with her audience to quickly send her all the money they could send because Jesus might come that very night! What nonsense! If that foolish woman really believed that Jesus was about to rapture her and all his people up into glory, what did she plan to do with all that money? Buy gold polish for God’s throne?

The return of Jesus is still a good way off, and the Spirit will let God’s faithful children know when it is near; it will not come upon them as a surprise (1Thess. 5:2-4). But even if he was coming tonight, he would not want his people to be in a tizzy about it. When Jesus first heard that his friend Lazarus was deathly ill, he did not turn to his disciples and say, “Hurry, men! We have to get to Lazarus, quick!” Instead, he stayed two more days where he was (Jn. 11:6). Then he went and raised Lazarus from the grave. God has never been in a hurry, and has never made a hasty decision. Those who walk in the Spirit do as He does, but those who fall for the “Jesus is coming at any moment!” tactic cannot help but to sin.

TACTIC #4: MERCHANDISE

Peter prophesied of false teachers who would use gullible saints for their own profit, reducing God’s children to the status of mere merchandise, to be used up and then discarded:

2Peter 2

1. But just as there were false prophets among the people *of Israel*, so shall there be false teachers among you. . .
2. Many will follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom, the truth will be slandered.
3. And through covetousness, with insincere words, **they will make merchandise of you. . . .**

Incredibly, men using God’s children for their own glory and prosperity has become so common now that for God’s children to submit to being used by them is seen as part of a godly lifestyle, a hallmark of true devotion to Jesus! I am speaking of bake sales,

covered-dish suppers, doughnut sales, church carnivals, and the like. (I do not mention volunteer labor such as groundskeeping, bus driving, etc.) With such commonly accepted tools of oppression, Satan's ministers steal from believers something far more precious than their money; namely, their time.

Your time is your life, and you should be more hesitant to give that away than your money. God wants only some of your time, not all of it, and the little time that He asks of you will not take you away from your family, your friends, the duties of your job, or your needed rest. He asks you to spend some time with Him "to consider the lilies", to pray, and then to spend some time together with others in His family, to edify one another and to worship Him.

"Glorying in their Shame"

It is disgraceful for a servant of Jesus to manipulate people by any means to get money from them, but manipulating people to hand over their money is so common among believers today that hardly anyone blushes at it. They have become like God's Old Testament people, who grew so accustomed to sin that they lost their ability to blush at the sins they committed (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). Even in Paul's day, some believers had already wandered so far from righteousness that they were "glorying in their shame" (Phip. 3:18-19). May God restore to us who believe a sense of true spiritual dignity in Christ, so that we might feel shame when we are walking contrary to His will!

Before moving on to the last tactic that I will mention, I want to point out that some ministers will subject themselves, not just their congregation, to public humiliation for the sake of money. There is a long list of repulsive acts which some ministers are willing to perform, such as the act of publicly kissing a pig if certain attendance or financial goals are reached. You can search for "kissing a pig" on the internet and see for yourself what I am talking about. It is not only performed by those who claim to represent Christ; it is advertised!

TACTIC #5: "SEED FAITH"

In the mid-twentieth century, a prince in the kingdom of God, the late Oral Roberts, began to teach God's people about sowing what he called "seeds of faith". Once Brother Roberts made that godly concept widely known, other ministers quickly twisted it into another tool of oppression. The beautiful, scriptural concept of "sowing seeds of faith" which God revealed to Brother Roberts degenerated into a catch-phrase used by greedy men. To this day, ministers use that phrase to pressure people to donate to their ministry, leaving the impression that if they do, God will multiply the givers' money back to them. But there is no such thing as "sowing a seed of faith" if the Spirit of God is not leading the giver to give; there is only the seed, and the faith is left out. False teachers are always trying to find a way to reduce life in the Spirit to a formula. But what God may allow today, He may forbid tomorrow. Being alive in the Spirit is knowing what God wants done *now*, regardless of what He wanted done yesterday. Without the leading of the

Spirit, what men call “seed-faith giving” is just another gimmick, a get-rich-quick scheme that is unworthy of Christ.

Tithing was not designed as a tool for getting rich, or for increasing to any extent one’s wealth in this life. Jesus said no such thing would happen to the poor widow who gave “all she had” to the Lord (Mk. 12:41-44). Tithes and offerings was a way for God’s people to express thanksgiving for God’s grace. Thanksgiving can swell up inside of God’s people, much the way air swells up a balloon, and those who are full of thankfulness find relief in bringing their tithes and offerings to God.

Of course, some have always looked for ways to use God’s grace to their own advantage. Israel’s high priest, Eli, had two extraordinarily wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These evil young priests attempted to use the ark of the covenant as a gimmick to win a battle against the Philistines, after the battle began to go against them. They sent for the ark rather than repent of their sins. They both learned, however, at the cost of their lives, that the Creator will not be manipulated and that gimmicks have no part in His kingdom. Tithing, too, is no gimmick. You cannot use money to trap God into blessing you.

The truth is that the concept of “seed faith”, when rightly understood, concerns the kind of life a person lives much more than what he does with his money. It concerns sowing such seeds as kindness to a neighbor, mercy to a sinner, and encouragement to the downtrodden. It concerns being led by the Spirit in everyday situations, not helping to prop up some man’s flagging ministry.

Real “Seed-Faith”

The following is an excerpt from one of my late father’s sermons. Even into his early 80’s, “Preacher Clark” preached sermons that could last a thrilling hour or more, covering a host of different topics. This excerpt is from a sermon delivered in 1972, when he was 71 years old. That day, his message included the following comments concerning tithes and offerings, and giving:

I heard a preacher promise people they would prosper if they paid tithes. That’s terrible. I won’t promise you to prosper one bit for bringing your tithes. I’ll tell you what I will promise: I promise that you won’t prosper if you don’t pay them. You’re going to be sick; you’re going to be in need; and you’re not going to be happy. But here’s what I promise you: If you’ll pay your tithes and give your offerings and use wisdom with what’s left, it will go further than the whole thing would have gone if you hadn’t rendered your tithes and given your offerings.

Under this anointing, you walk down the street, and you are imparting something to everyone. You need to give everyone you meet something. If they are in need financially, give them a shilling or something. If they don’t need any money, give them a smile. If they ask you directions, give them directions. Walk by them, and raise your hand, and smile to them. They

will soon inquire, “Who is he?” and “What does he have?” So, every person you meet, give them something, whatever it might be. You should never meet a person and nothing is imparted from you to them.

In that sermon, Preacher Clark was preaching real “seed-faith” living, though he did not use that term. Real “seed faith” is faith that is expressed in a godly lifestyle. It is not the giving of money to begging ministers but the constant sharing of love, truth, and mercy, and showing compassion to people in need. Blessings follow obedience to God’s will concerning tithes and offerings, and of giving beyond that (as the Spirit leads), but if it is not in a person’s heart to live that way, then it is evil for a minister to pressure him to act as if it is. Nothing is acceptable to God that is involuntarily done. Our Creator is worthy of all honor, without compulsion. It is a matter of the heart! Only the heart! Always the heart! And rendering to God His tithes and offerings is a part of the holy lifestyle that springs from sanctified and thankful hearts, for the good of the whole body of Christ.

