

DID THE APOSTLES COLLECT TITHES?

Did the early church make a practice of collecting tithes? Or did the law of tithing only apply to ancient Israel and has no validity for Christians today?

Did the apostles collect tithes from the early church as some believe and teach today? Or is this belief and teaching in error?

Let me put your mind at ease. This broadcast is not a plea for money. If you are a tithe payer and have wondered why some people do not practice tithing. The information contained in this broadcast will help you to clearly understand whether the teaching of tithing as practiced by the majority of the professing Christian community today is Fact, Fiction, or Fraud.

This information will make some people angry and some people happy, depending on whether you are a receiver or a giver of tithes and your willingness to believe what the Bible actually says and not what you have been told it says.

DID THE APOSTLES COLLECT TITHES?

If tithing were a Christian principle, there should be some reference to the apostles collecting or distributing tithes in The New Testament. One example of people involved in supporting the ministry and the church is that of Ananias and Sapphira and their land sale:

Acts chapter 5, verses 1 through 4 tells us this:

"A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the holy spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? why have you conceived this thing in your heart? you have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:1-4 KJV).

Most people who practice tithing today would say that Ananias and Sapphira had lied about the sale price of their property so that they would not have to pay so much tithe; however, this is not the case at all, notice what Peter says to them:

"While it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? you have not lied to men, but to God" (Acts 5:4 KJV).

Peter did not mention anything about tithes or offerings. He said the money was theirs. Neither God nor the church were entitled to any part of this money until it was pledged to the church. Only after the pledge was made did the money belong to God. Ananias and Sapphira's sin was not that of failing to tithe or give a proper offering. Their sin was lying.

THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Anyone who has read the writings of Paul should have observed that he did not water down the truth of God. He preached all the truth and did not hold back correction when it was necessary. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul shows them that they had a problem with their spiritual attitude, behavior, and understanding and he tells them how to correct these problems:

Paul said to the Corinthians

"Brethren, I could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, even as to babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men? For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal?" (1.Cor.3:1-4 KJV).

"To this very hour we have gone hungry and thirsting, without even enough clothes to keep us warm. We have been kicked around without homes of our own. We have worked wearily with our hands to earn our living . . ." (1.Cor.4:11-12 LBP).

The apostle Paul and the others who served with him were not collecting tithes or offerings from the Corinthians; they were supporting themselves as they taught these people God's truth. In this letter, Paul enumerates many of the Corinthian's problems and tells them what to do to correct these problems. It only seems logical that if Paul and the others with him were authorized to receive tithes, he would have also mentioned this in the long list of problems that those at Corinth needed to correct.

1. Corinthians chapter 1, verses 1 through 15 is often quoted to prove that the law of tithing is binding on the followers of Christ, but this is not Paul's intent: Paul said:

"I am an apostle, God's messenger, responsible to no mere man. I am one who has actually seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes. And your changed lives are the result of my hard work for him. If in the opinion of others, I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you, for you have been won to Christ through me. This is my answer to those who question my rights. Or don't I have any rights at all? Can't I claim the same privilege the other apostles have of being a guest in your homes? If I had a wife, and if she were a believer, couldn't I bring her along on these trips just as the other disciples do, and as the Lord's brothers do, and as Peter does? And must Barnabas and I alone keep working for our living, while you supply these others?" (vs. 1-6 LBP).

Apparently someone at Corinth had questioned Paul's apostleship and he was setting the record straight. Although Paul was a tentmaker and more than likely supported himself by working in this trade as indicated in Acts 18:3 and Acts 20:34. It seems that the church at Corinth was supporting the efforts of others while they labored in the gospel, but they were not supporting Paul who had raised up this church:

Paul asked the Corinthians a number of questions in order to help them to have a clear understanding of the issue of supporting those who served in the ministry.

"What soldier in the army has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a farmer who harvests his crop and doesn't have the right to eat some of it? What shepherd takes care of a flock of sheep and goats and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? And I'm not merely quoting the opinions of men as to what is right. I'm telling you what God's law says. For in the law God gave to Moses he said that you must not put a muzzle on an ox to keep it from eating when it is treading out the wheat. Do you suppose God was thinking only about oxen when he said this? Wasn't he also thinking about us? Of course he was. He said this to show us that Christian workers should be paid by those they help. Those who do the plowing and threshing should expect some share of the harvest. We have planted good spiritual seed in your souls. Is it too much to ask, in return, for mere food and clothing?" (vs. 7-11 LBP).

Paul tells them that all those who labor in the gospel should be paid for their effort. Doesn't it seem a bit strange that Paul did not quote the tithing law to get his point across? Paul had been a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:4-5); he knew the law extremely well and he knew that the law of tithing did not apply during the gospel age of salvation, which is why he never mentions it in his reprimands to the churches or to individuals.

