

A THREAT TO THE GOSPEL

A Threat to the Gospel

JEFFREY A. LYONS



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“It was great weakness
to be so fond of the shadows,
when the substance was come.”
- Matthew Henry

PREFACE

As a new believer, I often accepted the teachings passed down to me by my mentors without studying them myself. Having been taught to do so, I religiously gave at least 10% of my household's income to the church. My wife, who had not yet gotten saved, and I disagreed on the issue of tithing and eventually sought counseling from a psychologist who was also a member of our church. His advice was to stop tithing and give a lesser amount that we could incrementally increase over the course of time until we worked together to get back up to 10%. I wasn't happy about it, but, trusting that it was sound counsel, I relented and lowered our monthly donations to 3%. However, convinced that I was in disobedience to God's command to tithe, over the course of a relatively short period of time, I increased our donations back up to 10%, without gaining my wife's approval in the process.

Then, something happened. It occurred to me that I had not searched the scriptures for myself on the topic of tithing. Upon doing so, it didn't take long to conclude that, contrary to what my mentors had taught on the subject, there's zero evidence in the Bible to support the claim that Christians should tithe. The more I learned, the more convinced I became that the church is 100% free from any obligation, or even expectation, to do so.

Several years later, on the morning of November 25, 2018, I was having a conversation with my wife about our freedom from the Mosaic Law while getting ready for church. I quoted Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery", and applied it to the topic of tithing. I also mentioned that Martin Luther referred to the book of Galatians as his "Katie von Bora" (his wife's name) because he was so passionate about its message.

When I got to church, the sermon was right out of Galatians. The first verse the pastor read was Galatians 5:1, the exact same verse that I had quoted to my wife before the service. He even went on to mention that Martin Luther referred to the book of Galatians as his “Katie von Bora”! Although he didn’t apply these quotes to the topic of tithing, the fact that he mentioned them at all stood out to me. I also couldn’t help but to notice that they collected “tithes and offerings” before the service and then went on to preach from a book that emphasizes our freedom from the law. The offering I could understand, but “tithes”?

After the service I checked my messages only to find a link sent from an old friend. He had seen a post of mine in a private group on social media about our freedom from an obligation to tithe and strongly disagreed with me. The link he sent took me to a sermon recorded at his church that same morning as part of a series they were in called “Breaking the Power of Lack” (I still have the link). The sermon was about tithing and it was filled with heresy. I just about cried watching it; I could hardly believe what I was hearing!

First the conversation with my wife. Then the quotes during the service at my home church. Then a friend’s link to a sermon about tithing. It seemed to me the chain of events that morning were not a coincidence; God had my attention.

It was right about then the book was born.

I created a document on my phone to organize my thoughts on the topic. One turned into two; soon there were many. A short while later I decided that there was enough material available to write an entire book on the subject (at this point, I hadn’t read any books written about tithing and it would be a few years before I read much of anyone else’s work on the topic). Sometime in 2019 I decided to title

the book *A Threat to the Gospel Within the Evangelical Church*. I later dropped the last part, considering that false teachings on tithing are all too common in many different churches, and settled with *A Threat to the Gospel*.

Now, my family and I had been attending a church in Bensalem, PA since 2007. My involvement there included being a leader with the youth group, chaperoning for both the youth and children's ministries, several years of service in an evangelism ministry called Sharing My Faith, leading two seasons of an evangelism outreach known as Alpha, driving buses for various ministries and events, helping with concessions at events, serving at Cast Your Cares homeless ministry, serving as a team leader on the Sunday morning altar/prayer team and hosting a small group in my home. I mention these things only to show that I was very much involved throughout my time there. I was no stranger to the pastoral staff or the other ministry leaders. I was even given an electronic key that allowed me access to areas that were restricted outside of the church's normal hours of operation.

Sometime in late 2015, after several years of dreaming about starting an evangelism ministry, I had the opportunity to co-found and lead an evangelism team which went on to include quarterly evangelism training, participation with Evangelism Explosion, monthly street evangelism and setting up and overseeing a resource table at church and community events where we would represent the church, invite prospects to come to church, offer prayer and share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

After about four and a half years of building the ministry, sowing thousands of seeds and seeing many people come to Christ, in March of 2020, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we were temporarily (or so I thought) put on hold. Around that time, I began to share my beliefs about the dangers of false teachings on tithing more openly on social

media. One post in particular, in mid 2021, was brought to the attention (by other congregants) of the pastor who oversaw the evangelism team that I led.

I'll pause to say this: I've never spoken against any of the church's teachings, not even about tithing, while serving in an official capacity there and I've never mentioned my disagreement about tithing with the evangelism team. I mentioned my beliefs about tithing only when I was outside of the church's walls (e.g. on my personal social media accounts). Okay, unpause.

Sometime later, after discussing the matter with her, she told me that I would need to speak to our senior pastor before going any further with the evangelism team because he was "big on tithing" and she wasn't sure if he would approve of my leading the team while disagreeing with the church's teachings on it.

The senior pastor and I sat down together on March 30th, and again on May 24th, of 2023, never once discussing the future of the evangelism team, but rather the topic of tithing. I shared my beliefs and he shared his. Although I hadn't yet completed it, I even sent him a chapter from this book. His response was something to the effect of, "It's very well written, but it's not new; it's nothing I haven't heard before". He also mentioned that tithing was a "core belief" of the church.

After discussing the matter with the board, on July 13th he responded with a verdict: "in regards to you leading the evangelism team...we do not believe it is appropriate for you to serve in a leadership role".

It was the end of the road for me to serve in a leadership role there and it was the end of the evangelism team all together.

Because of tithing.

Let that sink in.

The issue of tithing brought down what was at that time the only remaining evangelism specific ministry in that church and, as a result, the gospel has been hindered from going forth from there with the fervency it once did.

Over the course of time that I've been writing this book, it has become ever more increasingly clear that false teachings on tithing are, without a doubt, a threat to the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

I recently had a friend tell me that I'm wasting my time discussing the topic of tithing because "tithing is about as important as choir robes".

The reality is, if *A Threat to the Gospel* were only about tithing, whether or not Christians should give 10% of their income to their local congregation, it would hardly have been worth writing.

But *A Threat to the Gospel* is not just about tithing; it's about much more than that.

A Threat to the Gospel is about preserving the truth of the gospel, understanding God's expectations for believers, what our relationship to the Mosaic Law should be, the truth concerning biblical generosity, our responsibility to support those who serve us in ministry, biblical fellowship, correctly defining sin, proper hermeneutics and more.

And, yes, *A Threat to the Gospel* is about tithing, but not just tithing; it's about the harmful effects of false teachings on tithing.

A Threat to the Gospel takes you on a journey through Abraham's tithe, Jacob's vow to tithe, tithing under the Mosaic Law, New Testament teachings on generosity, the adoption of tithing by the church, our freedom from the Mosaic Law and our responsibility to the law of Christ. *A Threat to the Gospel* also provides sound rebuttal to common arguments used to support tithing in the church.

A Threat to the Gospel, once and for all, provides conclusive evidence that God never intended for the church to tithe.

PROLOGUE

A Threat to the Gospel is a bold title. It sounds serious, because it is. To better understand why tithing is a threat to the gospel, we'll need a clear understanding of the gospel itself. I assume that most reading this would already have a thorough understanding of it, but let's re-view it together to ensure we're on the same page.

To start with, the word gospel means "good news". To hear the gospel of Jesus Christ is to hear the good news about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Now, before we elaborate on the good news, we'll need to consider some bad news.

The Bad News

It's important for us to know the bad news first, in order for the good news to make sense, as well as for us to understand our need for the good news.

That being said, here's the bad news:

- Everyone has sinned and done what is evil in God's sight. (See Romans 3:23)
- God is just and must punish sin. (See Romans 2:5,6)
- The punishment for sin is separation from God and, ultimately, if not dealt with in this life, eternal condemnation. (See Isaiah 59:2, Revelation 20:15)

The Good News

Now that we've heard the bad news, let's review the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. God sent his son Jesus to be born of a virgin.

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us")." (Matthew 1:23)

2. Jesus did what no one else could do; he lived a sinless life.

"He committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22a)

3. Jesus died on the cross, taking the penalty for our sins upon himself, and then he was buried.

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried" (1 Corinthians 15:3b,4a)

4. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day.

"he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4b)

5. Everyone who believes in Jesus will be saved. That is to say they will be forgiven of their sins, spared from eternal punishment and given eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

6. Salvation is a free gift, made available by God's grace; we can't earn it and we don't deserve it.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

7. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive salvation.

"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

More Good News

The gospel is about more than our eternal destination; there's a number of things that happen here in this life when we make the decision to put our faith in Jesus Christ:

- Our relationship with God is restored. (See 2 Corinthians 5:18)
- God develops the character of Christ in us. (See Romans 8:28-29)
- We receive the Holy Spirit. (See Ephesians 1:13)
- God hears our prayers. (See 1 John 5:14-15)
- We find our purpose. (See Proverbs 29:21)
- God enables us to more fully comprehend scripture. (See 1 Corinthians 2:12-14)
- We're freed from bondage to the Mosaic Law. (See Galatians 5:1)
- God gives us spiritual gifts, empowering us to serve others. (See 1 Corinthians 12:7)
- We're delivered from the power of sin and death. (See 1 Corinthians 15:55-57)
- God's promises apply to us. (See 2 Corinthians 1:20)
- We're united with other believers as members of one family, the church. (See Ephesians 2:19)

Do you know him?

Maybe you're reading this book because you're curious about tithing or because something else about it caught your attention, but have yet to trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. If that's the case, I'd like to invite you to take a step of faith by praying the following prayer in response to the good news:

God, I believe that you sent your son Jesus to die on the cross and that you raised him from the dead. Please forgive my sins and help me to live in a way that pleases you. Thank you for the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you said that prayer, and meant it in your heart, welcome to the family of God!

Now that your journey with God has begun, I'd like to encourage you to practice three important spiritual disciplines:

1. Pray

Communication is important; God wants to hear from you. Pray for yourself. Pray for your family and friends. Pray for others. Pray about anything and everything. Pray first thing in the morning. Pray periodically throughout the day, every day.

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15)

2. Read the Bible

How can we learn about God? Read the Bible. How can we know what God expects from us? Read the Bible. How can we grow in our faith? Read the Bible. The list goes on. Read the Bible every day, taking the time to study it well.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

3. Fellowship with other Christians

God created us to be people of community. Christian fellowship provides us with the opportunity to pray for others, as well as to be prayed for; to serve others, as well as to be served; to encourage others, as well as to be encouraged. Getting involved in a Bible based church, where we can fellowship with other Christians regularly, is important.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

It Should be Noted

1. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most central and essential doctrine of the Christian faith. To challenge any aspect of it is to threaten the very foundation of Christianity.

2. As we'll discover in this book, false teachings on tithing challenge several aspects of the gospel and its effects.

3. It's been said that there's only 18 inches between heaven and hell — the distance between our head and our heart.

God requires more from us than intellectual assent to a list of facts; he wants our heart. We don't deserve salvation and there's nothing we can do to earn it, but we do need to respond appropriately to God's gracious gift.

There's a few things we must do, in response to the gospel, before we can experience the effects of the gospel:

- Believe in Jesus Christ (His crucifixion, death and resurrection)
- Repent of our sins (Make a decision to turn towards God and away from sin)
- Confess Jesus as Lord (Surrender our lives to his lordship)

Paul summarized this well in his speech to the elders from Ephesus:

“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:21)

4. After putting our faith in Jesus Christ we're encouraged to undergo water baptism.

Baptism doesn't save us, but rather is an outward display of an inward commitment to repent from our sins and surrender our lives to God as we identify ourselves with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

“(1) What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (2) By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (3) Or don't you know that all of

us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
(4) We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:1-4)

On a Side Note

A study was done to determine which, when presented with both, people would prefer to hear first, good news or bad news. 78% chose to hear the bad news first because of their desire to end on a good note.

Abraham's Tithe

If you're anything like me when it comes to reading books, you may have just skipped right over the prologue (the chapter before chapter one). Which, quite frankly, in some cases wouldn't make much of a difference. However, before reading *A Threat to the Gospel*, we should make sure we're in agreement as to what the "gospel" is; the prologue will help us to do just that. With this in mind, if you haven't already done so, please read the prologue before continuing.

Now that we're on the same page, let's begin chapter one..

It would be difficult to identify a fake diamond without first becoming well acquainted with a real diamond. Likewise, in order to recognize false teachings about tithing we'll need to study tithing as presented in scripture.

To start with, the word tithe comes from the Hebrew word מַעֲשֵׂר (mah-as-ayr') meaning "tenth part". To tithe of something is to give away the tenth part of it (not the first part of ten parts, but rather the tenth part) or to set it aside for special purposes.

The first mention of a tithe in the Bible is Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek after rescuing his nephew Lot from captivity:

(17) After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). (18) Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, (19) and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. (20) And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (21) The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." (22) But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, (23) that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' (24) I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share." (Genesis 14:17-24)

As we consider this passage, let's remember to practice exegesis, without making the mistake of practicing eisegesis. Exegesis is an interpretation that reads from the text what is actually written. To the contrary, eisegesis is an interpretation that reads into the text what is not there.

For example:

Although a regular offering would not be completely out of the ordinary in Abraham's day, this is the only recorded instance of Abraham ever giving a tithe of anything to anyone including Melchizedek (exegesis). To suggest that he made a habit of doing so would be pure speculation (eisegesis) since scripture does not record any other such occasion.

Let's take a closer look at some facts surrounding the account of Abraham's tithe:

- It doesn't say that God commanded Abraham to tithe; the text seems to suggest that Abraham offered it (vs 20); we simply don't know, there's not enough information. It would seem that God, along with Moses (believed by many to have written Genesis), didn't consider it important enough to mention either way. In fact, outside of the context of the Mosaic Law, there is not one single instance, recorded in all of scripture, in which God ever commanded a tithe from anyone.

- Abraham's tithe did not come out of his own personal possessions. Abraham gave 10% of the spoils of war to Melchizedek and then gave the rest of the possessions retrieved, except what his men had eaten and what his allies wanted to keep, back to the king of Sodom (the people and possessions from Gomorrah are not explicitly mentioned). (See verses 22-24)

- Melchizedek blessed Abraham BEFORE he gave a tenth not because he gave a tenth.

“(19) and [Melchizedek] blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. (20) And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” THEN Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” (Genesis 14:18-20 emphasis mine)

When it comes to the law of tithing one must first faithfully tithe in order to receive God's blessings. Abraham's account of a tithe is different, then, from tithing found in the Mosaic Law, as well as the so-called “principle” of tithing referred to each Sunday before the collection plate is passed around; it should not, therefore, be confused with either.

Hebrews 7:1-10

Abraham's tithe is also mentioned in the book of Hebrews:

“(1) 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. First, the name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” (3) Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever. (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, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. (6) This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. (7) And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. (8) In the one case, the tenth is collected by people 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, (10) because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.” (Hebrews 7:1-10)

Let's take a closer look at the mention of Abraham's tithe found in Hebrews:

- The purpose of Hebrews 7:1-10 is to show that Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek proves his subordination to Melchizedek and that, by extension, Abraham's descendants, the Levites, are subordinate to our high priest, Jesus Christ, of whom Melchizedek was a foreshadow.

In short, it shows that Jesus and his priesthood are greater than the Levites and their priesthood.

- As we review this passage, it becomes apparent that the mention of Abraham's tithe doesn't actually have anything to do with tithing itself and most certainly doesn't even begin to indicate an obligation for the church to tithe.

- One piece of information we can extract from Hebrews 7:4 that helps to bring clarification is that Abraham didn't give a tenth of "everything" he owned to Melchizedek, as some proponents of tithing have claimed, but rather a tenth of everything retrieved from a battle he had just won:

"Just think how great [Melchizedek] was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!" (Hebrews 7:4)

The NIV uses the word "plunder" while the KJV and NASB use the word "spoils". Either way, we can see clearly that the tithe was given from that which was retrieved from battle and not from all that he owned.

There's simply no way for us to know if Abraham tithed of all his possessions prior to this occasion; to suggest he did would be pure speculation. We can see by the language used in Hebrews, however, that he did not tithe of all his possessions in his one recorded tithe to Melchizedek.

Not to mention, reason would suggest that it would have been unlikely for Abraham to have had a tenth of all his possessions there with him in the Kings Valley at the conclusion of a battle. But he would have what was left of the plunder that had been retrieved during the battle there with him, making it readily available to tithe of.

- If there were ever an opportunity for a NT writer to encourage believers to tithe according to Abraham's example, this would be it. But, no; nothing of the sort.

The writer of Hebrews mentions Abraham's tithe only to make a point about the superiority of Jesus and his priesthood to that of the Levites and their priesthood.

An appeal to Abraham's tithe, in defense of false teachings on an obligation for the church to tithe, is more than exegetically tenuous.

It Should be Noted

1. Tithing was not an uncommon practice in Abraham's day. Ancient documents reveal that tithing was practiced throughout the world among such people as the Syrians, Lydians, and Babylonians. People tithed to king's as well as to "deity's". It was often used as a form of taxation.

With this in mind, it's possible that Abraham gave his tithe in accordance with an ancient local custom or civil law; scripture simply doesn't say. Regardless, Christians are not required to honor the customs or laws of ancient civilizations.

2. Let us consider that, if we were to mandate for the church everything done by men of God as recorded throughout scripture, we'd have a very long list of unnecessary requirements. With that line of reasoning we could come up with all kinds of false doctrines about many different topics.

The fact that the Bible records something as having been done by a man of God doesn't automatically make it a requirement for Christians; "description does not equate prescription".

And yet, even if it were so, when it comes to Abraham's tithe, in order to follow in his footsteps, as far as we can tell, we'd only need to concern ourselves with tithing of the spoils of war.

3. Circumcision was required of Abraham and his descendants before the Mosaic Law (see Genesis 17:9-14). Yet, Paul vehemently refuted the claim made by the circumcision group, to the church in Galatia, that believers are required to be circumcised. (see Galatians 5:1-12)

If the pre-Mosaic Law requirement for circumcision is not required for those who are found "in Christ Jesus", why would we treat tithing, which wasn't even a requirement before the law, any differently?

4. Suggesting that the account of Abraham's tithe is evidence for a post-Mosaic Law mandate to tithe is a gross misinterpretation of the text.

Hebrews makes it clear that the record of Melchizedek's appearance, along with Abraham's tithe to him, is intended to point people to the new covenant in which salvation is found only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Melchizedek, a foreshadow of Jesus, even brought out bread and wine, the very things Jesus later chose to represent his body that would be broken and blood that would be shed for the sins of the world.

This makes the argument about Abraham's tithe being evidence to support a mandatory tithe for Christians particularly horrendous. That which was intended by God to point people to faith in Christ has

been used to point people, instead, to reliance on the law and/or their own good works to maintain a right standing with God.

On a Side Note

It's interesting that Abraham refused to keep any of Bera's possessions for himself, even after they were offered to him:

“(21) The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.” (22) But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, (23) that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ (24) I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.” (Genesis 14:21-24)

All that Abraham had was a blessing from the Lord and, while he could have accepted Bera's offer and just considered it to be another one of the Lord's blessings, it appears as though Abraham didn't want the credit for the great wealth the Lord had given him to be attributed to Bera.

How many of us would have made that same decision?

It's not clear whether Abraham kept any of Birsha's (the king of Gomorrah) people or possessions. In searching this out, it seems to be commonly understood that all of the plunder remaining after the tithe had been given, including that which was originally Birsha's, for whatever reason, was dealt with through Bera of Sodom.

Jacob's Vow

Jacob's vow to tithe is perhaps one of the most misunderstood passages concerning the tithe. Yet, when studied, understanding Jacob's vow is like finding a missing piece to the tithing puzzle. In this chapter we're going to take a close look at the account of Jacob's vow.

“Jacob's tithing vow has been overlooked because it is dwarfed between the shadows of Abraham and the Mosaic Laws. Much research has been done on Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek, and more research has been done on Mosaic tithing laws, while very few analyze Jacob's tithing experience. We try to prove or disprove tithing through Abraham's example and/or the Mosaic Law that we didn't realize that Jacob's tithing vow is the most significant moment during the timeline of the biblical tithe.” - *tithing.com*

Before we take a closer look at Jacob's vow, let's lay some context:

Jacob, at his mother's suggestion, deceived his father, Isaac, into giving him his brother Esau's blessing. And so Isaac blessed Jacob: “(28) May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. (29) May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.” (Genesis 27:28-29)

Esau learns of the deception and becomes very angry. He plans to kill Jacob after Isaac passes. Rebekah, concerned for Jacob's life, insists that he flee from Esau and stay with his uncle Laban in Paddan Aram until the whole thing blows over. Before Jacob leaves, Isaac blesses him again saying, "(3) May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. (4) May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" (Genesis 28:3-4).

Now, the account of Jacob's vow:

"(10) Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. (11) When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. (12) He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (13) There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. (14) Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. (15) I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (16) When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (17) He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (18) Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. (19) He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called

Luz. (20) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear (21) so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God (22) and 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." (Genesis 28:10-22)

Let's focus, for the purposes of this chapter, on God's promises to Jacob along with Jacob's vow in response to them.

God's promises to Jacob:

- "I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying"
- "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth"
- "You will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south"
- "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring"
- "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go"
- "I will bring you back to this land"
- "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you"

These are the same generational promises God had previously made to Abraham and Isaac (except for the parts that are specific to Jacob's situation). In fact, just before stating them to Jacob, God identified himself as "the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac". God later fulfilled all of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Jacob's vow in response to God's promises:

- "The Lord will be my God"
- "This stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house"

- "Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth"

It is quite evident from scripture that Jacob fulfilled the first part of his vow. The Lord surely was his God. We see proof of this throughout the rest of his life as well as in the fact that God later identifies himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (see Exodus 3:6).

The second part, he at least partially fulfilled. Later, after God told Jacob to return to Bethel, Jacob built an altar to the Lord: "(6) Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. (7) There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother" (Genesis 35:6-7).

