

THE TITHE OF THE LORD

Mal 3:10 *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

Mal 3:11 *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

A tithe can simply be defined as 10 per cent of one's annual produce or earnings. Once an individual is saved, which means he or she believes that God is one, this same God was manifested in the flesh and his name is Jesus, repents of sin, is baptized in full water immersion in Jesus' name, and seeks/receives the Holy Spirit, such an individual is commanded to tithe. Why should the Christian tithe? To begin with, God owns everything and provides for our needs. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High. And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalm 50:10-15). These scriptures indicate that God does not need anything from us but the opposite is true: we are dependent on God for our every need. We see this principle demonstrated in the life of Abraham.

Gen 14:19 *And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:*

Gen 14:20 *And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

Notice that God first blessed Abram after which Abram "gave him tithes of all". This is the first principle of tithing. We also observe this principle operating in the response Jacob gave to God at Bethel. "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on ... And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Gen 28:20, 22). Notice that Jacob began the vow with an "If God be with me ...". In other words, his vow was conditional upon God giving him food, clothing and protection. Before we judge Jacob, let us remember that tithing is the only ordinance where we are invited to test God. God emphatically declares, "... and prove me

now herewith ...” (Malachi 3:10). God kept his promise to Jacob. He prospered him despite Laban’s attempts to cheat him. God also protected Jacob and brought him back safely to the Land of Canaan and his family. In our modern times, the state has usurped this role of God.

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, observed how the modern state apparatus behaves like a pastor. We pay taxes, expect protection and even social benefits (in Norway, where I live, there is free schooling and medical care, among others). Foucault was from France, a Catholic country, and concluded that citizens now “confess their sins” not to a priest, but to the state. He was thinking about the way in which we fill out various tax, medical and other forms constantly informing the government about our activities. Foucault was concerned about increasing use of state surveillance and our complicity or docility in creating a state that controls our every activity (panopticon). He called his theory “pastoral governmentality”. While the Christian has responsibilities to the state, we must never forget our duties towards the God of heaven, Jesus. The Lord himself rebuked the Pharisees for neglecting the weightier matters of the Law, but he upheld tithing.

***Mark 12:17** And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.*

***Mat 23:23** Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

Christians tithe because God owns everything and generously provides for our needs. To tithe is recognize and acknowledge God’s providence and generosity. By tithing, the Christian demonstrates his or her belief in God’s power over the created order. While God causes his sun to shine and rain to fall on both the just and the unjust, only those who are children of God and enter into the pact of tithing can expect to enjoy supernatural increase and protection. This is the main difference. God promises to supernaturally increase the Christian’s income or produce after which the Christian acknowledges this blessing through the giving of tithes, as Abraham did. In other words, we tithe because we know our increase is a result of God’s intervention. Our increase is not due to natural talents, luck or human favor – it is purely a result of divine fiat (God’s command).

***Deut 7:13** And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee.*

***Deut 14:22** Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.*

One may wonder why God chose the number 10. It appears from the pages of the Bible that this number is associated with God's undisputed authority. It was only after the tenth plague that Pharaoh was broken and relinquished his authority over Israel. God was so certain before the 10th plague that Israel would be free that he commanded them to put on their shoes and prepare to depart Egypt. "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S Passover" (Exodus 12:11). Once we pay our tithes to God, we can be certain his undisputed authority will be stamped into every facet of our lives. No wonder God told Israel through Malachi that he would rebuke the devourer if Israel brought their tithes to the storehouse. Once God established his authority over Pharaoh, he brought Israel to Mount Sinai and gave them the 10 Commandments to establish his authority over the nation of Israel. From that day forth, God's word would be stamped into every facet of their lives. If they obeyed these 10 Commandments, they would be blessed above all nations. We know the many blessings promised in Deuteronomy 28.

Deut 28:1 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

Finally, allow me to say a word or two about the attitude that ought to accompany tithing or any giving to the Lord. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). Note that God "loveth a cheerful giver". Jesus loves those who love to give. Don't we covet the love of Jesus? One could say there is a special place in the heart of Jesus for those who love to give to him. David was such a man. No one asked him to give his gold and silver which he collected through his many wars with surrounding nations. He was a cheerful giver. "And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (2 Sam 24:24). David never gave a cheap offering to the Lord. No wonder the Lord testified:

Acts 13:22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

May the good Lord give us a heart to give cheerfully of our tithes and offerings!