Paul said to them:

"You give these things to others that preach to you, and you should. But shouldn't we have an even greater right to them? Yet we have never used this right, but supply our own needs without your help. We have never demanded payment of any kind for fear that, if we did, you might be less interested in our message to you from Christ" (v12 LBP).

the apostle Paul clearly shows that it is the responsibility of the elect to support those who labor full-time in the church and the gospel. Paul had a right to expect to be supported by the congregation at Corinth but he did not ask for this support while he was there.

To justify what he said to them Paul further says:

"Do you 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 has the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (vs.13-14 KJV).

There is no doubt that Paul is talking about the Levites who received tithes and offerings in payment for their service at the temple and to the people. However, the point he is stressing is that those who preach the gospel should be supported by those to whom the gospel is preached.

Paul further clarifies his position by saying:

"Don't you realize that God told those working in his temple to take for their own needs some of the food brought there as gifts to him? And those who work at the altar of God get a share of food that is brought by those offering it to the Lord. In the same way the Lord has given orders that those who preach the Gospel should be supported by those who accept it. Yet I have never asked you for one penny. And I am not writing this to hint that I would like to start now. In fact, I would rather die of hunger than lose the satisfaction I get from preaching to you without charging you" (vs.13-15 LBP).

When following the law of tithing, One thing to remember is that one spiritual law of God is just as important as another. The apostle James says, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of violating the whole law" (Jms.2:10 Para.).

For the apostle Paul to unilaterally make a decision to temporarily suspend the tithing law for the congregation at Corinth would have been to defy God and reject his calling to preach the truth. The apostle Paul makes no mention of tithes at all, he does not even infer that tithes should be paid. The whole context is wages for service rendered.

There are some people who believe that elders of the church should support themselves as Paul did

for much of his ministry. However, just because a man becomes a spiritual leader within the congregations of God, does not mean that he somehow has more time, substance, and energy than any other member of the church. Doing the work of the ministry takes extra time, extra money, and extra energy. A married or single spiritual leader must take much time from his family or his personal pursuits in order to properly fulfill this responsibility.

THE COLLECTION AT CORINTH

In 1. Corinthians chapter 16, there is an account that many people use to justify their tithing and offering practices:

Paul told the Corinthians in chapter 16 beginning in verse 1:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do you. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem" (1. Cor. 16:1-3 KJV).

It is more than interesting to note that between 41-54 A.D. there was a drought, which was predicted by the prophet Agabus that encompassed a large part of that area around Jerusalem. Moreover, there is always a need for food during and after a drought, because it takes time for the land to become productive again. In all likelihood these were the circumstances that necessitated the collections made by the apostle Paul.

It seems that the apostle Paul wrote 1. Corinthians in late spring of 55 A.D., and he began a collection that was meant for drought relief. Paul mentions this collection in his letter to the congregation of God at Rome (about 58 A.D.), saying to them:

"But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints who are at Jerusalem. It has pleased them

and truly; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain" (Rom.15:25-28 KJV).

When this entire account concerning the offering for the Saints at Jerusalem is carefully studied it becomes clear that the things that were collected were produce, and that tithing is never mentioned.

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul states again that he took nothing from them in the way of physical support:

"Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so will I keep myself" (2.Cor.11:7-9 KJV).

If those in the other congregations that Paul mentions were required to tithe, why would Paul have felt he was robbing them in order to serve the congregation at Corinth. Because Paul had been a well educated legalistic Pharisee, and of the tribe of Benjamin he knew that he had no right to the tithes under God's first agreement with national Israel. Clearly, he and the other apostles and elders were supported through voluntary offerings by God's people. There is no scripture in the entire New Testament that indicates otherwise.

PAUL'S KINDNESS

Some people believe that the apostle Paul was a hard hearted person, but the contrary is true. He was very kind, caring, and merciful, even to his own hurt. Paul had a right to be supported by those he was serving but he did not take what was rightfully his, because he did not want to offend the members of the Corinthian congregation. Paul said:

"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:33-35 KJV).

The apostle Paul and others who served the elect of God practiced what they preached. They worked long and hard to support themselves in order to preach the gospel and serve God's people:

To the Thessalonians he wrote:

"Don't you remember, dear brothers, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled and sweated to earn enough to live on so that our expenses would not be a burden to anyone there, as we preached God's Good News among you" (1.Thes.2:9 LBP).

"For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing; we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you, firsthand, how you should work for your living" (2.Thes.3:7-9 LBP).

What is totally lacking in the writings of Paul is any insistence for the elect of God to observe the law of tithing. However, Paul does have much to say about a giving attitude and that the elect of God should give to support those who serve them as elders and laborers in the gospel. Paul never quotes or refers to the law of tithing when discussing the matter of support for the church and the ministry. But why not? The reason is that Paul knew the law of tithing did not apply to the elect of God during the gospel age of salvation.