As for the third part, there's not one recorded instance in scripture of Jacob actually paying the tithe he vowed – or is there?

If you recall, later on in chapter 32, God changed Jacob's name to Israel. That's why the descendants of Jacob, the 12 tribes, are known as Israelites and the land they inherited (the land promised to Jacob) is known as the land of Israel. When the Israelites (descendants of Jacob) finally took possession of the land God had promised to Jacob, God remembered Jacob's vow "of all that you give me I will give you a tenth". And so it would seem that, through the law, God demanded that he receive from Israel that which was vowed to him by Israel (Jacob), a tenth from the land that God had given him.

In short, it appears Jacob was required to pay the tenth of the land that he vowed to give to God through his descendants, the nation of Israel, under the Mosaic Law. The law requiring Israel to tithe was simply God's response to Jacob's vow to do so.

There are many Bible commentators that would agree this is the origin of the tithe under the law of Moses:

“If tithing was not commanded before the Mosaic Law, then how did tithing become law? As we have just discovered, Jacob vowed to give a tenth of all that he would receive. Since a vow becomes an obligation once it is made, Jacob’s vow to give a tithe became a requirement. A requirement of what? The Promised Land (Canaan). After the death of Jacob and the conquest of Canaan, God held Jacob the nation (Israel) accountable to pay the tithe. Thus, we have the enactment of the law of tithing.” - Victor Stephens, *A Closer Look at Tithing*

“Now, since Jacob failed to deliver on his promise, God made him pay the tithe through his children who had emerged as a nation after his God-given name-Israel.” - Leonard C. Bupanda, *The Tithing Dilemma and the Triumphs of Love*

“Put simply, God fulfilled his vow to Jacob by giving the land to his children. If we are willing to accept that God fulfilled his promise directly to Jacob by finally giving the land hundreds of years later to his children, then we should be willing to accept that Jacob’s tithing vow could have been fulfilled in a belated matter as well.” - *tithing.com*

Of this we can be certain: The biblical account of Jacob’s vow to tithe lends no credibility to false teachings on tithing in the church.

It Should be Noted

1. God later reminds Jacob of his vow.

We can see clearly that God took Jacob's vow seriously by the fact that he makes it a point to remind him of it before sending him home: "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land" (Genesis 31:13).

2. The penalty, under the law, for redeeming the tithe is identical to that of breaking a vow. (See Leviticus 27)

Jacob vowed to tithe of the land that God would give to him and his descendants. To redeem the tithe was to pay money instead of tithing of the land; this was to break Jacob's vow. Perhaps that's why the consequence for redeeming the tithe was identical to that of breaking a vow. In both instances a fifth of the value was to be added.

"Leviticus 27 provides Israel with laws on vows...It is possible that tithing is discussed in the context of vows and the redemption of vows because previously Jacob made a vow to tithe (Gen 28:20-22) and Abraham's tithe was connected with a vow." - David A. Croteau

"There are many more very clear scriptures showing that the promise God had made was not fulfilled until the Israelites crossed over the Jordan and took possession of the land of Canaan.

The final and third part of Jacob's vow, "and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" would not have become valid and binding until this time. When we review God's instructions regarding tithing found in Leviticus 27 it is so clear. He is giving instructions regarding payment of vows in this chapter. He tells them the tenth, the tithe of the land, that Jacob had vowed to give to God was "holy to the Lord." (Lev. 27:30)" - Garry D. Pifer, *Did Jacob Tithe*

3. If you put all three parts of Jacob's vow together, interestingly, you get a picture of tithing under the law:

- Jacob's God
- God's house
- A tenth of the land

A tenth of the land was to be brought into God's house as provision for those who serve Jacob's God.

You see, Jacob's vow to build God a house would later be more fully fulfilled through his descendants, as would his vow to give God a tenth of the land. Jacob's vow to make the Lord his God would be honored through his descendants who would also worship the Lord. We see all three parts of Jacob's vow coming together to be fully realized through his descendants, the Israelites.

4. Let us also recall that, when Isaac blessed Jacob, he prayed that God would give Jacob an abundance of produce from the Promised Land:

"May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine." (Genesis 27:28)

We know that receiving Isaac's blessing was a big deal to Jacob, otherwise he would not have asked his brother to relinquish it (Genesis 25:29-34) or deceived his father so that he could receive it (Genesis 27:5-29). Perhaps Jacob had this blessing for God to "give" him "an abundance of grain and new wine" in mind when he vowed to the Lord "of all that you give me I will give you a tenth".

This would help to explain why God would later command a tithe of the produce of the land under the Mosaic Law.

Also, Malachi 3:10-11 is reminiscent of Isaac's blessing concerning "heaven's dew and earth's richness" and "an abundance of grain and new wine":

"(10) Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (11) I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:10-11)

Notice the parallels:

- In Genesis, Isaac prayed that God would give Jacob "heaven's dew" and, in Malachi, the Lord promised to "open the floodgates of heaven" if Israel would bring the whole tithe. Both refer to watering the earth.

- In Genesis, Isaac prayed that God would give Jacob "earth's richness" and, in Malachi, the Lord promised "so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" if Israel would bring the whole tithe. Both refer to the land producing an abundance. (If "earth's richness" means "fertile soil", as some commentators suggest, it would lead to the land producing an abundance.)

- In Genesis, Isaac prayed that God would give Jacob "an abundance of grain and new wine" and, in Malachi, the Lord promised to "prevent pests from devouring [Israel's] crops" and that "the vines in [Israel's] fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe" if Israel would bring the whole tithe. Both refer to crops and grapes/wine and pertain to "an abundance" or healthy harvest of such.

Essentially, in Malachi 3:10-11, it would seem that God promised to honor, on behalf of the nation of Israel, the blessing that Jacob received from Isaac, the blessing of “heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine”, if the nation of Israel would honor Jacob’s vow to tithe of it.

In short, it’s as though Jacob’s descendants would receive his blessing only if they honored his vow concerning that blessing.

5. The tithe was directly tied to the physical land of Israel.

After God promised “I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying” Jacob vowed “of all that you give me I will give you a tenth”.

So Jacob vowed to give a tenth of the very land that God promised. That is, a tenth of all that the land produced.

Moses later commanded, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30).

The fact that tithing was directly tied to the land itself can also be seen in Deuteronomy 12: “(1) These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land. (8) You are not to do as we do here today, everyone doing as they see 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" (Deuteronomy 12:1,8-11).

6. There is no record in scripture of a tithe being given while Israel was in captivity in a foreign country. This would make sense since the land of other countries was not the land that Jacob vowed to give a tithe of nor was it the land that God later commanded a tithe of under the law.

7. God did not command Jacob to tithe of the land he would give him, Jacob offered it to the Lord in the form of a vow. The Lord held him to it and so later required it from his physical descendants who took possession of the land of Israel. There's no record, in scripture, of God commanding a tithe from anyone before the Mosaic Law was given.

8. Jacob's vow is important in understanding the origin of the law of tithing. It's also important in understanding a Christian's freedom from an obligation to tithe:

- Christians are not the physical descendants of Jacob.
- Christians do not possess the land of Israel, the land of which the tithe was required.
- Requiring Christians to honor Jacob's vow would seem to suggest that Christians are obligated to honor every vow ever made by anyone of faith in all of scripture; no one would make that argument.

9. I realize that, even though, as we have seen in this chapter, there's an abundance of evidence that suggests it, scripture does not explicitly say that Jacob's vow was the origin of tithing.

However, even if we remove that argument completely, Jacob's vow still lends nothing to false teachings on obligatory Christian tithing.

Let's consider the following points:

- Nothing in scripture suggests that Jacob was commanded to tithe, but rather that he offered it in the form of a vow.
- There's not one recorded instance of Jacob personally tithing, even after he vowed to do so.
- God abundantly blessed Jacob regardless of there being no record of him giving a tithe.
- Even if Jacob did tithe, his assumed (by some) practice of tithing would be historical, not instructional. There are no instructions about tithing found in the account of Jacob's life, as recorded in Genesis, given from or to anyone.

On a Side Note

Genesis 28:12 says, “[Jacob] had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”

In the Gospel of John, Jesus made reference to this when he said, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

Notice that Jesus replaces the word “it” (a stairway) at the end of Genesis 28:12 with “the Son of Man” (himself).

Jesus is the stairway to heaven!

Tithing Under the Law

The only place scripture records God commanding a tithe is in the context of the Mosaic Law. If we're to have any chance of understanding what he says about it, we'll need to look there.

There were five tithes that the Israelites were commanded to give under the Mosaic Law:

- The Levitical Tithe
- The Tithe of the Tithe
- The Festival Tithe
- The Tithe for the Poor
- The Tithe of Livestock

Each tithe was to be given in accordance with specific instructions:

The Levitical Tithe - When the descendants of Jacob (Israel) entered the Promised Land all the tribes inherited a sizable portion of the land except for the tribe of Levi; the Levites were set apart for religious service. Because they were not given farmland they had no means of harvesting crops for themselves and so the other tribes were commanded to give a tenth of their harvests to them:

“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.” (Leviticus 27:30)

“(21) I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting. (22) From now on the Israelites must not go near the tent of meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin and will die. (23) It is the Levites who are to do the work at the tent of meeting and bear the responsibility for any offenses they commit against it. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. (24) Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord. That is why I said concerning them: ‘They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.’” (Numbers 18:21-24)

The Tithe of the Tithe - After receiving the levitical tithe, the Levites would then in turn give a tenth part of what they received to Aaron and his descendants who served in the temple (or the tabernacle of meeting which preceded it) as priests (kohanim). It was to be kept in the temple storehouse (rooms in the temple reserved for the storage of such goods). This tithe was to consist of the best of the tithe that the Levites received:

“(25) The Lord said to Moses, (26) ‘Speak to the Levites and say to them: ‘When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord’s offering. (27) Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor or juice from the winepress. (28) In this way you also will present an offering to the Lord from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must give the Lord’s portion to Aaron the priest. (29) You must present as the Lord’s portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you.’” (Numbers 18:25-29)

“A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.” (Nehemiah 10:38)

The Festival Tithe - The festival tithe consisted of a second tithe of each harvest. The festival tithe was not a tenth part that you gave away entirely, but rather one that you and your household, along with the Levites, ate at a feast before the Lord:

“(5) But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; (6) there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. (7) There, 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.” (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

“(17) You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and olive 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 male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns—and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God in everything you put your hand to.” (Deuteronomy 12:17-18)

The Tithe for the Poor - Every three years, in lieu of the festival tithe, a tenth part of the harvest was to be set aside and distributed to the needy in the towns in which they lived:

“(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 foreigners, 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.” (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

The Tithe of Livestock - In addition to tithing of their harvests, the Israelites were required to set aside a tenth part of all their livestock:

”(32) Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the Lord. (33) No one may pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If anyone does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed.” (Leviticus 27:32-33)

The Sabbatical Cycle

Under the Mosaic Law, every seventh year was to be a year of sabbath rest for the land of Israel. Each seven year period, ending with the year of sabbath rest in the seventh year, is referred to as the sabbatical cycle.

“(10) For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, (11) but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.” (Exodus 23:10-11)

“(1) The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, (2) “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. (3) For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. (4) But in the seventh year the land is to have a

year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. (5) Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. (6) Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, (7) as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.” (Leviticus 25:1-7)

“(20) You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” (21) I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. (22) While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.” (Leviticus 25:20-22)

The Levitical tithe was to be set apart and given to the Levites and then the Levites were to give a tithe of the tithe to the priests who served in the temple; this was to be done for each of the first six years of the sabbatical cycle. The festival tithe was to be set aside in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the sabbatical cycle to be eaten by its owner and shared with others. The tithe for the poor was to be set aside in the third and sixth years of the sabbatical cycle and given to the poor and needy. Neither of the three standard agricultural tithes (nor by extension the tithe of the tithe) were to be set aside in the seventh year. In the seventh year there would be no tithing because there was to be no harvesting and so no harvest to tithe from.

The needs of the Levites would still have been met during the sabbatical year both by the tithe given of the extra large harvest in the sixth year (an unusually large harvest would call for an unusually large tithe) as well as their access to the fallow fields in the sabbatical year.

The Declaration of Tithes

In the fourth and seventh years of the sabbatical cycle, tithers were to make a declaration of tithes:

“(12) When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. (13) Then say to the Lord your God: “I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. (14) I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God; I have done everything you commanded me. (15) Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deuteronomy 26:12-15)

Traditionally, this declaration was made on the last day of Passover in the fourth and seventh years of the sabbatical cycle.

The Order of Tithes

The Order of Standard Agricultural Tithes:

Many have understood Deuteronomy 26:13, a verse from the declaration of tithes, as referring to the order that standard agricultural tithes were to be given.

“The Mishnah in Ma’aser Sheini (7:11) explains that this refers to tithing in the proper order. The first tenth, ma’aser rishon, is distributed to the Levites. Only afterwards should the second tithe, ma’aser sheini, be set aside to be consumed by the owner in Jerusalem.” - *Gold from the Land of Israel*

First, the Levitical tithe was given (from which the Levites gave a tithe of the tithe to the priests descended from Aaron). Only then, from the remainder of the crops, was the second tithe set aside and either eaten by the owner or given to the poor (depending on the year of the sabbatical cycle).

“Ma'aserot (Hebrew: מַעֲשְׂרוֹת, lit. "Tithes") is the seventh tractate of Seder Zeraim ("Order of Seeds") of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and the Jerusalem Talmud. It discusses the types of produce liable for tithing as well as the circumstances and timing under which produce becomes obligated for tithing. In Biblical times, during each of the six years of the cycle, "Maaser Rishon" was given to Levites as 10% of an individual's crop. "Maaser Sheni" was separated in the first, second, fourth and fifth year and is 10% of the crop remaining after "Maaser Rishon". It was brought to Jerusalem to be eaten there or was redeemed upon coins which were deconsecrated upon food in Jerusalem. The final category is "Maaser Ani" that is given to the poor in the third and sixth years.” - *Wikipedia*

In addition to tithes, Jewish farmers were required to set aside firstfruits of grain, wine and oil, traditionally approximately 2.5% of their increase (no specific amount is mentioned in scripture), to be given directly to the priests before any tithes were taken out or any of the harvest was consumed. After the priests blessed these firstfruits they would become known as the Terumah Gedolah (Great Offering). This would bless the remainder of the harvest and render it fit for consumption. (See Deuteronomy 18:3-4)

"In order to render standard agricultural produce fit for ordinary consumption (hullin), terumot and ma'aserot had to be allocated from it in the following manner: first terumah was set aside for the priests, and from the remainder a tenth, the first tithe, was given to the levites. The levites then had to give a tithe of this first tithe, called terumat ma'aser or ma'aser min ha-ma'aser ("a tithe of the tithe") to the priests. After terumah and the first tithe were set aside, a second tithe had to be given of the remainder. In the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the sabbatical cycle this constituted the second tithe, while in the third and sixth years it became the poor man's tithe. The second tithe had either to be taken up to Jerusalem to be eaten there, or redeemed for money and the money plus an added quarter (many scholars interpret this to be a fifth) taken to Jerusalem, where it could be spent at the owner's discretion for his upkeep. The tithe given to the poor is not regarded as sacred. On the last day of Passover of the fourth and seventh years a declaration in line with the biblical injunction (Deut. 26:13-15, called "the declaration of the tithe"), which was applied to all tithes, was made." - *Encyclopedia Judaica* ("fifth" edit in parentheses mine)

To clarify, after firstfruits were given to the priests, standard agricultural tithes were set aside in the following order:

1. The Levitical Tithe
2. The Tithe of the Levitical Tithe
3. The Festival Tithe or the Tithe to the Poor

After all standard agricultural tithes were given in the proper order the declaration of tithes was then made in the fourth and seventh years of the sabbatical cycle.

The Order of Livestock Tithes:

Livestock were tithed separately from the standard agricultural tithes:

“(32) Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the Lord. (33) No one may pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If anyone does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed. (Leviticus 27:32-33)

Notice that it was every “tenth” animal that was to be tithed. If an individual owned 9 animals, none would be given. Likewise, if they owned 19 animals, only one would be given.

Traditionally, the dates on which the animals were to be tithed correlated with the dates of the three pilgrimage festivals:

”In addition to these standard agricultural tithes, three times a year the ancient Jewish farmers were required to tithe their flocks. Fifteen days before Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths), all flocks that had been born before those dates were gathered into a pen. To exit the pen, the animals had to pass through a narrow opening. As each animal came out, the farmer would count and mark every tenth animal until all the animals had exited. These animals, designated as Ma’aser-tithes, were struck with a rod and painted with a red stripe. Farmers were not permitted to sell or slaughter any animal from their herds before tithing. Animals that had been designated as tithes were eventually brought to Jerusalem, where they were slaughtered, their fat burned, and their blood sprinkled at the base of the altar. The owner was then permitted to invite his friends to partake of the meat, which had to be consumed in Jerusalem. The Priests, however, did not receive any part of this animal.” - *NJOP* (Edits in parentheses mine)

Straight from Scripture

To help us get a better understanding of each of the three tithes, I've listed every single verse in the entire Bible that contains a variation of the word "tithe" (tithe, tithes, tithed, tithing or tenth as it pertains to tithing) categorically with contextual texts (where necessary):

Levitical Tithe:

Leviticus: 27:30-31

Numbers 18:21-24, 31

2 Chronicles 31:4-10

Nehemiah 10:37-39

Nehemiah 12:44

Hebrews 7:1-10

Tithe of the Tithe:

Numbers 18:25-30, 32

2 Chronicles 31:11-12

Nehemiah 10:38-39

Nehemiah 12:44

Nehemiah 13:4-14

Malachi 3:6-12

Festival Tithe:

Deuteronomy 12:5-19

Deuteronomy 14:22-27

Tithe for the Poor:

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

Deuteronomy 26:12-15

Livestock Tithe:
Leviticus 27:32-33

Unspecified:
Amos 4:4
Matthew 23:23-24
Luke 11:42
Luke 18:11-12

(There are verses pertaining to tithing that haven't been listed here which do not contain a variation of the word tithe, such as Nehemiah 12:47.)

The more we learn about tithing under the Mosaic Law, the more we come to realize just how different it was than what we hear preached in the church today.

It Should be Noted

1. The tithe only involved agriculture, not money. In fact, the only time money was accepted was if a tither decided to keep the tenth part of his harvest, in which case he was obligated to pay the full monetary value plus another fifth. This was referred to as "redeeming" the tithe.

"Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it." (Leviticus 27:31)

Essentially, under the law, the act of tithing money instead of food from the land of Israel was penalized.

2. Although the Levites didn't receive land as an inheritance in the same way that their fellow Israelites did, they were given towns to live in within the territories of the other tribes. Each of these towns was surrounded by pasturelands that the Levites could use to graze cattle of their own. There were 48 of such towns scattered throughout Israel. (See Joshua 21)

3. Assuming the Terumah Gedolah was 2.5%, the standard agricultural tithes would have comprised approximately 18.5% of one's annual harvest each of the first six years of the sabbatical cycle (0% in the seventh year since there was to be no harvesting in the seventh year).

4. One big takeaway is that, under the law, tithes were a blessing for the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners and for those without their own land to farm on, rather than a burden on them.

On a Side Note

The sabbatical year was kind of a big deal. Not only was it required that the land rest, all debts were to be canceled and all slaves were to be set free in the seventh year of each sabbatical cycle (see Deuteronomy 15). When slaves were set free they weren't to be sent away empty handed, but rather blessed with gifts to take with them.

Now, when God gave the law concerning the sabbatical year (see Leviticus 25:2-4), he warned the Israelites about what would happen if they disobeyed him:

“(33) I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. (34) Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. (35) All the time that it

lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.” (Leviticus 26:33-35)

Israel did not continue to honor the Sabbath year by letting the land rest or by setting the slaves free (at one point they set the slaves free only to turn around and enslave them again; see Jeremiah 34:8-16) and so, eventually, God severely disciplined them (for this, among other sins) by allowing the Babylonians to destroy them. Afterwards, most of the survivors were carried away to Babylon to live in captivity as servants for 70 years while the land made up for the rest it had previously been denied (490 years without a sabbath rest = 70 years worth of sabbath rest years to make up for):

“(20) [King Nebuchadnezzar] carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. (21) The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.” (2 Chronicles 36:20-21)

| 4 |

The Silence

In this chapter we'll review every passage containing instructions about tithing, given to the church, in all of the New Testament.

“Crickets”

It Should be Noted

1. There are no instructions about tithing, given to the church, in all of the NT.

On a Side Note

In the 19th century the term “crickets” was used as a euphemism when using the word “Christ” as an interjection. By the 20th century the term “crickets” came to represent “complete silence”, as it does today.

Why the Silence?

As if the silence wasn't deafening enough, in this chapter we'll ask ourselves the question, "why the silence"?

"During World War II, fighter planes would come back from battle with bullet holes. The Allies initially sought to strengthen the most commonly damaged parts of the planes to increase combat survivability. A mathematician, Abraham Wald, pointed out that perhaps the reason certain areas of the planes weren't covered in bullet holes was that planes that were shot in certain critical areas did not return. This insight led to the armor being re-enforced on the parts of returning planes where there were no bullet holes. This wisdom was also beneficially applied to the Skyraider during the Korean War. This shows that the reasons why we are missing certain data may be more meaningful than the available data, itself. In questions of aircraft design, don't only listen to what the evidence says, listen also to what is not being said." - Anon

The fact that there are absolutely zero instructions given to the church about tithing, in all of the New Testament, speaks volumes. Especially considering that instructions about giving in general are included in the NT so often and to such a great extent.

So, why the silence about tithing?

Perhaps one of the following two possible explanations will shed some light:

1. The writers of the NT believed that the obligation for Christians to tithe was so obvious that there need not be any mention of it.

Or

2. The writers of the NT believed that the absence of an obligation for Christians to tithe, especially for gentile believers, was so obvious that there need not be any mention of it.

