

Hebrews 7:1-2 "To Tithe or Not To Tithe"

HEB 7:1-9 "This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. 4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people - that is, their brothers -even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. 7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham,..."

This portion of scripture is one which has some very important things to say to us today. The context is specifically dealing with the exalted nature of Christ and His salvation toward men and their responsibility to honor Him, and it is compared with that of other priesthoods and the responsibility of men toward them. It then shows how one is greater than the other.

When put into perspective our writer desires for us to arrive at the conclusion that our Lord deserves our full allegiance and undying love for Him above all things.

But what we've noticed here in the verses I read is that our writer builds his case using a practice which showed how those who were lesser, honored those who were greater. The particular practice in mind is the tithe.

For a Jew, in the first century, the tithe was a common and important part of his worship toward God. He understood most of what the O.T. had to say about the tithe. Unfortunately, most Christians have little understanding of what the tithe is and how, if at all, it is to be used today in the church.

I must point out that in our context here in Hebrews the writer's purpose is not to teach on tithing. He already assumes these Jewish Christians understood its meaning. And since my practice is to stick with the text I would be stretching the issue if I made this into a proof-text for tithing.

However, with that said, I also understand that since the concept of tithing plays an important role in the text and since tithing is such

an issue in the church I believe it's important to give some insights into its use today as well as how it was used in the O.T. and some of what we'll be looking at may surprise you.

We will be going back to verse one next week and deal with the text as it was intended by our writer, but this morning I would like to accomplish two things. **1)** Discover what the tithe was and **2)** Is it to be practiced in the Church today and if so, how?

The term tithe simply means a tenth part of the whole. The concept of tithing was not new to man prior to the Law of Moses. Even pagan cultures practiced it to some degree. In our text in Hebrews we find that Abraham practiced tithing as it related to Melchizedek. He gave a tenth of the spoils he got as a result from defeating the kings in battle.

We know that this was some 400 years before the Law of Moses. But tithing as a practice of worship, specifically commanded by God in Scripture, didn't come into its own until the Law of Moses was given by God.

Its original intent was designed by God to meet the needs of a specific group of people in Israel. But it went beyond that in the sense that it gave the people who were giving, an opportunity to show their worship and dependency on God. And so it had a dual purpose: one practical, one spiritual.

The first time we clearly see the tithe in Scripture is when Abraham met Melchizedek after battle which we have seen in our Hebrews text. It's first found in GEN 14:20 "And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." This of course is before the Mosaic Law.

The next time we see the tithe mentioned in Scripture is when Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is spoken to by God in a dream and has the covenant, which God made for Abraham, now confirmed in him.

After Jacob awoke he made that place where he dreamed a holy place unto the Lord. The place was originally called Luz. He changed the name to Bethel, which means house of God. But then he made a promise to the Lord.

GEN 28:22 "this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." This was also before the Law of Moses.

However, when God did finally give the law of tithes to the nation of Israel in the wilderness the Lord made a very interesting provision. He told Israel, who now had the law, not to observe the law until they got to the Promised Land to possess it and not to practice these things until God revealed where He wanted them to be.

DEU 12:7-11, 18-19 "There [in the promised land], in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you. 8 You are not to do as we do here [in the wilderness] today, everyone as he sees fit, 9 since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you. 10 But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. 11 Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name - there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. 17 You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and oil, or the firstborn of your herds and flocks, or whatever you have vowed to give, or your freewill offerings or special gifts. 18 Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose - you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns - and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to. 19 Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land."

The actual act of tithing was prohibited by God until Israel crossed over the Jordan and possessed the land. But as we see in Scripture the Levites were to be the ones who would benefit from the tithe because they had no inheritance in the land. And so they were supported by the tithes of Israel. Their function was to the house and worship of God.

But the tithe was not limited to the Levites. In fact we're told that the people themselves were to enjoy the tithe of their labors at times.

DEU 14:22-29 "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the

LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. 24 But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), 25 then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose. 26 Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. 27 And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own. 28 At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, 29 so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

And so we see that the tithe was never meant to be a burden but a means of worshipping God and meeting the needs of the Levites and those who had nothing; such as the fatherless, the alien and widow.

By the way, the tithe or one tenth of all their giving was not the total amount the Israelites brought to God. One tenth was simply a measurement of what God wanted at a specific time. And so if God said, give one tenth of your increase on a regular basis and then add to that one tenth at this particular time, in addition to your other giving, we can see how this would increase their giving beyond one tenth of their total amount.

The Scripture I quoted above confirms this.

