



SUPPORTING THE CHURCH

QUEST LESSON F-4

The Problem: To what extent does the Lord expect us to give money to the church? Religious programs on television sometimes stress giving more than the central aspects of the Gospel. In some churches, there is so much said about financial matters, and so many offerings are taken up that people wonder if perhaps money has become disproportionately significant to some religious leaders.

On the other hand, the Bible has a lot to say about the importance of liberal giving. The main reason for this Scriptural emphasis is that the Gospel message may go rapidly and efficiently to those who have not heard it. It costs money to commission preachers and missionaries for the task of making Christ and His truth known to the world. These Gospel workers have to live and pay their bills just like anyone else. And the work of the church inevitably involves expense. How can the Gospel message be published unless the church spends money to publish books and magazines? How can Christian schools and hospitals be operated unless people are willing to assist in their financial maintenance? How can we have church buildings in which people enjoy worshiping unless money is donated to build them? How can evangelistic meetings be conducted unless church members give money to meet the expense? How can the church have a welfare ministry to assist the poor unless someone helps financially?

It is just not possible to have an efficiently organized church program unless God's people are willing to help meet the expense.

Some people argue that an organized program is not necessary for the church. They think everyone should worship in his own way, in his own time and place, without an organized church structure. As we have seen in previous lessons (see especially F1), that is not the plan that the Lord has outlined for His church. The apostolic church that Jesus founded was an organization in which the ministry was supported, the preaching of the Gospel was fostered, and the poor were assisted.

Other people in the organized church refrain from giving because they think the leaders are not doing things in the right way. But there is nothing in the Bible indicating that our giving should depend upon the attitudes of the leaders. God is well able to take care of the leadership of His church! Jesus taught that we should look to our own spiritual needs and not sit in judgment on others. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Matthew 7:1-3. Our responsibility is to follow the Bible's counsel about giving and let the Lord have oversight of the church and its programs.

Let us turn now to the Bible and see what it says on this question of giving for the Lord's work.

Objectives

First, we consider God's ownership and man's stewardship

Second, we note that the Lord instituted the practice of tithing for a very special purpose.

Third, we ask, is the tithing principle for Christians

Fourth, we question what the Bible teaches about the importance of free offerings.

Fifth, we shall discover that there are great blessings for the faithful steward of God's goods.

I. God's Ownership Man's Stewardship

The owner of a business expects that his employees will be loyal to the business. The managers are expected to do all they can to make the business a financial success, and the workers are expected to be faithful to the tasks given to them. God is our owner, we are His managers (stewards) and workers.

The Word

1. What did the Psalmist write about God's ownership? Psalm 24:1; 50:10-12.
2. How much of worldly wealth belongs to God? Haggai 2:8.
3. What ability does God bestow upon faithful people? 1 Chronicles 29:12-14; Deuteronomy 8:18.
4. What does the Lord ask us to do as an acknowledgment of His ownership? Proverbs 3:9-10; 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19,

Explanation: The whole world is God's property because He created it (Genesis 1:1). The same Christ who died for our sins brought the world and human life into being in the first place (John 1:1-3). God gives us the strength, ability, and wisdom to make a living, provide for our families, and, in the case of some people, accumulate wealth. Not everyone is given wealth simply because not everyone can handle it. Jesus taught that it is difficult for a rich man to enter heaven (Matthew 19:23-26). It is difficult because riches tend to lead people to depend on themselves and their own resources instead of leaning on Christ. "But with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). He can save rich people just as He can save anyone. Whether a person is wealthy, middle class, or poor, the Bible counsel is that he be generous with the God who supports him. The Bible instructs: "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase" (Proverbs 3:9). Then the Lord will supply our material needs and use us in His service. Since our material advantages are supplied by the Lord, He asks us to manage them conscientiously "as good stewards of the manifold grace of Christ" (1 Peter 4:10).

Relevance: Whether we are blessed with material possessions or not, we can praise God as Job did: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). When the Lord gives us wealth, it is for a special reason. When He removes it, there is a special reason for that! Romans 8:28 teaches that all that happens to us, whether good or bad, is used by God for our blessing if we love Him. Our duty and privilege is to acknowledge His ownership by being generous in our giving. The Lord will then deal with us in a manner that is for our best good and the good of those for whom we are working.