It cannot be the former. If the church should tithe, why would there be so much instruction about giving, for both charity and the support of clergy, without one mention of the word tithe? It's quite a bit easier to say "tithe" than to go on to such an extent as we see on the matter of giving. Paul could have just told the Corinthians, "Tithe to your local church and, after paying expenses, they'll decide how to distribute the rest. And remember: 10% is the minimum; pray about how much more to give over and above the tithe". Instead, he wrote paragraphs and even chapters on the subject of giving while leaving the specifics of how much to give, how often to give, and who to give to, for the most part, up to the individual giver.

Also, the latter makes sense if we consider the historical context. It would have seemed obvious to the Jewish believers living in Israel that tithing was still necessary as long as the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system remained intact (not theologically, but rather pragmatically), as it did until the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. We need to remember that their system of government was largely supported by tithes. Even though they were no longer spiritually bound to the law, many early Jewish believers living in Israel, yet unaware of the freedom afforded them, still followed Jewish laws and customs

as they had their entire lives; they knew no other way. Those who farmed would have continued to tithe of their agriculture without consideration of doing otherwise.

The Gentile believers, however, didn't live in Israel and were not subject to the governing system in Israel that was supported by tithing, but rather were subject to the governing systems supported through taxation in the countries where they lived. Tithing wouldn't even have crossed their minds; not to the Levitical priesthood or to the church.

Paul instructed the believers in Rome, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). He continues, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Romans 13:6-7).

At the time of the NT, the Israelites did find themselves in a bit of a predicament. They obeyed the Mosaic Law to pay their tithes and, being under Roman occupation, were also forced to pay taxes to Rome.

Ultimately, about 37 years after Christ's ascension, both Jewish and Gentile Christians found themselves in a similar situation. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as had been warned about by the writer of Hebrews (see Hebrews 8:13), there remained no more temple, sacrificial system, or Levitical priesthood. As the Jewish believers were scattered throughout the world, they too could look to Paul's instructions about paying taxes, found in Romans 13 (which, from that time on, applies to all believers everywhere), in the countries where they settled, without the need (nor ability) to tithe according to the Mosaic Law.

Let us not only listen to what's being said, but also to what's not being said. When it comes to NT instructions on tithing, the silence is deafening.

It Should be Noted

1. Some might consider this chapter to be nothing more than “an argument from silence”. I disagree. This is not about one author of one book in the NT failing to mention tithing. It's about the collective silence on the matter from every author of every book in the NT, along with the silence of the Holy Spirit who inspired the writings of them all.

Not to mention, as we'll further detail in another chapter, the silence concerning official doctrine on tithing in the church continued for several centuries after the NT was penned.

The complete absence of any instructions from anyone about tithing in all of the NT is a reality; this fact shouldn't be ignored. If anyone thinks differently, let us agree to disagree. Only, let the silence speak for itself.

2. Jesus did make mention of tithing in passing, but not to his disciples. He was speaking to the hypocritical Jewish Pharisees who rejected him and were still living under the law of Moses, in the land of Israel, before his crucifixion, death and resurrection. His point was not that the church should tithe; he wasn't even speaking to the church. He was simply pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees for being strict with minor details of the Law while ignoring much more important matters of the Law such as justice, mercy, faithfulness and love. (See Matthew 23:23-24 and Luke 11:42)

Jesus also mentioned the word “tithe” in the “Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector”. This was simply a parable intended to teach the value of humility before the Lord while discouraging an attitude of self righteousness. Interestingly enough, in Jesus’ parable, it wasn’t the tither who “went home justified before God”. (See Luke 18:9-14)

As we’ve previously discovered, Hebrews also makes a brief mention of tithing. But this is only to make the point that Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek was proof that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and that, by extension, Jesus and his priesthood are greater than Abraham’s descendants, the Levites, and their priesthood. (See Hebrews 7:1-10)

None of these few mentions of tithing in the NT include any instructions for Christians to tithe.

3. In light of the absence of instructions on tithing in the NT, given that we’re not under the Mosaic Law (more on that later), let us once again consider what we’ve read concerning the mentions of a tithe in regards to Abraham and Jacob.

Neither is in support of an obligation for Christian’s to tithe in any way, shape or form. To suggest otherwise would be to suggest that Jesus would build his church, give no instructions about the church’s obligation to tithe in all of the NT, and then expect us to finance the whole operation based on two brief mentions of a tithe found in the OT from a couple thousand years earlier; one of which was given only once of the spoils of war, and of the other there exist no record of it ever having been personally given by the individual.

Jesus could have said, “Consider my servant Abraham who gave Melchizedek 10% of the spoils of war even before the law of Moses

gave the command to tithe. You are his children if you do what is right by donating 10% of your income to the church”.

Or perhaps Paul could have instructed Timothy, “Collect 10% of the income of each member of your congregation, encouraging them to follow Jacob’s example of generosity toward God. Tell them to do this and they will be blessed in all they do.”

But, no; nothing of the sort.

So God’s main plan to finance the church with all of its endeavors for nearly two thousand years, and who knows how much longer, was not important enough to include instructions about it, addressed to any believers anywhere, not even once, in all of the NT?

Hmmm.

It doesn’t sound like tithing was a part of God’s plan for the church, at all.

4. Having said all of these things, I honestly don’t think that the writers of the NT even thought about tithing with respect to the church; it probably didn’t even cross their minds. Especially considering that the somewhat complex system of tithing according to the Mosaic Law was still being practiced in Judaism.

And, if we really believe that the writers of the NT wrote what they wrote by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can conclude with certainty that the Holy Spirit who guided them did not bring it to pass that they would include instructions on tithing. We can know this for sure because there are no instructions on tithing to be found in the NT.

Jesus, although he clearly accepted financial support, never instructed the apostles to tithe, nor did the apostles ever instruct the rest of the church to tithe. In fact, it would be several hundred years before men in the church would officially introduce doctrine on Christian tithing. Eventually, some congregations would demand tithes with the threat of excommunication.

On a Side Note

According to a poll done by Overflow, only about 5-10% of churchgoers tithe.

As for the other 90-95%, perhaps they hear the sound of silence, loud and clear.

Anything But Silent

The New Testament may not contain instructions on tithing, but when it comes to generosity, it's anything but silent.

In this chapter we'll take a look at what the NT teaches about generosity under the following two categories:

- Provisions for Clergy
- Offerings for the Poor

We'll also look at some Bible verses that encourage generosity in general from both the OT and NT.

Provisions for Clergy

We often hear preaching on generosity towards those in need or giving to support missions and outreach, but rarely, if ever, hear a sermon about supporting those who serve us in ministry. The apostle Paul, however, did not overlook the matter. The following three sections of scripture provide us with insight into God's will concerning provisions for clergy and are what should be taught in the church instead of the Levitical tithe:

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

“(1) Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? (2) Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. (3) This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. (4) Don’t we have the right to food and drink? (5) Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas? (6) Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living? (7) Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? (8) Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? (9) For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (10) Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. (11) If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (12) If others have this right of support from you, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. (13) Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (15) But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast. (16) For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (17) If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. (18) What then is my reward?

Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.”

Highlights from 1 Corinthians 9:1-18:

- In v. 1, Paul refers to his ministry of preaching the gospel as “work”.

- In v. 4 Paul makes the claim that he and Barnabas have “the right” to compensation for their “work”.

- In v. 6 Paul insinuates that he and Barnabas have the right to not have to work a second job (their first job being their ministry).

- Paul likens the work of the gospel, in v. 7, to that of other jobs: “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk?”

In the same way that a soldier, farmer or shepherd benefits from their work, so too, a minister of the gospel should benefit from their work.

- In vv. 8-11 Paul takes a passage from the Mosaic Law and applies it, not literally, but rather in principle, to the topic of earning a living from preaching the gospel. You see, in the same way that it would be unjust to require an ox to work without providing it with food, it would also be unjust to expect a person to dedicate their life to preaching the gospel without their needs being met by those who benefit from it.

- In vv. 13-14 Paul, again, uses the Mosaic Law as an example, extracting its underlying principle, to lay down the moral standard of providing for those who serve in ministry.

- v. 14 says, “the Lord has commanded (The KJV says “ordained” which is probably more accurate) that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel”. It’s not a rigid command such as those found in the Mosaic Law, but rather the idea is that Christ “ordained” (KJV), “directed” (NASB) or “put into effect” (an alternative translation from the NIV exhaustive concordance) that ministers would earn their living from the gospel.

The idea here is that God intended for it to work this way; this is how it was meant to be.

- vv. 12 and 15-18 make it clear that Paul opted out of exercising his right to provisions from the Corinthians. There were false teachers among them who challenged Paul’s ministry. It seems that his decision not to burden the Corinthians financially may have been intended to counter these false teachers and prove himself to be a preacher with pure motives (see 2 Corinthians 11:1-15). Keep in mind, however, that in 2 Corinthians 11:7-9 Paul mentions that his needs were met by the Macedonians during his ministry in Corinth. That being the case, it’s clear that he did, at times, accept provisions from the church at large for his service in the Lord.

- In v. 18, although he chose not to “make full use” of it, Paul, again, refers to compensation for the work of preaching the gospel as one of his “rights”.

1 Timothy 5:17-18

“(17) The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. (18) For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.””

Highlights from 1 Timothy 5:17-18:

- Paul let Timothy know that the “elders who direct the affairs of the church” and “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” are among those who deserve “wages”.

- In context, “worthy of double honor” seems to imply higher “wages” for those “elders” who do their job “well”.

It’s interesting that the Greek word used here for honor can also be translated as “value”, “money”, “cost”, or “price”.

- As in 1 Corinthians 9:9, in mentioning a law about oxen, Paul extracts an underlying principle from the Mosaic Law and applies it to the church.

- Perhaps Paul, in v. 18, had in mind Jesus’ words to the twelve, “for the worker is worth his keep” (Matthew 10:10b).

Paul may have heard about Jesus’ words later recorded in Luke 10:7, even before they were written down, as well.

Galatians 6:6

“Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.”

Highlights from Galatians 6:6:

- “the one” indicates many, for there are many of us who receive “instruction in the word” and many of us who should “share all good things with their instructor”.

- The term “instructor” is translated “him that teacheth” in the KJV and “the one who teaches” in the NASB.

- The suggestion that those of us receiving instruction should “share all good things” with our “instructor” would seem to indicate more than just meeting the basic needs of our instructor. After all, it says to share with them “all good things”. I like to think of it this way: Those dedicating their lives to the full time preaching of the gospel and service of the saints should live no less a blessed life than what would be considered average among their congregation (elders who lead well, even more). Furthermore, “all good things” would seem to indicate that it doesn’t always have to be monetary. For example, if a member of the congregation has a vacation home, why not offer a free week’s stay to the pastor and his family? Or if you know that an elder enjoys golfing, why not treat them to a round of golf? If you know that someone serving you in the Lord enjoys a certain kind of food, why not invite them over for a home cooked meal?

Takeaways from provisions for clergy:

1. Full-time ministers should be compensated fairly for their work.
2. It would be wrong to expect ministers to work without being paid in the same way that it would be wrong to not pay anyone else for their work.
3. Everyone who benefits from the service of clergy should contribute to meeting their needs.
4. Providing for clergy is not limited to the giving of food or money; we should “share all good things” with those who serve us in the Lord.

Although it becomes clear that the church has a responsibility to provide for those who serve us in the Lord, nowhere in any of the

above scriptures (or anywhere else in the NT, for that matter) is it even so much as suggested that the church should tithe for the support of clergy.

Offerings for the Poor

Paul pleaded with the church in Corinth encouraging them to give generously to the poor believers in Jerusalem. His plea starts with a paragraph in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) and then takes up two whole chapters of his second letter (2 Corinthians 8,9). No other type of donation is discussed to such an extent in the NT. Paul's plea for generosity provides us with some valuable insight into how the early church managed offerings for the poor.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

“(1) Now about the collection for the Lord’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 your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (3) Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. (4) If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.”

Highlights from 1 Corinthians 16:1-4:

- v. 1 makes it clear that this particular collection was for “the Lord’s people”. In other words, it was for Christians.

- Paul mentions, in v. 1, that the Corinthians should do what he “told the Galatian churches to do”. Clearly, he had a method that he’d been using in other churches.

- v. 2 makes it clear that collections were taken on Sundays in the early church. Which only makes sense since that's typically when the church came together. To "set aside a sum of money", then, would be to give it to those appointed to oversee collections for the church during Sunday gatherings.

- "in keeping with your income" (v. 2) is translated "as God hath prospered him" in the KJV and "as he may prosper" in the NASB. The idea is that the offering would come from the congregant's abundance or "plenty" (see 2 Corinthians 8:14).

Also, "in keeping with your income", contrary to what proponents of tithing may claim, in no way implies a certain percentage and is certainly not a reference to the practice of tithing. Even if it were, given the context (this was a collection for the poor), it would allude to the tithe for the poor which, under the law, was given once every three years. But again, clearly, that's not what Paul is saying. This verse has nothing to do with tithing and everything to do with preparation.

- In the second half of v. 2, Paul explains the reason why he would like them to take up weekly collections saying, "so that when I come no collections will have to be made". Paul wanted them to be prepared with the offering before he arrived.

- v. 3 makes it clear that this particular offering was for believers in "Jerusalem".

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

"(1) And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. (2) In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. (3) For I testify that they gave as much as

they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, (4) they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. (5) And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. (6) So we urged Titus, just as he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. (7) But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

(8) I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. (9) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

(10) And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. (11) Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. (12) For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

(13) Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. (14) At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, (15) as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

Highlights from 2 Corinthians 8:1-15:

- In vv. 1-5, Paul holds up the Macedonian church as an exemplar of giving in an attempt to appeal to the generosity of the Corinthians.

- v. 3 is perhaps better translated “For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing” as in the NKJV. It’s not that they gave more than they could, but rather were “willing” to give more than they could. In other words, their willingness to give exceeded their very ability to do so.

- Notice, in v. 5, that the Macedonian’s “gave themselves first of all to the Lord”.

We can give everything we own to the poor, but it’s all in vain, as far as we ourselves are concerned, if we don’t give our own lives “first of all to the Lord”. For, without a surrendered life to Jesus Christ, not even the most generous of individuals will be credited with righteousness come judgment day.

- Paul makes it clear, in v. 8, that he’s “not commanding” the Corinthians to give; this is a voluntary offering.

- In v. 9, Paul points to Jesus as a most perfect exemplar.

- vv. 11 and 12 say, “according to your means” and “the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have”. Paul doesn’t want them giving away more than they can afford to, but rather to give as they’re able. He’s simply asking them to give what they can; not to give to the point of going into debt.

I once had a neighbor tell me that, a number of years ago, multiple congregants from her church took out second mortgages on their homes in order to pay off their church building. And she said it like it was a good thing. Similarly, a pastor once told me that he sold his house and gave the entire check away — he said it was the most

amount of money he'd ever seen — to help pay for a building project at the church he pastored, only to then borrow money to have another home built since they didn't have any money left from the sale of their house. So, like the former mentioned, he went from owning a house to living in debt on account of giving money to the church.

Friends, this doesn't make sense. God doesn't want us to go into debt to provide for the poor, nor does he want us to go into debt to fund church buildings or projects.

Let us recall the proverb, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).

God doesn't want us living in "poverty", becoming subject to the "rich", a "slave" to a "lender", in our attempt to support the church. Not for building funds, ministry outreaches, mission trips or even to provide for the poor.

Only give "according to your means" for "the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have".

- Paul explains, in vv. 13-15, that the goal is equality between believers as they give to one another from their "plenty".

Pause for a moment and just imagine if we did this today. Imagine if those in the church who had much, freely gave to those in the church who had much less, that there might be "equality". How much more a refuge the church would be!

- In v. 15 Paul quotes from Exodus 16:18, applying it to the context of equality within the church. Paul is suggesting that, as was the case with the Israelites when they collected manna from heaven, no Christ follower should have too much while another has too little, but rather each should have enough.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

“(16) Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. (17) For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm and on his own initiative. (18) And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel. (19) What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. (20) We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. (21) For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.

(22) In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous, and now even more so because of his great confidence in you. (23) As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker among you; as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. (24) Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.”

Highlights from 2 Corinthians 8:16-24:

- vv. 19-21 emphasize the importance of accountability when dealing with church offerings. Multiple believers participated in carrying the offering in order to avoid “criticism”.

- v. 20 refers to the offering as a “liberal gift”. The KJV refers to it as an “abundance” and the NASB calls it a “generous gift” revealing that Paul must have expected it to be a fairly large offering.

- In v. 24, Paul refers to the offering as “proof” of the Corinthians “love”. He could be referring to their love for God, himself, the poor believers in Jerusalem or all of the above. Either way, it’s clear that Paul considers generosity a testament to love.

- Notice that Paul, in v. 24, encourages them to give so that “the churches can see it”.

In Matthew 6:1-4 Jesus seems to discourage giving in the sight of others. However, in Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus encourages doing good deeds in the sight of all.

So which is it? Do we hide our giving or display it for all to see? Let me suggest that, maybe it’s both. You see, God’s not as concerned with whether or not people see our generosity or good deeds as he is about the motives and intentions of our heart. Are we giving to glorify God or trying to prove our own self righteousness? Are we giving to help others or to get something in return? Are we giving to show love or are we just putting on a show? Paul, here, encouraged the Corinthians to give in the sight of others that others might see the “love” the Corinthians had as well as to show that Paul’s pride (the KJV and NASB use the word “boasting”) in them was well founded.

2 Corinthians 9:1-15

“(1) There is no need for me to write to you about this service to the Lord’s people. (2) For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action. (3) But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you in this matter should not prove hollow, but that you may be ready, as I said you would be. (4) For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to say anything about you—would be ashamed of having been so con-

fidant. (5) So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

(6) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (7) Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (9) As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." (10) Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

(12) This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. (13) Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. (14) And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. (15) Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Highlights from 2 Corinthians 9:1-15:

- Paul urged the Corinthians to be prepared with their offering so that it will not be one "grudgingly given" (v. 5). To better ensure this, he sent some brothers ahead of his arrival to help prepare it.

- Paul uses an analogy from farming, in v. 6, likening the giving of offerings to the sowing of seeds. Naturally, the more seeds one sows, the more crops will grow. In the same way, the more one gives, the more good that can come of it.

- v. 7 is often quoted before collections are taken in the church, and rightfully so.

We shouldn't "reluctantly" (translated "grudgingly" in the KJV and can also be translated as "sorrow", "grief" or "pain" according to the NIV Exhaustive Concordance) give more than we're prepared to give in our heart or we may regret it later. Regretful giving is not the kind of giving that pleases God.

It's worth noting that the words "under compulsion" in the NIV are translated "of necessity" in the KJV. Also, the NIV Exhaustive Concordance reveals that the word translated "compulsion" is more accurately defined as "necessity" and is translated as "necessary", "must" and even "forced" (in conjunction with another word), elsewhere. This would seem to suggest that Paul is saying that we shouldn't give because we think it's a "necessity" for us to give or that we "must" give or because we think we're being "forced" to give, as would be the case under the law. We should give because we want to give, and only if we want to give. The word translated as "compulsion" in the NIV can also be defined as "distress" or "hardship". When we factor this in, it's as if Paul is saying that we shouldn't give because we think we have to, even if our heart isn't in it. To do so may cause us to be stressed about giving.

The idea is that one should plan in advance the amount he is comfortable giving. Then, after he has settled the matter in his heart, when it comes time to give, he will be more inclined to have peace about it and even experience joy in blessing others. This is the kind of giving that pleases God.

- In vv. 8-11, Paul makes the point that God blesses our generosity so that we can continue to be generous. We partner with God through grace giving. The more we give, the more we get to give.

- vv. 11-12 highlight the fact that our generosity results in thanksgiving to God.

- Paul states, in v. 13, that the offering to Jerusalem will result in praise to God; both for the offering itself and for the testament that such an offering gives to the genuineness of the Corinthians "confession of the gospel".

- According to v. 14, one of the rewards that the Corinthians would receive for giving such a generous gift is prayer from the recipients of it.

Takeaways from offerings for the poor:

1. The early church was generous to the poor.
2. Collections for the poor should be handled in an organized manner.
3. There's no specific amount or percentage of income that Christians are required to give to the poor.
4. While generosity towards the poor is voluntary, it is strongly encouraged in the NT.
5. We should seek to have some level of financial equality within the body of Christ. No believer should go without their basic needs being met.
6. Accountability and transparency are very important when handling offerings.
7. Generosity is a testament of our love for others.

8. We shouldn't give compulsively (too quickly without time to make a well thought out decision) or reluctantly (giving something we really don't want to give); we should give only what we are fully prepared to and completely willing to give.

9. If we make a habit of being generous, God will provide us with all that we need to continue to be generous.

10. Generosity is a testament of the genuineness of our confession of faith.

Although we can see that generosity towards those in need is strongly encouraged, nowhere in any of the above scriptures (or anywhere else in the NT) do we read that it's even so much as suggested that the church should tithe to provide for the poor.

Generosity Encouraged

Below are some Bible verses that encourage generosity from both the OT and NT. Verses like these are what should be taught on in the church instead of false teachings on tithing.

Old Testament:

“(9) When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. (10) Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:9-10)

“(7) If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them. (8) Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.” (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

“Give generously to [the poor] and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.” (Deuteronomy 15:10)

“(25) I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. (26) They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.” (Psalm 37:25-26)

“Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice.” (Psalm 112:5)

“(24) One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. (25) A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” (Proverbs 11:24-25)

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.” (Proverbs 19:17)

“Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered.” (Proverbs 21:13)

“The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.” (Proverbs 22:9)

New Testament:

“(1) Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let

your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

“(34) Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (35) For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (36) I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ (37) “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? (38) When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? (39) When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ (40) “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

(41) “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (42) For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, (43) I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ (44) “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ (45) “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ (46) “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:34-46)

“(10) “What should we do, then?” the crowd asked. (11) John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”” (Luke 3:10-11)

“Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.” (Luke 6:30)

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:38)

“(33) Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (34) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:33-34)

“(44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:44-47)

“(32) All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (33) With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all (34) that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales (35) and put it at the

apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need." (Acts 4:32-35)

"(33) I (Paul) have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. (34) You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. (35) In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:33-35)

"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." (Romans 12:13)

"(17) Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (18) Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (19) In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." (1 Timothy 6:17-18)

"And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:16)

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27)

"(15) Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. (16) If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16)

“(17) If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (18) Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:17-18)

It Should be Noted

1. We should be careful not to overemphasize the topic of finances in the church. The writer of Hebrews encourages us, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

2. Nowhere in the NT do we see money allocated to building funds.

Perhaps that’s because the church isn’t a building or an institution; it’s made up of people who have faith in Jesus Christ. Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and automatically becomes a member of the one true church (see Ephesians 4:4-6). We, the church, can fellowship anywhere without the need for a multimillion dollar facility with 10-15 full-time paid staff members.

