

INTRODUCTION

In my introduction to Financial Freedom I mentioned that God's desire is to bless us. His desire is for us to be the head, not the tail. His desire is for us to be the lender, not the borrower. He wants to bless our crops, our livestock, our going out and our coming in. His desire is to bless us in every area of our lives. There was one catch to His desire to bless us; we had to do according to all that was written in His word.

(Josh 1:8) ""This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

God does not make us do things. Even though He is all powerful, and can do anything that He wants, He gives us freedom of choice. In Deuteronomy 30:19-20, He tells us that He has set before us life and death, the blessing and the curse, and that we should choose life. He does not make us choose life, but He strongly encourages us to choose life.

(Deuteronomy 30:19-20) ""I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, {20} by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.""

There are two paths, the path of life and the path of destruction. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus tells us to enter by the narrow gate. He says that the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. He says the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Again, it is a choice. God wants us to choose the narrow gate, the narrow path, but the fact is that few choose it.

(Matthew 7:13-14) ""Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. {14} "For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

What is life? What is it that God is asking us to choose? Life is God's way of doing things. It is walking in agape love. It is walking in faith. It is walking uprightly. It is doing things in accordance to God's word.

What is death? It is the world's way of doing things. It is based on selfishness, greed, self gratification and pleasure, evil, and doing things contrary to God's word.

If we are going to choose life and walk on the narrow path, we have to know God's word. We have to listen to Him and obey Him. We have to make God's operating system our

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operating system. We have to do things according to His word. We cannot be double-minded. James says that we cannot operate effectively if we are double-minded. That is, we cannot be trying to operate under both systems at the same time. We have to either follow God's way or we will be walking in the worldly system. James tells the double-minded to purify their hearts (minds).

(James 1:6-8) "But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. {7} For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, {8} being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

(James 4:8) "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Today, we want to look at the area of tithes. We want to find out what God says about our tithes. Very few churches teach about tithes. Many feel that the tithes were part of the law and do not apply. There are several problems with that theology. The first problem with that teaching is that tithes were practiced in Scripture before the Law was given. A second problem with that understanding is that the tithe is talked about in the New Testament, after the Law was fulfilled by Christ. The tithes are not dependent upon the Law. Another problem with that theology is that Scripture is very clear about who the tithe belongs to, and how it is to be used. Those principles are still valid today, and are clearly taught and emphasized in the New Testament.

Definition of Tithe

What is the tithe? The word tithe means a tenth. The Hebrew word for tithe is ma'aser, which means a tenth. When we are told in Malachi to give God our tithe, it means that we are to give God a tenth. A tithe is not 2% of our earnings. A tithe is not 15% of our earnings. If we give 15%, the first 10% is our tithe, and the remaining 5% is an offering.

(Malachi 3:10) ""Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

Strong's H4643: ma'aser, mah-as-ayr'; or ma'asar, mah-as-ar'; and (in plur.) fem. ma'asrah, mah-as-raw'; from H6240; a tenth; espec. a tithe:--tenth (part), tithe (-ing).

Ownership of Tithe

In Leviticus 27:30-32, the Lord tells us that the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land, or the fruit of the tree belongs to the Lord. He says that it is holy. If a man wants to use the tithe for something else, he must add one-fifth (20%) to it.

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(Leviticus 27:30-32) "'Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD. {31} 'If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. {32} 'And for every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD.'"

The whole earth belongs to the Lord and everything on it. All of our money and assets belong to the Lord, not just the tithe. We are stewards who manage God's money and assets. As stewards, He tells us that 10% of what we bring in is holy and belongs to Him. The tithe cannot be used for other purposes; it belongs to Him.

The Use of the Tithe

In Scripture, the use of the tithe in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is consistent. Tithes went to take care of those who were doing the work of the ministry. The Levites and Priests lived off of the tithes. In fact, Scripture tells us that the tithe was the inheritance of the Levites. They did not get a land inheritance, they received the tithes.

(Numbers 18:21) "'And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting.'"

(Numbers 18:24) "'For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, 'They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel.'"

Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 that the elders (pastors) who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. He goes on to say that we are not to muzzle the ox while he is threshing, and the laborer is worthy of his wages.