DEU 14:28-29 "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, 29 so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

Charles Ryrie in his book, "Balancing the Christian life" points out that "the Jews understood that a second tithe (a tenth of the remaining 9 tenths) was to be set apart and consumed in a sacred meal in Jerusalem (Deu.12:5-6,11,18). Every third year this second

tithe was taken for the Levites, strangers, fatherless and widows. Thus the proportion was clearly specified, and every Israelite was obliged to bring to the Lord 19 percent of his yearly income."

I hope this short treatise gives you a little clearer view of the O.T. tithe (one tenth of ones increase) from a biblical perspective, both before and after the law of Moses. The question remains, however, how does this tithe apply to the church today?

Are we still obliged to follow the tithe in an O.T. sense and give 19 percent of our income if we follow the post-Mosaic law, or apparently 10 percent only, with the pre-Mosaic law?

Or is there a third alternative? To answer the first question. We know that Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. And yet we also know that Paul makes it quite clear that to add the law to our salvation is to introduce another gospel. Keep in mind that when Jesus said He didn't come to abolish it, it was in the context of what He was presently doing to redeem us from the penalty of our sin.

He had not yet gone to the cross. And we know that He was obligated to keep the law perfectly. But we also know that in bringing in a new covenant, He was coming to bring a better covenant where the old would give way to it as a means of worshipping and following God.

This is what the writer means in this same chapter in Hebrews when he says, HEB 7:21-22 "but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" (Psalm 110:4) 22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant."

One replaces the other. Paul speaks of this in GAL 3:23-27 "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. 26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

And so in the sense that the tithe is a law under the Old covenant we are not obligated to keep such a law as a **means** of worshipping God. However, the question must be raised, if the tithe was

practiced before the giving of the law, are we not then obligated to keep it according to the word of God today in the church?

And if not, does the word of God give us any insight into what we are to do with our increase as unto the Lord?

The argument has been made that since Abraham and Jacob offered a tithe to God prior to the law then the principle remains intact. Some might even go back to Cain and Abel and make the case that they offered up of their increase and therefore gave us an example to be carried out today.

The thrust of Cain and Abel's sacrifices should not be overlooked though. Was it the **amount** that pleased God or was it the type and attitude in which it was given? The two offerings were different. Cain's of the fruit of the ground, Abel's of the firstlings of his flock.

God was pleased with Abel's and not with Cain's. We're not told why. Some have surmised that one was a blood offering while the other one was not. But if the principle of tithing holds true then it should not be limited to an animal or vegetable.

We'll get back to this later. But let's move to Melchizedek and Abraham. Abraham gave a tenth, or tithe, of the spoils he gained in battle, to the King Priest Melchizedek. Next week we'll see why. But the point is that since Abraham gave a tenth before the Mosaic Law was enacted then the principle remains for us to follow today.

After all, despite the lack of a written law, God somewhere along the line must have made it clear that a tenth is what He wanted. In fact we know He did.

GEN 26:4-5 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring [Or seed] all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed me and **kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.**"

Therefore, the reasoning goes, since God's law was given, though yet not written, we must be giving a tenth of our increase today. That's the logical progression that is used to support this view, and since it was before the written law, it is still in effect.

The problem with this logic is it doesn't necessarily carry over to other related pre-Mosaic law practices. One glaring example would be the Sabbath.

We read in EXO 16:22-23, 26 "On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much -two omers [That is, probably about 4 quarts] for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning." 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

This all had to do with gathering and preparing the manna which God gave the Israelites in the desert. The instruction from God was, you can gather what you need five days a week, but on the sixth day you must gather enough for two days so you won't have to work on the seventh day which is a Sabbath unto the Lord.

The question is when were these original instructions given? Before or after the law was given to Moses at Mt. Sinai? These instructions are given in Exo.16:22.... We find the law given to Moses on Sinai in Exo.19.

Again Ryrie makes the comment: "The fact that something was done before the law that was later incorporated into the law does not necessarily make that thing a good example for today, especially if the N.T. gives further guidance on the matter. Not even the most ardent tither would say the Sabbath should be observed today because it was observed before the law, yet this is the very reasoning used in promoting tithing today. The N.T. teaches us about a new day of worship, and it also gives us new directions for giving."

And the remainder of our time will be spent looking at what our Lord teaches concerning giving as well as the writings of His apostles. Let me first say however, that I don't believe that the scriptures would discourage tithing in the church today. I would say that the N.T. broadens and deepens that aspect of giving and would not limit our giving to just 10 percent or force someone to give 10 percent.

There are churches where to become a member you must promise to give a tenth of your income to that church. In fact, if you are found not living up to your end of the bargain you will get a visit

from the leadership who will then implement disciplinary action if you persist in not giving that amount.

This is one extreme and certainly an abuse of what real giving should be in the church today. But do we have any guidelines to follow? The answer is yes!