The early church met in homes or at an existing structure (see Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Philemon 2, Colossians 4:15, Acts 2:46,16:40) and each person contributed through the use of God given talents and spiritual gifts (see Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:7-16).

The contemporary church has adopted a consumer model — gathering in large groups where only a handful of people get to use their talents and spiritual gifts while the rest of us sit quietly and enjoy the

show. And we often do this in expensive buildings that are financed with interest, placing a burden on all who fellowship there.

Friends, is this what God intended?

Is this what we see in the NT?

The early church sold unnecessary land and buildings to give to the poor (see Acts 4:33-35). The contemporary church collects money from the poor to purchase unnecessary land and buildings.

Something's wrong.

It seems to me that small groups are closer to what God intended — meeting in people's homes or on public property for free, where everyone has the opportunity to use the gifts and talents that God has given them — and yet we've been treating them as secondary.

3. Although there's no need to pay part-time ministry leaders who work a full-time job aside from their ministerial duties, or have another source of income to make ends meet, it wouldn't hurt to have an attitude of generosity towards them for their service. After all, the exhortation that "the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor" doesn't come with an "applies to full-time ministers only" stipulation.

4. God may use any tithes given for good purposes; he has every right to do that. However, the church (and the world, for that matter) would benefit all the more, while avoiding the harmful effects caused by false teachings on tithing (we'll get to that), if false teachings on tithing were not preached in the first place, but rather the truth about giving under grace.

On a Side Note

Most of Paul's writings concerning generosity are about taking up collections from the Gentiles for the impoverished church in Jerusalem.

Some believe that the poverty experienced by the church in Jerusalem was due to the lower class status of Christian's which may have resulted in an isolation of Christian Jews from the current economic system.

Others have suggested that it was because of widespread famine throughout the region.

Still others attribute their poverty to their extreme generosity recorded in Acts.

I find it interesting that Paul didn't mention the reason for their poverty when discussing taking up collections for them; nor is Peter recorded as having mentioned it to Paul at the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem (see Acts 15).

The reality was, there were Christian's who needed financial assistance, so Paul asked the church to give, and the church gave.

The Christianization of the Tithe

To properly interpret a historical document, it helps to look outside of the document itself to other historical records where we can find more information on what took place around the time the document was written.

For example, in the United States it's been claimed by some that there's a supposed "separation of church and state" based on the establishment clause of the First Amendment that prevents a representative of the government from expressing his or her faith while serving in an official capacity. However, we can see quite clearly that this is a gross misinterpretation of the Constitution simply by considering other historical records of the words and actions of our nation's early leaders, which prove that they openly and regularly put their faith on display, even while on duty.

Likewise, any misguided opinions concerning the topic of tithing can be easily discredited by simply considering the words and actions of the early church — did they tithe or did they not tithe? If the apostles, along with the rest of the early church, are recorded as having tithed, then the case is closed; we should all be tithing. However, if

they didn't tithe, nor clearly advocate tithing, it becomes evident that we, the church, almost 2,000 years later, are not obligated to tithe.

So, what can we learn from the early church about tithing?

First Century

As we've already discovered, not once, in all of the NT, did Jesus, the Apostles or anyone else ever command the church to tithe. Nor does scripture include any record of the early church practicing tithing.

"In the New Testament the words tithe and tithing appear only eight times – Matt. 23:23, Luke 11:42, 18:12, Heb. 7:5-6, 8-9. All of these passages refer to Old Testament usage and to current Jewish practice. Nowhere does the New Testament expressly command Christians to tithe." - *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*

Neither is there any extra-biblical record of tithing taking place in the first century church. In fact, quite the contrary:

"It is admitted universally that the payment of tithes or the tenth of possessions for sacred purposes did not find a place within the Christian church during the age covered by the apostles and their immediate successors" - *Hastings Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*

"The Christian church depended at first on voluntary gifts from its members" - *Encyclopedia Britannica*

"[Tithing] was not practiced in the early church" - *The Encyclopedia Americana*

"The early church had no tithing system—it was not that no need of supporting the Church existed or was recognized, but rather that other means would suffice" - *The Catholic Encyclopedia*

Ante-Nicene Period (100-325 AD)

In the Ante-Nicene period (the period of the Christian church after 100 AD and before the Nicene Council of 325 AD) the church continued to experience freedom from false teachings on tithing:

"The Lord, by the gift of His grace, has set you loose and given you rest...that you should no more be bound with sacrifices and oblations, and with sin offerings, and purifications, and vows, and gifts, and holocausts, and burnt offerings, and [Sabbath] idlings, and shewbread, and the observing of purifications; nor yet with tithes and first-fruits, and part-offerings, and gifts and oblations – for it was laid upon them [Jews] to give all these things as of necessity, but you are not bound by these things..." - *Didascalia Apostolorum* (est. 200-250 AD)

"And for this reason did the Lord, instead of that [commandment], "Thou shalt not commit adultery," forbid even concupiscence; and instead of that which runs thus, "Thou shalt not kill," He prohibited anger; and instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, to share all our possessions with the poor..." - *Irenaeus* (180 AD)

Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, loosely mentioned the Levitical tithe in some of his writings sometime around 250 AD. Some suggest he was attempting to introduce the concept of tithing as an expectation for believers, while others insist that his mentions of the tithe were simply a point of comparison. Either way, it becomes quite apparent to us that tithing had not yet become a common practice among believers in Cyprian's day.

Dr. David A. Croteau summarized the Ante-Nicene period well in his dissertation to seminary:

“In the Ante-Nicene period (100-325), nothing was said (directly) about tithing by Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Quadratus, Tatian, Hippolytus, Kallistos, and Novatian. In the second century, Irenaeus apparently believed that Jesus abrogated tithing. Clement of Rome and Justin Martyr both discussed offerings in the early church which do not appear consistent with a tithing model, but rather appear to be based upon a 1 Corinthians 16 model.

The Didache never discussed obligatory giving or tithing; it did state the principle of 1 Cor 9:14 that ministers have a right to live from the gospel. In the third century, Clement of Alexandria concluded that Christians need to tithe. However, his advocacy of keeping the Sabbathical Year and the Year of Jubilee renders suspect his opinions on issues in the law-gospel relationship. Tertullian's description of giving is incompatible with the conclusion that Christians are obligated to tithe. Origen specifically stated that he did not tithe and Cyprian's comments can be understood to mean that tithing was not practiced in his time. The Didascalia Apostolorum explicitly said that Christians were not bound to give tithes or first fruits.” - Dr. David A. Croteau

In short, the Ante-Nicene period saw no significant advocacy of tithing in the church.

Fourth & Fifth Century

We begin to see more of an emphasis on tithing after the Roman emperor Constantine united the church and state in 325 AD.

Some say that Constantine himself instituted a ten percent tax, influenced by the Levitical tithe, to finance the construction of church buildings as well as to pay the many bishops that he appointed. While

others believe that he used alternative sources of income for his endeavors, even giving generously of his own resources at times. Either way, it appears that the church had not yet officially adopted tithing as a means of clerical support.

Although the practice remained unofficial, we can see that it began to gain a bit of traction as Hilary of Poitiers (366), Basil of Caesarea (370), Ambrose (374), Chrysostom (375), Jerome (385), and Augustine (400) are all said to have exhorted the church to pay tithes in the second half of the fourth and into the fifth century.

Sixth Century

The majority of evidence for the official dogmatization of the tithe points to the Council of Tours, in 567 AD. Evidence would also suggest that the 2nd Council of Macon, in 585 AD, is credited with upping the ante by deeming the payment of tithes compulsory under the threat of excommunication.

“As the Church expanded and various institutions arose, it became necessary to make laws which would insure the proper and permanent support of the clergy. The payment of tithes was adopted from the Old Law...The earliest positive legislation on the subject seems to be contained in the letter of the bishops assembled at Tours in 567 and the [canons] of the Council of Macon in 585.” - *The Catholic Encyclopedia*

“In the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge it is explained that when the tithing concept was first adopted by the Catholic Church, it was voluntary in nature. But, at the Synod of Macon in the year 585 A.D., payment of tithes was made compulsory under threat of excommunication. Secular authorities were then used to enforce this demand.” - B. L. Cocherell, Article: “*Tithing: Fact, Fiction, or Fraud?*”

"In the early Christian church the custom of consecrating to religious purpose a tenth of income was voluntary, and it was not made obligatory until the Council of Tours in 567 A.D. The second Council of Macon, in 585, enjoined the payment of tithes under pain of excommunication" - (Article: "Tithes") *McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia*

"It (tithing) was not practiced in the early Christian church but gradually became common (in the Roman Catholic church in western Europe) by the 6th Century. The Council of Tours in 567 and the 2nd Council of Macon in 585 advocated tithing." - *Encyclopedia Americana* [p6, 259]

It Should be Noted

1. The history of tithing (or not tithing) in the early church should raise some questions about teachings on tithing in today's church. If God intended for us to tithe then:

a) Why do we find no evidence of tithing in the church in all of the New Testament?

b) Why do we find so little mention of tithing in the church from the Ante-Nicene period?

c) Why do we find no official doctrine on tithing in the church until the sixth century?

If tithing were God's intended method of support for Christ's church, wouldn't we find much more clear evidence of the practice within the church's first 500+ years of history?

We certainly would.

2. Much could be written about tithing in the church beyond the sixth century, and certainly much has been written by other authors. Our point here is simply that tithing was not taught or practiced in the early church and is therefore not to be expected of believers today.

On a Side Note

The Council of Nicea, convened by the Roman Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantine (aka Constantine the Great) in May of 325 AD, consisted of approximately 300 bishops. It was the first ecumenical debate of its size held by the church.

Topics discussed included:

- The Arian controversy
- The date on which to celebrate Easter
- The Meletian schism
- The baptism of heretics
- The status of the lapsed in the persecution under Licinius

Among these, many other issues were discussed and, in fact, approx. 20 church “laws” were promulgated during the course of the council, which lasted until August 25, including a prohibition against self castration.

The original Nicene Creed was also penned during the council which states:

"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;

By whom all things were made

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;

He suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

And in the Holy Ghost."

(Translations vary)

"The Nicene Creed is a statement of faith that Christian leaders first agreed on at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. The creed was written in response to a popular heresy about Jesus Christ and the Trinity. It is the only creed affirmed by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and most Protestant churches. Churches throughout the centuries have recited it as a confession of faith during baptism and the Eucharist.

While the Nicene Creed itself is not in the Bible, it summarizes biblical truths. Many churches still recite the creed in weekly services today, reminding congregations about the foundation of their faith as well as how faith in Jesus unites the global church. Using the creed is still useful today because the heresy it was first designed to fight still exists in the church." - Emily Hall

Whether we agree with all of the conclusions reached at the Council of Nicea or not, one thing's for sure, having a record of it provides us with valuable insight into the fourth century church.

Liberty

Proponents of obligatory Christian tithing often refer to the Mosaic Law to support their claims. Understanding our freedom from the law is vital in understanding our freedom from an obligation to tithe. As we'll see in this chapter, Christian liberty was not left undiscussed by the early church.

The Council of Jerusalem

Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch when some Jewish false converts came from Jerusalem preaching an opposing message. They didn't entirely reject the gospel of Jesus Christ, instead they perverted it. They preached a "grace plus" message (salvation by God's grace plus obedience to the law), spreading confusion and causing division in the newly formed church.

In response to this, in approximately 48 AD, Paul and Barnabas took a trip to Jerusalem to consult with some of the other apostles about whether or not the Gentile believers should be required to obey the Mosaic Law:

"(1) Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the

custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” (2) This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. (3) The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. (4) When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

(5) Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

(6) The apostles and elders met to consider this question. (7) After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. (8) God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. (9) He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (10) Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? (11) No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

(12) The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. (13) When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. (14) Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. (15) The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

(16) “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, (17) that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ — (18) things known from long ago.

(19) “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. (20) Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. (21) For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (Acts 15:1-21)

Let’s take a closer look at some highlights from the Council of Jerusalem:

- In v. 5, the “believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees” made the claim that “the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses”.

- It appears that, after a larger initial meeting, the “apostles and elders” (see v. 6) including “James, Cephas (Peter) and John” met “privately” (see Galatians 2:2,9) with Barnabas, Titus (see Galatians 2:1) and Paul to discuss whether or not the Gentile believers should be required to keep the law of Moses. Essentially, the church held its first recorded council with the topic of discussion being a question of obligation to the Mosaic Law for Gentile believers .

- Peter reminded the council, in vv. 7-9, that, when he was sent by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, they believed and “[God] accepted them” and “gave the Holy Spirit to them” just as he did to the Jews, for God “purified their hearts by faith”.

Peter, no doubt, said this in reference to his visit to the household of a Gentile named Cornelius, as recorded in Acts 10.

- In v. 10, Peter went on to make the point that, trying to place the burden of the law upon the Gentiles, who had already been proven to be accepted by God through faith apart from the law, would be to “test God”. He referred to the law as a “yoke that neither [the Jews] nor [their] ancestors have been able to bear”.

- Peter ended his speech, in v. 11, by stating that both the Jews and the Gentiles are “saved” by the “grace” of the “Lord Jesus”.

- In v. 12, Paul and Barnabas then told of the “signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them”. This added testimony to the fact that God had “accepted” and “saved” the Gentiles by “grace” through “faith” apart from the law.

- James spoke up, in vv. 15-18, and quoted the prophet Amos about God’s intentions from long ago to have a people from among the Gentiles.

- James, very much in agreement with Peter, stated, in v. 19, that they “should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God”.

- In v. 20, James went on to make a few suggestions as to some guidelines the Gentiles should follow. These are perhaps best understood as an attempt to facilitate peace and unity within the church between the law-abiding Jews (see v. 21) and the Gentiles who did not follow the law (more on this later).

Takeaways from the Council of Jerusalem:

1. God accepts people who believe in Jesus, giving them the Holy Spirit and purifying their hearts by “faith”, even if they’ve never followed the Mosaic Law.

2. Both Jews and Gentiles are saved by “the grace of Jesus Christ”; neither are saved by obedience to the law.

3. The church should not demand obedience to the law; to do so would be to “test God”.

4. We should not “make it difficult” for those who come to Christ by requiring more from them than God himself requires.

The Magna Carta of Christian Liberty

Paul's letter to the Galatians, written in approximately 49 AD, has been referred to as the “Magna Carta of Christian liberty”. The Magna Carta, Latin for the “Great Charter”, is hailed as one of the greatest historical documents in western civilization concerning the idea of liberty for citizens. Issued in the year 1215 and signed by King John, it limited the powers of the English monarchy. It would go on to influence the American Constitution and Bill of Rights.

The great reformer, Martin Luther, so esteemed the book of Galatians that he referred to it by the name of his wife, saying, “The Epistle to the Galatians is my own epistle. I have betrothed myself to it. It is my Katie von Bora.”

After the apostle Paul’s second missionary journey, during which he preached the gospel to the Gentiles in the region of Galatia, Jewish false Christian converts traveled from Jerusalem to Galatia preaching a grace plus message, just as they had done in Antioch. Paul's letter to the Galatians took a stand against the teachings of the false converts. In it, Paul explains, at length, that Christians are free from an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law. He assures the church in Galatia that

righteousness is available to all by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the law, from start to finish.

Paul comes on strong early in his letter in defense of the gospel of grace:

“(6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— (7) which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! (9) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!” (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul goes on to, in part, recount the Council of Jerusalem for the Galatian church. He insinuates that the grace-plus gospel has the potential to enslave and warns that, on account of false believers, the preservation of the “truth of the gospel” was at stake:

“(1) Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. (2) I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. (3) Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. (4) This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. (5) We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. (6) As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. (7) On the

contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. (8) For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. (9) James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. (10) All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.” (Galatians 2:1-10)

Paul continues, stating that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith and not by obedience to the law:

“(15) We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles (16) know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:15-16)

In regards to his own freedom from an obligation to the Mosaic Law, Paul makes a powerful statement. He tells the Galatians that he’s died to the law and that now, instead of attempting to live through obedience to the law, he lives through faith in Jesus Christ:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Paul’s choice of words, in the beginning of chapter 3, undoubtedly got the Galatians attention. He refers to the deceived church as “foolish” for turning back to the law, and suggests (sarcastically) that they’ve been “bewitched” (controlled as if by a spell) into doing so. He makes the point that God gives the Holy Spirit and works miracles

because of their faith in Christ, not because of their obedience to the law; if they started out by faith (which they did), why would they turn to the law now?

“(1) You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. (2) I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (3) Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? (4) Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? (5) So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?” (Galatians 3:1-5)

Then Paul explains that Jesus took upon himself the curse of the law so that his followers might be justified by faith. If believers try to be justified by the law, any of it, they would need to continue to obey the whole law (which no one except Jesus has ever been able to do) or remain under a curse:

“(10) For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” (11) Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” (12) The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” (13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” (Galatians 3:10-13) (Some translations say “tree” instead of “pole”)

In chapter 3 Paul makes it clear that the requirement to obey the Mosaic Law was only temporary until justification by faith in Jesus was revealed:

“(23) Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. (24) So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. (25) Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” (Galatians 3:23-25)

Keep in mind that Paul is writing to believers, not unbelievers; this is not evangelistic in nature; he’s writing to the church, addressing people who’ve already been saved.

In chapter 4, Paul rebukes the church for “turning back” to the law after salvation:

“(9) But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? (10) You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! (11) I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” (Galatians 4:9-11)

Again, in Galatians 5:1, Paul encourages the church to remain free from the law:

“(1) It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Paul warned the church that if they do turn back, and trade justification by faith for an attempt at justification by obedience to the law, they would be obligated to obey the whole law and would, as some already had, fall away from grace and be alienated from Christ:

“(2) Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. (3) Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to

obey the whole law. (4) You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (Galatians 5:2-4)

These are just some highlights from Galatians revealing Paul’s passion for the preservation of the truth of the gospel and our freedom from the Mosaic Law. We would all do well to study the entire letter in depth.

It was the book of Galatians that helped open my eyes to the truth about our freedom from the law and, more specifically, our freedom from an obligation to tithe.

The book of Galatians is a powerful weapon that we have as a part of our arsenal to combat heresy. However, although possibly the first and probably the most thorough, it’s not the only letter Paul wrote that addressed the topic of a believer’s freedom from Mosaic Law. He continued to encourage the church to walk in the liberty of the gospel throughout his ministry.

I Myself am Not Under the Law

In approximately 55 AD Paul wrote the Corinthian church, making it clear that he no longer considered himself bound to the Mosaic Law, but rather to the law of Christ (we’ll take a closer look at the law of Christ in the next chapter). He did, however, continue to honor Jewish laws and customs for the sake of the Jews, to whom he ministered, when he was in their company. They had been brought up under and followed the law throughout their entire lives. If they thought him to be a lawbreaker they might be offended and not accept his message, but if he honored the law they would be more inclined to listen when he shared the gospel, and perhaps believe and be saved.

Paul refrained from honoring Jewish laws and customs around the Gentiles for their sake. If he preached a message of grace, but followed a list of unnecessary rules in front of them, they might assume that obedience to the law was necessary for salvation and so depend on the works of the law to be made righteous.

Paul knew that he himself was no longer bound by the law, but he did what was best for everyone in each situation, that they might be saved.

“(19) Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. (20) To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. (21) To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. (22) To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. (23) I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

The “weak” Paul became like “to win the weak” are likely people similar to those referenced in Romans 14 whose “faith is weak” (see Romans 14:1, see also Romans 15:1). These individuals, although saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and free to eat anything, had trouble accepting that all foods were clean and so refrained from partaking in certain foods such as meats sacrificed to idols. They thought that to do so would be to worship the idol and commit idolatry. Their faith was too “weak” to allow them to experience the liberty afforded them through the gospel. On account of this, Paul chose to become like them by also not eating those foods that would offend while he was around them. For to do so might cause them to turn away from Christ to idolatry.

The main point we're making with 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 is that Paul clearly saw himself as "not under the law" (see v. 20) in regard to the Mosaic Law.

An Illustration from Marriage

Around 57 AD Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, explaining their freedom from the Mosaic Law in practicable terms using an illustration from marriage. In the same way that a woman is freed from her marriage covenant once her husband dies, so also those who were under the Mosaic Law were freed from an obligation to it once they put their faith in Jesus Christ who died and rose again.

"(1) Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? (2) For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. (3) So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. (4) So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (5) For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. (6) But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:1-6)

Let us recall that Paul made a similar point in his letter to the Galatians when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer

live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

We are dead to the Mosaic Law, but alive in Christ, to serve in the “new way of the Spirit”, rather than the “old way of the written code”.

A Barrier Removed

Sometime between 60-63 AD, while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus (as it’s traditionally attributed). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reiterates that believers are saved by grace through faith and not through the works of the law:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Paul continues, explaining that, in the past, the law created a barrier, a wall that divided Jews and Gentiles, producing hostility between them. By removing the law, Jesus destroyed the barrier bringing the two groups together as one body of believers:

“(14) For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (15) by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, (16) and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14-16)

The fact that Gentile believers would be included in the salvation of Jesus Christ, and united with Jewish believers as one family

(through the removal of the law), was unknown in the past. The Jews looked forward to the coming messiah, but they didn't understand that he would also come for the Gentiles. Paul refers to this new revelation as the "mystery of Christ" (aka the "mystery of the gospel"):

"(4) In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, (5) which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. (6) This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:4-6)

A Shadow of Things to Come

Between 60-63 AD Paul wrote a letter to the church in Colossae. He told them not to let anyone judge them according to the law because the law was only a "shadow" of what was to come. What was to come had now come and it is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one to whom the shadow bore witness.

