

THE TITHES AND THE COVENANTS

Recently several friends asked for a perspective on tithing. So let us examine every scripture and question everything. The Holy Spirit is the teacher but if we do not ask questions He cannot answer. Religion makes a virtue of passive acceptance. The foundation of every religious system is to make people feel guilty for asking questions. Every cult makes submission a primary virtue so that the people will accept manipulation and control from those who lead them.

Jesus played questions and answers. He wanted creative, engaged followers not passive accepters. Question everything! If you are not asking questions, the Holy Spirit cannot guide you into all truth. Tradition is not necessarily truth. Often tradition is the enemy of truth. Lies repeated often enough can be accepted as true and a conscience trained in lies will initially feel guilty when beginning to reject them and receive the truth. It is probable that most of what you have been taught about finances is wrong.

In this study our methodology will be to examine every scripture that refers to tithing with reference to their primary context of Old or New Covenant. If you play cut and paste you can make the scriptures say anything you want! We need the big picture. The parts only speak truthfully in the context of the whole. Wisdom is to place the parts in the proper context. This study will require that you look up each scripture and work through the implications of what we are saying. We invite you to study with us.

However let me ask a question to begin. Why would anyone think that the answer to releasing generosity is a system of blessings and curses, carrots and sticks rather than a deep encounter with the generous heart of God and a deepening relationship with Him?

A/ THE OLD COVENANT AND THE TITHE

Strong's Concordance lists thirty-two references to "tithe", "tithes" and "tithing" in the Old Testament. Two Hebrew words are used for these but their root meaning is the same- "tenth". These texts refer to four different tithes. Let us study each of them in turn.

The giving of ten percent of the total yearly harvest is commanded in Leviticus 27:30- 32, Numbers 18:21- 28 and the practice is recorded in II Chronicles 31:5, Nehemiah 10:35- 37, 12:44 & 13:5. This is a tithe of all produce of field, vineyard, orchard and of the yearly increase of the herd and flock. This tithe was for the support of the tribe of Levi. The landowners, the business owner/operators, from eleven tribes gave a tenth to one tribe and they got a good bargain! This tithe paid the tribe of Levi to provide spiritual care as well as the medical, judicial and educational systems of the nation. The tabernacle, and later the temple, were built and maintained by offerings and temple taxes (Exodus 30:11- 16, Exodus 35:20- 29 Exodus 36:2- 7). The tithe was always for the priests and never for the buildings.

God's original intention was for a nation of priests to be symbolized by the first born son of each family being a priest (Numbers 3:35). Their function was to mediate between God and the nation through the sacrificial system. However, when

only the tribe of Levi did not sin around the golden calf (Exodus 32:26- 28), God chose them to be priests. Priests did not receive an inheritance of land like the other tribes (Numbers 18:21- 24). They were separated from normal work unto the work of the temple and sacrifice. No other tribe of Israel was allowed to offer sacrifices or serve in the temple. Thus the inheritance of the tribe of Levi was the tithe and the first fruit offerings (Deuteronomy 1- 8).

It may be good to note that the tithe is not the same as the first fruit offering. The first fruit was simply that- the first ripe fruit of each harvest that was to be given as an offering before any of the rest of the harvest could be eaten (Leviticus 23:9- 14).

The second tithe was used for the feasts at Jerusalem. Deuteronomy 12 & 14:22- 29 instructs them to take this tithe and spend it on a party! Listen to verse 26, "And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God and you shall rejoice, you and your household." God commanded huge parties! They were to gather in Jerusalem three times per year (Exodus 23:14- 17) and they were to use a tithe of their income for these parties. In the societies of that day idol festivals with drunkenness and sexual orgies were common. These Jewish festival days were to be true celebrations plus a renewal of the covenant through the reading of the law. This is the classic wisdom of replacing something evil with something good. This is a demonstration of the generous heart of God. Religion can be stingy and utilitarian. God is not! He is a Father.

The third tithe was taken every three years and was so that the "Levite... the stranger and the fatherless and the widow... may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you..." (Deuteronomy 14:27- 29). This was a tithe so that every three years those who were not landowners could feast like those they worked for and gleaned from. The poor were cared for day by day as they gleaned (Leviticus 19:9- 10 & Deuteronomy 24:19) in the fields, orchards and vineyards. The day laborers survived day by day. This tithe was not for their daily needs. If a man does not work for his daily needs his integrity is destroyed. This was so that every three years they could fully participate in the national parties. The wisdom of God! And again a demonstration of His generous heart. He wanted all to participate in the party!