Tithes and Offerings Correspondence

Hopefully, the following section of the book will answer some of the questions that remain unanswered on the subject of Tithes and Offering. At his website, www.PastorJohnsHouse.com, Pastor John responds to questions on many issues, and the following are some of the questions and comments he has received on the topic of Tithes and Offerings, with his responses.

JACOB'S TITHES

Hi, Pastor John:

In Genesis 28:22, when Jacob was fleeing his home for fear of Esau, Jacob promised God that if God would bring him back to Canaan's land in peace, then he would give to God the tenth (the tithe) of his increase. We know from later chapters that Jacob did return in peace to Canaan's land, but who was Jacob going to submit his tithes to?

Thank you,
Billy

Pastor John's Response:

Hi Billy.

No one in our time knows the answer to that question, but the only one who really needed to know it was Jacob.

What we have in the Bible, Billy, from one end to another, is "the tip of the iceberg" of what could have been written. John ended his Gospel, you will remember, by saying that the worlds could not have contained all the stories that could have been written about what Jesus did while he was here (Jn. 22:25). And that is just the life of Jesus! Think about the many other men and women of great faith, like Jacob!

As a result of so much not being revealed, we are left with many unanswered questions, such as the one you asked. And so, we must live in faith toward God, that whatever events and wisdom that He had written down for us is all that we need to know. We should, of course, commit ourselves to learning what is in the Bible, but remember what Moses wrote: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, forever" (Dt. 29:29).

Pastor John

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Amen, Pastor John,

We know Jacob had good examples, like his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham. God knew Abraham would “command” his children (like Isaac), and teach his children the statutes and laws of God. Isaac knew that about his father Abraham’s faith from firsthand experience, such as when he carried the wood for the sacrifice up Mount Moriah. God even said to Jacob, “I am the God of Abraham *and* Isaac.” I think that would be a wonderful thing for God to say that about us to someone else.

I am sure Jacob had enough faith to believe that God would supply someone (if He hadn’t already) to whom he could render his tithes when he returned from Padan-aram. These stories are exciting!

Billy M
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MELCHIZEDEK

Pastor John,

Who was Melchizedek?

Lona Faye
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Pastor John’s Response:

Melchizedek was a man who served as a priest to God in very ancient time. Almost nothing is known about him. Genesis 14:18-20 is the place where you can find his short story, and he is mentioned again in Psalm 110. In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews, in Chapter 7, speaks of him as a figure of the coming Christ.

Pastor John
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But Pastor John, Hebrews 7:3 says that Melchizedek was without father or mother. Wasn’t Jesus Melchizedek? Please help me understand!

Lona Faye
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Pastor John’s Response:

Thank you for writing back.

Jesus was not Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a great man, possibly the greatest man who ever lived before Jesus, according to Hebrews 7:6-7. He was probably a Canaanite, but at any rate, he was human. He did have both a father and a mother; there was just no historical record of them. The author of Hebrews was not saying Melchizedek was non-human. He was simply using the priesthood of Melchizedek as a pattern for the priesthood of Jesus. As far as the priesthood was concerned, Jesus, too, was “without father or mother”. A priest’s genealogical record was of extreme importance under the

law; if a priest lost the record of his genealogy, so that he could no longer prove that he descended from Aaron, he was kicked out of the priesthood. This actually happened to one family of priests. During the Babylonian captivity, they lost the record of their ancestry, and “these sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore, they were, as polluted, put out from the priesthood” (Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:64).

In pointing out that there is no historical record of Melchizedek’s birth or death, the author of Hebrews is simply using the lack of historical records concerning Melchizedek to make another point; namely, that we don’t have any record of when or where, but Melchizedek was born, and he did die. Figuratively speaking, then, Melchizedek was like the Son of God, for there is no record of when the eternal Son of God came into existence or when he died.

Please note that in Hebrews 7:8, the phrase “he who lives” does not refer to Melchizedek. “He who lives” is Jesus. In heaven, the Son of God receives the tithes that God’s children bring to his ministers on earth.

Melchizedek was a very great man, but he was human. He was not an angel; nor was he the Son of God.

Thanks again for writing. God bless.

Pastor John

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GOD’S WAY OF PAYING BILLS

Hi John,

I want to tell you about my tax situation this year. We found out at the last minute that we were going to owe over \$7,000 to the IRS because we can no longer claim Ellen, our daughter, and her educational deduction – which we were totally unprepared for. When I got up from my desk while working shortly after we found out, I felt the Spirit say to me, “If you take all the work I send, and work hard, I will send it ALL before it’s due.”

That was on about March 18th or so. When I told Song what the Spirit said to me that day, I’m pretty sure she did not believe me. But I have to say that I did not really believe me, either. It just felt like the “Amen” talking, so I told it.

As of today, *in less than three weeks*, before the deadline to pay our taxes, and in addition to my regular calendar of work, since March 20th, the Lord has sent in \$9,900 in new web design orders/updates.... which is enough to pay for our tithes and offerings, our taxes, AND our beach trip this year – IN FULL! And that’s in a month (April) that in EVERY YEAR prior has been my slowest month of the year, without exception!

You can’t beat God, John. He is so good, He does things for me that I cannot even dream He would do. I have never had this volume of work come in during one month the

whole time I have been making websites. Amazing. And April 15th is still not even here yet!

Gary

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Pastor John's Response:

Dear Brother Gary,

Your testimony (incredible!) reminds me of brother Tim's testimony about "God's economy". Look at this! God chose what has always been the slowest month of your business year to teach you more about His economy. What love for you – and all who hear you! Your experience also reminds me of that phrase from the book of Hebrews about those of faith obtaining promises from God. You obtained a promise! I praise the Lord with you, brother Gary, for the promise you received. What a burden-bearer Jesus is!

God is good.

jdc

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TITHES ON BUSINESS INCOME

Bro. John,

I have a question about tithes. A couple of places I sell my writing to are kind of marketplaces/escrow services, which withhold a percentage of each of my sales for their administration, marketing, etc. Usually, we tithe on what I originally charged for the writing, instead of what I receive after the middleman fees. Are we doing that right or are the fees business expenses we shouldn't tithe on?

BW

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Pastor John's Response:

Hi BW:

God commanded His people to bring to His servants a tithe of their "increase". In modern terms, that would mean "profit". You should tithe only on the amount after all business expenses are deducted, and that includes the fees that are being deducted from the check you receive.

By the way, you should also not pay tithes what is taken out of your paycheck for retirement, including, in the United States, Social Security taxes. You need only pay tithes and offerings on retirement money once you retire and start receiving payments.

Pastor John

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ALL BELIEVERS ARE PRIESTS

Dear Mr. Clark,

Greetings in the name of our saviour Jesus the Christ. I have read your tract on tithing. I think it is very interesting. Christians are in the “do as you are told” mode. I believe one should consult scripture before coming to a conclusion or persuasion.

I am writing because I have a question for you and it’s based on other tracts you have written. You have stated that the church is not a place that you go, but that one is born into the church\house\family of God (true). (You do not have to go anywhere to be a Clark do you? You are born a Clark.) You also stated that the law is still relevant for the church (true). You also mentioned that the tithe has relevance to the church since it was instituted before the giving of the law (don’t agree). Why would only the pastor have rights to the tithe?