"(16) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. (17) These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." (Colossians 2:16-17)

"It was great weakness to be so fond of the shadows, when the substance was come." - Matthew Henry

Through the scriptures that we've explored in this chapter, we can see with absolute certainty that Christ followers are free from an

obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law. This includes any and all laws pertaining to tithing.

Now that we're confident in our freedom from an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law, what should we do with it; should we tear it out of our Bibles?

Not so fast!

We'll discover what the role of the law should be for believers in the next chapter.

It Should be Noted

1. To get a better idea of what we've been set from let's take a peek at a brief overview of the law:

There are approximately 613 laws in the Old Testament. Of them, 248 are positive (you shall) and 365 are negative (you shall not). As many as 16 of them pertain to tithing.

The books of the law are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Together, these five books are known as the Torah. The Torah is part of a larger collection of writings that makes up the Hebrew Bible (known as the Tanakh) which consists of the Torah (Law or Instruction, also called the Pentateuch), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). The Hebrew Bible is identical to the Christian Old Testament.

Many of the laws found in the OT are rather vague. To help explain them, and in some cases even to add to them, Jews relied on what's known as Oral Tradition (aka Oral Law) which was passed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next. Some Jews

believe that the Oral Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai at the time the written law was given and that it has the same authority as the written law while others believe it's simply tradition that emerged later.

Eventually Oral Tradition was put into writing in the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah (approx. 200 AD) consists of 6 books and is rather sparse. The Gemara (200-500 AD) was later added, consisting of 66 tractates elaborating on the Mishnah. Together the Mishnah and Gemara make up what is known as the Talmud. There are two Talmuds: The Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. They're similar, but were put together in different locations and have some interesting variations. The Babylonian Talmud is generally accepted as the more complete and authoritative of the two and is generally what is referred to as "the Talmud". The Mishneh Torah (1180 AD) and Shulchan Aruch (1563 AD) were later written to help simplify the rather large Talmud. There are also many Rabbinic commentaries devoted to the exegesis of the Torah, Tanakh, Mishnah, Gemara, Mishneh Torah, and Shulchan Aruch.

One could spend countless hours, days, weeks, months and even years studying and still not know everything there is to know about the law and how it applies to specific circumstances, especially in light of contemporary culture and modern technology. To help with this, there's literature referred to as responsa (aka Teshuvot) where individuals can write to authorities in the law asking specific questions to receive a written answer. This method has been used for the last 1700 years and is still in use today. Modern responsa enlists the telephone and internet, allowing experts to easily share questions and answers with the world. A collection of responsa spans thousands of books. While they don't hold the same weight as the Talmud, the thousands of books that make up responsa are very much a well respected and studied collection of Jewish literature.

A life of submission to the law can be all consuming and yet fails to produce the righteousness that God desires. I don't know about you, but I'm grateful that, through the gospel, God has freed us from an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law, clothing us in the righteousness of Christ, by grace through faith!

2. Most believers understand that we're free from an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law, but, for some reason, many fail to apply this truth to tithing.

Some pastors will wake up Sunday morning, trim the edges of their beard, put on a cotton-argyle shirt, eat ham with their breakfast and then preach from Malichi about tithing from the pulpit.

Friends, this doesn't make sense; we're either free from the law or we're not free from it. And, as we have seen in this chapter, we most certainly are free from the law.

3. In Acts 15, the apostles chose to tell the gentile believers to "abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood". Why not leave well enough alone at complete freedom from the law? Why mention those four things?

It is commonly understood that those four things were points of contention for the Jewish believers, perhaps due to their association with pagan idolatry. The apostles encouraged the Gentile believers that they would "do well to avoid" (see Acts 15:29) those things in an attempt to facilitate unity among the Jews and gentiles.

These commands are not considered to be long standing with the church, but rather only temporary, given the friction between Jewish and Gentile believers at the time. After the Council of Jerusalem, Paul writes quite a bit about a believer's freedom from Mosaic Law and yet

never mentions this list again. In fact, he even goes so far as to say that there's nothing wrong with eating meat sacrificed to idols (see 1 Corinthians 8) as long as we're sensitive about our brother's and sister's convictions so as not to cause them to stumble.

In other words, these four commands are not laws for the church to follow. The only rule from the list of four to continue to apply to the church today is the command to "refrain from sexual immorality" since it is moral in nature. That being said, we should certainly continue to refrain from idolatry (which is still a sin) and its associated practices (when used for the purpose of idolatry), as well.

4. Circumcision for reasons other than justification (e.g. medical concerns) has no negative effect on one's salvation.

In one passage Paul wrote, "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek" (Galatians 2:3). Titus was not compelled to be circumcised because it was being presented to him as a means of justification, which he understood could only be found through faith in Christ.

However, in another situation Luke records, "Paul wanted to take [Timothy] along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3). Paul, in an attempt to open the hearts of the Jews toward Timothy, had him circumcised (only the procedure, not a commitment to the law). Had he not done this, the Jews would not have wanted to associate with Timothy. After being circumcised, the Jews would be more inclined to welcome him, which would afford Paul and Timothy the opportunity to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them.

You see, in the case of Titus there were false converts who came to the church demanding obedience to the law, which is unacceptable.

But in the case of Timothy, he was entering into territory where there were many unsaved Jews and Paul wanted him to be received well by them for missionary purposes.

Circumcision, in and of itself, does not bind one to the law; an intentional commitment to the law through circumcision is what binds one to it.

5. What if we want to obey parts of the Mosaic Law without making a commitment to the entirety of it?

For example: I know a believer who refuses to eat pork, even though we're no longer bound by the dietary laws. This person doesn't even try to follow most of the law, but they still hold on to that one.

Understand this: The law is a package deal; either it's all necessary or none of it is. While obedience to parts of the law might look or feel spiritual, know that it's completely unnecessary. Adherence to parts of the Mosaic Law will not earn you favor from God, as some may erroneously believe, but will only burden you.

We are a freed people; let us live free and stay free: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

Also, let us recall that Paul referred to believers who hold onto parts of the law as those whose "faith is weak" (see Romans 14). I've never met a Christian who wanted to be associated with a group of people considered in the Bible to have weak faith; have you?

6. Some assume that we're simultaneous under the Mosaic Law and under grace. They believe that the requirements of the law are

still in place and yet we don't get punished for not following them perfectly because we're under grace.

For example, they might say that, although Leviticus 19:27 forbids a man from trimming the edges of his beard, God forgives Christians if we do that because we're under grace.

The truth is, we don't need forgiveness for trimming our beard. The command for a man to not trim the edges of his beard does not apply to Christ followers. We don't need grace to disobey the Mosaic Law; we're simply not under it.

We're not under the Mosaic Law and under grace; we're under grace instead of being under the Mosaic Law: "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

On a Side Note

Martin Luther was a 16th century Catholic monk who, due to his disagreement with certain false doctrines, eventually broke away from the Catholic Church (barely escaping possibly being burnt at the stake for "heresy") and went on to advance the protestant reformation.

In what's known as Martin Luther's "tower experience" he read Romans 1:17: "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" This brought him to understand that righteousness from God is a gift that comes through faith and not by works.

"At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the

righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open." - Martin Luther

In 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, adding fuel to ongoing protests against the Catholic Church.

One of Martin's pet peeves, addressed in his 95 theses, was the selling of indulgences. An indulgence is essentially money given to the Church for the remission of temporal punishment of sin and is even said to relieve purchasers (and/or their loved ones) from blocks of time in purgatory.

Among his 95 theses were the following:

62. The true treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.

63. This treasure, however, is deservedly most hateful, because it makes the first to be last.

64. While the treasure of indulgences is deservedly most acceptable, because it makes the last to be first.

65. Hence the treasures of the Gospel are nets, wherewith of old they fished for the men of riches.

66. The treasures of indulgences are nets, wherewith they now fish for the riches of men.

67. Those indulgences, which the preachers loudly proclaim to be the greatest graces, are seen to be truly such as regards the promotion of gain.

68. Yet they are in reality in no degree to be compared to the grace of God and the piety of the cross.

Sadly, indulgences are still used within the Catholic Church today.

Luther was eventually brought before the Diet of Worms (a council held in the city of Worms in West Germany) and asked by his superiors in the Catholic Church if he would recant his statements against church dogma. Luther responded with, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe...Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

Likewise, I believe it to be a responsibility of ours to stand firm in the church today, speaking the truth regarding false teachings on tithing. While not quite as bad as the selling of indulgences, persuading Christians to tithe according to a law they've been set free from so that they'll escape a curse that Christ already took upon himself for our sake, is not much better.

Love

I remember how confusing it was, as a new believer, not knowing what God wanted or expected of me. I grew up in the Catholic Church, so when God got ahold of me, at 27, it only seemed natural to head back there. On one particular Sunday morning I picked up a printed calendar they had laid out in a vestibule and, after going over it for a few moments, began to feel a bit heavy. I wondered how I could possibly keep up with all of the burdensome expectations, such as honoring holy days and various saints birthdays or keeping track of all of the other “important” extra-biblical information presented. Just the thought of it was overwhelming; especially for someone struggling with addiction and mental illness. I had faith in Christ and the hope of eternal life, but I had no idea what God expected of me on a daily basis and it was beginning to sound like it was more than I could handle.

Several months after having first believed, I enrolled in a year-long recovery program called Teen Challenge (sometimes called “Adult and Teen Challenge”). Upon my arrival, they took the Catholic reading materials I had brought with me and tucked them away in an office, out of my reach. I wasn’t sure why at first, but the longer I spent in that program, getting alone with God and his word, the more I understood. God began to open my eyes to the truth about who he is

and what it means to belong to Christ's church, helping me break free from the burdensome false teachings of Catholicism.

When I graduated from Teen Challenge I went home to a new church. However, the false teachings didn't stop coming. There were several presented in my new home church; tithing was one of them.

It took me over 15 years of knowing Christ to finally realize just how simple God had made it all along. Maybe I've been a slow learner, but, truthfully, I don't think it was just me. I've heard hundreds of sermons, watched countless videos, read many articles and spent a significant amount of time in fellowship with other Christians and, quite astonishingly, don't recall anyone ever once giving an explanation about God's expectations for believers in the simple terms that I have now come to understand.

There's really only one requirement for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ: To love our neighbor as ourselves.

That's it.

It's that simple.

This chapter will help us to understand how God brought humanity from an obligation to obey the entirety of the Mosaic Law to the simple requirement of loving others through faith in Jesus Christ. Upon its completion, it should become quite evident that contemporary teachings concerning an obligation to tithe run contrary to sound biblical doctrine.

Categories of the Mosaic Law

Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law, but it does still play a role in our lives. We can better understand what the role of the law should be for us by dividing it into the following three categories:

- Civil
- Ceremonial
- Moral

These categories can be defined as follows:

Civil Laws - Laws that govern everyday life. Includes rules about courts, farming, war etc. along with instructions on punishments for certain crimes. Applied to those who lived in the nation of ancient Israel.

Ceremonial Laws - Statutes concerning religion and worship. Pertained to such things as holy days, feasts, that which is clean or unclean, animal sacrifices, regulations for priests and various temple practices. Applied to Jews and Jewish converts under the old covenant.

Moral Laws - Timeless ethical principles of good and evil or right and wrong thoughts and behaviors. Applies to everyone everywhere throughout all of time.

Let's take a closer look at each category:

The civil laws (aka social or judicial laws) in the OT applied only to the nation of Israel. Believers today are not citizens of ancient Israel. For example, Christians are not obligated to enforce the death penalty for murder or require a man to marry an unmarried virgin he had relations with, in accordance with the Mosaic Law (see Leviticus 24:17,

Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Paul made it clear that Christians are to submit to the local governing authorities where they reside: "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). But we are not bound to the laws of our nation in the same way that ancient Israel was under the old covenant. For example, it's not a "sin" to drive 5 mph over the speed limit on the highway, pay your taxes late, or jaywalk. However, we would do well to obey the laws of the land to avoid any potential civil consequences. When a civil command contradicts God's word, we're to obey God rather than man (see Acts 4:18-20).

The ceremonial laws pointed forward to Jesus Christ and are no longer necessary after Jesus' death and resurrection. Let us recall what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Colossae: "(16) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. (17) These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ". (Colossians 2:16-17) The ceremonial law can be likened to the wooden framework that concrete is poured into. Once the concrete begins to set, the frame is removed and discarded; it has served its purpose and is no longer needed. What remains is the greater thing that was intended all along, the concrete structure. Similarly, the ceremonial law pointed forward to someone greater, Jesus Christ. Now that he who is greater has come, these laws are no longer needed, their purpose has been served.

The moral laws represent timeless principles that still do apply to us. In fact, whenever Jesus or the apostles mentioned the moral laws they either reaffirmed them or intensified them. For example, Jesus made it clear that we're not only to refrain from murder, but also from harboring anger in our hearts: "(21) You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'" (22) But I tell you that anyone who is

angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22a).

Discovering Moral Principles

While we’re no longer under the Mosaic Law, we should still seek to discover and apply the underlying moral principles of the law. Finding the underlying principle is like peeling a piece of fruit. The peel on the outside is tossed aside; the fruit inside is then enjoyed. Likewise, when believers read OT passages concerning the law, we should look to find a moral principle that can be applied, not concerning ourselves with the specifics of those laws, but rather the heart of them.

For example, we all know the story of Ruth. When Naomi returned to Israel with Ruth, the two had little food for themselves, so Ruth went out and picked up leftover grain in Boaz’s field. But why did Boaz’s harvesters leave grain in his field in the first place? There was a law that farmers could not reap the crops on the edges of their field or go back and collect the gleanings (the pieces that they dropped while harvesting), but instead had to leave them for the poor: “(9) When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. (10) Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10).

We may not all be farmers, and we obviously don't live in ancient Israel, but we can apply the underlying moral principle of Leviticus 19:9-10 by providing for those in need. Providing for those in need was the purpose of the law found in Leviticus 19:9-10. We can see in the NT that the spirit of this law still applies to the church. In fact, at the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem, after it had been deter-

mined that the Gentiles need not obey the law of Moses, the apostles in Jerusalem asked Paul to remember the poor: “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” (Galatians 2:10). They didn’t ask Paul to follow the specifics of the Mosaic Law concerning providing for those in need, they simply encouraged him to “remember” to be generous to “the poor”.

The underlying moral principles that can be extracted from the law can be summarized in one word: Love.

Love summarizes the moral law.

Paul explained to the Romans, “(8) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (10) Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

Paul mentioned several moral laws from the Ten Commandments saying that they, along with “whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

And to the Galatians Paul wrote, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself”” (Galatians 5:14).

The command to “love your neighbor as yourself” summarizes an obligation to uphold the moral principles of the Mosaic Law. Therefore, “in keeping this one command” to “love your neighbor as your-

self”, the “entire law”, that is to say the spirit and intention of it, “is fulfilled”.

New Covenant, New Priesthood, New Law

At this point, we might ponder, “If Christ followers need only to apply the underlying moral principles of the Mosaic Law by loving our neighbor as ourselves, then why did the Israelites have to obey all of the other specifics of it?”

To put it simply, they were under a covenant with God that required them to do so.

God made a covenant with the people of Israel that required them to obey the Mosaic Law. Under the agreement, he would bless them for obeying the law or curse them for disobeying it (see Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 28, Leviticus 26). This is what we now refer to as the “old covenant”. “Old” because it no longer applies to us, now that the “new” covenant has come.

Christ followers are under a new covenant. One that no longer requires strict adherence to a set of rules and regulations in order to be made (and remain) right with God. The new covenant is based on the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for our sins. Jesus made this clear at the Last Supper when he said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20b).

Under the new covenant, Jesus has become our high priest, as the writer of Hebrews explains: “[Jesus] has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20).

With Jesus appointed as high priest, the Levitical priesthood is no longer needed: “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people estab-

lished that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron” (Hebrews 7:11)?

The Levites, including the descendants of Aaron, are, quite simply, out of a job now that Jesus has assumed the position of high priest.

With the coming of a new priesthood, the law is now changed; the old law is set aside: “For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also...the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7:12,18-19). The “better hope” referred to here is the gospel of Jesus Christ (see prologue).

We are under a new covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. The Levites are no longer priests, as they were under the old covenant; Jesus has become our high priest, establishing a new priesthood. With a new priesthood came a new law.

The Law of Christ

Love, which summarizes the moral law, is the law of Christ.

Jesus said to his disciples, “(34) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (35) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Elsewhere, Jesus said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Jesus reiterated, "This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:17).

Paul encouraged, "Carry one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the requirements of the law of Christ [that is, the law of Christian love]" (Galatians 6:2 AMP).

Concerning the law of Christ, James exhorted, "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right" (James 2:8).

First comes faith, then comes love; after putting our faith in Jesus Christ, our responsibility is to love others.

John wrote, "And this is [God's] command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (1 John 3:23).

Paul relayed this truth well in his letter to the Galatians when he said, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6b).

What a powerful statement!

Strict obedience to the letter of the Mosaic Law doesn't count, our ancestry doesn't count, whether we sit, stand or kneel doesn't count, lighting candles and incenses doesn't count, tithing doesn't count, observing holy days doesn't count, making sacraments doesn't count (I'm upsetting someone now) and the list goes on!

What counts is "faith expressing itself through love"!

What is Love?

Paul prayed that the church in Philippi would learn “more and more” about “love”, so that they might “discern what is best” (the NRSVue says, “determine what really matters”) and be “pure”, “blameless” and “filled with the fruit righteousness”:

“(9)And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, (10) so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, (11) filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11)

Learning how to apply love in every situation is to “discern what is best” and to “determine what really matters” in every situation. Our love for others — doing what’s morally “best” and what “really matters” for them — is what makes us “pure” and “blameless” because it is to fulfill the law of Christ. Where the law of Christ is fulfilled there is purity and blamelessness because where the law of Christ is fulfilled there is no sin. The collective goodness that comes from our love is the “fruit righteousness”. We’re clothed in righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ and then we walk in righteousness as we love others, which also “comes through Jesus Christ”. This is all “to the glory and praise of God”.

So what “more and more” can we learn about “love” that might help us to focus on what’s “best” or what “really matters”, causing us to become “pure”, “blameless” and “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”?

For starters, love sees a need and fills it. Love is, oftentimes, manifest through good deeds. The Apostle John wrote, “(16) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (17) If anyone

has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (18) Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18).

John Wesley (attributed by many) once said, “Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”

That, my friends, is love.

However, love is more than just good deeds, it’s also the absence of harmful words and actions towards others; we are to do good for others while refraining from doing them harm. As Paul explained to the church in Rome, “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

Love is also an attitude of the heart. Peter wrote, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

Paul gave an extensive (though not exhaustive) description of love to the church in Corinth: “(1) If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (3) If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. (4) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. (5) It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (6) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

- (7) It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
(8) Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:1-8a).

The love that Paul is referring to here is “agape”. Agape is a Greek word that describes the perfect, unceasing, sacrificial and selfless love that God has for us and which he commands us to have for each other. It takes time for God to mold our hearts that we might love with agape. Loving others with agape fulfills the law of Christ.

“Love that fulfills the law is agape love. This love is not based on emotions, but an act of the will. It is self-sacrificing, deliberate, active love. To love someone with God’s love is to promote that person’s best interests—to actively work not to harm but to bring good to that person. This love is directed not only toward fellow believers but to all people, even our enemies. Regardless of our emotional response to another person, agape love will act for his or her good, regardless of the cost. That is the kind of love Scripture speaks of when it says to love your neighbor as yourself. That kind of love is the fulfillment of the law.” - Got Questions, gotquestions.org

A Kind of Love Letter

The letter of 1 John, traditionally attributed to the Apostle John, mentions quite a bit about love. In fact, in 1 John, one out of every fifty words is “love”, making it the highest concentration of the word love in the entire Bible. In his letter, John (aka the Apostle of Love) emphasizes the necessity of love in the life of a believer, making it clear that love is the commandment of Jesus Christ. Although the intended recipients are not specifically named, it becomes apparent that John was writing to believers who were facing a threat from false teaching that had risen from within the church (sound familiar?). Just as Paul’s letter to the Galatians is considered by many to be the greatest book of the Bible in defense of our freedom from the Mosaic Law,

1 John offers perhaps our greatest encouragement to walk according to the new law, the law of love.

In chapter two, John parallels the contrast of light and darkness with that of love and hate. The one who loves, walks in the light of Christ and his gospel; the one who does not love, but hates, stumbles in the darkness:

“(9) Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. (10) Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. (11) But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” (1 John 2:9-11)

John reminds his readers, in chapter three, that love has always been central to Jesus’ message:

“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” (1 John 3:11)

As mentioned earlier, John encourages believers to love not merely with their mouths, but also with their deeds. We follow the example of Christ when we sacrifice our time, energy and resources for the sake of others:

“(16) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. (17) If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (18) Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:16-18)

God commands us to not only to believe in Jesus, but also to obey Jesus. We obey Jesus by loving others as he commanded us. Having faith in Jesus and loving others produces confidence within us that God will hear our prayers.

“(19) This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: (20) If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (21) Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God (22) and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. (23) And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” (1 John 3:19-23)

John points out that love comes from God. Love that believers have for one another is therefore evidence of their relationship with God:

“(7) Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (8) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (9) This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. (10) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (12) No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” (1 John 4:7-12)

John had a way of writing that's oftentimes beautiful, but can also be a little confusing; you might even say it's somewhat poetic. In 4:13-16 John is making the point that the Holy Spirit within us, our confession of faith in Jesus and the display of our love, together confirm to us that our salvation is genuine. It is the outward display of

love through us that provides the surest evidence to others that we are saved or “in God”, for “God is love”.

“(13) This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. (14) And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (15) If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. (16) And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.” (1 John 4:13-16)

John explains that if we live within God’s will, continuing to love others, then we have nothing to fear. God has no punishment in store for the one who obeys the law of Christ, living in perfect love for others. You see, it’s not just saying that we have faith that gives us confidence before God, but also living out our faith through love for others as Jesus did. We are saved by grace through faith, but it is our love for others that testifies to the genuineness of our faith, which then gives us confidence before God.