The last tithe was what the tribe of Levi gave to the house of Aaron as instructed in Numbers 18:25- 28. This is what the Levites are bringing into "the storehouse" in Nehemiah 10:38. The Levites tithed to Aaron. He must have been a very wealthy man! Now you understand why some contemporary leaders like to live in the Old Testament and talk so much about David and Solomon. The life styles of the kings of old do not rebuke our latent materialism. However, our example is primarily Jesus and secondarily Paul.

One of the Old Testament verses which is used to teach tithing as normative for today is from Deuteronomy 27:30 which declares that "all tithe... is the Lord's. It

is holy to the Lord.” That is a strong statement. However, the Old Testament also declares in Leviticus 3:16 that “all fat is the Lord's” and verse 17 enforces this by saying that not eating fat is to be a “perpetual statute”. Why is the first taught today but not the second? This point about the inconsistency of legalistic teachers is made by Paul in Galatians 6:13 (as translated by Eugene Peterson), “All their talk about law is gas. They themselves do not keep the law. And they are highly selective about the laws they do observe.”

2/THE OLD COVENANT AND FAITH

Giving is an act of faith! You take security and substance out of your present and sow it into God and into your future! That is the lesson of Abraham giving to Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18- 20. That is the lesson of Job and of Jacob. God is our source and we demonstrate that by giving to Him. Tithing did not originate with Moses. Giving was a part of relationship with God right from the beginning.

Yes, Abraham's giving to Melchizedek is the first mention of tithing in the Scripture. This happened before the law was given. Thus some would say that tithing is a part of the Covenant of Promise that applies to us today. However, have you looked at what Abraham tithed? He tithed the spoils of war! And after giving that tithe, he gave all the rest back to the original owners. This does set a precedent but it is not a precedent for tithing from income. It sets a precedent for what we should do with the spoils of war. So unless you are collecting the spoils of war, this tithe does not apply to you. There is no record of Abraham ever tithing from his income!

Not only did Moses command the people to give tithes and offerings, he also commanded them to keep the Sabbath days (Exodus 20:8- 11), keep the feast days (Leviticus 23), keep the seventh year sabbath (Leviticus 25:1- 7) and keep the fiftieth year sabbath, the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8- 55). It is one thing to give tithes and offerings it is another thing to rest every seventh day, take a week off every four months, to rest every seventh year for the whole year and not be able to even glean in the fields of what came up by itself! You had to trust that the harvest from year six would see you through two years! Then there was the year of Jubilee where the harvest from year forty-eight had to see you through year forty-nine and fifty! One harvest, after tithes and offerings, was to last for three years! That takes faith!

Then every seventh year all debts were to be forgiven and all who had sold themselves into slavery to pay debt were to be released (Deuteronomy 15:1- 18). On that year of Jubilee all debts were to be forgiven, all slaves set free and all land that had been purchased was to be returned to its original owners (Leviticus 25). Income earned from the land could be kept, houses purchased inside walled cities could be kept but the land, the basis of building wealth, had to be returned to its original owners. If a father lost his land due to illness, laziness or addiction, his posterity were not condemned to be day laborers. The land would come back to them and they could have the opportunity to generate wealth. The land was not to become concentrated in the hands of a few creating a society of the rich and the poor.

This is the wonderful wisdom of God! The whole economic life of the nation was centered around faith, obedience, generosity and justice. Each family had its opportunity to create wealth renewed every fifty years!

Even in the Old Covenant God wanted His people to walk in faith and obedience. Even in an agricultural economy where they were self-sufficient, they were to suspend that self-sufficiency every seven years and trust God that what they had harvested on the sixth year would carry them through the seventh until the new harvest of the eighth. They were to trust that provision even though they were giving away 23% of it!

The tithing, offering, sabbath, feast, sabbatical and Jubilee provisions of the law required that the believers of the Old Covenant walked in faith. They had to believe that their obedience to God would result in their favor and blessing.

