

The tithe

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The word 'tithe' means the tenth part, 10% (Leviticus 27:32). Tithing was codified by the Law of Moses, but the idea existed before that. Abraham tithed Melchizedek: "Abram gave him a tithe of all" (Genesis 14:18-20; Hebrews 7:2). Job gave a lot (Job 29:11-17). I would say that tithing is like the rent we pay the Creator for the use of the earth's natural resources – water, air, soil, wood, etc. But those who are aware of the multiple benefits we receive from the Creator tend to give more, like Job.

The tithe belongs to the LORD [not the church]: "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD. And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD" (Leviticus 27:30, 32). At that time, the entire economy was based on agriculture and animal husbandry; nowadays the economy is much more diversified, but the principle does not change. 10% remains 10%, whether it is still mandatory or not.

Now look at Numbers 18:26: "Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as an inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD's offering". Those who receive tithes—whether Levites, pastors, or missionaries—must also tithe. A personal observation: Even though I am a slave of Jesus, as I am, and living my life to serve the Kingdom, as I do, I understand that there is a principle here that should not be disregarded, because I have seen the negative consequences of such disregard; I, in our day, and therefore I myself do not disregard it.

Now then, since putting money directly into God's hand is not possible, nor does He need it, the idea is to redistribute it to those in need. Deuteronomy 26:12-13: "When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. Then say to the LORD your God: 'I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands, nor have I forgotten any of them'." In the context, Moses was giving instructions for just after the occupation of the land, hence 'the third year'; after that it would have to be every year, of course—otherwise the produce would spoil and the needy would starve.

The main text used to 'impose' tithing on believers today is Malachi 3:8-10: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed you?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed me,

even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." Although this text was addressed to the people of Israel, I believe it continues to be true that God really does bless the tither, to this day (see Proverbs 3:9-10 as well).

But to return to Malachi, the crucial point is in verse 10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house . . . says Jehovah of hosts." Was Jehovah's 'house' the temple? In Malachi's time Ezra's temple was more or less new, and far less pretentious than Solomon's. The warehouse would not be the temple itself, since stored food could spoil (giving off a bad smell, attracting rats, etc.). Beyond question the food was distributed to the needy, otherwise the warehouse would turn into a dump.

The difficulty today is that every pastor wants 'the house of the Lord' to be his church—but does that follow? The NT speaks of the Church as the 'house of God', but it is the global Church, not a local congregation. Hebrews 10:21: "Having a Great Priest over the house of God". It is the global church. 1 Timothy 3:15: "so that you may know how it is necessary to conduct yourself in God's household, which is the Church of the living God, pillar and foundation of the truth."¹ It is the global church. 1 Peter 4:17: "Because the time has come for judgment to begin at God's house; now if it starts with us, what will be the end of those who keep disobeying the Gospel of God?" It is the global church. And don't forget Galatians 6:10: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do what is good toward everyone, but especially toward those who are of the household of the faith." Each of us must listen to the Holy Spirit, so that we may know what we should do, case by case.

In passing, we may agree on the following. Naturally, if you participate in a community that has expenses – water, electricity, taxes, wages [pastor (1 Timothy 5:17), janitor], etc.—you should help with those expenses; of course, and that may take a portion of your tithe, but you should listen to the Owner—simply giving the tithe to the church, without caring what they do with it, may seem comfortable, but I doubt that it will work before the judgment seat of Christ; the one who has to answer for the blessings you have received is you!

In the New Testament there is no mention of tithing after the day of Pentecost, apart from mentioning some historical event in the Old Testament. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus criticized some misuse of tithe by Pharisees. The point is that now we

¹ My first impression would be that the truth should be sustaining the Church, not the other way around. But it is the Church that has the responsibility to promote and defend the truth in global society – in education, in health, in commerce, in government, everywhere.

are to serve God because we want to, not because we have to. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, the Father wants to worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). And God still wants us to help those in need.

In Luke 14:26-33 the Lord Jesus defines discipleship; first, verses 26-27: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Then He gave two practical examples and concluded with verse 33: "So likewise, any of you who does not renounce all his own possessions cannot be my disciple". Note that three times Sovereign Jesus said, "cannot be my disciple", and the 'cannot' is a strong negative. Jesus demands first place in our lives and in our hearts—above family, material things, our very being. In verse 26 the verb 'to hate' is not an active hatred, it goes in the direction of disregard. In line 33 'all' is 100%; the tithe is gone; now Jesus demands everything. I know, you didn't like it. How is that possible? If I give it all away, how can I survive, etc. The solution is to be a slave of Jesus. Exactly how this works is explained in another video in this series, 'How to save your life'. Further, I invite attention to Luke 12:22-34, where Jesus portrays what I call the Kingdom mentality; those verses contain no fewer than ten commands. It is worth reading them carefully.

In the NT we have several texts, already in the time of the Church, which say that we should help the needy. I will cite here only Paul's example in Acts 20:34-35: "You yourselves know that these hands have supplied my own needs, and of those who were with me. In every way I showed you that working hard like this it is necessary to help the weak, and to remember the word of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'." Although this saying of the Lord Jesus is not found in the four Gospels, He must have said many things that were not recorded, and Paul was informed of this saying by someone who heard it. Note, 'It is necessary to help the weak'.

I ask special attention to 'It is more blessed to give than to receive': we should not deprive anyone of the blessing of giving. When I was about 20, I turned down a small offering from someone I thought needed it more than I did. But that night the Holy Spirit made me understand that He was not pleased. I had deprived that person of the blessing of giving. I learned, and I never again turned down an offering, from whoever it was. (However, it is necessary to be awake to neutralize anything cursed that is offered to us.)

Conclusion: tithing is no longer mandatory, because God wants voluntary service. Having said that, God continues to bless the tither, but we must remember that the tithe belongs to the LORD, not to the church. Yes, because we are to be disciples of

JESUS, not of the church, nor of any denomination. And Jesus demands total commitment, but at the same time He guarantees to supply the basic needs of those who live to serve the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33).