“(17) This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. (18) There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:17-18)

John makes the point that our love for God is a response to God’s love for us and is reflected in our love for others. If anyone claims to love God it should be evident that they also love their brothers and sisters in the faith; hate has no place within the body of Christ.

“(19) We love because he first loved us. (20) Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God,

whom they have not seen. (21) And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” (1 John 4:19-21)

The Greatest of These

Faith, hope and love are a trio that have been referred to as the “three pre-eminent graces”, “three theological virtues”, “three Christian graces” and the “three pillars of Christianity”. They are the most excellent assets of Christianity. While they are found individually in many Bible verses, they are found in relatively close proximity to one another in the following nine passages of scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 5:5-6, Ephesians 1:15-18, Ephesians 4:2-5, Colossians 1:4-5, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Hebrews 6:10-12, 1 Peter 1:21-22.

Should we truly have one, we’ll have all three. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ we immediately receive the hope of eternal life. However, it is the development of love in us that confirms the genuineness of our faith, giving us assurance in the hope of our salvation. In other words, faith gives us the hope of eternal life and then our love for others assures us that our hope will someday be fully realized because it confirms that we have true faith. (See Romans 5:1-5, 1 John 4:13-16)

One might assume that faith was the greatest of the three since without faith, we would have neither hope nor love. Yet, Paul concluded his famous treatise on love with the statement: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

John Calvin explains that love is the greatest of the three, “because faith and hope are our own: love is diffused among others.” We have

faith in Jesus Christ and, because of this, we have the hope of eternal life, but to love is to benefit others. Sure, our faith benefits others in that God hears our prayers for them. Our hope, too, benefits others in that the peace and joy we experience looking forward to the hope of eternal life can improve the lives of those around us. But love uniquely benefits others through the motivation it provides us to do them good, while refraining from doing them harm, as well as through tangible expression. Our acts of love, on behalf of others, serve as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ. That is to say that, through us, others don't only hear about Jesus, they also experience his love in practical ways.

Another reason love is the greatest of the three is that love will continue to bless others for all eternity. Think about this: Eternity will be filled with reciprocal love between God and his children and his children one for another. We'll spend an eternity loving others and being loved by others, never to not love anyone or not be loved by anyone ever again. We will do nothing contrary to loving everyone and being loved by everyone, forever. How wonderful it will be when the law of Christ reins perfectly in the hearts of all of God's children for all eternity!

Understanding our freedom from the Mosaic Law, along with, under grace, our obligation to uphold the law of Christ, helps bring clarity to what God's expectations are, as well as what are not his expectations, for the Church. With this in mind, it becomes quite apparent that contemporary teachings on obligatory Christian tithing run contrary to sound doctrine. If up to this point you're not convinced, in the next chapter we'll rebut definitively common arguments used to promote tithing in the church.

It Should be Noted

1. The 16 laws pertaining to tithing can be placed under the categories of either civil or ceremonial law.

The Levitical tithe was a necessary means of provision for the tribe of the Levites who tended to matters concerning the ceremonial law.

The festival tithe was to be given toward religious pilgrimages and shared with the Levites, which would place it under the ceremonial law.

The tithe for the poor was moral in nature, however, it only applied to Israelites and foreigners in Israel. Not unlike a modern national welfare system, the tithe for the poor was provision for those living in the nation of Israel who did not have enough food of their own; it wasn't sent to the poor in other countries. For this reason, I would consider it part of the civil law.

2. The three categories of the Mosaic Law discussed in this chapter were not recognized in ancient Jewish culture. God's law was considered equally binding across these categories. What was law was law; to break the law was to sin. These categories are for the purpose of study so that we can better understand what the role of the law is for us as Christ followers.

3. Some have made the claim that we're still under the old law, suggesting that Jesus commanded obedience to it in the Sermon on the Mount:

“(17) Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest let-

ter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (19) Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (20) For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20)

Jesus absolutely, without a doubt, could not have meant by this that his church must continue to adhere to the letter of the Mosaic Law after his death and resurrection. To suggest that he did would be to suggest that scripture contradicts itself; why would we have so many passages explaining our freedom from the law if Jesus requires our strict obedience to it?

So what was Jesus saying in Matthew 5:17-20?

It's important to note that Jesus is referring to the "law and the prophets" which is another way of saying "the whole of the Hebrew scriptures" and not just the Mosaic Law found in the Torah. He's speaking of the entirety of what we now know as the Old Testament.

The fulfillment of the law and the prophets that Jesus is referring to here is probably not merely the fulfillment of prophecy, as has been suggested by some (although that might sound like an easy way out of further explanation), but rather the bringing to fullness (or completeness) the Hebrew scriptures through his teachings. He goes on to give examples of this in verses 21-48 of this same chapter. He continues to contrast his teachings (the true meaning and intention of the law) with that of the teachers of the law, throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

When it comes to obedience to the law, Jesus raises the bar; not in the sense of a strict literal interpretation of the written law, such as the Pharisees had, but rather the spirit of the law that the Pharisees often overlooked. God cares about more than our actions, he cares about our hearts; who we really are inside. Jesus teaches us to consider our words and even our thoughts. The high standard Jesus presents is extracted from the scriptures and will, along with the scriptures from which it is extracted, remain until the end of the age.

Jesus' teaching on this lines up with that of Paul's (or rather Paul's lines up with Jesus'). We're no longer bound by the strict legal requirements of the law, but we are to, with God's help and by his grace, strive to live according to the high moral standard found in the underlying principles of the law, which, as was explained earlier in this chapter, are summarized in Jesus' command for us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In fact, toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). The words "do to others what you would have them do to you" are another way of saying "love your neighbor as yourself" which is, let us recall, how Paul summarized the law: "(9) The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:9-10). And again, "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

Both Jesus and Paul taught that the true meaning and intention of the law is fulfilled through love.

Jesus ends his sermon by telling his listeners that they should build their lives on his teachings about the law (its true meaning and intention) because they, unlike the strict legalistic teachings of the teachers of the law in his day, are a firm foundation. (See Matthew 7:24-27)

Let us also recall Jesus' statement "(28) Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

When we consider that Peter referred to an obligation to the law as "a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear" (see Acts 15:10) and that Paul referred to an obligation to the law as a "yoke of slavery" (see Galatians 5:1), it becomes clear that to "yoke" oneself to Jesus who's "yoke is easy" is not to yoke oneself to the ridged commands of the Mosaic Law. Rather, when we take Jesus' "yoke" upon ourselves, having received salvation by grace through faith in him, we find "rest" for our "souls" as we "learn" from him to walk in the way of love.

Let that thought wash over you for a moment: Set free from an obligation to uphold the strict legalistic requirements of the law, by grace through faith, we walk side by side with Jesus, learning to love as he loves.

4. It's important to understand that love has always been the spirit of the law, even under the old covenant:

"(34) Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. (35) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: (36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the

first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Notice that Jesus said, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”. He’s saying that the entire Old Testament (it wasn’t “old” at that time) is centered around love for God and love for others.

5. It’s through our love for others that we show our love for God. This is why loving our neighbor fulfills the law; to love our neighbor is to love God.

Let us consider Jesus’ words, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”. And again, “whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me”. (See Matthew 25:40,45)

The writer of Hebrews said, “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” (Hebrews 6:10)

It’s clear that the writer of Hebrews considered “help” given to God’s people to be the equivalent of “love” shown to God.

R. Hillel told the following story: “A mocking Gentile promised to become a proselyte if he would teach him the whole Law while he stood on one foot—a gibe at the multitudinous precepts, reckoned at 613. “What is hateful to thyself,” said the Rabbi, “do not to thy neighbour. This is the whole Law; the rest is commentary.””

6. Some have mistaken Jesus’ words “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15 CSB) to mean that if we love him we will keep the commands found in the Mosaic Law.

I've heard people quote this, and other verses like it, in defense of tithing. The problem with that is, Jesus doesn't command us to obey the details of the letter of the Mosaic Law; he commands us to love: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Keep in mind that love sums up the moral law. This could explain why, at times, the plural (commands) is used instead of the singular (command). To keep the commands of Jesus is to uphold the principles of the moral law, which is summarized in the command to love our neighbor as ourselves. To keep Jesus' command to love others is to keep his commands concerning morality.

Let us also consider that there are two chief commands in the NT: first, to believe in Jesus, and then, through faith in Jesus, to love one another: "And this is [God's] command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us" (1 John 3:23). "Commands", then, could be a reference to both the command to have faith in Jesus and the command to love one another.

7. All sins mentioned in the NT are disobedience to the commands of faith or love. That is to say that, all sins in the NT are intrinsically immoral.

We've already discovered that the moral laws are "timeless ethical principles of good and evil or right and wrong thoughts and behaviors".

I won't list the various sins mentioned in the NT here, only read through the following passages and you'll get the idea: Mark 7:21-22, Matthew 15:19, Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 and Revelation 21:8.

If we have faith in Jesus Christ and love our neighbor as ourselves we are free from sin without the need for adherence to the Mosaic Law; tithing is no exception.

Tithing, the giving of specifically 10% of our income to the church, is not moral in nature. Therefore, to not tithe is not immoral. That is to say that, to not tithe is not a sin.

8. A proper understanding of the NT is not possible without the realization that we are free from the Mosaic Law and, instead, under the law of Christ, which is clearly defined as loving our neighbor as ourselves. Failing to acknowledge this distorts our understanding of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ and just about every other Christian doctrine there is.

9. Jesus didn't deliver us from an obligation to the Mosaic Law just to create for us a whole new list of burdensome laws in its place (as some denominations might claim). He delivered us that we might be free, burdened only by "the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8b).

10. Adherence to moral law (loving others) absolutely can not save us. No one can live a perfect life (except Christ) "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:123). Even if we did everything right for our entire lives and only missed the mark one time (we all certainly sin much more than that), we're still sinners. Salvation comes only by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ: "(8) for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— (9) not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

11. After we're saved by grace through faith, the Holy Spirit develops the character of Christ in us, helping us to grow in love for others.

Disobedience to the law of love may lead to discipline, but it does not constitute grounds for immediate or complete separation from God.

Remember, we're not under law, but under grace; under grace, God raises us up as his own children.

In Titus 2:11-14 Paul explains, "(11) For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. (12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, (13) while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

The Greek word for "teaches", in v. 11, encompasses all that's involved in raising a child including discipline, instruction and punishment for the purpose of bringing about better behavior. We can see that, as a result of being raised by grace, God's children will become "eager to do what is good" (see v.14).

Grace "teaches" us, as a parent teaches their child, how to live the right way, producing within us an "[eagerness] to do what is good".

Essentially, grace teaches us to love.

On a Side Note

Teen Challenge was founded in the early 1960's by a minister named David Wilkerson for the purpose of helping teen gang members that ran the streets of Brooklyn, New York. Since its conception TC has grown to nearly 250 centers in 48 states with a total of approximately 1,400 centers in 129 countries around the world, each do-

ing their part to help those struggling with various forms of addiction transform their lives through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One study done in 1968 by the National Institute of Drug Abuse found that Teen Challenge had an 87.5% success rate, which is considerably higher than secular programs which typically have a 1-15% success rate. A number of other studies have since been done, e.g. by North Western University in Illinois and a study in 1994 by the University of Tennessee, showing similar results.

The high success rate of TC is attributed to what has become known as the “Jesus Factor”, something secular programs lack. When we invite Jesus to be a part of the program, souls are saved and lives are changed!

Refuting Common Arguments

“**W**e demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

In this chapter we’ll take a look at common arguments made in support of tithing, followed by sound rebuttal.

Chapter Guide

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New Testament Arguments

1. “Jesus commanded tithing”

“(23) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice,

mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (24) You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” (Matthew 23:23-24)

“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.” (Luke 11:42)

At a glance, it may seem that Jesus is suggesting that we should tithe when he says, “without neglecting the former” or “without leaving the former undone”; the “former” mentioned was tithing, right?

However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Jesus is in no way advocating tithing for the church.

Let’s consider the following points:

- Jesus is not speaking to his disciples; he’s speaking to hypocritical Jewish Pharisees.

- As of this conversation, these Pharisees have rejected him (which is made evident in the way Jesus addresses them, “Woe to you Pharisees”).

- Given that this conversation took place before his crucifixion, death and resurrection, Jesus’ audience (the Pharisees) are still living under the Mosaic Law during the time of the old covenant.

- The Pharisees Jesus spoke to were living in the land of Israel. (Remember, tithes were only required from the land of Israel)

- Jesus was speaking in past tense about what they “should have” done.

- Jesus was not giving instructions to or addressing the church in either of these passages.

After considering these points, it becomes clear that Jesus was not advocating tithing for the church.

Another passage used by proponents of tithing is Matthew 22:21 in which Jesus says, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's".

It's been suggested that Jesus' statement "give back...to God what is God's" is a reference to tithing.

Other translations more accurately use the words "pay" (NASB) or "render" (KJV and ESV) instead of "give back" as in the NIV. Regardless of the translation, there are several points to be made:

- Jesus' words, "to God what is God's" are somewhat ambiguous. Since no other reference is made, there's simply no way of knowing exactly what Jesus meant (time, talents, hearts, lives, worship, glory, honor, temple taxes, tithes, offerings or several of these things or even all of these things and more).

- Even if Jesus was promoting tithing in this passage, similar truths apply as did with Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42: Jesus was not speaking to his disciples; he was speaking to Pharisees and Herodians who, as of this conversation, have rejected him (which can be clearly seen by the fact that they're trying to trap him) while still living under the Mosaic Law during the time of the old covenant, in the land of Israel, before his crucifixion, death and resurrection.

- Once again, Jesus is not giving instructions to the church in this passage.

When analyzing Jesus' words and actions recorded in the NT, we should keep in mind that Jesus lived under the old covenant. He observed the Passover according to the Mosaic Law and even told a man healed of leprosy, "go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing" (Luke 5:14). (Yet, quite peculiarly, we all seem to agree that Jesus was not commanding the church to do likewise for millennia to come in either of those situations.)

Jesus kept the law and he encouraged others to do the same. Which, when we consider the historical context, makes sense since his ministry took place while he and his disciples were still under the law.

However, as we have already discovered, apostle Paul makes it abundantly clear throughout his writings, that Christ followers, after Jesus' death and resurrection, are no longer under the law of Moses:

Jesus "has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations" (Ephesians 2:14b,15a).

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ" (Romans 7:4)

"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:6)

"for you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14b)

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

Nowhere in the NT is it recorded that Jesus ever once commanded the church to tithe.

2. “Paul gave instructions on tithing”

Didn’t Paul say, “set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income”?

“(1) Now about the collection for the Lord’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 your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. (3) Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.” (1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

This passage, quite simply, has nothing to do with tithing.

In context, this passage is about taking up a collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul’s instructions were to “set aside a sum of money” as one earns it so that the decision to give an offering wouldn’t be a last minute decision. The giving of such offerings was out of love and not commanded: “I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love” (2 Corinthians 8:8a).

The exact amount of such an offering was to be determined by the giver: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Paul also gave instructions to the church about providing for those who serve in ministry, without mentioning a tithe:

“(13) Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14)

If Paul were an advocate of Christian tithing, this would have been a really great opportunity for him to simply say, “tithe”. But he doesn’t. It almost seems as if he goes out of his way not to. He starts on the topic of providing for ministers in v. 1 of this same chapter and continues through v. 18 without ever once mentioning the word tithe. I find that remarkable.

That’s because he’s not preaching tithing; he’s simply using the law concerning tithes and offerings as a principle we should follow. Not legalistically and not to the point of commanding, or even so much as suggesting, the giving of a literal 10%, but rather that, in the same way priests were provided for through Israel’s tithes and offerings, Christ followers should provide for the needs of those who serve them in ministry.

Nowhere in the NT is it recorded that Paul, or anyone else for that matter, ever once instructed the church to tithe.

3. “The early church gave all they had so giving 10% shouldn’t be a big deal”

I recently heard a preacher mention that when people complain about tithing, he explains to them that the early church gave everything they had and, once they realize that, they’re happy to just give a tenth according to OT standards.

First off, if one really believes that NT standards of giving are so much higher than OT standards, why cop out by going back to the lower standard? What a terrible thing to teach!

But is it really even true? Did the early church really give away everything they had and are we expected to do the same?

Let's review the texts that form the basis of this argument:

“(44) All the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (46) Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (47) praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:44-47)

“(32) All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (33) With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all (34) that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales (35) and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (36) Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), (37) sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.” (Acts 4:32-37)

As a reminder, let's be careful to practice exegesis instead of eisegesis; to read from the text, rather than into it.

In chapter 2, after it says “they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” and goes on to state that “they broke bread in their homes and ate together”. So they clearly didn’t give away “everything” or they wouldn’t have had bread, or homes to eat it in. But they had both homes and bread, leading us to believe that the “property and possessions” they sold were not the only properties or possessions they had; they obviously kept some things.

Chapter 4 describes a scenario where the early church “shared everything they had”. So “they had” things to share, and share they did. In fact, they shared so much that “there were no needy persons among them”. It doesn’t say they all gave “everything” away. If that were the case, who would the recipients have been? Surely the recipients now “had” things. It, actually, says that they shared all things to the point that “no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own”; which is pretty impressive, but it’s not the same as giving everything away to the point of being empty handed. And that’s okay, nobody asked them to give everything away until they were empty handed.

Chapter 4 also says that “from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need”. Which, again, would seem to suggest that, as we discovered in chapter 2, these were fields or homes they didn’t use or didn’t need. It doesn’t say they all sold the only homes they had and slept in the street. And it says that the money from the sale of such belongings was “distributed to anyone who had need”, indicating that not everyone “had need”. Therefore, some must have had things.

In regards to their radical generosity, Acts 4:33 says that “God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them”. So it was “God’s grace” that led them to be so generous, not the law. That same grace, rather than the law, is what leads us to generosity.

Some food for thought: Perhaps there's a reason that "God's grace was so powerfully at work" in the early church in Jerusalem, causing them to give so freely and generously of their earthly possessions:

God, who was "powerfully at work" among them through radical generosity, knew that Jerusalem would be demolished in 70 AD, less than 40 years after the founding of the church. Whatever houses and properties were not sold would be destroyed or taken by the Romans, and the opportunity for the church to gain from their sale lost.

Also, what's recorded about the generosity of the early church in Jerusalem is historical; it's a record of what did happen, not instructions about what should happen. Remember, "description does not equate prescription".

Paul told the church in Ephesus, "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). He said they should work so that they "have something to share", not that they should give everything away.

Timothy was instructed by Paul to, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:17-18). Timothy wasn't to tell the rich to give everything away, rather they were to "be generous and willing to share". Notice also that Paul said "God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment". So then it's okay to have things, and even enjoy the things we have, as long as we're "generous and willing to share" with those in need.

Paul gave instructions to the church on free will offerings, encouraging them to excel in the grace of it (see 2 Corinthians 8:7). He understood that it was okay for Christians to own possessions and that it was up to them to decide what they would give (we should do this prayerfully, of course).

If there is a takeaway for us in learning from the generosity of the early church, perhaps it's that they understood the concept that "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:11), as John the Baptist encouraged.

As Christ followers, we should be willing to sacrifice our abundance to make up for our brother's and sister's lack. If a family in our congregation is wealthy and yet another, earning an honest living, is barely able to put food on the table, there's something wrong. Yet, this is the kind of thing we see all too often in the church today.

Perhaps it's because the church has become so institutionalized and legalistic — "as long as I give my 10%, and maybe a little extra to charity, my conscience is clear". Never mind the fact that so many in the congregation are still suffering. We seem to forget that, to God, it's all about people.

Some more food for thought: The allocation of funds donated by the early church in Jerusalem would seem to suggest that benevolence should be our first priority. But it isn't, is it?

Not.

Even.

Close.

Try about 1% of the total budget.

That's the average amount of income brought in by the church that actually goes towards benevolence, with approximately 73% going towards administrative and building costs (percentages calculated from the 2014 Church Budget Priorities Study done by Christianity Today's Church Law & Tax Group).

This begs the question, "Are we doing church the way Jesus intended"?

Also, one can't help but to notice that a cursory glance at the book of Acts (aka Acts of the Apostles) reveals that the word "tithe" is nowhere to be found.

Friends, the argument that "the early church gave all they had so giving 10% shouldn't be a big deal" isn't just a terrible teaching, it's factually weak and completely invalid.

4. "Ananias and Sapphira were punished for keeping too much of the money from the sale of their property"

Actually, they were punished for lying (along with hypocrisy, dissimulation and pretentiousness).

Let us consider that, in the account of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter said, "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God" (Acts 5:4). Why didn't Peter just say, "You failed to tithe" or "because you didn't give everything.."? Instead he said, "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal"?

The problem was not that they didn't give enough or that they didn't tithe, but rather that they hypocritically lied about how much they were giving. Peter makes it clear that they could have kept all of it; it was rightfully theirs. But they chose to obey Satan (see Acts 5:3) and follow the path of deception by lying and saying they gave it all when they were really only giving part of the money.

5. "We're free from the law of Moses in regard to our salvation, but we still have to obey it after we're saved"

Proponents of tithing often quote the Mosaic Law in their attempts to persuade people that tithing is an obligation for the church. They argue that we're still required to obey the law of tithing after we become a Christian because our freedom from the law only pertains to our salvation.

However, the question of a Christian's obligation to obey the law of Moses was settled by the apostles and elders in the first century.

Acts 15 records the Council of Jerusalem, a meeting between some of the apostles and elders, at which this very matter was discussed. After some deliberation, they concluded that gentile believers would not be required to follow the law.

Paul wrote extensively on the matter of our freedom from the law as believers. In his letter to the Romans he wrote, "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Romans 7:6).

To the Galatians Paul wrote, "(9) But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? (10) You are observing special days and months and

seasons and years! (11) I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you." (Galatians 4:9-11) and "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

We're saved by grace through faith apart from the law and we remain free from an obligation to the law; even the law(s) of tithing.