Well did Habakkuk say (Habakkuk 2:4), “the just shall live by faith”. Thus the Old Testament was a faith system. The New Covenant makes this even more intense by removing all the system and making our faith dependent upon the voice of the Holy Spirit alone and our obedience to Jesus who is the fulfillment of the Law. He is the Word.

3/ MALACHI CHAPTER 3- CURSES AND BLESSINGS

Every time this passage is used to teach tithing to those who are in Christ it is taken out of its context. This is the last book of the Old Testament and is addressed to the Jewish nation under the Law. . It is a part of the covenant requiring festivals, sacrifice, special garments, special rituals around sexual relations and special foods. Why is this chapter used so much today? Why not the chapters about special foods? The issue is money. Many leaders are afraid that if the people do not tithe, they will not be able to provide for themselves. These leaders are motivated by fear of lack and that is what they minister to the people. When we speak to people of curse and blessing we first of all raise up guilt if they are not tithing and then raise up fear of being cursed if they do not continue to do so. Guilt and fear are potent religious motivations. However, they are in themselves a curse. This is not good news!

Clearly, Malachi 3 is part of the Old Covenant and in Galatians Paul tells us what happens when we mix the covenants, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.'” (Galatians 3:10).

If we are going to teach tithing as a legal requirement for God's financial blessing, why do we not also teach obedience to the other financial laws such as loaning money at no interest or the Jubilee forgiveness of all debts? Why do we not use tithe money for huge church parties?

The reality is that if we are going to keep one law, we have to keep them all. And if we cannot keep them all we are under the curse! And if we mix the covenants we are really under the curse, the biggest of them all, the curse that says if you mix law with grace, “Christ will profit you nothing” (Galatians 5:2).

Some go further and even teach that the tithe is the foundation for blessing and that our offerings determine the size of our blessing. This is gross manipulation and magical thinking that has no scriptural basis in the Old or the New Testaments.

Yes, God wants us to “test” Him (Malachi 3:10) but in the New Covenant

everything is in Christ. Is Christ enough? Test Him! Do what He asks you to do! In Matthew 6:25- 34, Jesus promises to supply our needs and “add all things to us” if we “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”. That is very practical. The kingdom of God is the people he rules over and righteousness refers to acting right towards others. This is not a mystical seeking after God in heaven but a practical care for others which culminates in the judgment of Matthew 24. When we put the needs of others first and give to meet those needs, Jesus promises to meet ours. Test Him!

Yes, God promises to “rebuke the devourer” (Malachi 3:11) but because you keep a law or because the devourer is defeated in Christ? We do not need a revelation from Malachi. We need a revelation from the Holy Spirit about what God has done in Christ! That is Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesians 1:15- 23. That is the message of Colossians 2:14- 15 as well as Hebrews 2:14- 15. I think we need to read these scriptures until we get it- Satan was defeated at the cross of Christ! There has been a resurrection! We are in Christ! All the promises of God are “yes” and “amen” in Christ “to the glory of God through us” (II Corinthians 1:20)!

The devourer is rebuked! The “ruler of this world has been judged”, (John 16:11). Here Jesus is teaching that it will take the convicting truth ministry of the Holy Spirit to reveal to people that they are no longer under judgment but that their enemy is already judged! You are free of the curse (Galatians 3:13). Your enemy has been rebuked. The strong man is bound. You are in the covenant of grace! You are in Christ and Christ is in you, your hope of glory.

But let us follow the legalistic path a little further. If the the people are cursed when they do not tithe, what happens when the leaders misappropriate the tithe? The law said the tithe was for the priesthood. The goal was to release service to the people and meet every need. What happens if the tithe is used for buildings, utilities and administration. If you like dealing in blessing and cursing you may want to consider that question.

And a little further down the legalistic path... Malachi never says “tithe” singular but “tithes” plural. The blessing and the curse revolve around the “tithes”. If you are going to preach this you must preach all four tithes, not just the first tithe! That would be a difficult sell would it not? It would also be difficult practically since how would you tithe to the high priest?

And what about this? We are told to bring the tithes into the “storehouse” which is always interpreted as “your local church where you are fed” and it goes on to say so “That there may be food in My house” (Malachi 3:10). According to Strong's #01004, the Hebrew word translated as “house” has the primary meaning of household or family. In the Old or the New Covenant, “house” refers to the people, the family of God.

