

Extravagant Giving: Not Tithing

TITHING AND THE BIBLE

There were 3 tithes¹ of the produce of the land in the Mosaic Law, not one, amounting to 23.3%:

- A yearly tithe to support the Levites who had no inheritance in Israel.²
- A yearly tithe to sponsor religious festivals in Jerusalem – sometimes called “the festival tithe”³
- A third-year tithe for the local Levites, orphans, strangers, and widows.⁴

Note: The tithe was on the produce of the land, not income or accumulated wealth.

Tithing of produce was exemplified by Jesus when he referred to the way the Jewish religious leader’s went about it. He called the scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites”, because they *paid tithe of the herbs and spices they grew*, but they neglected the more important matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.⁵

However, things changed with the NC regarding the Law, which included the tithe:

Colossians 2:13-14, 16-17 (NASB) – *“When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross...Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”*

TITHING HISTORY

Frank Viola gives an extensive study of tithing in his book “Pagan Christianity”. He writes:

*“With the death of Jesus, all ceremonial codes that belonged to the Jews were nailed to Christ’s cross and buried, never to be used again to condemn us. For this reason, we never see Christians tithing in the New Testament, just as we don’t see them sacrificing goats and bulls to cover their sins.”*⁶

From the 2nd century onwards Frank notes:

*“Other than Cyprian⁷, no Christian writer before Constantine ever used Old Testament references to advocate tithing.⁸ It was not until the fourth century, three hundred years after Christ, that some Christian leaders began to advocate tithing as a Christian practice to support the clergy.⁹ But it did not become widespread among Christians until the eighth century.¹⁰”*¹¹

*“By the eighth century, the tithe became required by law in many areas of Western Europe.¹² But by the end of the tenth century, the tithe as a rent charge for leasing land had all but faded. The tithe, however, remained and it came to be viewed as a moral requirement supported by the Old Testament. The tithe had evolved into a legally mandatory religious practice throughout Christian Europe.¹³”*¹⁴

1 – Tithe = 10% or 1/10th

2 – Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-31

3 – Deuteronomy 14:22-27

4 – Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13. Jewish historian Josephus and other scholars believe this is a third tithe used in a different way from the second.

5 – Matthew 23:23

6 – Frank Viola & George Barna (2008) “Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices” Barna Books p:173-174 (Kindle Edition)

7 – In the third century, Cyprian of Carthage was the first Christian writer to mention the practice of financially supporting the clergy.

8 – Stuart Murray (2000) “Beyond Tithing”, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, UK p:112. Chrysostom advocated tithing to the poor in some of his writings (p:112-117)

9 – Stuart Murray (2000) “Beyond Tithing”, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, UK p:107. The Apostolic Constitutions (c. 380) support tithing to fund the clergy by arguing from the Old Testament Levitical system (p:113-116). Augustine argued for tithing, but he did not present it as the norm. In fact, Augustine knew that he did not represent the historic position of the church in his support of tithing. Tithing was practiced by some pious Christians in the fifth century, but it was by no means a widespread practice (p:117-121).

10 – Edwin Hatch (2004) “Growth of Church Institutions”, Wipf & Stock Pub. p:102-112.

11 – Frank Viola & George Barna (2008) “Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices” Barna Books p:176-177 (Kindle Edition)

12 – Stuart Murray (2000) “Beyond Tithing”, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, UK p:134. Charlemagne codified tithing and made it obligatory throughout his enlarged kingdom in 779 and 794 (p. 139); Durant, Age of Faith, p:764

13 – Stuart Murray (2000) “Beyond Tithing”, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, UK p:111, 140

14 – Frank Viola & George Barna (2008) “Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices” Barna Books p:177 (Kindle Edition)

Over the past 3 centuries, the tithe was not adhered to by such revivalists as the Methodists, who espoused freewill offerings as their main practice. It has been reinstated these days with the pentecostal and charismatic movements.

THE FIRST CHURCH'S EXAMPLE

The 1st church were extravagant givers, not tithers – full stop!

They sold possessions¹⁵, houses (not the one they lived in¹⁶) and land¹⁷ they had in excess, giving all the proceeds to the church leaders¹⁸ for distribution to the church community for any needs. They shared everything, regarding their possessions as communal, and treating nothing as their own.¹⁹

They weren't compelled to sell their properties, and contrary to what some may believe, they were not compelled to give all the money from property sales to the church.²⁰

The purpose of this giving was a heart-generated welfare system similar to the Jewish one²¹, where there were no poor among them²².