Now I'm aware of the other extreme and its dangers. Some would suggest that if a standard is not put into practice then there will be those who abuse the responsibility to support God's work. They will use their liberty as an excuse to give as "little" as possible. This is a real danger. But if a person's heart is that hard against God's work then even a 10 percent standard will be violated by these people.

What we find in the N.T. is not a departure from giving, but rather a new principle of giving. A principle ruled by the Spirit not by the law. We see this in a variety of places. One such example is found in the gospel of Luke.

LUK 21:2-4 "He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

The point Jesus was making was that this widow gave more to God in her heart because she gave without concern for her future, which is to suggest, she gave knowing that God would meet her needs and it showed her love for God in the process. This does not teach that we should be irresponsible to the point where we don't meet our needs and those of our families with what we have.

This woman gave out of her poverty and put in all she had to live on. That does not mean that she had not already met her needs, but with all she had left over, gave it to God. God is not teaching to disregard your present needs when giving to Him.

Paul makes this clear in 1TI 5:8 "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

The point though is that those wealthy Jews were probably very meticulous in making sure they gave their tenth. But who is commended? Not them, but this widow.

But simply giving well beyond a tithe is not necessarily what God wants either. He's looking for much more than that. He's looking for the heart attitude of wanting to please the Lord and do it in a joyous way.

2CO 9:7-8 "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

Paul was a man who was well versed in the O.T. laws and yet he does not press those laws into action when it comes to giving.

1CO 16:1-2 "Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

Two things should be noted here. **1)** The collection of monies is to be done on the first day of the week. The inference here is to the Lord's Day which was celebrated on what we know as Sunday which is the first day of the week. So, when we come together this is the time to take up such collections. If you get paid weekly this works out well and if you get paid otherwise it still works. There are always more Sunday's to come.

2) Each person is to set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income. We're not told what that amount is. But if they are willing to be led by the Spirit and give with cheerfulness Paul trusts that they will give all that they can. If that's a tithe for some then that should be appropriate as that person has decided in his heart to give.

Notice how the heart must be engaged. Is this the way we give to God's work? And if it is should we be afraid that the Holy Spirit cannot move the heart of people to give what is needed?

The issue is always the heart. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. If your heart is in the things of the world they will usually take priority to God. If your heart is simply putting God at the end of your giving list then this will reveal itself as well.

There are many people who take the attitude of "tipping" God. They go through the motions of giving but it's usually just one

more religious exercise to make them feel good. If the tipping attitude is high on anyone's priority list I would remind them that waitresses are getting 15 to 20 percent these days.

Giving should be done in an attitude of liberty. Not liberty from giving to God, but liberty in knowing that this is our Lord and Savior we are serving with what He has given us.

There were some in the early church who gave 10, 20, 40 percent or more. There were others who simply didn't have much to give after their needs were met. And by needs I don't believe Jesus Christ had luxuries in mind. Neither He or I would have any problem with luxuries, but the question is, as always, if they prevent me from giving from my heart to my God then are they preventing me from truly worshipping my God in the area of giving?

And if so what do they then become? Possibly idols. It all comes down to loving Christ with all our hearts, souls and minds. It's not as though God needs anyone's money. But it is very interesting that God would desire us to give as unto Him. There's something real about our pockets being touched.

My problem with much of what is happening in the church today is that many pockets are being picked in the name of "Godly giving" being *imposed* on the flock. We need to be set free to give and to give as the Lord would desire us to as we seek Him. We have been set free and given new lives in Christ. Jesus tells us that this is one tangible way to show Him and thank Him for the life and freedom we have in Him.

There is obviously much more one could say on the subject of giving to the Lord and His work. But I still believe the best approach is to seek the Lord and earnestly desire to please Him with what He has given us. Keep in mind, He's given us 100 percent of what we have. He then asks us to use that 100 percent to His honor and glory in all that we do.

For some, 10 percent of that 100 percent will be what the Lord lays upon their hearts, with others it may be 30 percent, and still for others it may be 5 percent. But, the bottom line is are we giving cheerfully, knowing that what we've been given in Christ, should affect our attitude of wanting to please God? Or are we giving because we feel compelled by a particular numerical standard alone? The standard is not necessarily a set amount. The standard is Christ and loving Him because He first loved us.

I shared this message this morning not because I'm trying to make someone feel guilty about giving. I don't know who gives what. I teach as God's word is set before me. Tithing is an important part of our text in Hebrews, even though it's not the central theme of Hebrews. But I hope this helped this morning. And if this is an area you need to go to God with, because you've neglected it, then you take it up with Him and give accordingly as unto Him.

My desire is to use whatever comes in for reaching out to the lost and meeting the needs of God's people who may not have what they need. This is what our Lord wants to press home. You and I play a role in that.

2CO 9:6-8 "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

And finally.

PHI 4:19-20 "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."