WHAT HISTORIANS SAY ABOUT NEW TESTAMENT TITHING

Historical evidence also proves that the practice of tithing was not taught by the apostolic church:

Hastings Dictionary of the Apostolic Church says:

"It is admitted universally that the payment of tithes or the tenth of possessions for sacred purposes did not find a place within the Christian church during the age covered by the apostles and their immediate successors".

Encyclopedia Britannica says:

"The Christian church depended at first on voluntary gifts from its members"

The Encyclopedia Americana says:

"It [speaking of tithing] was not practiced in the early church"; "The Christian church depended at first on voluntary gifts from its members".

The Catholic Encyclopedia says:

"The early church had no tithing system—it was not that no need of supporting the Church existed or was recognized, but rather that other means would suffice"

In the Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, it is explained that when the tithing concept was first adopted by the Catholic Church, it was voluntary in nature. But, at the Synod of Macon in the year 585 A.D., payment of tithes was made compulsory under threat of excommunication. Secular authorities were then used to enforce this demand.

M'Clintock and Strong's Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature say:

"In the early Christian church the custom of consecrating to religious purpose a tenth of income was voluntary, and it was not made obligatory until the Council of Tours in 567 A.D.. The second Council of Macon, in 585, enjoined the payment of

tithes under pain of ex-communication" (article 'Tithes').

It is interesting to note that nowhere in the historical records of the early church or the New Testament writings can one find a record of the church financing its efforts or the ministry through the tithing system.

The early church did not practice the law of tithing given to Israel in the wilderness, but how and why was this law imposed on professing Christianity as a means of financial support? Early church history shows that the Catholic Church changed the way that it thought the church should be financed, and most of professing Christianity today accept the Catholic church's teaching in this matter.

The historical record, and the New Testament scriptures prove that obligatory tithing was not taught or practiced by the apostolic church of the first century.

It also becomes apparent when one searches history and the scriptures that there is no historical or scriptural authority whatsoever for carrying over and modifying almost beyond recognition, as some have done, the law of tithing that was given to ancient Israel.

THE REJECTION OF TRUTH

The origin of professing Christianity's tithing system can easily be found by anyone who wishes to investigate the subject. But as always, many who come to know and understand the truth of God will refuse to accept or obey it.

To reject truth is willful sin. To those who are truly God the Father's earthly children and followers of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews says, "There is no more sacrifice for this type of sin, but a fearful looking forward to death" (Heb.10:26-29).

Jesus Christ says that we can know a person's spiritual condition by their fruit, and gives this warning following about counterfeit ministers of the gospel message. Jesus Said:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore you shall know them by their fruits" (Matt.7:15-20).

AN INDICTMENT FOR THIS AGE

Ezekiel chapter 22 is part of a dissertation about the national and personal sins of Israel. Within this chapter, the prophet Ezekiel serves an indictment from God upon the people of Israel. Ezekiel gave this indictment and warning message about 127 years after the ten-tribe House of Israel had been taken into captivity by a foreign power. Whether or not the House of Israel received this prophetic message at that time; it is clear that this message has a contemporary meaning for the scattered House of Israel today:

Ezekiel Writes:

"There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravaging the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests [pastors and ministers] have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they made a difference between the holy and the profane . . ." (Ezk.22:25-26 KJV).

Most ministers who teach tithing, know that they are teaching tithing in opposition to biblical truth. But, rather than repent and teach the truth of God, they refuse to do so and tenaciously hold onto their teaching of tithing for their own gain.

No person or organization has ever had the authority to bind anything on the elect of God unless it can be proven from the Bible that it has already been bound in heaven. Unless today's

tithing system can be biblically proven as a valid way to financially support the church, it has no place in a true church of God.

The first agreement between God and national Israel had a physical priesthood as the mediator between God and man and animal sacrifices, which had to be offered to cover the sins of the people. This system was to be supported by mandatory tithes on the agricultural and animal production of the land plus freewill offerings from all Israelites.

Under agreement that God the Father has with those whom he has called to become children during this gospel age of salvation, Jesus Christ is the High Priest, Advocate, and Mediator between the Father and his elect children. Speaking of Jesus Christ, and this agreement, the writer to the Hebrews said:

"He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them [the Israelites], he said, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, says the Lord (vs.6-9 Para.).

The agreement that God the Father has with his earthly children, is a better agreement and supersedes the first agreement that was made with national Israel. It is clear that the law of tithing that God gave to Israel does not apply to the elect of God today, because none of the conditions for its practice exist today. Moreover, the elect of God today have entered into a new and different relationship with the God family.