I want to say because of what the church is, the tithe does not apply to the church. The church is not only the house\family of God, but the church is a priesthood (ALL BELIEVERS ARE PRIESTS [JESUS IS THE HIGH PRIEST]).

Believers not only represent Abraham and Jacob (saints of old). We are priests just like Adam (first priest) Seth, Noah, including Job etc. Melchizedek and the Levites. We must realize we are priests because of our relationship to Jesus (the high priest). We no longer have to wait outside the tabernacle, we can approach boldly to the throne of grace because we have faith in the work our Lord did on Calvary. We are God’s Temple/tabernacle/building made without hands; LIVING STONES (1Peter 2). We have all things in common (Acts). No one exercises lordship over another as the kings of the Gentiles do. Therefore WE ALL partake of the benefits, including tithes. (It does not have to do with money only). NOT ONLY THE PASTOR.

FIRM IN CHRIST,

Cameron

Please respond, the grace & peace of Christ be with you.

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Pastor John’s Response:

Thank you for writing, Cammie.

I have heard a lot of explanations over the years as to why tithes and offerings are no longer a part of the will of God for His people, but your reason (that we are all priests) is a new one. Though fatally flawed, it is actually the best argument I have ever heard for God’s people keeping all of God’s tithes and offerings for themselves. But you go too far.

You commented that “No one exercises lordship over another as the kings of the gentiles do.” While it is true that the government of God’s kingdom is not like that of sinners, it is also true that some in the body of Christ do “rule over” others in the body (Heb. 13:7; 1Thess. 5:12). In fact, they have such authority that in the Final Judgment, they must give account to Christ for the conduct of those over whom they ruled (Heb. 13:17). If you pay careful attention to Jesus’ messages to the seven pastors in the second

and third chapters of Revelation, you will see that Jesus holds those pastors personally accountable for what others in the congregation of saints do.

Part of the authority of God's ministers, according to Paul, is to "live of the gospel" (1Cor. 9:13-14); that is, to have their needs provided for by the financial support of those to whom they minister the things of God. This may apply, in some situations, to prophets, healers, and other ministers of God besides pastors, but it applies, at least, to them.

I hope this helps you understand more perfectly the will of God for you. Thank you again for writing, and may God bless you and yours. I hope that we will both be given the grace to do the will of God in this life so that we can meet in the resurrection.

*Your servant in Christ,
Pastor John*

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Pastor John,

I feel for this person and what a beautiful, gentle answer. God's children have been so abused by their experiences within Christianity that even when some of them hear the truth, they don't know good from evil.

This person reads, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2), but he does not notice this from Acts 4: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. ... Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and they **laid them down at the apostles' feet**, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

My point in looking this up was the statement that they "laid them down at the apostles' feet." This early practice of the believers may have had nothing to do with tithing as such, but it still evidenced the respect these people had toward the government God had given them. Why did they not just help out others as each individual saw fit in their own eyes? Why bring the money to the apostles? However, notice the words, "neither *said* any of them..." I wonder whether they sold everything up front or raised the money as someone's need became apparent. This is what we, as a body, just did for a brother who needed a car.

What wonderful liberty it is to be able to recognize God's government and submit to it! Yes, we are free - to submit to the government of God. A slave to sin has no such freedom.

What abuse such people as this man must have suffered at the hands of greedy Christian ministers! It is going to take extraordinary love and meekness, with the truth, to heal these people. I believe that is just what you showed them in your response.

Damien

=====

SENDING TITHES AND OFFERINGS

In reply to a brother in Arizona who wrote Pastor John and asked if he could send tithes and offerings to him, Pastor John wrote:

Hi Brother M:

I do not quickly accept anyone's tithes and offerings because doing so can eventually lead to trouble if that person's heart is not yet established in the faith with me. I am not after money; I am after fellowship in the light.

Please acquaint yourselves well with my teaching on tithes and offerings. It is available online at my personal web site, www.PastorJohnsHouse.com. Then, if you have any questions, feel free to ask.

=====

Brother M:

It impressed me, the resolution of you not accepting money if God does not lead you to. It is a testimony of righteousness and pureness, (in Christianity they want all the money that they can get, and they never get enough).

=====

(After this, some time passed and their relationship grew in Christ, and Pastor John accepted this brother's tithes and offerings. Some of their correspondence follows.)

=====

Brother M:

I feel led by the Spirit to do it, and in obeying God, I help His people. Thank you for receiving my tithes and offerings. I cannot keep what is not mine. I don't want to be a thief.

=====

Pastor John's response:

My first preference, and yours I am sure, would be for you to find a man of God in your area who teaches the truth so that you can bring your tithes to someone close by you, but until then, we will do it this way.

=====

Brother M:

I get excited every time I receive the CDs; it is food to my soul. And if God is showing me to stand alone for now, He knows exactly what he is doing. For now, you are my closest pastor that preaches the truth, and I feel God would be pleased if I give you what is His because you are His minister. I know God's people need help desperately, and I want to be worthy of having a part in helping them (by the way, I

received the 500 tracts in Spanish, “Bautismo”. They look great! I hope God can open me a door to give them to His precious people.)

=====

Pastor John’s response:

Give my love to your wife. I hope she is doing well. We here love you both in the Lord.

=====

Brother M:

She is doing well, just returning from visiting her grandma. We love you all in the Lord, too. I am so happy with what God has shown me so far. With your teachings, I am blessed.

=====

TEACHING AID

Sir/Madam:

I have to lecture at our church on this subject. After having prepared some text, I decided to delete it and use your “pamphlet” as is.

Thank you for a Biblical based, concise, unemotional and factual rendering of the truth on this topic.

Regards,
Herman

=====

Thank you, Herman. I hope some of the other things on the site will bless you, too. I am enclosing a few of our most popular titles in PDF format to this email.

Blessings,

Gary

[Brother Gary is one of Pastor John’s fellow workers]

=====

FIRSTFRUITS

Pastor John:

I am going to try to be as faithful in this story as I can recall. After this incident which I am fixing to tell you happened, I have pondered over how to make sure to be faithful in telling exactly what happened, like Uncle Joe, and not add anything to the story or leave anything out.

Last week, I had three or four squash plants to start producing. There was enough tender fruit for maybe a meal for a small family. As Joseph and I starting picking the fruit, I was telling God in my heart that I had always wanted to understand His commandment concerning the offering of Firstfruits. So, Joseph and I looked over the plants twice with a flashlight, and to the best of my knowledge, picked all the fruit, even

the small ones. I decided to just give a shot at what God may have meant, and I left them in a bowl in your basement. (My thought was, after leaving the fruit, that you would probably give them to someone else, but that wasn't my business.) I returned home that night, and I had a muscle in my back lock up, and it didn't ease off until about bedtime. After this, I don't believe I gave another thought to what I had done with the squash.

The next evening (less than 24 hours later), since I was going to travel out of town, I went down to the garden to look it over. To my amazement, there was (I estimate since I didn't have scales to weigh) about twice the amount of fruit on the same plants which I had emptied the night before. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

One of the best parts to me was Joseph was there to see before and after, and I am glad I explained to him what and why I was doing with the harvested fruit while I was doing it.

Wendell

=====

A NEW BROTHER IN CHRIST WANTS TO GET IT RIGHT

Hi Pastor John,

I am getting ready to send a check for tithes and offerings that I have accumulated over the past 19 months, which I hope will be acceptable. I am ashamed to say that there is very little in the way of offerings in this amount because I didn't, and still don't really, have a solid understanding of how to handle offerings.

