

The Practice of Tithing

BY Deacon Herbert Ruff

We are introduced very early in the Bible to the concept of Tithing- a practice of giving. Abraham gave Tithes to Melchizedek from the spoils of war. In this first mention of the word "Tithe" the concept of a tenth of your wealth is not conveyed. In fact, Abraham gives away all of the spoils of war with the exception of food that his men consumed and a portion that they were to receive of everything else-**Gen 14:20-24**.

But Jacob vowed (as if he could bargain with God) to give continuously a tenth of what he obtained in life if God would always be with him- **Gen 28:20-22**. The word Tithe is not used in this chapter. The tenth of wealth vowed by Jacob is a personal pledge, a voluntary offering that Jacob made, and not a requirement of God. In fact in neither of these cases did God request Tithes as a tenth of wealth as we define Tithes today. Tithing, in these examples with Abraham and Jacob, simply, could be defined as an act of giving without a minimum or maximum limitation- Abraham gave all and Jacob would give a tenth. It was not until the time of Moses did God make formal demands of man. Man was instructed in precise details how to build His Tabernacle, give offerings of sacrifice and Tithes to support the Levites and the poor.

God made the Levites the Priest of His Tabernacle giving them the responsibility of caretakers. In doing so God required that the Levites come out of the fields and devote all of their efforts to the duties of maintaining the Tabernacle. So it was that Tithes and Offerings were the means by which the Levites made their living. Throughout the land of the Israelites Tithes and Offerings were brought to God's storehouse. And there was no doubt what man's roles was in regards to giving- if you were a member of God's chosen people you gave Tithes in some form. But the requirements of what should be given ranged from a voluntary offering to a specific tenth of an amount of what one had. There were fixed guidelines on various types of offerings that did not require a tenth of what one had. In addition there were alternatives to giving that took in consideration one's ability to satisfy specific requirements-if you did not own ten sheep your sheep's firstborn was Gods but when you had more than ten sheep every tenth and firstborn was Gods.

Even though God specified what He expected from His chosen they were not faithful to His demands. In some cases they begin to turn away from Him to worship gods of other tribes. As a result, God inflicted punishment on the Jewish nation but allowed them to be restored to His grace over time. The Bible details several narratives in which the Israelites are punished and then blessed with the lesson un-learned. Then two significant things occurred that dramatically impacted the behavior of God's chosen people- the land of the Israelites was divided

into Judah with two tribes and Israel in the north with 10 tribes. Perhaps most significant was the fact that the Babylonians and Assyrians invaded and conquered the lands of the Israelites. God's great Temple built by Solomon was desecrated, God's ornaments removed this time by foreigners, tens of thousand of the chosen people taken from the land, and the Levites forced back to the fields to make their living. God allowed this because His Chosen people neglected to worship Him, and to fulfill their Offering and Tithing responsibilities, but they worshiped other Gods and married into other tribes who worshiped idols. Yet God did not abandon His promise to Abraham.

The exile of thousand of the Israelites to Babylon made a dramatic impact on their relationship with God. While in Babylon they prospered, worshiped God in private rooms (later built as synagogues), prayed, and asked for forgiveness. As time passed God allowed them to return to the promised land under the leadership of the prophet Ezra (**Ezra 7**). With Jerusalem in shambles and God's temple destroyed effort was put forth to restore the great Temple. Eventually the wall of Jerusalem was also rebuilt thanks to the efforts of Nehemiah. Putting the old tradition of Tithing and Offerings back in place was not an easy task – because the chosen had grown accustomed to worshipping in a local assembly that had shifted from sacrifice, to teaching the law of the Prophets, because of the work that the Prophet Ezra did in gathering all of the books of the Bible and using Scribes to reproduce them made this new form of worship more acceptable (less burdensome), because the blood line of the Levite Priests was polluted (**Ezra 2:62**) with the blood of tribes who worshiped other gods, because those who settle in the northern region of the promise land were reluctant to travel south to Judah to God's temple with their offerings, and because the process of collecting the elements of a particular offering became a burden. So God's Temple (although rebuilt) was not used for a while for traditional worship but instead became a place to trade and sell goods and a place where corrupt priests made offerings of the weak and sick to a god who always demanded offerings without flaws.

