

Tithes and Offerings (Law vs. Grace)

by Andre van der Merwe (tweaked by Ted Nelson)

Cain and Abel

Cain and Abel were the first record in the entire Bible of someone bringing an offering to God. Remember this was long before the law and the 10 Commandments had ever been introduced. There was no stipulation that demanded they should give anything to God or to the church, because the church didn't even exist yet. They gave God an offering simply out of their free will.

Abraham

In Genesis 14 we have the first record of someone actually "tithing" in the Bible, and then he didn't even tithe from out of his own possessions, but gave a tenth of the spoils from a battle he'd just won. Abraham had just defeated the four kings with his 318 men:

When Abram came back from his victory over Chedorlaomer and the other kings, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in Shaveh Valley (also called King's Valley). And Melchizedek, who was king of Salem and also a priest of the Most High God, brought bread and wine to Abram, blessed him, and said, "May the Most High God, who made Heaven and earth, bless Abram! May the Most High God, who gave you victory over your enemies, be praised!" And Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the loot he had recovered. (Gen 14:17-20 GNB)

There was no person nor any law that forced Abraham to tithe, because the laws of Moses were only introduced 430 years later:

What I mean is that God made a covenant with Abraham and promised to keep it. The Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later, cannot break that covenant and cancel God's promise. (Gal 3:17 GNB)

Many preachers say that because Abraham gave a tithe before the law, it serves as a type and a shadow of what believers under the New Covenant (who are also not under the law) should also do. Bertie Brits, from Dynamic Love Ministries, makes a very interesting observation regarding Abraham's tithe:

"Long before the law was given, Abraham tithed, animals were sacrificed and people were circumcised. Can we therefore say that because Abraham tithed before the law, people were circumcised or because animals were sacrificed, that we should do the same today? Of course not! It doesn't matter which way we look at it, we cannot make Abraham's action into a command for believers under the New Covenant."

Another interesting point to note was that Abraham gave 10% of the loot he had just won from a war! He also only did it once! It's therefore not accurate to assume that what Abraham did serves as an example for us to give away 10% of our income every month.

Jacob

Jacob was instructed by his father (Isaac) to go from Canaan, to Padanaram and the house of Laban (his mother's brother) to take for himself a wife. One night on the way there, he fell asleep and dreamt about the angels of the Lord ascending and descending on a great ladder that extended down from heaven onto the earth. God reaffirmed the vow He had made to Abraham, to bless him and make him into a great nation. After Jacob had woken up, he built an altar and called the place *Bethel*, because the Lord was in that place.

Then he said this:

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You". (Gen 28:20-22 NKJV, emphasis added)

Jacob did not think: "I'd better give ten percent to God else He's not going to bless me". No! Jacob already knew he was blessed because God had just made a vow to bless him. He knew that God would take care of him and *because* he expected to be laden with wealth by God, he said that he'd give back ten percent of all he received from God.

This flies straight in the face of most church doctrines today. Just about everywhere we go it is preached that we need to give to God first if we want to receive anything from Him. "You cannot receive if you have not given anything!" is proclaimed far and wide. Well this is definitely not the way it would appear from the above scriptures in Genesis 28. Jacob said that he would only give *after* God had given to him first.

"Encouraged" to Give

Because so many ministries these days are facing financial difficulties, they often "encourage" their members to "give" generously to the work of the Lord. Unfortunately most of the time the Bible verses used and the motives given are law based. Note the following saying: "If it's God's will, it's God's bill. If He leads He feeds".

If the people established in grace, the leadership would never have to preach on tithing because the members would automatically give out of a motive of love. They would feel they are actually contributing towards something significant and not feel they *have* to give just to help their ministry's struggling cause, but because they want to be a part of getting the message of God's love and grace reaching as many people as possible.

The Malachi 3 Manipulation Method

Teaching people to tithe out of Malachi 3 is Old Covenant Law! Remember that the entire Bible was written *for us*, but not everything in the Bible was written directly *to us*. This section of the prophetic book of Malachi was written specifically to the nation of Israel who was still living under the Old Covenant Law and had at the time turned away from God.