II. The Lord Instituted The Tithing Principle

A tithe is a tenth of our income. The Lord taught ancient Israel that they should give a tenth for a special reason,

The Word

5. How did the patriarchs show their gratitude for God's blessings? Genesis 14:18-20; 28:20-22.
6. What did the Lord command Moses in regard to tithing? Leviticus 27:30-33.
7. What was the tithe used for in ancient Israel? Did priests pay tithe? Numbers 18:21, 24-27.
8. Where did the people bring their tithes? Nehemiah 13:12.

Explanation: Abraham, who is used in the New Testament as the great example of righteousness by faith (Romans 4; Galatians 3), was a tithe payer. Jacob also gave God a tithe for all his increase.

Leviticus 27:30-33 teaches that a person was to pay a tithe of all his income, whether of the produce of the soil or the increase of his cattle. If a man wanted the wheat for sowing and preferred to pay in money than in wheat, he might redeem the tithe (Leviticus 27:31). This meant that he would have the wheat appraised and would pay the regular tenth in money plus one-fifth. But he was not permitted to do that in the case of the tithe of the cattle (verse 33).

Thus, the Lord ensured that the Levites, who were the priests and the caretakers of the sanctuary, would have sufficient grain and cattle for their sustenance. They were not to have land of their own. Their income was the tithe paid by the people (Leviticus 18:21). The Levites were also to pay tithe (verse 26).

The tithe was paid into the central treasury of the sanctuary (later the temple) and distributed equitably to the Levites (Nehemiah 13:12). No one had the right to single out a particular popular priest and pay tithe directly to him. It was given to the treasury so that every priest and Levite could receive the same income. There was no class distinction among the priests in ancient Israel.

Relevance: The Lord provided for spiritual leaders in Israel (priests and Levites) by having all the people give a percentage of their income. What a delightfully equitable system that was! The giver, including the priests themselves, had the joy of giving back to God some of what He had given. And the receiver (the priest) had sufficient income to support his family.

III. Is The Tithing Principle For Christians?

Old Testament religious laws were only temporary when they typified or illustrated some aspect of the future ministry of the Messiah. Animal sacrifices in the sanctuary lost their significance when Jesus died on the cross (Hebrews 10) because every animal sacrificed represented Christ, who was sacrificed for our sins. But such practices as tithing were never to be done away because the circumstances requiring it would exist until the second coming of Christ.

The Word

9. What did Jesus say about tithing? Matthew 23:23.
10. What principle still applies that is at the basis of the tithing practice? Matthew 10:9-11.
11. What special reference to tithing was made by the Apostle Paul? 1 Corinthians 9:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18.
12. What wonderful promises to tithe payers still apply today? Malachi 3:8-12.

Explanation: Jesus taught that we ought to pay tithe (Matthew 23:23). When Matthew recorded Jesus' statement to the Pharisees, he did not add that tithe was once required by God, but since the cross

things are different. There is no hint anywhere in the New Testament that tithe paying has been done away with by the Lord. Quite the contrary! Jesus taught that those who are preaching the Gospel should be supported by the people to whom they are ministering (Matthew 10:9-11). That is the very principle at the basis of the tithing practice.

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, further emphasized the importance of tithing. When he referred to those "which minister about holy things" living "of the things of the temple" (1 Corinthians 9:13), he was speaking of the support given to priests in Israel. They were supported by the tithe of grain, produce, cattle, and money that the people brought to the temple. Paul adds, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (verse 14).

The promises of Malachi 3:8-12 have never been rescinded! When we are true in heart to the Lord today and are faithful in our tithe paying, we can expect Him to fulfill for us those wonderful promises. He will pour out blessings upon us that are greater than we could have imagined. He will rebuke "the devourer" that would destroy us materially or spiritually. If we suffer as Job did and lose all our possessions, the Lord will make it up to us; if not in this life, then most certainly in the hereafter. The principle stands that we can claim by faith God's great promises and believe that He will take care of us if we are faithful in our tithe paying.

Relevance: Are you willing to "prove" the Lord as Malachi 3:10 says we should? Are you willing to pay a tenth of all your increase? That means giving God a tenth of your income before anything else is taken out of it. When you consider all that He has done for you, that is a very small token of appreciation.

