



TITHING

NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE?

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Remember this: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." @ Cor. 9:6-8.

'And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, Possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." (Genesis 14:18-20)

The doctrine of tithing has been a controversial subject over the years. There are those who insist that because the Apostle Paul never uses the word "tithe," except in reference to Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek, he does not teach it. Others have stated that since it was a part of the law, and God has delivered us from the bondage of that law, He has also delivered us from the "bondage" of tithing. Still others have termed the practice a "welfare program for preachers." In this article, we shall endeavor to show that tithing is most assuredly for us today. Jesus and Paul both taught it, and God still uses it to produce spiritual results in our lives. There are a number of Scriptures which teach us that the tithe is the same as the firstfruit, and that the first part belongs to the Lord. "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine . . . And the Lord spoke unto Aaron, Thou (the Levites) shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even in the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Numbers 18:12-13; 20-21). Deuteronomy 18:1-4 tells us the same story. "The priests, the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: They shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the Lord is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them. And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him." Nehemiah records it thus: "And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God: and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage" (10:37). God teaches a number of lessons by the tithe. First, it is considered the "firstfruit" and is thereby a reminder of Christ, the Firstfruit of the resurrection. Secondly, being taken out first, it tells us that the first part of our lives, is to be given to the Lord even as we read in Numbers 28:29: Out of all your gifts ye shall



offer every heave offering of the Lord, of all the best . . ." Jesus Himself was very careful to observe this aspect of the resurrection when He said to Mary, "touch me not for I have not yet ascended to my Father." God must get His portion first. The firstfruit or tithe of our money is to serve as a constant reminder that God wants "the best" or the fat, the choicest part of our love, our devotion, our worship, our time, joy, and all the rest of the fruit of the Spirit. Next we see that the tithe teaches us discipline. The text in Numbers instructs the Priests to tithe out of the tenth which they received from the Children of Israel. Then, and only then, was it to be counted for their own personal increase. "Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshingfloor, and as the increase of the winepress" (Numbers 28:30). Likewise today, we are to exercise the discipline of building our own economic lives around the tithe. Jesus said, "if ye continue in My Word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). The tithe is but one of the disciplines which He teaches, albeit a very important one.

JESUS TAUGHT TITHING. "But woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Luke 11:42). As we see so often in the Gospels, Jesus most assuredly taught doctrines which superseded the law and here is one example of it. He showed the Pharisees that they had come woefully short in the weightier matters regarding spirituality, but notice that He declares they were not to neglect observing the tithe.

THE APOSTLE PAUL TAUGHT TITHING. In Hebrews 7, he quotes from our text in Genesis, and asserts: "And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth" (Verse 8). He writes in the present tense. It is not recorded as though it refers to an era where men have ceased to receive tithes. In addition to this, it is quite evident that Paul is talking about tithing in I Corinthians 9. He quotes freely from the Old Testament, calling to witness those portions which refer to God's ministers being supported by the tithe. This chapter begins with Paul defending himself as their apostle, or minister, indeed, as a pastor. "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord" (1-3). Several times in this chapter, Paul uses the pronouns, "I and we", in reference to himself and his co-workers, who like the priests and Levites, were entitled to the material provisions from those to whom they ministered. In Verse 9 he quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (Verses 9-10). The ox is a symbol of the faithful pastor who labors day after day, treading out the corn, sometimes a tedious grinding, time consuming, even monotonous responsibility. Such an ox is to be rewarded. We read in Proverbs 14:4: "Much increase is by the strength of the ox." Paul uses this same analogy in writing to Timothy: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the laborer is worthy of his reward" (I Timothy 5:17-18). The subject here is about giving monetary compensation to the faithful ox. In addition to



the ox, notice the other examples: "Who goeth to warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?"

Three major points are taught by these examples. (1) The schedule of the soldier is determined by his superiors and he does not go and come at his own discretion. Likewise, the husbandman and the shepherd govern by the needs of the vineyard and the flock. (2) None of these are of a parttime nature, but are constantly on the job. (3) All of them are to be rewarded by those for whom they minister. I say, Paul teaches by these verses that the tithe goes to the faithful pastor who is constantly working and ministering, rather than to the visiting preacher who would come for a short period of time, collect an offering and leave, as was the case in Corinth. "If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ" (Verse 12). They were contributing to others at Paul's expense, and though the apostle would have been well within his right to demand their support, he refused to abuse that power, and declared plainly that whether he received their support or not, he would continue to preach the Gospel to them. Verses 13-14 are conclusive proof that Paul is speaking of God's faithful ministers being supported by the tithe. "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel," I think the things of the temple and altar refer to the tithe which was given to the priests and Levites as seen in the references given. The tribe of Levi had no inheritance in one specific sector of the land of Israel. Their land was rather taken from the combined 12 tribes and was interspersed throughout the nation. The Lord is said to be their inheritance, but He most assuredly provided for their natural needs, just as surely as He did for the other 12 tribes. God chose to do it this way to free the Levites to do the service of the Lord.

During the time of Nehemiah, when the Jews were allowed to go back to Jerusalem after the captivity, the tithe was neglected and the Levites had fled to the fields (Nehemiah 13:10-12). Without this support they must do something to care for their own families. When this condition came to Nehemiah's attention, he wasted little time in correcting the matter, because it was of such great importance to the spiritual success of Israel. Likewise, it is important for God's people today. All of these references are indeed taken from the law, but the record is clear. Abraham paid tithes over 400 years before the law was given. The tithe did not originate with the law, nor was it exclusive to it. Paul uses this same argument in writing to the Galatians when he informed them that the institution of the law did not disannul the promises given to Abraham 430 years earlier (Galatians 3:17). Likewise to the Romans, in regard to the relationship between righteousness and circumcision, he wrote, "How was it then reckoned? When he (Abraham) was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision" (Romans 4:10). The Jews boasted in the ritual of circumcision as connected with the law, but both Jesus and Paul taught that it existed long before the law was given. Paul tells us in Romans that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised" (Verse 11). There may be certain medical advantages to circumcision, but just because one would choose to do so for this reason, does not mean he is under the bondage of the law. Likewise, the practice of



tithing. Unlike circumcision, it is not an option as indicated by the text in I Corinthians 9. Although circumcision may have some physical advantages, it will not make one more spiritual. This is why the Gentiles were not required to follow this procedure (Acts 15). The tithe, however, carries with it both natural and spiritual blessings, if it is observed, and consequences if it is not (Malachi 3). In conclusion, Paul enlarged on the grace of giving in II Corinthians 8, but this is to be distinguished from the tithe. Paul does not "plow the same ground" in this letter. The giving taught here would be defined more as a freewill offering above and beyond the tithe. It is an option as we read in Verse 12: "It is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." We also notice that this offering was not taken for those who served in the Gospel. It was not given to Paul or to those who ministered with him. The Macedonians literally begged Paul to "receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the SAINTS" (Verse 8). Giving is a very intricate and important part of our spiritual development and we do well to begin with the disciplines of the firstfruit and then go on to being true Macedonian givers, who "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (Verse 5). When we do that, not only what we have but what we are, belongs to Him.