The whole household! That was not just the priesthood, it was also the poor. Have you ever heard Malachi 3:5 quoted in preaching about tithing? The nonpayment of tithe was oppression and exploitation of the “wage earners and widows and orphans”. Why? Because they could not party with the rest of the nation! In our day the tithe is generally spent on salaries, buildings and programs. Other

offerings are taken for the poor or helping the poor is left completely to the “para church ministries” (ministries that do what the church is supposed to do but which it does not do since it is too focused on itself?). Under the Old Covenant if the third tithe is not used for the poor that would have been misappropriation. It is still misappropriation.

And another question arises. God does not like the oppression of the “wage earner”. To command a wage earner to pay tithe means a whole different thing than to command a business person to pay tithe! In fact none of the tithes in the Old Testament were collected from the wage earners or the day laborers. Tithe was only collected from the business men- the land owners! Today, that would leave most people free from the requirement to pay tithe! When have you ever heard that preached?

The gospel is supposed to be good news for the poor. In the Old Covenant economy the poor and the wage earners paid no tithes. That was good news! Now we tell wage earners, who are already paying taxes for government and social services, that they must pay another tax to the church! That is not good news! We tell the poor they must pay tithes in order to be blessed. That is called oppression. The truth is that the poor are often more generous in helping others than the wealthy.

Every religion in the world oppresses the poor. Other religions also demand a tithe to support their systems. The promise is that if they will give to the temple, the priests and the priestly hierarchy, they will be blessed. That is simply not true. Most religious systems keep the people poor and ignorant so as not to challenge the privilege and power of the priesthood.

And another question- why do leaders stress Malachi 3 and giving to themselves and their systems rather than Isaiah 58 and giving to the poor? Why indeed! After all, Isaiah 58 promises more blessings than Malachi 3 and the principles of Isaiah 58 are strongly endorsed by Jesus in Matthew 25.

God does promise to open “the windows of heaven” and “pour out ... blessing”. Thus some teach that if 60% of the church tithes, they will receive only 60% of the blessing God intends for them. They promise the people a 100% blessing, that the church would move into revival, if they all tithe and do so “accurately” which means on their gross income and not on their net. This is perverse legalism and magical thinking. Some ultra orthodox Jews believe that if they could only get their community to keep a perfect sabbath, the Messiah would come. This is another example of foolish human effort to try and make something happen which has already happened!

Martin Luther started a reformation in reaction to the selling of indulgences. The lie of that day was that release from purgatory into heaven could be bought. The lie of our day is that a perfect tithe will release of heaven to us. Jesus is the door and the window of heaven. He always will be. Your money cannot buy you entrance into blessing or the release of blessings to you. We are already “blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

Most would say that they know that their giving does not earn the blessing of God but our hopes and fears tell us something else so we pay a tithe “just in case”.

However we do not sacrifice little goats in our back yards just to make sure we are forgiven. We understand the difference between the covenants when it comes to forgiveness but not when it comes to finance. We need to repent from works of the law and mixing the Covenants. In Christ all that we receive and all that we do is in response to what He has already done for us.

Let us summarize the good stuff. Generosity honors God who wants His household to have food and the poor to be blessed. That is a consistent message through the Old Testament. Proverbs is full of it! We are to be generous because He is generous. We are to be like Him!

What is the principle of Malachi that we can apply now? When we are generous He “opens the windows of heaven” to pour out blessing (Malachi 3:10)! Have you ever seen money float down from heaven? Do you ever open your windows to throw out money? No, you open windows to let in fresh air or in this case He opens the windows to let the air of heaven flow out. What does that mean? What is the wind of heaven? Could that be the breath of God? Could it be the words from His mouth? Could that be new and creative ideas about how to make wealth? Wisdom is worth more than silver or gold! Ideas are wealth!

This is not magical thinking but creative ideas about wealth creation and how we can partner with God and multiply resources through discipline and hard work. Faith without works is dead in every realm but especially in the realm of finances.