1 Tim 5:17-18 "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. {18} For the Scripture says, "you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

In our church, we have sought to honor the ministers that have sowed into our lives. Paul says, "if we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" We have taken honorariums for our guest speakers. Most of the offerings have been very generous. There have been a couple occasions where our body has not connected with a minister. Recently, we gave \$600.00 to one instead of the \$165.00 that was given. Why? Because we wanted to honor the person. We want to honor those who sow into our body.

(1 Corinthians 9:10-11) "Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. {11} If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?"

Part of the tithe went to take care of the widows, orphans, and strangers. Because many people in the church do not tithe, funds are not readily available to take care of the widows, orphans, and poor.

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(Deuteronomy 26:12) ""When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied."

A tithe of the tithe went to the priests. There were more Levites than priests, so the portion that went to the priests was only ten percent.

(Numbers 18:26-28) ""Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. {27} 'And your offering shall be reckoned to you as the grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat. {28} 'So you shall also present an offering to the LORD from your tithes, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the LORD'S offering to Aaron the priest."

In the American church, much of the tithes that come in go towards buildings. In other countries, much of the tithes go towards the work of the ministry. A few weeks ago I was on the plane from Houston to Dallas with a builder. His company builds churches around the country. He was on his way home from a building project in Houston. The church that he was doing work for has a campus that is worth over one hundred million dollars. The audio visual budget for the new sanctuary that they are building is about five million dollars. I would venture to say that the majority of their budget is not going into the workers in the church, and to the widows, orphans, and strangers in need.

Taking care of the poor is on God's heart in the Old Testament and also in the New Testament. When Paul met with the apostles in Jerusalem, they told him to remember the poor, which he was eager to do.

(Galatians 2:9-10) "and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. {10} They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do."

James also speaks about honoring the poor in God's household, or assembly. He says that when we show favoritism and tell a rich man to sit up here and a poor man to sit over there, we dishonor the poor man. Furthermore, he tells us that we have violated the royal law, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are not walking in love when we dishonor people in the church.

(James 2:1-9) "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. {2} For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, {3} and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," {4} have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? {5} Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? {6} But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? {7} Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? {8} If, however, you are fulfilling

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the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. {9} But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."

The Principle of the Tithe

Let's look at the principle of the tithe and what happens when we tithe. In Genesis 14 we have the first mention of the tithe. I believe that the tithe was first given by Abel. Scripture tells us that he gave the fat portion, or the best portion to the Lord. But, the Scripture does not call it a tithe.

(Genesis 4:3-4) "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. {4} And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering;"

Let's look at the account in Genesis 14. There were five kings who went to war against four kings. The king of Sodom was taken captive, along with many of the people in Sodom. Lot, Abram's nephew, was living in Sodom and was taken captive.

(Genesis 14:8-12) "And the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah and the king of Admah and the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) came out; and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, {9} against Chedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim and Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar-- four kings against five. {10} Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But those who survived fled to the hill country. {11} Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply, and departed. {12} And they also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom."

Abram went out with three hundred and eighteen trained men, and pursued these kings and defeated them. Abram brought back all the goods, Lot, and all the other people.

(Genesis 14:13-17) "Then a fugitive came and told Abram the Hebrew. Now he was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner, and these were allies with Abram. {14} And when Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he led out his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. {15} And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. {16} And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people. {17} Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley)."

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The King of Sodom wanted to reward Abram for his heroic rescue of himself and his people. However, Abram refused to take any of the reward. He said that he had sworn to the Lord that he would not take anything from the King of Sodom, so that he could never be accused of being made rich by him.

(Genesis 14:21-24) "And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." {22} And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, {23} that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' {24} "I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.'"

Before Abram gave the King of Sodom all the goods that he had brought back, he had a significant meeting with Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and the priest of God Most High. At this meeting, several things happened. First, Abram gave him a tenth of all the spoils. Next, they had a covenant meal of bread and wine. Third, Melchizedek blessed Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth."

(Genesis 14:18-20) "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. {19} And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; {20} And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tenth of all."

This blessing is the fulfillment of the blessing that God promised Abram in Genesis 12. Note in this passage, God says I will bless you. In Genesis 14, Melchizedek pronounces Abram as blessed. The fulfillment of that blessing came at the time when Abram offered his tithes.