I know you don't like to call a lot of attention to this matter, so I want to make sure I have this right to begin with, and not bother you about it again. Here are a few of my questions:

1. Tithes are easy to understand, but offerings are a matter of the heart, and we need to go to Jesus to help us with offerings; offerings should also not exceed what you are financially able to give. Is this correct?

=====

Pastor John:

YES, that is an adequate general description of it.

=====

Brother V:

2. The money I have been setting aside does not include tithes on my wife's income. Is this how things should remain until God gives her an understanding about tithes & offerings, and can render them on her own?

=====

Pastor John:

YES. I do not ever want money from anyone who does not willingly (or knowingly) give it.

=====

Brother V:

3. This is probably a silly question, but do you want to know the details of our financial situation (our income, monthly bills, debt, etc.)?

=====

Pastor John:

No. I would rather not. All I need to know is your heart, and with the Lord's help, I have come to know it.

=====

Brother V:

Lastly, I want to tell you thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I am so thankful that Jesus led me to someone sent by God for His children to trust, learn from, and obey. I know that your work is just a testament to God's love and mercy, but I want to thank you personally, too, because I know that if you did not obey God in all you do, He would just move on to someone who would.

Sorry this was long. I hope to talk to you and see you again soon.

With love,
Brother V

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Brother V,

I want to emphasize, at the beginning, that tithes and offerings given directly to me are NOT tax deductible, according to the Federal tax code.

*God bless you and yours,
Pastor John*

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LEARNING NOT TO STEAL

Hi Pastor John:

I listened to the CD, "Tithes and Offerings", not long ago. I recalled the days when I first started out in the Lord, that tithing was not taught correctly at the place I attended. I did not know that the tithe belonged to a person rather than an organization, though I paid them faithfully.

At that time, I wanted some recording equipment and didn't have an extra penny to my name, especially for any music and recording equipment. I decided one day that I would take a portion of my tithe and buy a nice recorder. I did, and immediately, I felt heavy in my spirit. That feeling was so overwhelming that after a couple of weeks, I felt as though I was going to die.

Though I didn't have the right teaching, I knew in my heart that I had stolen from God. I prayed one day, "Lord, if you will allow me, I will pay back the tithes that I stole from you, and pay interest on top of that." I felt a relief in my spirit, and after a few weeks, I repaid everything, including the interest that I promised to the Lord.

Oh . . . the recorder broke not long after the warranty went out; I was back in the same place, not having anything to record with.

But now, by doing things God's way, I not only have recording equipment, but I have a recording *room*, with musical instruments that are literally flowing out of the room, into the garage. I even have a piano in my living room and a guitar in my office at my fingertips.

Yes, doing things God's way is the only way.

Thank you,
Billy M.

=====

TOO POOR TO TITHE

Pastor John,

Having read the website article on tithe, whilst I fully agree with it, my wife and I are unable to pay a full 10%, because all my pensions come from the UK, and my wife is disabled and not able to work. Recently, the pound has gone down so much we are unable to pay the tithe; otherwise, we would not be able to pay the bills. In fact, we cannot do it now, but the creditors are so good, and prepared to wait.

It does concern us that we cannot pay tithe and would only be happy if we were able to. Can we pay a smaller amount than 10%, for the time being? Perhaps you have some ideas on what we can do to satisfy God and not be accused of covetousness. Looking forward to hearing from you.

God be with you
John G.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Dear John,

Thank you for your question. It is one that many people have.

First, your letter seemed to suggest that you have thoughts of sending me a donation, but please understand that I do not accept any money from anyone outside the congregation that the Lord has given me here. I emphasize that fact so that my answer can in no way be taken as self-serving.

As for me, I would render my tithes and offering to God before I bought food to eat, if it ever came to that. That is how important a matter it is. The saving gospel of Jesus Christ is more important than my comfort, my security, and my life.

Having said that, however, part of the true fast which God has ordained for us to keep is to "let the oppressed go free" (Isa. 58:6), which is a phrase that means that the ministers of Christ have the authority to release certain people from the obligation to pay tithes and offerings if they are "oppressed".

The word "oppressed" in the Bible is very frequently associated with finances. It has happened that when certain people in this congregation have found themselves oppressed by evil persons because of their love for the truth, I have released them from bringing tithes and offerings to me until Jesus got them back up on their feet, financially. Some have refused to be "free" and have brought God His tithes and offerings in spite of their difficult circumstances, and I respected their choice to do that. On the other hand, others have taken advantage of the opportunity Jesus gave them to pay off things such as the debts dumped on them by unfaithful or vindictive spouses.

Since I am not your pastor, and I do not know what your situation is, I cannot comment specifically on what you should do. The above explanation, however, will give you a clear picture, both of how important tithing is and of how merciful and good God is. He is not an oppressor.

Hope that helps.

Pastor John

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Dear Pastor John,

Thank you very much for your letter. It was helpful, but has also got me confused, because if we pay tithe at the moment, we will not be able to pay for our wood for the winter. The situation should change in November, when we get more OAS, and with a struggle, we should be able to pay it. I take it that you are not in favour of paying a proportion of the tithe until we can pay the full amount.

God be with you,

John G.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Greetings again.

Life is filled with all sorts of situations, and nuances in them all. No one answer will fit them all. That is why we so much needed the Spirit of God within us instead of a law written in a scroll. The Spirit will guide you into all truth. As you seek the will of God for your particular situation, let me encourage you not to be anxious about it. Trust God. He loves you and is standing ready to help, not to destroy. Also, pray for the courage not to fear to do what He says. As Mary told the servants at the wedding in Cana, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." You will be glad you did.

Your servant,

Pastor John

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Hi John,

This email correspondence reminds me of my financial situation when my brother Richard moved out. I looked at my finances and knew my savings were the only way I could afford the newly purchased car with all the other expenses. I remember feeling nervous and unsure of how it would work out.

But the Lord worked it out so that not only could I afford everything, but I could also afford an extra car payment every month. I had some trying months (I had over \$5,000 of unexpected expenses - IRS debt & work on the house), but “God's economy” is amazing, and I never missed paying my tithes and offerings or paying extra on the car.

I pray to continue to be reminded of how blessed I really am (and have been).

Amanda

=====

KEEP WORKING!

Pastor John,

I've finished the new book on Tithes and Offerings, and it is very good. The truth in this book is written very plainly, yet not without the love of God. This is wonderful instruction for some child out there who has it in his heart to want to tithe, but doesn't know how to go about it. You've spelled it out very plainly who and who not to give your tithes and offerings to, and what to do if you don't have an anointed person to give your tithes, etc.

What I love is that the simplicity of the truth brings relief! Every time. Whether it concerns Tithes and Offerings, or the issue of Marriage and Divorce, or the Trinity, or whatever. If the heart is right, then the truth lines up with what you're already feeling on the inside.

I look forward to this book finding its way to many sincere hearts. What an honor to be able to help get this and all of the other books, CDs, etc., out there! Keep working for Jesus! Jesus has given you some wonderful truths to get out there, and you're doing a great job! Whatever little bit I can do to help you will be my privilege!