4/ THE NEW COVENANT & THE TITHE

The words “tithe” and “tithing” are used seven times in the New Testament. One of those times is in Matthew 23:23 and another in Luke 11:42 where Jesus curses the Pharisees for paying tithes from their window box herb gardens while neglecting justice and the love of God. Some say this usage shows that Jesus blessed the tithe as a New Covenant practice. If so, this is a very strange blessing! Jesus was commenting on what the Pharisees were doing, not prescribing what we should do.

Jesus does say, “unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20). “Accurate tithing” like the Pharisees does not gain us much in terms of the Kingdom of heaven.

For the first three centuries of the church there were no paid professional ministers or local pastors. Local leaders had their day jobs just like everybody else. The priesthood of all believers was functional. God finally had His nation of priests!

That is why Peter (I Peter 2) is so strong about “new born babes” being “a holy priesthood”, “a royal priesthood”, and “a holy nation” that could “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God”. They fulfilled the fifty-six “one another” scriptures as they ministered to one another. They met in homes around a real love feast with real food that they served to each other not a symbolic one served to them in a special place at a special time by someone in special clothes with a special office saying special words and doing things in a special repetitive manner.

That is why Paul (Galatians 3:28) announces that all gender, race and class distinctions are gone in Christ.

That is why he tells the Corinthians (II Corinthians 1:24) “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy: for by faith you stand.”

That is why Paul declared that the head of every man is Christ (I Corinthians 11:3)! God finally had His nation of priests and Paul was not going to get between them and Him! That is why the dogma of a positional leader being a spiritual covering over another member of the body of Christ is so wrong.

That is why so many present day leaders crash and burn. They are trying to do something that God does not want them to do. There is no New Testament teaching or example of the modern senior pastor who administrates, counsels, preaches, visits, prays, fasts, and leads every meeting while the congregation watches and receives. There is no clergy and laity distinction in the New Testament. You can set yourself over God's people and try to sit on God's chair but be prepared for when He sits down!

Paul did not talk about tithes because tithes placed one class of believers above another. Paul did not collect tithes for himself since he saw himself as a “fellow worker” for the joy of those that he served. The declaration of Timothy 2:5 rings through Paul's thinking and practice, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” The New Covenant reality is no special priestly class in doctrine or practice doing special things in special clothes since this removes Jesus from His place.

The testimony of history is that tithing to support professional clergy did not appear until the eighth century. And those leading the Roman Catholic system made an appeal to the Old Testament pattern of priesthood to justify this practice. They had to do so- it is not in the New! For more on this you can check out “Pagan Christianity” by Frank Viola. They turned to the tithe to support their professional priesthood when the Roman Empire crumbled and the priests were no longer being paid by the state. They were brutal about collecting the tithe with the farmer actually losing his lands to the church if he refused or was unable to pay. This oppression of the people was one reason the Roman Catholic system became so wealthy and powerful.

Recently it came to my attention that one “apostle” was preaching that giving to the priests of the Old Testament released blessing to the people. He declared that the apostles of the New Covenant are the priests of the Old and that finances given to him would generate that same blessing back to the givers. This is wholesale lie fabricated in order to manipulate money from people.

Another lie which keeps coming around is that of the 100 fold return promised to those who will give a certain amount. If that preacher had the authority, anointing and faith to know that each giver would receive 100 fold return, why does he not simply give away to each person in the crowd and wait to receive his own 100 fold? He does not do that simply because he knows himself it is a lie. Meanwhile people do give in hope that maybe he is telling the truth, maybe there is enough anointing, maybe there is enough faith and maybe it is my time. This is the Christian lottery. The false hope is that there is some way to become wealthy without risk and exercising the disciplines of hard work and frugality over time.

Another place the word “tithe” appears is in Luke 18:12, the story of the

Pharisee and the sinner at prayer. Even with his tithing and other legalistic righteousness, Jesus still declared the Pharisee unjustified. And there is no reference to show that Jesus has changed His mind on that one!

The last use "tithe" in the New Testament is in Hebrews 7:5- 9 where the argument is that Melchizedek has a superior priesthood over Aaron since Aaron paid tithes to Melchizedek while in Abraham's loins. Christ is a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" so His order is superior to and does away with Aaron's. Conclusion? The person we listen to and follow is Christ, not Aaron. New Covenant not Old! What could be more clear?