Slow in returning to traditional ways the Israelites are accused of stealing from God by withholding Offerings and Tithes, praise, and gratitude for God. This stinging pronouncement by Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi was accepted by the people and gradually forced them to return to traditional ways. However, experiences developed during their exile stayed with them. Worshiping God in the Synagogues became the routine and the special pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a special offering to God in the Temple became the norm. In addition, Tithing took on more of a monetary offering rather than a material offerings- God's service in the Synagogue and Temple was supported. The act of Tithing became very important to the Pharisees and Scribes-the Orthodox Jews. For four hundred years they involved themselves in the letter of the law of God. Often, base on their interpretation, mistreating those whom they felt did not live up to the law, and was responsible for the death of some who talked about the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus encountered this way of thinking throughout His time with man. He was constantly being challenge by the Pharisees and Scribes for His sayings and knowledge of the law. You can read about this in the book of St. Matthew, and you can read Jesus' response when He denounces the Pharisees and Scribes on how they take advantage of their people while sitting in the seat of Moses. Jesus also reminds them of their attitude on Tithing in Matthews 23:23-24.

" Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

Jesus is telling them that they place heavy burden on men for their works while they carry around their book of laws-from **Matthews 23:5-7(see also Mark12:38-44)**

"....and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."-

You can find in another example that Jesus expose the braggart's attitude in the parable of the Pharisees and Publican in **Luke 18:10-14.**

"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisees, and the other a Publican. The Pharisees stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give Tithes of all that I possess. And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

From this parable Jesus is telling us to be humble in order to be honored and lifted up. In addition it should be clear that you cannot buy your way into Heaven nor will you be given special consideration.

It appears that Jesus viewed Tithing as part of the law and that man is incapable of living up to it- note that as with all the laws given to Moses, Jesus never said don't Tithe. He did, however, remind us that Tithing is secondary to judgment, mercy, and faith. Supporting our religious institutions is a must, but the manipulation of the process of tithing to advance personal objectives is hypocritical.

You should not confine your giving to the universal definition of Tithes as a tenth of one's wealth but give what you can and never out of obligation, for God loves a cheerful giver. Follow the guidelines given by Paul in **Cor. 9:6-8**

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:"

Remember Tithing is a practice of giving so give from the heart.

Test your knowledge of the Bible. See how many of the following questions you can answer. The answers to all questions will be given in the next issue of the newsletter.

Bible Trivia

1. What father lay naked and intoxicated in his tent, which so disturbed his sons that they came and covered him?
2. What was the first animal out of Noah's ark?
3. Who was the last king of Judah?
4. Who attacked the Israelites on their way into Canaan, only to be completely destroyed later?
5. What Bible character's name means, "messenger"?
6. What priest ranks fourth with a total of 339 references?
7. What saintly king of Judah was crippled with a foot disease in his old age?
8. What king broke his own law when he called on a spiritualist to bring up the ghost of Samuel?
9. What Prophet spoke of the need to purify temple worship after the return from exile in Babylon?
10. What a loveless father would give a child asking for an egg?
11. Who sacrificed his son on the city wall when he was losing the battle to Israel?
12. Where did Jesus stay when John the Baptist was in prison?
13. What seaport in Asia did Paul walk to from Troas?
14. What tower, mentioned by Jesus, killed eighteen people when it collapsed?
15. At the first Passover, what kind of blood were the Israelites told to apply to their entryways?

Genesis 14:20-24.

"20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: ²⁴ Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

Genesis 28:20-22

"²⁰ And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, ²¹ So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: ²² And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

Number 18:21-24

²¹ And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. ²² Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. ²³ But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. ²⁴ But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

Leviticus 5:11

¹¹ But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering.

Leviticus 27:32

³² And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD.

Deuteronomy 12:6

⁶ And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:

Deuteronomy 14:22

²² Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.

Deut 26:12

¹² When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; ¹³

Luke 18:8-14

⁸ I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? ⁹ And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³ And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, ³⁹ And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: ⁴⁰ Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. ⁴¹ And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. ⁴² And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. ⁴³ And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: ⁴⁴ For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

Matthew 23:23-25

²³ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. ²⁴ Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. ²⁵ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

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