IV. What Does The Bible Teach About The Importance Of Freewill Offerings?

The tithe is a fixed amount that the Lord asks us to give back to Him, Freewill offerings are to be given as the Holy Spirit moves us. And He will move us according to our ability to give.

The Word

13. What do offerings have to do with worship? Psalm 96:8-9.
14. What kind of giver does God love? 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.
15. What kind of giving does God despise? Matthew 6:1-4.
16. What example of sacrificial giving did Jesus point out to His disciples? Mark 12:41-44.

Explanation: We come to worship the Lord to receive a spiritual blessing. He does not ask us to buy His love and grace. Quite the contrary it is a free gift (Romans 3:24). But as a response of love to His love for us, we are to give something for the support of His work on the earth. He knows that different people have different incomes. Some can afford to give a large offering, and others can afford very little. But if we give as the Spirit moves upon our hearts, our gift will be very acceptable to the Lord. Such a gift comes from a willing heart.

God does not want us to copy the Pharisees and let everyone know how much we gave so that we can have human praise and glory. He wants us to give quietly, without any fanfare, and without any ulterior motive. Our giving should be like that of the poor widow woman, of whom Jesus spoke, who gave sacrificially. The Lord knows that we need to have some savings for the future, and He knows that we have to pay our monthly bills. But He is anxious to bestow upon us the glorious blessings of heaven, both

spiritually and materially. When we give sacrificially, we demonstrate that we really love Him. And He loves to bestow His special blessings upon those who love Him.

Relevance: Are you willing to come to worship with an offering for the Lord? In the final analysis, our offerings are not for any human being. The Lord's part is to see that they are used carefully and faithfully for the onward progress of His work. Our part is to give as a heartfelt response to His love, and with a great burden that others may share the salvation we enjoy.

V. There Are Great Blessings For The Faithful Steward Of God's Goods

It is impossible in the short compass of this study to list all the blessings that God bestows upon born-again Christians who give freely for His work. But we can refer to His most important blessings.

The Word

17. Where does the faithful giver receive his true reward? Matthew 6:19-21.
18. What did Jesus promise to the loyal disciples who sacrificed for Him? Matthew 19:27-30; compare Luke 18:28-30.
19. What special blessings does God give now to the faithful person who pays tithes and offerings? 2 Corinthians 9:8-11.
20. Who is our example in giving? 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Example: We lay up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19) by dedicating ourselves fully to the service of Christ, whatever the financial consequences. The most important consideration in life for the surrendered Christian is to do Christ's will, even if that keeps Him poor until death. Jesus promised that the reward in the Kingdom is great. But He also pointed out that there are great rewards now. The disciple who sacrifices for Him will "receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Luke 18:30). That does not mean that the Lord plans to make every Christian believer materially wealthy. Undoubtedly it is true that there will be great material blessings of one sort or another. The real issue, however, is that "all grace" will abound to the faithful believer who gives back to the Lord some of what he has been given (2 Corinthians 9:8-11).

Such a person will be spiritually enriched every day. He will have all that he needs spiritually and materially to carry on the specific work in life that the Lord has given him; He will emulate Jesus in His lifestyle and in his giving. Jesus gave completely unselfishly (2 Corinthians 8:9). He turned His back on the riches of heaven. When He died on the cross, He felt that He would never again be restored to the glory and wealth of His heavenly home. That sacrifice was infinitely expensive for the God of the universe. It involved suffering that we will never fully understand, not even when we are in the heavenly Kingdom.

Relevance: If Jesus could so freely give for you His time, His talent, His service, and His life, is it so difficult to give back to Him a tenth of your income and free will offerings so that the Gospel can be preached around the world? We plead with you first to give Him your heart, and then it will not be a sacrifice at all to give up your material possessions. Because you love Him more than any human soul, much more than you love yourself, you will be willing to lay all on the altar of sacrifice and allow Jesus to have complete direction in the affairs of your life.

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Tithing was only for Old Testament times.
 - b. There are great blessings for the tithe payer today.
 - c. Only the Lord can tell us how much we should give in offerings. No human being can command a free will offering.
 - d. We are to buy the blessings of the Lord.

2. Discuss: Jesus asked the rich young ruler to give up all his possessions and travel with Him as an evangelist (Matthew 19:21). But when Zacchaeus became a Christian, he only gave half of his good to the poor (Luke 19:8). Why the difference?