The fact is that, the agreement that God the Father has with his children does not contain many of the laws, terms, and conditions that were in the agreement with ancient Israel, such as animal sacrifice, a multiple tithing system, and many other

requirements that were specifically given to the ancient Israelites for that day of salvation.

But just because the Father's earthly children do not have to abide by the Levitical tithing law does not mean that they are absolved of all responsibility to support the church and its work. One who uses the liberty of not being required to give a specific percentage of their increase as an excuse not to support the church or its work is violating many important spiritual principles concerning their responsibilities toward God, his people, and the church.

STEWARDSHIP

There is no doubt Jesus gave people a commission embodying an outward concern for others. How that commission is to be supported is taught throughout the Bible in a positive way. The early disciples clearly understood how the work of the church was to be supported and the method that they used is the one we should use today. There was no confusion or misunderstanding regarding this matter in the early church.

Paul was inspired to reveal that much of what was written as God's word before the gospel age of salvation is to be used to guide our lives today. If the tithing system given to ancient Israel were to be used literally as a guide for the support of the church, only people who make their living from growing agricultural products and animals would be required to give and bear the responsibility for the support of the church.

Although the giving of a set percentage of one's income to help support of the church, its work, and the poor is a good practice, there is a far better and more rewarding method for this support, which is set forth in the Bible. Besides the law of tithing, God provided another way for those who were not covered by the tithing system to have a part in supporting the Levites, the priesthood, the poor, and the temple system of worship. This method is the giving of freewill offerings, which is still a method that is binding upon the elect of God today.

A MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

A point that escapes many when studying the subject of tithing is that the tithe was the minimum that God expected to be given to him for the support of the temple service and other services to Israel. Besides the tithe, God expected the Israelites to give generous offerings in the form of festival offerings and freewill offerings.

The tithe was the lowest acceptable level of giving, not the maximum acceptable level. If an Israelite gave just ten percent of his increase, he was only giving the minimum required. And Christ says that those who only do that which is required of them are unprofitable servants.

THE LABORER'S HIRE

Another scripture that is often quoted in an attempt to prove that the law of tithing is still binding is Luke chapter 10, verse 7 that says of those who's work is delivering the gospel message:

"And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house" (KJV).

In this account, Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to preach about the Kingdom of God and he told them not to take any money with them, but to accept what is provided for them along the way (Lk.10:1-12). Many people use this text to say that Christians should tithe and that the ministry must be the recipient of these tithes because they are the laborers of the church. Indeed, one who labors in the delivery of the gospel message is worthy of his hire.

In order to understand the meaning of Luke chapter 10, verse 7, one must understand the circumstances that surrounded those whom Jesus sent forth to proclaim the gospel message. They left their jobs in order to become laborers of the gospel; therefore, their means of support came from those whom they served through the teaching of the gospel or through the supernatural works that they bestowed as blessings on those with whom they came in contact.

See also Matt.10:5-10.

Some people think that they are worthy of their hire and they may or may not be right. The measure of whether one is worthy or not depends entirely upon the service rendered. Many quasi-Christian evangelists, preachers, and teachers believe that they are worthy to be kept in the style of kings and they live in opulence with private aircraft, mansions, and a host of servants. Where do these people of such supposed great ability and service get their examples for such treatment? Their examples for such treatment is not found in the Bible; instead, their example is the society around them.

For God's servants to live in opulence, while those whom they are to serve live in constant need is nothing short of criminal and a gross violation of the law of love.

Those who call themselves 'ministers' of the living God and draw substance from those that they serve beyond that which is just and prudent are stealing from God and those that they serve. Misappropriation or mis-management of what is given to God is gross misconduct and will be dealt with very severely in the day of judgment.

Many preach that tithing should be done out of a sincere desire to please God. Although they may be misguided and uninformed on the subject, they are at least demonstrating a genuine desire to put God first in this area of their life. Unfortunately many have been preaching the doctrine of tithing to further their own interests. Instead of being honest and forthright in teaching the truth about this subject, many ministers pervert the scriptures in order to coerce people to tithe and therefore place an unnecessary burden on people in order to fulfil their own greed and desire for money.

Although there is not one scripture in the entire Bible that instructs to practice the law of tithing as stated under the first agreement with national Israel, there are many scriptures that instruct a person to freely share their skills, talents, time, and material goods with those who labor in the gospel.

I see that my time is up. All of the so called proofs requiring Christians to tithe can be easily disproved. If you want an in depth of tithing that covers the subject in detail, get a copy my article Tithing, Fact, Fiction or Fraud, or if you want to know more about other subjects that I have briefly touched on in this in this broadcast, Write to me at the at the address given in the following announcement. Until next time this is Bud Cocherell for Bible Research .org.

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