(Genesis 12:1-3) "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; {2} And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; {3} And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"

In Malachi 3:8-12, we are told that the people were cursed for robbing God of His tithes and offerings. Then, God tells us to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there is food in His house. That food is for His servants, the Levites and Priests, and for helping the poor, orphans, and widows. Second, God says to test Him about the tithe. He says that He will pour out a blessing on us until it overflows. Where does the blessing start? It starts with giving a tithe to the Lord. There is an exchange that takes place when we tithe. We are blessed by God. He pours out a blessing for us.

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(Malachi 3:8-12) ""Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. {9} "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! {10} "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. {11} "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts. {12} "And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts."

Next, God says that he will rebuke the devourer for us. He will protect our crops and investments. We see in this passage that the tithe clearly belongs to the Lord. If we do not give it to God, we are robbing Him of what belongs to Him. We see the purpose and use of the tithe. We also see the significance of the tithe, that there is a blessing that is bestowed on us when we tithe.

I mentioned earlier that this principle of tithe was given in both the Old and New Testament. We saw that the use of the tithe is clearly evident in the New Testament. We are to take care of the workers of the house, the elders and missionaries. We are also to take care of the orphans, poor, and widows. The use of the tithe has not changed. The principle of the blessing from Melchizedek has changed either.

Who is this Melchizedek? Hebrews 6:20-7:10 tells us a lot more about him. He was the King of Salem. Salem means peace. Who is the Prince of Peace? Who is the King of Peace? Who is Jehovah Shalom? It is God. In Hebrews 7:2, we find that Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. Who is eternal? Who has neither beginning nor end? Who is the Alpha and Omega? Who is the only one with mother, father, or genealogy? It is the Lord God. This Melchizedek that blessed Abram was the Lord. Abram was giving the Lord the tithe, which belonged to the Lord. The writer of Hebrews goes on to talk about how Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek. He also makes it clear that Jesus is now the high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Our blessing comes through Jesus.

(Hebrews 6:20-7:10) "where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. {7:1} For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, {2} to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. {3} Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. {4} Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. {5} And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from

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their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. {6} But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. {7} But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. {8} And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. {9} And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, {10} for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him."

How did the blessing come upon Abram. It came upon him through Melchizedek when he brought his tithes and offerings. Notice in Galatians 3:14 that the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus. He is the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. We are blessed through Christ.

(Galatians 3:14) "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Paul tells us that the things that have been written in earlier times was written for our instruction. The author of Hebrews talks about these earlier writings so that we have a clear understanding of who Melchizedek is, and who Abraham was really paying his tithes to.

(Romans 15:4) "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Do we have to pay tithes? No. God puts before us life and death. He puts before us blessings and curses. He tells us to choose life, but He does not make us choose life. We can enter into the blessings of Abram. We can test God to see if He will pour out a blessing upon us and rebuke the devourer. Choose life.

INTRODUCTION (Josh 1:8)

- God gives us a _____ . (Deut 30:19-20, Matt 7:13-14)
- Being _____ is trying to operate in the world's system and God's system at the same time. (James 1:6-8, 4:8)

Definition of Tithe

- A tithe is a _____ . (Mal 3:10)

Ownership of Tithe

- The tithe belongs to the _____ . (Lev 27:30-32)

The Use of the Tithe

- The tithe is to be used to support the _____ in God's house. (Num 18:21, 24, 1 Tim 5:17-18, 1 Cor 9:10-11)
- The tithe is to take care of the _____ . (Deut 26:12, Gal 2:9-10, James 2:1-9)
- A tithe of the tithe went to _____ , who was over the other priests and Levites. (Num 18:26-28)

The Principle of the Tithe

- The Lord had regard for the _____ that Abel brought. (Gen 4:3-4)
- Abram gave a _____ of all the spoils to Melchizedek. (Gen 14:1-24)
- Abram was given the promise of the _____ in Genesis 12:1-3.
- Abram received the blessing when he _____ in Genesis 14:18-20.
- God tells us to _____ Him with our tithes. (Mal 3:8-12)
- God promises to _____ us, and _____ the devourer for us when we make sure there is food in His house. (Mal 3:8-12)
- _____ is our high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 6:20-7:10)
- The blessings of Abram come to us through _____ . (Gal 3:14)

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