Talk to you soon,

Lee Ann

=====

OUT OF CHRISTIANITY

Pastor John:

I am thankful that you are available so we don't feel obligated to give to that abomination called Christianity. I could never find a doctrine in that mess which I could

feel good about, although at the time I didn't know why. There was always truth and error mixed together.

Every new Revelation given to you for the body has made us cleaner and brought relief. This book has washed some remnants of Christianity out of my heart which I didn't realize were buried deep in there, hidden even from me. It is making us cleaner.

I have at times asked people who are still in Christianity if they support all the doctrines of where they attend, and I have never had anyone in Christianity say they did, that I can recall. By their expressions, it appeared to me that it is an odd concept to them that anyone would believe all that their pastor taught. How sad, to be supporting something which is not only contrary to the truth of God's precious Son, but contrary to what they themselves really think!

We are blessed! Thank you, Jesus, for providing a way for me out of that mess!

Thanks,
Wendell

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ASHAMED

Pastor John,

I have really enjoyed corresponding with you about different parts of the Tithes and Offering book. I remember how ashamed I felt when I was a little kid in a catholic church, with my momma. Every Sunday, they would pass that big collection plate, and I knew my momma never had money to put in it. I felt all the people around us staring at us when we just passed the plate and didn't put anything in it. As a kid, it was really embarrassing. I grew to hate that, but at the same time, I also felt bad for hating it! Now I really hate that whole institution because I finally know that it is not of God at all, and the ceremony of "taking up a collection" makes people see God as a beggar. I'm thankful to be where God has put my little family in your care for the rest of your time on earth. Praise God!

TE

=====

A CONTRARY VIEW, PART 1, EXCERPTS

The following are excerpts from a series of comments sent in by a Christian minister who teaches that the commandment to tithe is not a part of the New Testament.

Dear Pastor John,

I am forwarding you an article discussing the Biblical and historic definitions and practice of tithing. I will not write you again nor are you obliged to respond. You will simply be disagreeing with scripture and history, not me. Bless you again.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

I have taken the time to read through what you sent me. Your teaching, that God's children were the only ones who were free from the law's tithe commandment is clearly impossible, on the simplest of grounds; to wit, God gave the tithing commandment to no one but His children. How, then, were the children of God the only ones free from them? God's people are, in fact, the only people on earth who are NOT free from the tithing laws, for God and His true ministers accept tithes and offerings from no one but them.

=====

The Minister:

I admit that Jesus instructed his Jewish audience to continue tithing (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). On this point, however, it is extremely important to note why the subject of tithing came up: while going to extremes in following the letter of the law on tithing, the Jews had completely forgotten the Gospel motivation for it. The caution and reminder Jesus gave about tithing is needed today more than ever.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Yes, it is. The rulers of the Jews had placed too much emphasis on the lesser issues of the law. But we must not diminish the fact that Jesus told those men that they should continue to keep the commandments concerning tithes and offerings, while concentrating on the more important elements of the faith. He was not at all condemning them for bringing their tithes and offerings to God.

=====

The Minister:

The Jewish historian Josephus states that three tithes were firmly in place in first century A.D. Judaism, but nevertheless, tithing is never mentioned in the New Testament's description of the first century church.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Josephus' information concerning the Jews cannot be taken at face value, even if he himself was a Jew. I have read his writings, and his knowledge of the Old Testament, the covenant which God made with Josephus' own ancestors, was very poor. It is unwise, if Josephus had not even made the effort to learn well that extremely important document, to put trust in anything he wrote.

Besides the issue of Josephus' reliability, whatever the Jews were doing is irrelevant to the people of God when the Levitical priesthood was replaced by the priesthood of Christ. The apostles had families, too, and we are never told that God's way of support for His servants differed from that which He revealed in His law.

=====

The Minister:

Concerning the material support of ministers of the Gospel, all the New Testament says is that they should eat what is set before them (Matt. 10:10) and that the church should take care of them (Gal 6:6).

=====

Pastor John's Response:

There is no commandment from God for His ministers to "eat what is set before them". That is a quote from 1Corinthians 10:27, not Matthew 10:10, where Paul is telling Gentile believers not to ask questions about the meat they were being fed by idolaters.

Galatians 6:6 is certainly not all that "the New Testament says concerning the material support of ministers of the Gospel." There is much more than that found in the New Testament on the subject. My friend, do not be so determined to make your point that you ignore or deny the available evidence.

=====

The Minister:

The tithe for the support of the temple services outlived its usefulness: the sacrifices of the temple, soon to be leveled in AD. 70, gave place to the one Sacrifice for all sin.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

God's tithes were not merely for the temple services but for the men who ministered in His name. As always, it was not things, but people, that mattered most to God.

=====

The Minister:

The "social ministry" tithe was no longer needed because Christian brothers and sisters helped one another by way of special collections, as was the case with the famine-stricken Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16). While giving for the Lord's work obviously continued in the church, no amounts or percentages are prescribed in the New Testament.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

There is no mention of a "social ministry" mentioned in the Bible. And I would say that since "tithes" is mentioned in the New Testament, that qualifies as a mention of a percentage, since the very word, "tithe", means, "tenth".

=====

The Minister:

All that is said is that early Christians had everything in common (Acts 2:44 - a "tithe" of 100%!), that they gave sacrificially (2 Cor 8:1-3), and that they gave as God had prospered them (1 Cor 16:2).

=====

Pastor John's Response:

There is very much more said concerning almsgiving and tithes in the NT than you suggest. That early attempt at “having all things in common” was not a commandment of God, and it did not work well at all. Lazy bums began to take advantage of it. Paul eventually told the saints that if a believer in their number refused to work, then the saints were not to give him anything to eat (2Thess. 3:10).

And giving “as God prospered them” is precisely what the tithing system provides for. A man who earns more, owes more tithes to God, and a man who earns less, owes less. Offerings beyond the tithe may be given sacrificially or not, depending on an individual’s faith.

The Minister:

The Gospel is obscured when preachers, by way of a gross misinterpretation of God’s call to faith in Malachi 3, entice people into greater giving by appealing to their fleshly, selfish desires: “If only you would give more money to church, you would have unparalleled business success and two new cars in your garage.”

Pastor John’s Response:

My friend, God is the one who said, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me herewith, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10). He certainly was not “appealing to their fleshly, selfish desires.”

The fact that some men abuse the scriptures when it comes to tithing does not alter God’s will. We must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water, as the saying goes.

The Minister:

Such talk turns Gospel giving into a business deal - “If you do this, God will do that” - and striking a deal with God is totally contrary to the Gospel.

Pastor John’s Response:

But, my friend, the New Testament, or “Cov enant”, as with the Old, is altogether a “deal” that man makes with God. In fact, that’s what the word “covenant” means! We agree to love and obey God, and He agrees to bless us here and to give us eternal life in the world to come. God’s own description of the first testament was in the form of a “deal”, as we see when he first offered the deal to the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:4-6).

The Minister:

Business-deal language smacks of manipulation, the thought that God can be manipulated into doing this or that through one's own activity. This kind of divine manipulation characterized all the pagan Canaanite religions that surrounded the nation of Israel.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

One man's "manipulation" is another man's opportunity to obey God and be blessed by Him. Would you say that by acknowledging God's demand that we keep His commandments that we are striving to manipulate God? If it is so, then He Himself has called us to manipulate Him with obedience.