The following is a short extract from Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Book of Malachi: *Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and is supposed to have prophesied B.C. 420. He reproves the priests and the people for the evil practices into which they had fallen, and invites them to repentance and reformation, with promises of the blessings to be bestowed at the coming of the Messiah.*

Malachi was rebuking the nation of *Israel* for forsaking God and not keeping the law of Moses, which included tithing. And what were the results of breaking these laws? Curse upon curse (see Deut 28:15 onwards). But we know that we are not under the Law of Moses and its curses anymore, because Christ became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). Now with this in the back of our minds, let's read these often misunderstood verses:

For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob [Malachi is addressing Israel]. Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them [Israel is being rebuked for not obeying the commandments - this is the context!]. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

“But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ ‘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. “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:6-11 NKJV, annotations and emphasis added)

There are actually quite a few clues that make it crystal clear this is Old Covenant:

First Clue

“Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:7b NKJV) Under the New Covenant God promised to never leave or forsake us: ...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matt 28:20b NKJV)

Second Clue

You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. (Mal 3:9 NKJV)
Under the New Covenant Jesus Christ became a curse for us so that we would never have to bear any of the curses for disobeying the Old Covenant Laws, including tithing:
Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone having been hanged on a tree”). (Gal 3:13 NKJV)

There are more clues, but I think we get the picture. To get to the point, often verse 10 is used by preachers to “encourage” people to give and to “test” God’s faithfulness:

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.

This is law based preaching again because this teaches that *only if* people do their part *then* God will do His part. But actually God has already proven His love and faithfulness towards us:

But God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! (Rom 5:8 GNB)

In fact God never has to do a single thing again to prove Himself faithful, because He has already given his most treasured gift: His own Son! And here is the most ironic phenomenon: When people are recommended to “test” God’s faithfulness, they are normally also given the bank account details or very conveniently told where they can deposit this money with which they intend to “test” God...

Don’t Call it Tithing!

What we should really be doing is to not even call it “tithing” in the first place, because “tithing” refers to the giving of an exact amount of money (10% percent of our income), turning it into a stipulation or law again. If believers wish to give money to the work of the Lord, they are commanded to do so cheerfully:

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:7 NKJV)

If giving 10% of their income does not make someone cheerful, then they shouldn’t give at all! If giving 5% or 40% or even 1% of their income is what makes them cheerful, then that is what they should give. In the end, whatever a person chooses to give, it’s all about their motive. If somebody

isn't giving anything at all and they do so cheerfully, then that is their choice: they shouldn't give just because they feel the need to give, read 2 Corinthians 9:7 again. So let's not call it "tithing" but instead call it "giving". So in the light of the New Covenant, where then does "giving" fit in? The answer is two-fold:

1) The first part of this answer relates to our positional standing with God; our identity in Him: Giving fits in exactly where holy living, obedience and loving other people fit in - it is something that happens simply because of who we are. Our inner nature (or our born again spirit) is now holy and set apart unto God. Good works is something that just flows out from us as naturally as breathing.

There is no effort or striving, but simply rest and a motive of returning love to the One who loved us first. His love for us is so complete that nothing we do can ever make Him love or accept us more. And if He cannot love us anymore than He already does, then giving money to the church to earn His love really becomes meaningless and perverted, just like all other works of self righteousness.

2) Secondly this answer relates to the natural realm, to our physical lives and the expansion of God's kingdom here in the earth. God made the earth in such a way that almost everything functions by means of money. Therefore in order to mobilize missionaries, maintain infrastructure, resource evangelists, etc. the church needs financial resources to function. Paul preached that people who put their lives into spreading the gospel should also be able to live off the gospel:

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. (1 Cor 9:3-14 NKJV)

And because this is true then it means that those who draw benefit from the message (the hearers) have a responsibility to care for the needs of the ones who are bringing the message. But even so, the most important thing is that it should *still* be out of a motive of love and a cheerful heart. Believers are not supposed to be manipulated into giving for whatever reason. The amount we give should be "as we purpose in our hearts" as we have read in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (above). There are churches where people are "motivated" to give so much to the church that they take out second mortgages on their homes, while the pastor spends luxury holidays on his yacht. Come on! We didn't give up our right to think logically when we became Christians; clearly there is something wrong with this picture!