So what does Jesus say about tithing? Nothing. What does Paul say about tithing? Nothing! What does the council at Jerusalem say about tithing? Nothing! Remember that council in Acts 15 where they were trying to figure out how much of the Old Testament law the gentile believers should keep? They said nothing about tithing but did ask Paul to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). Can you imagine a meeting of any church council today where they did not ask for money or seek to enforce a religious tax but only asked that the poor be remembered?

However, an argument from silence can be a foolish argument. There are groups which do not use instruments in worship simply because the New Testament does not mention any. Well, the New Testament does not mention tea either and we do not use that silence as a reason for not drinking tea so you see how silly this can get. The point is that Jesus and Paul have a great deal to say about money and investing it in people. They are not silent about money! They are just silent about the tithe! For them to speak about money but not about the tithe shows that they understood the tithe to be done away in Christ just like the rest of the law.

5/ JESUS AND MONEY

Jesus had women of means who ministered to Him and His team "from their substance (Luke 8:3). He obviously did not tell them to "sell all and to give it to the poor" like he did the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18- 23). And that is the point! There is no legalistic approach to giving in the New Covenant. There is only instruction from the Master. Do we believe New Creation realities or not? What is Jesus asking each member of his body to do? Is the head of every man Christ (I Corinthians 11:3)? Are we all Royal Priests (I Peter 2:9)? Do we really have an anointing from the Holy One and know all things so that we do not need any man to teach us (I John 2:27)? Do all of His sheep really hear His voice (John 10:4)? Is Jesus able to build His church (Matthew 16:18) or do we have to help Him just a little? What is Jesus asking you to do?

Following a system can be much easier than following the voice of the Master. To follow His voice we must cultivate a relationship of humility and obedience with Him. Rule keeping can be much less threatening than intimacy. Intimacy with Jesus demands that we lose ourselves in Him. Rule keeping leaves us in control. A tenth is much easier to give than everything. Systems are much easier to manage than generous hearts.

Jesus said that whatever is done to the least is done unto Him. That is the

whole message of Matthew 25:31- 46. It is all about food, clothing and water being give to the poor and all about visiting the prisoner and the sick. If we took what the church system worldwide spends on buildings, salaries and programs we could provide food, clean water, clothes, and education to a good portion of those in need. That is the justice issue Jesus is talking about in Matthew 23:23. He is serious about it! Are we goats or sheep? To spend money on buildings or to meet in homes is not a model issue. It is a justice issue. Jesus wants money spent on people not on buildings and public performances.

There are churches where they are afraid to talk about money and justice issues for fear that will drive people away. Jesus was never afraid to talk about the cost of discipleship. As a matter of fact, He commanded us to count the cost, not hide it! He chose twelve who counted the cost over multitudes who would not!

The law only asked a tenth, actually the three tithes add up to 23% plus offerings. Jesus asks for every thing! People need to know that! The New Testament does not call us "King's Kids". It calls us sons of God but also servants and bond slaves. People need to know that! We are not our own and nothing we have is our own! This is not about ten percent. It is about everything. That is not religious misery. That is the original apostolic joy! Have you ever meditated on Hebrews 10:32- 34? It is all for Jesus.

6/ PAUL AND MONEY

Paul thanked those who supported him financially (Philippians 4:10- 20) and laid out the principle that the "laborer is worthy of his hire" (I Corinthians 9:6- 18) but he lived that "it was better to give than to receive" and pointed to his self support as a pattern for all who would come after him to follow (Acts 20:33- 35).

Paul did raise money but it was for the "poor saints" in Jerusalem. The whole teaching in II Corinthians 8 and 9 is about raising money for the poor. The promise of abundance to those who sow and who give cheerfully is given to those who sow into the poor! The purpose of the giving was so that there could be "equality" among the saints where one's abundance met another's lack and where the faith of the poor would answer the prayers of those who gave. Money laid at the "apostles feet" in Acts 4:35 was not for financing an executive lifestyle but for distribution "to each as anyone had need".

However, giving for equality would not preach well in most contexts today! One present day American "apostle" boasts of a three million dollar house and seven cars as being "necessary for the people he deals with". Consider that in the light of James 2:1- 9! Another American "apostle" thinks that one cannot be an apostle unless one is a millionaire. That is the worship of mammon.