Giving outside of this was done by invitation.²³

There was no need for tithing because they lived a communal life where it wasn't required. In regards to that, there are no references in the NT epistles about tithing – it's absence is a deafening silence. Check it out for yourself on your electronic bible.²⁴

The usual verse trotted out to defend tithing in today's NC church is God's message to Malachi.²⁵ This is talking about providing food²⁶ for the needy as prescribed by the Law²⁷ – i.e. priests, Levites²⁸, widows, fatherless, sojourners and aliens²⁹. The chapter in Malachi refers to tithing in that context:

Malachi 3:5, 10a (NKJV) – *And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness...against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien...Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house.*

The 1st church fulfilled the intent of the tithing law³⁰ and more. They exceeded the imposed tithing level of 23% – not our 10% – and gave all their excess to their church community in the form of money³¹.

These first members of the church community fed everyone who had need, both with daily food distribution³² and dining set-ups like our modern-day 'soup kitchens'. The need to feed was so great that the burden of handling all this feeding caused the apostles to spend too much time in hospitality tasks rather than their apostolic duties.³³ They released themselves from this load by appointing wise, spirit-led servants³⁴ called deacons (*diakonos* - δῆκονος) who waited on tables and handled the welfare system. Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas were the first ones of these.

15 – Acts 2:45; 5:1

16 – They didn't all follow Jesus' mode of homelessness as they still had their own homes. (See Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 11:22; 1 Timothy 5:14)

17 – Acts 4:34

18 – Acts 4:34-35

19 – Acts 2:44; 4:32

20 – The case of Ananias & Sapphira was not giving everything, but lying that they were giving everything. They defrauded the Spirit of God by saying one thing and doing another. (Acts 5:1-4)

21 – i.e. The tithe.

22 – Deuteronomy 15:4 (NIV)

23 – Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

24 – Do a search on 'tithe', 'tithes' & 'thing' and the only references from Acts to Revelation is the book of Hebrews where it's talking about Abraham & Melchizedek in the OT.

25 – Malachi 3:8

26 – Could be converted to money if the person had to travel a long distance to present their tithe. (Deuteronomy 14:24-25)

27 – Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:23

28 – Numbers 18:21

29 – Deuteronomy 26:12-13

30 – This included: burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, heave offerings, vowed offerings, freewill offerings, and first-fruits (Deuteronomy 12:6)

31 – We don't know if they gave food to the community, as only money is recorded in the NT. (See

32 – Acts 6:1

33 – Acts 6:1-5

34 – Acts 6:3

The 1st church believers also opened their homes for other community believers to dine with them. This became like a perpetual ‘progressive dinner’ as they daily went from house to house eating meals as a community.³⁵

The apostles were supported by the funds given to them by the believers so that they were able to carry out their apostolic duties without the hindrance of having to have a money-generating job. Paul did the same, just as Jesus had set up the case for it³⁶, calling it ‘living off the gospel’³⁷.

FOR US TODAY

So how do we handle our resources in these Last days?

- Take ‘a leaf out of’ the 1st church’s spiritual attitude towards money
- Jesus our Sabbath must become our resourcer
- Give extravagantly
- Support Kingdom community members
- Focus on the local city to support, not overseas missions
- Be led by the Spirit in what you do with your money and possessions
- Live with basic needs only
- Follow the Kingdom IPO principle: ‘Freely receive: Freely give’

We consciously do everything for the Lord and in honour of him – no matter what we do. Whether it’s celebrating special days³⁸, what we eat³⁹, giving, whatever, our attitude is to do it lovingly and heartily for our Lord and King,⁴⁰ and not to men of legalistically. There is no condemnation when we do things this way and while we are led by Holy Spirit.

FREEDOM!

Laurence

12-12-2015

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Essential Reading

- Frank Viola (2012) “**Pagan Christianity**” Tyndale House Pub. [Ch 8: ‘Tithing and Clergy Salaries’]
{26 minute audio from audio-book}

(continued over page)

35 – Acts 2:46

36 – Matthew 10:10

37 – 1 Corinthians 9:14

38 – Romans 14:6

39 – Romans 14:6

40 – Colossians 3:23

Resources

- Jonathan Welton (2014) “**My Tithing Blog**”
(disruptingculture.com/2014/12/20/my-tithing-blog-finally)
- “**Old Testament Giving to God**”
(canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/old-testament-giving-to-god.pdf)
- “**The ‘Freely Receive: Freely Give’ Principle**”
(canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/freely-receive-freely-give-principle.pdf)
- Stuart Murray (2000) “**Beyond Tithing**”, Paternoster Press: Carlisle, UK
- Mike Bickle (2009) “**Give Extravagantly: The Joy of Financial Power Encounters**” [PDF, MP3]
(mikebickle.org/resources/resource/11)