6. "Jesus doesn't require 10%, he requires 100%"

If the person making this argument really believes that Jesus wants 100% of all their possessions, then why do they still own things? They own a vehicle, home, TV, phone, clothes, shoes, jewelry, food, or any number of these things and more, and yet they claim that we're supposed to give it all away?

Hmmm.

Jesus wants all of us, our whole heart, but he doesn't ask us to give away all of our possessions.

That is to say that he doesn't ask of us to literally give away every single thing we own, leaving us to live on the streets naked and starving with zero resources.

Consider John the Baptist's words recorded in Luke 3:11: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:11).

John didn't tell his disciples to give away both of their shirts, but rather to give the extra one away and to do likewise with food. He taught his disciples to give of their superfluity.

Jesus encouraged the same spirit of generosity, reminding us that our true treasures are not here on earth, but with God in heaven: "(33) Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (34) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34). (See also Matthew 19:21)

The NT contains an abundance of exhortation on generosity (grace giving) for a reason. If we were to have nothing it would've been easier to just tell the church that they should give away every single thing they own until there's nothing left than to go on to the extent that we see on the topic of generosity.

God wants us to acknowledge him as the provider of all good things and he wants us to be thankful and content and good stewards of the resources he provides us with. He also wants us to be generous towards one another and especially with those in need. But he does not require every believer to literally give away 100% of all their possessions.

We should, however, hold all things loosely, acknowledging Jesus as Lord of ourselves and of everything we own, ready to forsake all at a moment's notice, even our very lives, for the cause of Christ.

Finally, although I've personally heard this argument in support of tithing more than once, what does it actually have to do with tithing? Even if Jesus did want us to give 100%, how would that be an argument for an obligation to give only 10%? Once again, it sounds like proponents who use this argument are referring back to the Mosaic Law in an attempt to cop-out of meeting what they believe is a higher standard found in the NT. If anything, this sounds more like an argument against tithing.

Arguments from the Law

7. “We should honor the Lord with our firstfruits”

I’ve heard preachers quote Bible verses pertaining to firstfruits in support of their beliefs about tithing. The problem with that is, firstfruits and tithes were two completely different things.

Under the Mosaic Law, ancient Jewish farmers were required to set apart the “firstfruits” (aka *terumah*, after it’s blessed by a priest) of their harvest(s), traditionally about 2.5% of their crops (scripture does not indicate a specific percentage), that were to be given directly to the priests, before any tithes were taken out. The purpose of giving firstfruits was to acknowledge all that God had done for Israel since they left Egypt, give thanks to God for his provisions in the land of Canaan, as well as to bless the remainder of the harvest, including what would become the tithes. (See Exodus 23:19a, Leviticus 23:10, Leviticus 23:17, Proverbs 3:9-10, Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Numbers 18:11-13)

We’re no longer under the Mosaic Law and no longer required to offer firstfruits.

The ceremonial law, of which firstfruits were a part, pointed forward to Jesus Christ. In the NT, the principle of firstfruits is applied metaphorically in reference to the early Jewish followers of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:16), the first saints of Jesus Christ (James 1:18), the Holy Spirit (aka the Spirit of Christ) given to the church (Romans 8:23), the 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will spread the gospel of Jesus Christ during the tribulation (Revelation 14:4), as well as to the resurrection of Jesus Christ which brought with it the promise of resurrection for the of followers of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20).

In all of the NT not one mention of the term “firstfruits” is in reference to Christian giving; not monetarily or of anything else.

The argument that Christian’s should “honor the Lord with their firstfruits” simply doesn’t hold water; especially when it’s made in reference to tithing.

8. “God will bless us if we tithe”

This argument most likely originates from a misinterpretation of Malachi 3 and/or the erroneous idea that believers are blessed for obedience to the law in general.

However, the concept of being blessed in return for generosity is found throughout scripture, apart from obedience to the Mosaic Law or any mention of a tithe.

“A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.” (Proverbs 11:25)

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

10% is not some kind of magic formula, regardless of what proponents of tithing might have you believe; as if giving 9% will disqualify you from God’s blessings.

God may bless our generosity, but not on the basis of tithing; God blesses generosity of any amount.

9. "You can stand on the promises of God for tithing as per Malachi 3"

"(10) Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. (11) I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. (12) "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:10-12)

I believe that these promises have been motivation for many tithers.

We might consider that Paul does say, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

And you can be sure that if you stand on the promises of God, by faith, you will receive what he has promised.

Some of God's promises are contingent upon obedience; "If you do this, God will do that". Now it may seem that this is the case with Malachi 3, but let us recall that Malachi also makes it clear that if you don't tithe you are under a curse.

So it's different than simply standing on a promise by faith in that Malachi doesn't just say (paraphrasing), "Do this and you will be blessed", but also, "If you don't do this you will be cursed". In other words, "You are obligated to do this, or else". This is the very nature of the old covenant. The Israelites were blessed for obedience to the Mosaic Law or cursed for disobedience to it.

But we Christians are not under the old covenant nor are we obligated to meet the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Through Christ, we are free from bondage to the law.

Not to mention, the obedience needed to meet the requirements of the law in order to receive the blessings found in Malachi 3, are very specific. To tithe according to Malachi 3 is to tithe according to the instructions found in Mosaic Law. You can't change the rules and still receive the promise.

Technically, to tithe as per Malachi 3, you would have to own land in Israel and then, after setting aside first fruits to bless the remainder of your harvest, give a tenth part of the produce from your land to the tribe of the Levites who would then give a tenth part of that to be kept in the storehouse in the temple to be reserved for meeting the needs of the Levites serving there. This would be difficult since there hasn't been a temple since 70 AD and, consequently, no storehouse there or Levite's serving there.

You can't give cash when the law, and by extension the promise, calls for produce.

And if you'd prefer to instead give cash, you'll need to tack on another 20% of what would have been your tithe as a penalty. This was known as "redeeming the tithe". (See Leviticus 27:31)

You can't give it to Christians at your local church when Malachi is clearly referring to a tithe for the Levite's (the tithe of the tithe derived from the levitical tithe) to be stored in the storehouse in the temple (which, again, no longer exists).

You can't even identify as the addressee of the prophecy when it's specifically addressed to "the descendants of Jacob" living in the "nation" of Israel. (See vv. 6,9)

For all intents and purposes, you can't stand on the promises about tithing found in Malachi 3.

I feel the need to emphasize that again: You absolutely can not stand on the promises of God about tithing found in Malachi 3.

But, the good news is, you don't have to worry about the curses found in Malachi 3 either.

10. "God will curse us if we don't tithe"

"You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me." (Malachi 3:9)

Malachi 3:9 is not addressed to Christians. It's a warning given to the "nation" of Israel through the prophet Malachi for not paying the required tithes of the land under the Mosaic Law.

If you really want to talk about being cursed for disobedience, Paul made the point that, for those who depend on the law to be justified, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Galatians 3:10). You can't get away with only tithing, you'd have to do "EVERYTHING" the law says to do!

In the very next verse Paul went on to explain that, "Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith"" (Galatians 3:11).

He continues in verse 13 with, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13a).

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law and became a curse for us that we might become righteous through faith in him rather than by obedience to the law.

If you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you won't be cursed for not following the Mosaic Law.

So don't worry, you won't be cursed if you don't tithe.

11. "The only time God invites us to test him is in reference to tithing"

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it." (Malachi 3:10)

You couldn't "test" God in this, even if you tried. In order to test God's faithfulness in holding up his end of the deal, you'd have to hold up your end of the deal. You can't do that because you're not an Israelite farmer living in ancient Israel. Not to mention, there's no Levitical priesthood to give your tithe to nor temple with a storehouse for them to store tithes in. It simply can't be done; you can't "test [God] in this" in accordance with Malachi 3:10. In ancient Israel, they could. Otherwise, God would not have invited them to do it. However, it hasn't been possible to tithe according to Malachi 3 since before the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D.

Consider the following illustration: Imagine I told you that I would give you \$100 today if you first brought me a cheeseburger from In-N-Out, encouraging you to trust me. Then, 75 years later, someone you've never met brought my great grandson's neighbor a pair of socks from Forever 21, expecting to get paid the \$100, reminding him that I said, "trust me". Wrong thing; wrong place; wrong peo-

ple; wrong time. Seriously, it's that unreasonable, maybe even more so, to think that we could "test" God today, as per Malachi 3, in regards to tithing. Giving a tenth of the wrong thing, from the wrong place, to the wrong people, at the wrong time, and expecting God to honor it, is simply ludicrous.

Also, it should be known that God's invitation for Israel to test him by tithing is not the same as the testing of God that is discouraged elsewhere.

For ancient Israel to test God by tithing would have been to prove him faithful by taking him at his word. This is good testing; we would do well to "test" God's faithfulness to all of his promises (the ones that actually apply to us). This is an important principle that we can extract from Malachi 3; for God keeps his promises and is faithful to his word.

Compare that with testing that's discouraged. For example: When Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the top of the temple, misappropriating a promise of God's protection found in Psalm 91, Jesus replied, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (see Matthew 4:5-7).

Two totally different scenarios. In Malachi 3, God invited the Israelites to take him at his word; they could only benefit by testing his faithfulness concerning his promise. In Matthew 4, Satan tried to deceive Jesus into doing something dangerous that would require God to act on his behalf to save him from almost certain death; it would be a bad idea to test God in such a manner.

Exhorting Christians to tithe, using the argument that "the only time God invites us to test him is in reference to tithing", is fallacy.

12. “You’re robbing God if you don’t tithe”

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In tithes and offerings.” (Malachi 3:8)

There are several points that can be made here:

- In context, this was written to Israelites living under the Old Covenant in the land of Israel concerning a command found in the Mosaic Law, not to the church.

This point alone is enough, but we’ll go on...

- The tithes that the Israelites were stealing were agricultural produce, not money. We’re not stealing from God by not giving 10% of our monetary increase. The Israelites living under the Mosaic Law, to whom this warning was written, weren’t even required to do that.

- The reason that not paying tithes of the land in ancient Israel was considered robbing God, is because Jacob vowed to give a tenth of the land (what the land produced) to God.

That’s like if someone offered you and your children a business and then you, as a part of the deal, promised to give them 10% royalties from all the profits ever made by the company. Then, after you passed away, your children took over the business and stopped giving the 10% that you originally promised to give. In a sense, your children would be stealing. The 10% being withheld belongs to the original owner because you promised to give it to him as part of the deal when you acquired the company; the deal hasn’t changed.

The Israelites found themselves in a similar situation. Jacob vowed to give God a tenth of the Promised Land (all that the land produced); as far as God was concerned, it belonged to him. For the descendants

of Jacob, after inheriting the Promised Land, to not give what Jacob vowed to give was to steal from God.

We Christians find ourselves in no such predicament.

We're not "robbing God" if we don't tithe.

Pre-Law Arguments

13. "The principle of tithing was introduced in the Garden of Eden"

This is, quite frankly, one of the most far-fetched arguments for tithing out there.

It goes something like this: "The principle of tithing was present in the Garden of Eden in that Adam and Eve were commanded to set aside the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the same way that we're to set aside a tenth of all our income for the Lord through tithing."

Let's review the text:

"(15) The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (16) And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; (17) but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'" (Genesis 2:15-17)

Notice that Adam and Eve weren't given the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; how, then, could they give it back?

Nor were they asked to set it aside for the Lord. Genesis 3:3 makes it clear that they were forbidden to even touch it: “but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

And, although I wasn’t there to see it, I think it’s safe to assume that the fruit of that one tree didn’t equate to 10% of all the fruit of the entire garden. Otherwise it would’ve been either a relatively small garden or an absolutely gigantic tree.

Yet, even if the tree did make up 10% of the garden, again, unlike the tithe, Adam and Eve weren’t even allowed to touch it at all. It’s not like God said, “Here are all of the trees in the garden. You are required to give a tenth back to me”. He never gave them that particular tree in the first place.

Now if God had said, “Here are all of the trees of the garden, but reserve the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for your descendents who dedicate themselves to full time in ministry”, then I would agree that there’s something there, in principle. But that’s not what happened. As far as we can tell, no one was to eat from the tree nor was it given to anyone.

Using this argument to support Christian tithing just doesn’t make sense; it’s bogus. The principle behind tithing is simply not there.

Another angle proponents of tithing will use with this argument is that the tree represents a constant and continual test of Adam and Eve’s free will. From there, they’ll reason that, if Adam and Eve needed a test of free will then all of mankind must also need such a test. They will go on to suggest that tithing is that test.

However, Adam and Eve, prior to eating from the tree, didn’t have a knowledge of both good and evil. Every single human born since

then does. That means, unlike them, we're all constantly and continually tested with many choices concerning many different things (particularly of moral nature). There doesn't need to be only one test for us all to be tested. In fact, I'd say we're all tested much more than Adam and Eve were in the garden. We're faced with challenges to our morality just about every day and just about wherever we go. Even sitting at home by ourselves in the dark, we're challenged in our very thoughts.

Adam and Eve had one command to follow; that was their test. We have many rules to follow within the scope of the law of Christ (love). In our exercise of free will, while having a knowledge of good and evil, we're tested throughout the day, every day.

Besides, where in the Bible does it teach that we all need to be constantly or continually tested with one universal test? Throughout scripture, we find that different men were tested at different times and in different ways.

Finally, Jesus was tested on our behalf. We simply can't constantly and continually pass the various tests on our own; no one can. We're saved by grace through faith in the one who did. Now that we have faith in Christ, we've been given the Holy Spirit and the word of God to help us in our temptations, but even so, it takes time to grow and mature in our faith, under grace.

Using this argument to support tithing is a particularly bad thing to do, given that we should be pointed to faith in Christ through this biblical account, not obedience to the Mosaic Law or a pre-law practice. In fact, immediately after Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree, the Lord prophesied about Jesus' coming; the coming of the one who would save us by grace through faith! (See Genesis 3:15)

The fact that the Lord commanded Adam and Eve to refrain from eating from (or even touching) the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden contributes nothing to false teachings on tithing.

Taking biblical text out of context, in an attempt to support a false doctrine, is flat out heresy.

14. “Abel’s offering was an early example of the tithe”

You may have heard the argument that Able’s offering, as recorded in Genesis 4:4, was accepted on the basis that it was of the “firstborn” of his flock and so it is like the tithe which comes from the first portion of our income. The suggestion here is that we should follow Abel’s example through obedience to tithing and we will receive favor from the Lord just as he did.

Let's take a look at the account of Abel's offering:

“(2b) Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. (3) In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. (4) And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, (5) but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” (Genesis 4:2b-5)

A number of points could be made:

- Abel brought “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock”, but the livestock tithe later called for each tenth animal, not the first. In fact, no tithe under the law was to consist of a first portion of anything; the word “tithe” means “tenth part”. Abel’s offering, being of the “firstborn” of his flock, is therefore different from a tithe.

- Cain's offering, which was not pleasing to God, was actually more inline with tithing than Abel's offering, in the sense that, he did not give the first part, but rather "some of" his crops.

- As we've discussed earlier, in the NT, the principle of firstfruits is applied metaphorically in reference to the early Jewish followers of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:16), the first saints of Jesus Christ (James 1:18), the Holy Spirit (aka the Spirit of Christ) given to the church (Romans 8:23), the 144,000 Jewish witnesses who will spread the gospel of Jesus Christ during the tribulation (Revelation 14:4), as well as to the resurrection of Jesus Christ

which brought with it the promise of resurrection for the of followers of Jesus Christ

(1 Corinthians 15:20). It's never used in the context of an offering being given to or from the church, nor is it ever used in reference to tithing.

- Finally, we must be careful to consider that it wasn't simply the offerings of Cain and Abel that were accepted or rejected, but also the persons of Cain and Abel. This can be seen in the Lord's response to Cain: "If you do what is right, will *you* not be accepted" (see Genesis 4:7a emphasis mine)?

So then, to insert the tithe into this narrative would be to suggest that Abel was accepted because he tithed and Cain was rejected because he didn't tithe.

What a terrible thing to teach Christians, saved and accepted by grace through faith!

Let us recall that Paul said, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

There is absolutely nothing to be found in the account of Abel's offering to support the notion that the church should tithe. Any suggestion otherwise reveals one's lack of insight and/or depth of depravity.

15. "Tithing preceded the law"

Consider that the sabbath was practiced before the law and yet, after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul said, "Let no one judge you...in regards to...a sabbath" (see Colossians 2:16). It would seem that the majority of christendom understands this; we don't hold strictly to a Saturday sabbath.

Paul blasted false teachings on the need for circumcision, even though circumcision was required before the law was given. (See Galatians 5:1-12)

The levirate law is recorded as early as Genesis 38, long before the Mosaic Law was introduced, but no one seems to think that it applies to all believers today. In fact, I've never met a brother in Christ who's married to his widowed sister-in-law; have you?

Also, there's not one recorded instance of God commanding anyone to tithe before the Mosaic Law. In the one recorded instance of a tithe being given before the law, it appears that it was given voluntarily.

Many things have been recorded as having been done by men of God before the law was given that we're not obligated to do today. The argument that believers are obligated to do something after the Mosaic Law was set aside, just because it was practiced before the law was given, is bad hermeneutics, at best.

As we've mentioned earlier: "Description does not equate prescription".

16. "Abraham tithed"

Scripture records Abraham tithing only once and it did not come out of his own personal possessions (see Genesis 14:18-24). Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek and then gave the rest of the possessions retrieved from Sodom (except what his men had eaten and what his allies wanted to keep) back to the king of Sodom.

Also, the account of Abraham's tithe is historical, not instructional.

Finally, chapter 7 of the book of Hebrews extracts a greater point from the account of Abraham's tithe, rather than focusing on the tithe itself: Jesus and his priesthood are greater than Abraham's descendants (the Levites) and their priesthood. (See Hebrews 7:1-10)

17. "Jacob tithed"

Jacob made a vow to God stating that if God would be with him on his journey and protect and prosper him then he would give a tenth of all that God gives him back to God (most likely a reference to the produce of the land that God promised to give him and his descendants). It should be understood that Jacob laid down the conditions of the vow, not God ("If God will...", "I will..."). (See Genesis 28:10-22)

It is unclear from scripture if or how Jacob fulfilled this as the priesthood had not yet been established (so who did he give a tithe to?). There's simply no recorded instance of Jacob ever making good on his vow.

It's likely that the requirement under the Mosaic Law for Jacob's descendants to tithe of the Promised Land was a direct result of Jacob's vow to do so. It would seem as though Jacob's descendants were held accountable to make good on his vow.

Again, we Christians find ourselves in no such predicament.

Finally, the account of Jacob's vow to tithe, as with the account of Abraham's tithe, is historical, not instructional.

Extra-Biblical and Nonsensical Arguments Arguments

18. "Tithing is about the heart"

Generosity under grace is about the heart; tithing is of the law. The law requires obedience regardless of the condition of one's heart.

19. "10% is a starting point"

Many of us, including myself, gave nothing to the church before we got saved.

Giving any amount is a good starting point.

20. "Tithing is a biblical principle"

Many advocates of tithing understand our freedom from the Mosaic Law and opt to, instead, present tithing as a principle.

If there be any principle that we might extract from the Levitical tithe it would be found in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14:

“(13) Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? (14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”

Paul mentions that “those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple”. This is a reference to the tithes which were stored in the temple storehouse for the Levites who served in the temple.

So Paul, instead of telling the church in Corinth to tithe, references the Levitical tithe simply to make the point that ministers of the gospel should be paid for their service.

The principle here is that people should get paid for their work (see 1 Corinthians 9:4-18). That's what the Levitical tithe was; it was payment to the Levites for their work: “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting” (Numbers 18:21).

The NT is full of exhortation based on moral principles that stem from the most central principle of our faith; namely, to love our neighbor as ourselves. The responsibility to love one another is foundational; it is universal and timeless. Love governs (at least it should) every aspect of a believer's life. To pay others fairly for their work, that you benefit from, is the right thing to do and so honors the law of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself”. After all, who doesn’t want to be paid fairly for their work?

Also, there's a flaw in the logic.

Proponents of tithing, understanding our freedom from the law, often cite Abraham’s account of a tithe while referring to tithing as a principle.

However, if the so-called “principle” of tithing is that when you give 10% God will bless you, then why was Abraham blessed by Melchizedek (a foreshadow of Christ) before he gave a tithe? (See Genesis 14:18-20)

Referring to tithing as a “principle” might sound better than calling it a law, and might even make it sound more acceptable and applicable to a people who are not under the law, but the truth is, tithing as presented in the church, giving specifically 10% of all our income that we might be blessed and not cursed, is not a “principle”.

In the early church, believers were not obligated, or even expected, to tithe; nor are we now. We would, however, do well to practice generosity towards the poor as well as towards those who serve us in the Lord. Both are based on the foundational principle of love. We should most certainly love one another; to this, we are called.

Consider, also, Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:33: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

When we continue to put God first, not just in our finances but in every area of our lives, he will provide us with all that we’ll ever need.

Matthew 6:33 is a principle you can trust. In fact, it’s not only a principle, it’s a promise; and one that we can stand on!

It’s time for the church to let go of the so-called “principle” of tithing and, instead, embrace God’s promises.

21. "Tithing is a way of exercising the principle of first"

Under the law (and even before the law), a tithe was not the first 10%.

Technically, it wasn't even 10%; it was a tenth.

In other words, if you're tithing of livestock and you have 19 sheep, you would only give 1. And it wouldn't be the first sheep, but the last of the ten; every tenth animal. Nor would it be the best of the sheep. You would get penalized for giving the best if the best didn't happen to also be the tenth. (See Leviticus 27:32-33)

Also, Abraham didn't give the first 10% from the spoils of war to Melchizedek, but rather allowed his men to eat what they wanted from it before giving a tithe. (See Genesis 14:24)

Perhaps confusion about tithes being the first 10% comes from the misunderstanding that tithes are synonymous with firstfruits; they are not. Firstfruits were traditionally about 2.5% (there was no specific amount required) of the harvest, to be given to the priests before any tithes were taken out. Only after the firstfruits were given would the different tithes be set aside and distributed according to the law.