=====

The Minister:

Contrast that self-centered, acutely law-oriented approach to the offerings of the 75 year old man who is avidly supporting a parochial school, a program that will afford him no direct personal benefit. Only the Gospel can inspire giving like that.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

It is revealing that you equate "law-oriented" with "self-centeredness". That is a unbiblical and destructive opinion to hold. Paul said that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). If something is "law-oriented", Paul considered it to be good, not evil. It was, after all, God's law.

=====

The Minister:

The Gospel is obscured when tithing is made into a new law, thereby turning the grace of the Gospel, in the final analysis, into no grace at all.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Tithing, as well as the whole law of God, was made into a new law by Christ, a law written on our hearts. Paul said he was "not without law to God." Let us not be, either.

=====

The Minister:

When tithing is made into a law, one of two anti-Gospel outcomes can result: 1) the individual member fails, and 2) the member succeeds. If the member fails to tithe, his conscience may become burdened to the point of despairing of God's grace. If a member does tithe, he faces the distinct danger of taking pride in his accomplishment to the point of considering the grace of God irrelevant. (This has been known to happen - Luke 18:12).

=====

Pastor John's Response:

God is the One who made tithing a law, my friend, not man.

But once again, your example does not apply. In Luke, Jesus was not condemning the Pharisee for tithing. That Pharisee is among those whom Jesus condemned for having their priorities confused. He had become proud, but his pride did not make God's tithing commandment an evil thing to obey. That is completely illogical.

Lastly, you overlooked the best possible result of tithing. And that is this: If one humbly obeys God's commandments, including those concerning tithing, it may happen that God will be so happy about it that He fulfills His promises to bless and reward him! This possibility you left out altogether.

I hope you will be encouraged by these replies to look further into the matter. I do thank you for writing. It is good for me to be challenged so that I re-examine what I am teaching, and I thank you for giving me that opportunity. May God bless you.

*Your servant in Christ,
Pastor John*

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WHAT KIND OF LAW IS IT?

Pastor John,

I have talked to many people through the Internet over the years – and what I see about those who teach that the commandments concerning tithes and offerings are no longer in effect is that they say that tithing was a part of the Old Testament law, and therefore not applicable in this age.

However, since they know and agree that murder, adultery, etc., although also part of the law, are still wrong, they try to resolve this by saying that tithing must be “ceremonial” – similar to the animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and such. Therefore it is not a part of New Testament worship (since, they falsely say, it is not taught in the new testament writings.)

So the question believers must resolve is – IS tithing a ceremonial law, or is it a moral law? If it is moral, it must still be kept. If it is ceremonial, it is completed in Christ, and is not part of worship today.

That is why your teaching on the “three time zones” made all the difference for me. If I did not understand that there are things that righteous men did BEFORE, DURING and AFTER the law, time-wise, I would possibly consider tithes as ceremonial and only a part of the Old Testament. However, what did righteous men do BEFORE the law? What did Jacob do? What did Abraham do? and so on....

The important question to me is: Is tithing “ceremonial” or is it “moral”. And the answer is VERY important. In fact, it makes all the difference!

Gary

=====

Pastor John's Response:

That's right, Gary. To know that tithing is a moral commandment is the key. And we know that tithing is a moral, not ceremonial, law because 1) "Thou shalt not steal" is a moral law and 2) God said His children who failed to bring Him their tithes were thieves (Mal. 3:8).

=====

Hi Pastor John,

If a wife wants to pay tithes and offerings but her husband does not share the same desire, what is the right thing to do in that situation? Can she pay her tithes and offerings? Also, if the wife does not have an income of her own, is she obligated to pay tithes and offerings?

Thanks,
Amy F.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

Hi Amy.

A wife can bring her tithes and offerings, even if her husband does not. However, she must not bring tithes and offerings *from her husband's salary*. God made it very clear in the Old Testament that whatever anyone brought to Him had to be willingly offered.

Leviticus 1

3. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice from the herd ... he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle.

As to your second question, no one can be obligated to pay tithes and offerings if he has no income of his own. I cannot locate the specific verse that states this right now, but in God's law, one of the basic rules concerning sacrifices was that the animal you sacrificed to the Lord had to belong to you; you could not sacrifice to God what belonged to someone else.

Years ago, before I understood many of the truths in my book on Tithes and Offerings, a woman who attended our meetings was paying tithes on her husband's salary in addition to her own. I did not know she was doing that. Her husband was a nice guy, but he was an unbeliever, and he didn't know, any more than I did, that his wife was using his earnings to bring me tithes. She was, in fact, stealing her husband's money and giving it to me.

When I learned what this sister had done, I immediately researched my records for the couple of years she had been bringing me tithes, to determine how much she had given. Then I called her husband and apologized for the error. I told him that a check would be made out to him for all the money he had lost. I was surprised when he insisted that I not do that, but we did agree that from that point on, his wife would not use his income to bring me tithes and offerings.

This woman is long gone from our midst. I hope that wherever she is now, she has learned not to do things behind her husband's back. That is not a godly thing for a wife to do, especially when her husband is working hard and trusting her to take care of his money.

Pastor John

=====

A CONTRARY VIEW, PART 2, EXCERPTS

Dear Mr. Clark,

You missed several major points in all of my previous correspondence. The three tithes in place in Jesus time were all brought into the temple and Malachi likewise refers to this. In fact the "meat in my house" verse so many like to quote was a chastisement of the Levitical priests for not giving THEIR share to the poor. Read the entire chapter.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

I did as you said, and I can't find anything in that chapter, or anywhere else in the book of Malachi, about God demanding that tithes be brought to the storehouse in order to punish the Levites. Nor is there any mention of the Levites not giving a portion to the poor.

Also, there is nothing in the Bible about "the three tithes" that you say were "in place" during Jesus' time. Nor is there any mention in the Bible of three tithes being brought to the temple. Extra-biblical sources of such information such as Josephus are notoriously unreliable, and I would again caution you against them.

=====

The Minister:

Since you indicate tithing is still required, where now are we to bring in such tithes? (Keep in mind these Biblical tithes were: A hin of oil, and ephah of wheat, etc.)

=====

Pastor John's Response:

The tithe, even under the law, took many forms, for Israel was an agrarian society. However, a person could exchange his tithes of the field and his animals for money, and then travel with that to the men anointed by God to take his tithes. So, the place to bring tithes now is the same place that it has always been: to men anointed by God.

=====

The Minister:

Many churches require people to pay 10% of their income as a tithe to the church, and they use the same reasoning as you have.

=====

Pastor John's Response:

“To church” is not the appointed place for God’s tithes and offerings. Church religion has nothing to do with the real Jesus.

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The Minister:

If we believe this then circumcision is still a Biblical requirement.

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Pastor John’s Response:

Because circumcision was a ceremonial law, it IS still required, but in this covenant, it is a circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not circumcision of the flesh by a knife (Rom. 2:28-29). Tithing was a moral law. So, your analogy doesn’t work.

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The Minister:

I am myself a minister of the Gospel and do not require anyone to tithe me anything. Paul and Barnabas WORKED to support their own ministry as an example even though as ministers of the Gospel, we are entitled to support. “Or is it only I and Barnabas who must WORK for a living?” (1 Cor. 9:6)

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Pastor John’s Response:

You are misrepresenting the context of 1 Corinthians 9:6. In context, Paul’s meaning is clear. He has “authority over the saints” (v.9) to receive from them what he needs for his livelihood and to carry on the work of God, but he chose, at that time and place, not to use it. The context (9:1-12) will show what I mean.