Paul's fund raising was not for "his ministry" but for the poor saints! What a contrast to most fund raising today! Nor did Paul say the poor were poor because they were cursed (like I have heard some present day "apostles" say as they asked the people to sow into themselves since they were "good ground" which would produce good fruit while the poor were "hard ground" which would produce little fruit.). James (James 2:5) saw the poor as "rich in faith" and so did Paul. Proverbs 19:17 says that to give to the poor is to give to God. The whole point of Matthew 25 is that what is given to the poor is given to Jesus. The poor are the best ground that

there is- God makes total identification with them.

The New Testament guideline for giving was not a certain percentage but “as (each one) purposes in his heart” (II Corinthians 9:7) and “as he may prosper” (I Corinthians 16:1- 3). What is difficult about that? Do we not trust the hearts of the saints? Do we not have a Covenant of the New Heart? Do we not trust them to hear the voice of the Master? In the Old Covenant God lived among His people and spoke to them through prophets and judges. In the New Covenant God lives in His people and whispers His will in each new heart. As Eugene Peterson says in his introduction to the book of Galatians, “God did not coerce us from without, but set us free from within.” Do we trust the Covenant of the New Heart? Do we trust that the heart people have receive in the new birth is the generous heart of God?

There are church groups that throw you out if you do not pay your tithes for three months! (No, I did not make that one up!) That is not a New Testament church. That is a money cult. And it certainly is not secret giving. Remember Matthew six? The kind of giving that God rewards openly?

There are many more groups where you cannot function in any leadership capacity if you do not pay your tithes. Paul must have missed that item on his list of requirements for elders in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. There are some churches where they demand 20% tithe! At least they are being more faithful to their Old Covenant convictions than most! However, what right does one royal priest have to judge the giving record of another royal priest?

Poor Paul just did not seem to understand the demands of building an institution! That is correct. He had the example of the Jewish system that he had been a part of with its priesthood, temple and synagogue. He had the example of all the pagan cults around him with their rich priesthoods, ornate temples and oppression of the people and he was working as hard as possible to raise up something completely different where each person was free before God to obey Him from their heart!

The church was not a “holy place” but a holy people. The temple of the Holy Spirit was not a building made by hands but the body of the believer. Thus whatever was done unto the people was done unto Jesus.

Paul stated to the Corinthians that he would not be “burdensome” to them “For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (II Corinthians 12:14). Thus he would not have much patience for leaders who go around seeking “sons” to tithe to them!

The clear teaching of Paul in II Corinthians 11:20 is that the division between true and false apostles is not their gifts or even their teachings but how they take money from the people. Have you ever noticed Proverbs 22:16, “He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches and he who gives to the rich will surely come to poverty.”? Why is that? Why does giving to the rich have the same curse as stealing from the poor? The reason is that we do both for the same reason. We take from the poor for reasons of greed and pride. We give to the rich for reasons of greed and pride. We want the attention, favor and benefits which we believe the rich can give to us.

Our conviction and experience is that we are in a better covenant than the old which is founded upon better promises so that we are blessed and able to give more than under the old! As we sow He is able to make all grace abound toward us so that we “always having all sufficiency in all things may have an abundance for every good work”. II Corinthians 8 and 9 are true as we sow into the poor.

Our conviction and experience is that as we seek God's Kingdom (which means the well being of people) and His righteousness (which means righteous acts of kindness towards those around us), He will supply all our needs. Matthew 6:33 is true!

Our conviction and experience is that if we are doing what Jesus is asking us to do, He will speak to those whom He has blessed to bless us! Our conviction is that people want to obey Jesus and do so with joy!

Our conviction and experience is that we do not need to ask for money. Such begging dishonors King Jesus who is our Jehovah Jireh. If He has sent you on a mission, He will supply the needs of the mission. If He has not sent you, you are on your own.....

WRAP UP

Let us not mix the covenant of the law and the covenant of grace. We do not want that curse on any part of our lives and certainly not on our finances. Let us listen to Jesus as His priests and free each other to do the same. The principle is that we are to remember the poor and to support true apostolic ministry which is laying foundations of Christ in areas where there are none.

We are partakers of the generous heart of God. Let us express that heart. He calls us to be like Him in every way.

I can think of no better wrap up than to quote John Wesley, “Make all you can, save all you can and give all you can!”