The flip side to this story is that the apostle Paul, even though he may have had some sort of right to claim financial support from the churches, did not make use of it. The gifts that he received from some of the churches were given out of love, because the people had a concern for Paul's well being.

Did you get less of me or of God than any of the other churches? The only thing you got less of was less responsibility for my upkeep. Well, I'm sorry. Forgive me for depriving you. Everything is in

readiness now for this, my third visit to you. But don't worry about it; you won't have to put yourselves out. I'll be no more of a bother to you this time than on the other visits. I have no interest in what you have - only in you. Children shouldn't have to look out for their parents; parents look out for the children. I'd be most happy to empty my pockets, even mortgage my life, for your good. So how does it happen that the more I love you, the less I'm loved? And why is it that I keep coming across these whiffs of gossip about how my self-support was a front behind which I worked an elaborate scam? Where's the evidence? Did I cheat or trick you through anyone I sent? I asked Titus to visit, and sent some brothers along. Did they swindle you out of anything? And haven't we always been just as aboveboard, just as honest? I hope you don't think that all along we've been making our defense before you, the jury. You're not the jury; God is the jury - God revealed in Christ - and we make our case before him. And we've gone to all the trouble of supporting ourselves so that we won't be in the way or get in the way of your growing up. (2 Cor 12:13-19 MSG, emphasis added)

It's a heartrending reality that the majority of the people involved in leadership roles in churches across the world do not have Paul's shepherd heart for their flock, but instead see their flock as a means to sustain themselves and build their own empire.

Paul also clearly mentioned that he was supporting *himself* in these passages, so to see Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9 (above) as a rule that preachers should earn an income off those who benefit from their message, is entirely incorrect. If Paul did establish this as a rule, why was he then breaking his own rules?

Where to Give

Where should we give? In the Old Testament people had to bring their tithes and offerings to the temple. But since God doesn't live in man-made buildings anymore (like He did in the Old Testament) but in the temples of our human bodies, it cannot really be argued that we should give our money to support the institution which calls itself the "church" anymore, because in the New Covenant WE ARE the church. However, when we find a person or ministry who contributes to our spiritual well-being, it's really not much of a sacrifice to give them money, is it? It actually becomes a privilege, a partnership, a faith motivated gesture of love. When we sow into a ministry that produces life and bears fruit, we become partakers and partners of that life because we have sown into it and the Word teaches that every seed brings forth fruit after its own kind (Genesis 1:11).

Offerings can also be given to people or ministries which we believe are making a difference in the world in reaching the unsaved and getting the gospel to the nations. Alms are also given to the poor and needy to the extent we are able to. The Bible further models giving to apostolic fathers (like the churches that sent offerings to the apostle Paul to support him, see Philippians 4:14-17) and living a lifestyle of generosity and sharing (Acts 4:32-36 and also 1 Timothy 6:17-18).

On the other hand when we are sowing into a ministry that is promoting law motivated living (that teaches God will not bless us if we don't tithe, or where we are constantly made to feel guilty about our lifestyle, or about this and that sin, or for not giving enough), we are sowing into a ministry that produces death, since the Bible calls the law a ministry of death (2 Corinthians 3:7). We needn't worry however that we will reap death or curse from such a ministry because Christ became a curse for us according to Galatians 3:13.

However, we will not reap spiritual life from this ministry either since they are not producing any life. Even though the works they do may appear to be helping others, a pattern that normally emerges in these ministries is that things are so well organized and arranged that they seem to manage fairly well on their own – they don't actually seem to need God. They don't need to trust God for anything

since they manage to extract pretty much all they need from their people using their calculated, manipulative methods. It is always best to sow into the place where we are spiritually fed and where life is imparted to us; the place where we can see that people are being saved and healed, and the Kingdom is expanded.

We can trust that God is always good, and that He will always bless and love us, regardless if we give our entire salary away, or if we don't give a cent. But why wouldn't we want to give as generously as we can into something we believe in, and be partakers and partners of that life?

Will God not love and bless us the same, even more than He does the lilies in the field, and the birds in the air that don't even give Him anything...?