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The Minister:

Please notice that the Bible says “support” and not 10% of anyone’s income. They were not acting as Levitical priests but as fellow slaves. Nowhere in the Bible do we read about the apostles collecting “tithes” which would have gone to the temple anyway.

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Pastor John’s Response:

It would have been sin for Paul to act as a Levitical priest because he was from the tribe of Benjamin. But he didn’t need to be a Levitical priest in order to be worthy of the tithes and offerings of God’s New Testament people.

It is true that there is no example anywhere in the Bible of the apostles using the specific words “collecting tithes”. (If that phrase had been in there, the “take up a collection” ritual of Christians would no doubt be even worse than it is.) But neither is there any mention in the New Testament of the “rapture of the saints”. It is other descriptions of that event which let us know that such an event will occur.

Finally, I would like to point out that since we can agree that the phrase “collecting tithes” is not mentioned in the Bible, would you also be willing to agree with me that the

apostles in no place said what you are saying; namely, that God's way of support for His ministers ended with the coming of the Spirit?

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The Minister:

My faith is founded on Christ and in his finished work for salvation. Not the keeping of ritual laws which are but a shadow of things, the reality of which is in Christ. "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the REALITY, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

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Pastor John's Response:

*I will say it again: Tithing was **not** a ceremonial, or ritualistic law. It was a moral commandment. It provided the people of God with a gracious opportunity to respond to Him in gratitude for choosing them as His own. You err when you include tithing as part of the ceremonial works of the law.*

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The Minister:

Tithing or any other "works" will not make us more acceptable to our Heavenly Father.

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Pastor John's Response:

The "works of the law" are the ceremonies that were contained in the law, not God's moral commandments. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" was not a work of the law. Nor was "Thou shalt not steal".

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The Minister:

Christ gave his life for us to receive this free gift of eternal life. Thinking that you are earning it by tithing is the mark of a deceived, fleshly mind.

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Pastor John's Response:

That is true only if keeping the moral commandments of God is "the mark of a deceived, fleshly mind."

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The Minister:

Bless you all the same and please do not write again. You really do not even have the most basic idea of what you are talking about.

Dr. M.

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Pastor John's Response:

As you wish. But I have benefitted from our correspondence and have enjoyed it. Please feel free to write again whenever you wish. I sincerely thank you for writing.

*Your servant in Christ,
Pastor John*

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READING WITH HER SON

Hey Pastor John,

I loved going through the man's comments about tithing who did not believe it is for today. Just reading those comments and your responses, and all the scriptures included, were a "class" about tithing, the law written by the Spirit in our hearts, and about being reasonable. It was great.

I found myself reading the man's comments aloud to my son (he had just finished his fiddle lesson). We would read the Scriptures that the man listed, then I would say what I thought and felt, and then we would read your response and the scriptures you pointed out. I love the truths we have been taught, and are still learning. I loved reading and going through the dialogue you had with him.

God is serious about us giving back to Him what is His. Can anyone really think they are hiding from God? Whew.

Donna N.

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MONEY BROUGHT INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

Daddy ~

Where would the money have come from which was collected from the people [see verse below]? Would it have been money that wasn't supposed to be collected b/c nobody knew what the law actually taught during this period in Judah's history? And/or maybe a special collection for temple restoration?

Thanks,
Bekah

2 Kings 22:3-7 ESV

"In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the Lord, saying, "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. And let it be given into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the Lord, repairing the house (that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons), and let

them use it for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house. But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly.”

===== [I cannot make this format right]

Pastor John's Response:

Good question!

The money in the temple could have come from a mixed bag of sources. First, God always had His few who kept His commandments even under the worst of conditions, and under the worst of kings. At the same time, even though most Israelites were idolatrous throughout the Old Testament history, those idolatrous children of God would still have brought occasional offerings to Jehovah. It almost never was the case that an Israelite stopped serving Jehovah altogether. To do so would have been contrary to the spirit of idolatry, which was very inclusive. Even heathen priests and prophets would have encouraged the Israelites to show respect to their national God, even though, in the eyes of those priests and prophets, He would have been a minor deity. In all my research concerning the ancient world, I have yet to find a priest or prophet among the Gentiles who denied the existence of the gods of nations beyond their own.

So, the money that Josiah knew was in the temple had been brought there by both faithful people of God and unfaithful people of God. Note, too, that the fact that there was money in the temple was not treated as if it was an unusual situation. That, too, indicates that tithes and offerings from faithful Israelites, as well as from unfaithful Israelites were routinely brought there. Understandably, false priests and prophets did insist that the people obey the parts of Moses' law which instructed them to render tithes and offerings (Amos 4:4-5).

A third source of that money might have been some booty from war. It was not unusual in many cultures for triumphant warriors to share his spoils from war with his god. Somebody, probably King Saul, had even deposited the sword of slain Goliath in the house of God (1Sam. 21:8-9)

Finally, there might also have been a fourth source of that money in the temple. It was common among cultures in the ancient world for travelers to make offerings to the gods of the territories through which they passed. So, foreigners wanting no trouble from Jehovah as they traveled through His territory might have brought a few gifts to him.

Thanks for the question, Bekah!

PS The ESV translation makes it sound as if the servants of the temple had “taken up a collection” from God's people, so to speak, but that is not the case -- not under King Josiah, and not without a word from God to the king commanding that such a special offering be taken. I think it would be better to use some other word, such as “gathered” in this case.

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THE LEVITES' "INHERITANCE"

John,

I am excited about something that I found in proofreading Chapter 1 of your Tithes and Offerings book!

I was looking up Numbers 18:24, a scripture reference in the section called "The Priests' Portion". This is the second time I've looked it up, and both times, it has struck me that it says the tithe is the "inheritance" of the Levites, and they have no inheritance among the children of Israel. I had to stop and chew on that. First of all, someone's inheritance is their possession. It is THEIRS. So, that point was more cemented for me. No part of the Tithes belong to the people at any time...they were given by the Lord to the Levites. It was theirs! It makes it more clear, too, how anyone who did not bring their tithes and offerings to the Levites was considered a thief by God.

Also, I'm not sure if my train of thought (as follows) is entirely right, but this was what it was: No inheritance among the children of Israel means no land. No land means nothing to farm. Nothing to farm means the Levites probably didn't raise their own crops/animals...BUT then, God didn't give that type of work to them - their work was to judge and teach the law to God's people. The children of Israel were given land to farm...that was their work. But for the Levites, God provided them NO land to work...their jobs were in His service. (I suppose they ate mainly from what the children of Israel brought as tithes?) I also read a few of the nearby verses in that chapter, and I found this verse 27 says: "And this, [the tithes and offerings which the Levites brought to the priests] shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress." And verse 30 is similar. So, God counted the Levites' tithes and offerings from what the nation gave them as if they were offering from the crops and herds that they did not have! Right?

These things were exciting to me. I feel like the nail of understanding was driven deeper or something, concerning the tithe.

:)

Lyn

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Pastor John's Response:

Yes, you are seeing that right.

