

Tithing: the Basic Lesson

For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. – *Mark 9:41*

In the Bible, how a word is used is often more indicative of its meaning than its strict dictionary definition. The word *tithe*, for example, simply means *tenth*, or *ten percent*; it's a ten percent financial or material offering given to God from the increase of our labors. (Some call it a "tax.") The percentage amount is fixed although the numerical value will change based upon the amount of income: a man that makes \$50,000 a year is expected to pay \$5000 in tithes while a man who makes \$85,000 is expected to pay \$8500. The percentage is the same (10%) but the numerical value fluctuates because of the differences in the amount of income.

Freewill offerings are just as the term suggests.¹ These are *voluntary* offerings made to God that are over and above the tithe. They can be any amount.

But already we should be asking ourselves a couple of questions. First, why does God, a Spirit, need material things (Jn. 4:24)? As Creator, why does God need to be sustained by what he's already created (Ex. 19:5)? Why does he need an offering? What would he do with it? It just doesn't make any sense...

Ps. 50:12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof. ¹³Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? ¹⁴Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

The second question is similar: how do we give to God when what we give is given to men? We're told to give to God through our local church or some ministry, but then we see our tithes and offerings placed into the hands of men. We're then told that they'll be used "to advance the Kingdom of God." But how do we know that God is actually receiving them? How does a Spirit receive material things? Are we to believe it just because the preacher said so?

What does make sense, and this *is* the biblical pattern, is that we're to dedicate our tithes and offerings to the Lord and then use them in fulfillment of his plans and purposes. It's true that God doesn't need material things, but men do. So if we set aside our tithes and offerings and then use them as he directs, then we have every right to believe we'll be blessed (Mal. 3:10-12). But if we don't give, or if we give but not use them according to his plans and purposes, then we're functioning as thieves because we're robbing him (Mal. 3:7-9).² And who wants to face that Judge!

¹ In the Bible, *offerings* is often used in the expanded sense of the word; thus we'll find tithes, freewill offerings, and other sacrifices all being referred to as "offerings" because they were all offered up as offerings unto the Lord at some point in time. The key to discerning the difference is context. But for our purposes here, *offerings* always refers to *freewill offerings*.

² We're also denying being a blessing to others which in turn denies us a blessing.

The emphasis, then, isn't on giving as much as it is in making sure we're using them according to his will. Giving is actually the easier of the two; using them for his intended purposes is where most fail. Thus we're reminded that how a word is used in Scripture is often more indicative of its meaning than its strict dictionary definition. So what follows is a definition of tithes and freewill offerings *as defined by their use*. Pay close attention to the wording.

In the Bible, **tithes** were for people, and *only* for people, to meet people's *personal* needs. Nowhere in Scripture will you *ever* find tithes used to build or maintain church buildings. Nowhere.

In the Bible, **freewill offerings** can be used for anything, but *only* freewill offerings were ever used to build and maintain "church buildings."

It doesn't matter where you go in Scripture, you'll find the above to be true and you'll find it to be true on *every* occasion. It doesn't matter when they gave, where they gave, how often they gave, or to whom it was given, on every occasion the pattern was exactly the same: tithes were for people, and only for people, to minister to people's personal needs. And while it's true that freewill offerings can be used for anything, only freewill offerings were ever used to build and maintain church buildings.³

With this perspective, it now becomes apparent that our churches are leading us into GREAT sin. Your traditional lesson in favor of tithing (tithers) emphasizes its giving while ignoring its purpose. The New Testament church flourished and they had no church buildings at all; we have them on every corner and then wonder why we don't have the same testimony as they did. This is due in part because of our unwillingness to be obedient to God's Word concerning tithes and offerings. We're supposed to be using them according to *God's* will but instead we've used them *for our own*, and this is sin. God challenged us to "prove" him in this and he did it for a reason, it's because he knew that so very few of us would (Mal. 3:6-12)!

But traditional arguments against tithing (non-tithers) fare no better, and are actually far worse. To them, there's no higher purpose to the tithe; it was only a means of supporting the government in Israel. But just like their tithing counterparts, they're so focused on how tithing was observed that they can't see that its PURPOSE has ALWAYS remained the same. It's the spiritual equivalent of them "not being able to see the forest for the trees." Because of this, they're unable to discern that the New Testament church perfectly practiced tithing and their tithing counterparts are unable to discern that tithes were never used for church buildings!

But with this new revelation, which isn't really new, only new to many of us, it then becomes necessary to re-examine our understanding of the *storehouse*. Traditionally it's always been defined as the *place* where we go to church, but this isn't the biblical pattern. Tithes were brought *to* the storehouse but they weren't used *for* the storehouse. They were divided up between the priests and Levites who then took them home and used them for their personal

³ I.e. the Tabernacle; Ex. 25:1-9, 31:1-6, 35:20-36:7. Ongoing maintenance: 2 Ki. 12:4-15; 2 Chr. 24:5-14 etc.

needs (Num. 18). And so the biblical definition of the storehouse isn't the place, but the person providing the ministry. The man is the storehouse! So when we're told to bring our tithes and offerings to the storehouse, we're not being asked to support a building, but the ministers and others in need (Mal. 3:10)! We're to support the man and not the building that surrounds him! The only church building that God IS interested in is the individual believer in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19). Thus we see that the definition of the storehouse is in keeping with the definition of the tithes according to its use. But is this what most preachers have in mind when they tell us to bring our tithes and offerings to the storehouse? (No!)

Is God against us having church buildings? No he's not. But the mandate is that only freewill offerings be used for this purpose. It's nice to come together with a large group of believers in an air conditioned building, but this isn't the emphasis in the Bible. All preachers would dismiss any notion that they care more for their buildings than they do the people inside, but all you need to do is look at how they spend the church's money and that'll tell you. A church building isn't a personal need it's a corporate *want*. To use the Old Testament verbiage, tithes are for the priests, strangers, fatherless, and widows. And as we're now all *priests* unto the Lord (1 Pet. 2:9), this means that tithes can be used to support ANY believer in Jesus Christ (Gal. 6:10).

Strangers are the *unsaved*. What better way to testify of Christ than to share your finances when they're in need? The *fatherless* are those *who can't support themselves* and the *widows* are those *who've lost their support*. In other words, tithes can be used to provide for the needs of ANY person in need, lost or saved (Gal. 6:10). They can be used to pay mortgage, rent, car note, utility bills, groceries, etc. These are all personal needs. But they're not to be used for church mortgages, utility bills, and maintenance. This is what freewill offerings are for. But in their sin, our church leaders have redefined tithing to satiate their own misguided notions. And at the very least, this has hampered the spiritual growth and maturity of the saints and hindered the spread of the gospel. But again, check every passage in Scripture on this and you'll find it to be true and you'll find it to be true on *every* occasion: tithes are for people, and *only* for people, to meet people's *personal* needs. Freewill offerings can be used for anything, but only freewill offerings were ever used to build *and maintain* "church buildings." It's just that simple; follow the money.

Most preachers are aware of the fact that only about 10% of their congregations are ever going to tithe on a regular basis. (This is why churches are so evangelical; they need the numbers) But in real terms, what this means, O' Preacher, is that 90% of your people don't believe in what *you're* doing. If they did, they'd give.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world. – *James 1:27*

So how do we give to God? We set aside and dedicate our tithes and offerings to God and then distribute them according to his will. This is what the early church did and they prospered. We're doing the exact opposite and our churches are languishing. Focus on satisfying the PURPOSE of the tithe, O' Preacher, and the giving will follow. Selah.