Technically, though, we should note that the Levites were given some land, a very narrow strip surrounding each of the 48 Levitical cities (see Brother Damien's comment, below). However, that strip of land would not have been enough to produce the food needed by the Levites and their families. Clearly, God intended most of the Levites' needs to be met by the tithes and offerings of the nation.

jdc

Damien's Comment:

The Levites did have a small 1,000 (or 2,000) cubit-wide piece of land around their cities "for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts" (Num. 35:3).

Incidentally, this could have been the source for the animals that were regularly sacrificed at the temple.

Damien

RELIEF

Hi John,

This excerpt from your book is very clear, and I like it so much:

“These promises are not for everyone who pays tithes and offerings. They are for God’s children who take their tithes and offerings to the place God says to take them; that is, to a man whom God has anointed.”

I always wanted to pay tithes and offerings, but didn't know who to pay them to. The church where I was going when I received the holy ghost had a “supply minister” who was filling in until someone was hired. That supply minister stayed years, the whole time I went there. He had a regular, full-time job at Duke, teaching, I think. He just preached on Sundays, and didn’t even claim to be anyone’s pastor.

For years, I sponsored a child in India through the Christian Children's Fund. I knew that wasn’t the same as paying tithes and offerings, but I wanted to give something, somewhere.

The Charismatics taught the scriptures from Malachi about tithes and offerings, and I believed it, but they taught it with the slant of “get rich” and that didn’t seem right either. It was the idea of “Give, so you will get back more.”

This book will have to be a relief to God's children when they realize there is a right way to render tithes and offerings.

Thanks,

Debbie

Good morning.

What I keep thinking about while we read the T & O book is that there are not enough men anointed by God for all of God's people to even bring their tithes to. Where are they? And if they are out there, most of God's people don't know where they are. I also think about your dream about the two elderly ladies imprisoned with you. You were breaking out, and the ladies would not follow you. The body needs more men of God saying what you are saying.

In time, I guess.

BP

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JUST BECAUSE HE LOVES US

I loved the part in the book where you pointed out that the whole amount that we earn, along with everything else is God's. He allows us to get the money, then in turn, to bring just a tenth of the increase to the anointed man of God. I had the thought, "He has it all, and He allows us to bring to Him what's already His, just so we can have a part of His work!" The whole process is just because He loves us and wants us to be a part of His work! Wow!! You are right; it is all about relationships! He really does have an order, and it is an honor to be part of it.

Paul

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FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Good morning Pastor John,

I thought about the Tithes and Offerings book all night. I feel so blessed to be a part of what God is doing for his people through you with this book. There is so much division among God's people that it seems overwhelming at times. I wish we had more men sent from God to help with the task at hand. God's way is not hard. In fact, it is so easy that God's people can't believe that it is that simple, and so, they add things that hurt them because they don't know their God.

I feel so blessed at times, and so ashamed at other times, when I think about the condition we, the people of God on earth, are in. It is so sad to think of how few of God's people really understand and trust what He has done for us. There is so much rest for God's people in just knowing what He requires of them in tithes and offerings, and yet there is so much division about it in the body of Christ that some are being skinned alive in the "Give ye!" culture of Christianity, and they are made to feel guilty when they can't give any more.

I am looking forward to you getting this book out to God's people, maybe they will start asking more questions about their God and what His will for them really is. It all just makes me want to search myself and make sure I am doing my part to help you and them. I am so thankful that I am with you!

Stuart

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A BOOK ABOUT LOVE

Hi John,

I agree with Stuart about the Tithes and Offerings being a simple way, and yet it seems to be such a controversial subject. Before I started learning the Old Testament, I used to think God was hard on the Israelites with all of the different offerings that he required. I remember thinking that I could have never been saved if I had lived during those times! But once I started learning the Old Testament and finding out what God *really* required, I learned that God was not hard on his people at all! Instead, I learned just how good he was! He actually required very little from them, but like Stuart said, they never had the faith to believe that it was as simple as it really was!

Last weekend, you reminded us of how simple it was during Old Testament times when you answered Ashley's question about why you were describing all of the Old Testament offerings in your book, and you explained to us how easy it was to keep those offerings. I kept thinking, as we were reading together, about how little God has always required from His children. That story about the lady whose front porch you painted is such a good example this. When you went back the next day to finish painting her porch, you stood there with nine dollars to give to her, and all that was required from her was just to show up at the front door. But because of her greed, or rebelliousness, or whatever it was, she wouldn't come to the door! Even in the Old Testament, all they had to do was show up with their offering, and the priest did the rest. It wasn't hard!

God has always been there with a bucket full of blessings if we just do our small part. He really is that good, and it really is that simple! That's one thing that is so good about this book. Just by talking about the subject of Tithes and Offering, you are demystifying the whole subject and letting people know what God really requires from his children, which is so little. We just need the faith to believe it. I love this book, and I'm thankful to be a part of something that is telling people how good God really is! It really is a book about how much God loves us!

Lee Ann

Deleted email:

INFLUENCE

Hey Brother John,

RE: This paragraph in your book:

As the story of Abraham and Melchizedek demonstrated, the act of rendering tithes and offerings to God's servant is an act of submission, as to one's "better" in the kingdom of God. And by submission to a superior in God's kingdom, the door of the heart is opened in a special way to the influence of that better one. In a real but mysterious way, the rendering of tithes and offerings makes the giver a partaker of the spiritual condition of the receiver. Those who supply the needs of a minister of Christ will share in that minister's reward (Mt. 10:41) because in the world of the Spirit, when anyone shares his earthly substance with a servant of God, that person is made a partaker of the spiritual substance of that servant. Jesus suggested this spiritual reality when he said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). There is a very real and very profound connection between our hearts and our riches. Our spirits and our relationships are greatly affected, for good or for ill, by what we do with our money, especially our tithes and our offerings.

As I was reading this, I had a new thought for me, which is, We are, as the saying goes, what we eat (take in), but we are also what we give out (our tithes and offerings). If we become partakers of the spiritual condition of the one to whom we give our tithes and offerings, then, if the receiver of our tithes is holy, we become holy, but if the receiver of our tithes is polluted, then we become polluted.

Billy H

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Hey,

Billy's comments seem to contradict what you have taught, that a person must bring his tithes and offerings to the right person, and will be blessed for doing so, even if that person is not living right. If the "right" receiver of tithes and offerings is not obeying God, does the giver have to become a partaker of the receiver's spiritual condition?

BC

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I agree that Billy's wording leaves the impression that the receiver of your tithes and offerings determines whether you become holy or polluted. That is certainly not the case. If you are in Christ, you are holy, or "sanctified", regardless of the spiritual condition of your pastor. But your pastor has a special avenue of influence on your life, and he can influence you toward growth in holiness, or influence you toward a spiritually polluted condition.

However, but it is not true that the receiver's spiritual condition determines the giver's fate. It's just that tithes and offerings opens the door of the giver's heart to be

significantly influenced by the receiver. In a case such as you described, when a true man of God goes astray from the will of God, there is both a good and a bad influence emanating from him. Then, those who bring their tithes and offerings to him have choices to make. They can certainly overcome the bad influence of a wayward pastor, as those few souls in Sardis overcame their pastor's bad influence (Rev. 3:1-4), or they can succumb to the bad influence. That is a test of their hearts.

jdc

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