22. "I've heard testimonies about God's faithfulness to people who tithe"

You've heard testimonies about God's faithfulness, for sure, but not because they tithed.

Yet, we've all heard testimonies in which tithers claim that God blessed them because of their decision to tithe. It usually goes something like this: "I was struggling financially until I started tithing.

That's when things turned around for me and I was able to pay off debt, get a raise at work, finance a house, buy a new car, etc."

That all sounds great, but before we throw hermeneutics to the wind, let us consider that, again, the concept of being blessed in return for generosity is found throughout scripture, apart from any mention of a tithe.

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." (Proverbs 11:25)

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)

Just in these two verses we can see that a generous person "will prosper", "be refreshed", and "given...a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over".

Testimonies about tithing would be better suited as testimonies about God's faithfulness to his word concerning generosity in general.

One of the things that can happen when we buy into a belief is something called "confirmation bias". Essentially, confirmation bias is the tendency to notice, focus on, or favor information that confirms an existing belief. This is often unintentional and typically results in people ignoring information that's inconsistent with their beliefs.

This is what we see, oftentimes, when people believe false teachings about tithing. They believe that if they tithe, God will bless them, and so they look for confirmation of this in everything. When they are blessed, whether minutes or years later, they say it's because they

tithed. If they give any less than ten percent and run into difficulties down the road, they assume it's because they didn't tithe.

Never mind the fact that there's Christians who have tithed for years and still struggle in various ways, including financially. Never mind the fact that there's Christian's who have never tithed and are still blessed in many ways, including financially. And never mind the fact that their beliefs about tithing are inconsistent with scripture.

I recently sat directly across the table from someone who gave a testimony about how God was doing amazing things in several areas of his life. At the end of his testimony he looked at a pastor (a strong proponent of tithing) who happened to be there and, as if to try to please him, said that God had been working in his life, "ever since [he] started tithing".

However, this particular person admitted previously that he had just recently, for the first time in his adult life, begun taking faith in Christ seriously. He rededicated his life to God, started attending church weekly, began witnessing to others at his job, set aside time for reading the Bible and other Christian literature, and faithfully attended a ministry at our church.

Not being a tither, it seemed obvious to me that, amazing things weren't taking place because he tithed. Amazing things were taking place because of his faith in Jesus Christ and his willingness to finally put God first in his life.

Confirmation bias isn't a new problem; the prophet Jeremiah dealt with it in his day.

The Israelite women living in Egypt would burn incense and pour out drink offerings to, and make cakes in the image of, a false goddess named Ashtoreth whom they referred to as the "Queen of Heaven".

The women claimed that, when they worshiped the Queen of Heaven, they “had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm” (Jeremiah 44:17b). They went on to claim that, ever since they stopped worshipping her, they “had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine” (Jeremiah 44:18b). Convinced of these things, they refused to repent of their idolatry, regardless of the fact that the Lord had warned them through the prophet Jeremiah.

You see, these women were convinced that their worship of the Queen of Heaven resulted in blessings. They were also convinced that they were later denied blessings when they didn’t worship the Queen of Heaven. In their minds, worship of the Queen of Heaven was synonymous with receiving blessings and avoiding curses.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, the complete opposite was true. Jeremiah warned them that God was about to severely punish them for their idolatry. Later, God did, in fact, almost completely wipe them out on account of it. These women and their families suffered harm due, in part, to confirmation bias.

Let me say this, I don’t tithe and God provides all that my household needs and more. Sometimes in amazing and unexpected ways!

In fact, just a week ago today I was expressing concern to my wife about our finances. We had a little money in the bank and a little more on the way, but I knew from experience that what we had would barely be enough to get us through the next week. The very next day I sold two items that I had recently listed for sale on social media, totaling over \$500!

As if that wasn’t enough, later that same night I received extra money in my account for my paycheck! I had previously mentioned to my boss that my hours were wrong, but he brushed it off and told me not to worry about it. I received it as a blessing from the Lord!

God didn't stop there: Earlier tonight I was at a thrift store where I bought a few small items, including a coffee cup with the words "Let go and let God" printed on it. After ringing up the items, my total came to \$6.33. I pointed to the numbers on the screen and quoted Matthew 6:33 to my wife saying, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you". Right after leaving the thrift store I drove around the corner to a gas station to fill up. When we got there, someone offered to pay for my entire tank of gas! Again, I received it as a blessing from the Lord!

Over the course of this past week, my household has received at least \$700 more than we expected to. And all this, just in time to take a trip to upstate NY for my sister's wedding! Now THAT'S a testimony! God is good and God is faithful to his word! We've been blessed beyond anything we deserve and I pray that God's blessings flow through us, into the lives of others, by his grace and to his glory.

Now, had I been a tither, I almost certainly would have assumed that the blessings I just mentioned were a direct result of my "obedience" in tithing. But that's just it. I don't tithe. No one in my household does. I do, however, believe that God is faithful to fulfill his promises, such as what is found in Matthew 6:33. (For you generational blessing tithers, my parents and grandparents don't/didn't tithe either.)

Friends, it's a disservice to others, and a flat out shame, when Christians attempt to give testimony about God's faithfulness in regards to false beliefs. God is faithful to his word, and his word makes it clear that we're free from the law. Nowhere in his word is it even so much as suggested that Christians are expected tithe. His word does, however, make it clear that believers will be blessed for putting him first, as well as for their generosity in general.

Have faith in Jesus Christ. Put God first in every area of your life. Be blessed and be a blessing.

And please, never testify in a manner that's inconsistent with God's word; hermeneutics matter.

23. "We need tithes to pay the mortgage on our building"

It's not wise to borrow money to finance a building for Christian fellowship. Period.

Proverbs 22:7 warns that "the borrower is slave to the lender". If we make the decision to borrow money for ourselves or for our own household that's one thing; we're the ones that will suffer any consequences. But when we borrow money to build/buy a facility for Christian fellowship, we're enslaving our brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, why don't we meet in houses, yards, public places, rented facilities, buildings that have been donated or purchase a facility when we get the cash in hand, trusting all the while for God to provide all that we need in his perfect timing?

If you find yourself to be a member of clergy at a congregation that has already made the mistake of borrowing money to build/buy, please do not place the burden on the backs of the congregation, many of whom may not have been in agreement with the decision to do so or even present at the time the decision was made, through the preaching of an OT command that Christians were never required to follow. Instead, trust God to provide as you preach the truth of his word. If it is his will for the congregation to continue to meet in that particular building, he will indeed provide.

If God doesn't provide enough money to pay the bills, perhaps it's because jumping into debt by borrowing money was testing God. Matthew 4:5-7 warns about "jumping" when it's not God's will and

then expecting God to catch us: “Then the devil took [Jesus] to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ ” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

Don’t put the Lord your God to the test by jumping into debt borrowing money that you have not the means to repay; as a congregation, live within your means. And keep in mind that income, especially that which comes from donations, can fluctuate. Just because borrowing money looks feasible today, doesn’t mean it will be tomorrow. But whatever you do, don’t teach false doctrines to clean up a mess you (or anyone else) have made.

Nobody wants to hear this, but the reality is, if a congregation finds that they’ve gotten themselves in over their heads, they may have to sell the building, accept the loss and meet someplace more affordable. I know, it hurts to even think about it. But it won’t hurt the church as much as the preaching of false doctrines will. However, if you can afford to stay, preaching truth all the while, than pay off that debt and get out from under the burden; “Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another” (Romans 13:8).

One more point on this: Borrowing chokes giving.

Every dollar that must be repaid results in:

A dollar less to feed the hungry

A dollar less to fund missions

A dollar less to provide benevolence

A dollar less to help orphans and widows

A dollar less to provide for those serving in ministry
A dollar less to fight addiction
A dollar less to preach the gospel through outreach
A dollar less to house the homeless
A dollar less to fight sex trafficking
A dollar less to sponsor a child

The list goes on.

Remember this simple truth: To God, it's all about people. And it should be all about people to us, as well.

24. “We don’t call it a requirement, rather we refer to it as the standard of Christian giving”

Inference, my friend.

When you claim that not tithing is to fall short of the “standard of Christian giving” and you support this claim by quoting Malachi, a prophet speaking under and in regards to the law, you’re suggesting that it’s a requirement and that Christians are obligated to uphold the law, at least inasmuch as it pertains to tithing.

I presume that most proponents of tithing do so unintentionally.

Also, who on earth (I say “on earth” because I know it wasn’t anyone in heaven) gave who else on earth the authority to decide what the “standard of Christian giving” should be for the entire church, especially when it’s completely unscriptural?

25. “We teach tithing properly”

There’s no good way to teach bad doctrine.

The only way to teach about tithing properly is within its historical context — what it was.

26. “The money from tithes is used to do good things”

“The end doesn’t justify the means.” - Anon

Especially when, in the end, whether proponents are aware of it or not, as we’ll discover in the next chapter, false teachings about tithing can cause quite a bit of harm.

27. “We don’t have to tithe we get to tithe”

We “get to” do a lot of things living under grace. Having the right to do something under grace shouldn’t turn into some sort of standard or requirement to be placed as a yoke on the backs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In that case, grace would be nullified and we’d no longer “get to” we’d “have to”. But we don’t have to.

If a Christ follower really believes he “gets to” tithe he should do so quietly, given there’s zero biblical support concerning a universal tithe within the church.

28. “God is a God of order”

There are several possible definitions for the word “order” that could be implied with this statement; none of them support doctrine on Christian tithing.

a. The opposite of disorder

Logically, a God of order wouldn’t make it clear that we’re not required to do something and then turn around and confuse people by

requiring us to do it. We're not, at the same time, bound to the law and yet free from it. God doesn't contradict himself.

b. The enforcement of law as in "law and order"

Scripture makes it clear that we're free from the Mosaic Law and, consequently, no longer subject to the enforcement of it.

c. Sequence or arrangement

In the sequence of events, law came first, then grace. Under grace we're not required to obey the law; not even as it pertains to tithing.

d. Command

I think it's been made clear enough, at this point, that the church has not been commanded to tithe. In fact, there's not one recorded instance in all of scripture of God commanding anyone to tithe outside of the context of the Mosaic Law (which we are free from).

29. "You can't outgive God"

I'm not 100% confident in the validity of what that statement suggests; God wants us to be good stewards.

Besides, what does that have to do with tithing? Even if that statement were true, it would be true for any amount, not just 10%.

The argument that "you can't outgive God" adds nothing to the claim that Christians should tithe.

30. “90% with God’s blessing is worth more than 100% without it”

Of course it is; to the point, so is 91% (or 92% or 93% or 94% etc.).

Again, this concept would be true for any amount and adds nothing to an argument for tithing.

31. “Tithing is a test”

Some say that tithing is a test of our faith — do we trust that God will provide for our needs if we give away a tenth of our income?

Here’s the thing, tithing *was* a test.

Under the law, the Israelites were to tithe of their agriculture, trusting that God would bless them in return. (See Malachi 3:10-11)

Furthermore, the Israelites were to trust that God would provide for their needs in the sabbatical year (and the following year as they planted again and waited for a harvest), through an extra large harvest in the 6th year, even if they gave away a tithe of the 6th year's harvest. (See Leviticus 25:20-22)

However, we’re not under the law, nor is our faith tested by obedience to it.

That would be like if the government officially canceled all of your tax obligations and then, after you didn’t pay them taxes that you no longer owed, told you that you failed the “test” and so proceeded to penalize you for not paying taxes. It wouldn’t make any sense!

God is not testing you through tithing; he doesn’t require it of you or expect it from you at all; period.

32. "Giving should be sacrificial"

That's what giving is; it's intrinsically sacrificial.

Every time we give something away we make a sacrifice. We don't need to give away a specific percentage of our increase for it to be considered sacrificial.

The writer of Hebrews said, "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:16). Sharing with others is a sacrifice that pleases God, whatever the amount.

Also, there's nothing in the NT that suggests our generosity need cause us pain.

In fact, quit the contrary. Concerning an offering for the poor, Paul wrote, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Paul is saying that, we shouldn't compulsively give when we haven't considered it well enough, nor should we reluctantly give what we don't really want to give. The idea isn't to give until it hurts and then try to be "cheerful" about it later, but rather to give from our heart only what we have already thoughtfully decided on ahead of time, so that we can be cheerful about giving it, as we give it.

Not to mention, some of us would need to give away 50% of our income before it starts to hurt, while others would feel the pain at 2%.

Many point to the story of the widow's offering (aka the widow's mite) to support the claim that giving should be sacrificial (see Mark

12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4). However, we should be careful to consider the following:

- In context, the story of the widow's offering is sandwiched between a warning about how the teachers of the law show off in public while also devouring widow's houses and a prophecy about the destruction of the temple.

- Other passages, from both the OT and the NT, reveal God's heart concerning the poor and widows. Great emphasis is placed on caring for them and providing for their needs. (See Exodus 22:22-23, Deuteronomy 15:7-11;24:17-21, Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 68:5;82:3;146:9, Luke 14:12-14, 1 Timothy 5:3, James 1:27)

- One of the last things Jesus did before he died was to ensure that his widowed mother would be cared for. (See John 19:25-27)

- Paul instructed Timothy concerning a list of widows that the church in Ephesus was to support. (See 1 Timothy 5:3-16)

Having considered these things, we might ask ourselves if Jesus would use an instance in which a "poor widow" gave "all she had to live on" as an example of the kind of generosity the church should engage in.

It's plausible that the story of the widow's offering was included in the Bible to show a connection between the current broken religious system, in which widows were taken advantage of, and God's soon to come judgment on the nation.

I will add that, if there be anything we can learn from the widow's offering about giving, it's that giving any amount, no matter how small, from the heart, is more honorable in God's sight than giving a larger amount from impure motives.

The argument that “giving should be sacrificial” does no favor for false teachings on tithing.

33. “Everything belongs to God anyway”

I saved this one for last because it’s typically what proponents of tithing say when there’s nothing left to say.

All arguments have been heard and they have yet to make any headway so, abandoning the argument altogether, they forsake any attempt to justify false teachings about tithing and quibble something like, “everything belongs to God anyway”.

What point does a statement like that make in regards to tithing?

And, yes, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalms 24:1). With this in mind, we should hold everything loosely, ready to forsake all for the cause of Christ.

Although the statement “everything belongs to God” is true, it adds no validity to false teachings on tithing.

It Should be Noted

1. We should regard unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ a higher priority than one another’s stance on nonessential doctrines. We can still fellowship, be friends, and do ministry with most proponents of tithing (I say “most” because there are some that go way too far as if one’s salvation depends on the tithe. With such people, after you’ve stated the truth, have nothing to do with them, unless they repent). I would never suggest (in most cases) that we should reject

others on account of their current understanding (or lack of) on the matter of tithing.

Paul encouraged the church in Rome, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7).

But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t refute false doctrines in consideration of the harmful effects they may have on our brothers and sisters in Christ. Truth is important to know and share: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 1:4).

2. Our primary motive for “refuting common arguments” about tithing should be love; love for God and love for others.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen the wrong attitude expressed from fellow believers who disagree with false teachings on tithing; some have been prideful, disrespectful and demeaning. Such an approach is largely ineffective. Remember, “knowledge puffs up while love builds up” (1 Corinthians 8:1b).

3. Many proponents of tithing have been indoctrinated since youth; it could take years for them to break free from the false teachings they’ve been exposed to. We’re to sow seeds of truth, in love, being careful not to become overbearing; we’re not trying to make enemies of our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we patiently trust the power of prayer, that God might open the minds of those who’ve been misled to know truth in all things.

On a Side Note

Ananias and Sapphira were not the only people recorded in scripture to have lied; there were quite a few others.

Genesis 18:13-15 records Abraham's wife, Sarah, lying to the Lord in person. And yet, she was not smitten to death as Ananias and Sapphira were for lying to Peter (which was considered to be the same as lying to God).

However, Sarah lied because she was afraid: "(13) Then the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' (14) Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.'" (15) Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh"" (Genesis 18:13-15).

Unlike Sarah, Ananias and Sapphira's lie was premeditated. And, although their motive for lying is not specifically mentioned in scripture, I think it's obvious that it wasn't a healthy fear of the Lord.

Many have speculated as to whether or not Ananias and Sapphira were true believers. You can study the account for yourself, but I'm fairly convinced that perhaps one of them was and the other was not. There are some things that only God himself knows.

A Threat to the Gospel

It may seem harmless to proponents who promote it with the best of intentions, however, teaching an obligation to tithe truly is harmful.

1. It perverts the gospel

When tithing is preached, instead of hearing a message of freedom in Christ through the clarity of the true gospel, listeners hear a mixed message of freedom in Christ sprinkled with a tad bit of bondage to the law.

If you preach tithing and close with an altar call, what the unbeliever hears is something like this: “Come to Jesus so that you can be forgiven of all your sins and then bound to the law of Moses”.

Let us heed Paul’s warning to the Galatians: “(6) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— (7) which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! (9) As we

have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse" (Galatians 1:6-9)!

The "gospel — which is really no gospel at all" that Paul is referring to as a perversion, is the grace-plus gospel; God's grace plus an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law. When you preach tithing and quote from the law, you preach the law and pervert the gospel; whether you intend to or not, that's what takes place.

Preaching an obligation to uphold the Mosaic Law is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. It sets a precedent for poor hermeneutics

Paul encouraged Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Using proper hermeneutics was important to the Apostle Paul and it should be important to us, as well.

Some basic principles of hermeneutics are as follows:

- Practice exegesis, not eisegesis
- Consider the context
- Consider the whole of scripture
- Consider the genre
- Discover the writer's intended meaning
- Use tools
- Discover the practical application for today's readers

If one were to study every single mention of tithing throughout all of scripture using these basic principles of hermeneutics, he would

never come to the conclusion that tithing is an obligation, or even an expectation, for the church.

False doctrine on Christian tithing ignores the above principles; preaching it encourages others to do the same.

3. It threatens Christian liberty

It strips disciples of the freedom the NT declares they have by placing a burden on their backs that God never intended for them to carry.

In reference to the gentile believer's freedom from the Mosaic Law, Peter warned, "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10)?

Paul exhorted the church in Galatia to continue to remain free from the law, even referring to an obligation to the law as "a yoke of slavery": "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

It is appalling that an obligation to tithe, supported by verses found in the Mosaic Law, is still preached in the church today, almost 2,000 years after Jesus set us free.

4. It can stunt spiritual growth

God wants to mold our hearts through grace.

Grace works on the heart; it "teaches" us to live the right way, developing within us an eagerness "to do what is good". (See Titus 2:11-14)

We're saved by grace and then we're raised by grace.

Contrast that with the law: "Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 18:5).

In other words, the one who "obeys" the law will live because he "obeys". On the flip side of that coin, the one who doesn't obey will not live. There's no room for growth; the requirement to obey is full and immediate.

Grace says, "grow", while the law says, "do this now, or else...".

Consider the following parable in comparing the law to grace:

"[A] ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the quantity of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its quality. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the work of the "quantity" group: fifty pounds of pots rated an "A", forty pounds a "B", and so on. Those being graded on "quality", however, needed to produce only one pot — albeit a perfect one — to get an "A". Well, came grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the "quantity" group was busily churning out piles of work — and learning from their mistakes — the "quality" group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay." - *Art and Fear*

The "quality" group can be likened to those under the law. Try as though they may, perfection was unattainable. You see, the law demanded perfection, but, by it, no one could even get close.

The “quantity” group can be likened to those under grace. Through grace, we’re given the opportunity to make gradual changes over the course of time. God uses even our mistakes to mold our hearts. Grace, eventually, produces the quality that the law could never produce.

Paul wrote, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Paul says that we’re “being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory”. That means we become more and more like Christ over the course of time. It implies a process of growth.

One of the few times I’ve heard God’s voice directly I was driving to work feeling really down on myself. Although I was leading an evangelism team for the church, I felt unworthy. Sad and frustrated, I called out loud to God something to the effect of, “How can I tell people about your holiness when I’m so messed up”? That’s when I heard the Lord say, “Tell them about my grace”. My eyes filled with tears; what a perfect answer!

If you feel unworthy, it’s because you are. Only look to the one who is worthy, Jesus Christ. God will forgive your sins and give you new hope as you continue to grow in love by his grace through faith. And remember, change takes time; keep looking up and keep pressing forward. You may not yet be who you want to be, but you’re not who you used to be either. Give him praise!

The law of Christ is love; God molds our hearts through grace. Demanding obedience to aspects of the Mosaic Law can serve to hinder the spiritual growth of a Christ follower.

5. It provides leverage to those who peddle the word for profit

Apostle Paul said, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God” (2 Corinthians 2:17). Yet, not everyone seeks to follow Paul’s example.

I recently saw a video in which a celebrity preacher told his congregation that, if not for the blood of Christ, he would pass out uzis to tithing members so that they could line up the non-tithing members, mow them down, drag their dead bodies outside to bury them in a large pit, and then come back inside for the service. You can’t make this stuff up! This particular prosperity preacher has a celebrity net worth of \$27,000,000. Yep, he’s a wealthy celebrity prosperity preacher who preaches tithing, and people actually listen; they think they have to.

This individual, and others like him, wouldn’t be able to so easily mislead believers if the believers themselves had a better understanding of the gospel along with the fact that they’re from an obligation to uphold the law.

Instead of preaching the false doctrine of tithing in the church, God ordained pastors ought to be clearly distinguishable from those who do. Let there be no room for the unfair accusation that all churches or pastors are greedy for money; why let the world throw us all into one group? Take a stand by preaching AGAINST a mandate to tithel!

Update: After I began writing this chapter, this particular prosperity preacher publicly repented of false teachings on tithing. He went

so far as to tell his congregation to “throw away every book, every tape, and every video I ever did on the subject of tithing”.

The reason? He said that he’s “still growing” and that, when he taught tithing, he had “not yet been confronted with the gospel of grace, which has made the difference”.

Ponder that for a moment.

When he finally embraced the “gospel of grace”, he let go of tithing.

That speaks volumes!

Sadly, there are others still using false teachings on tithing as leverage to peddle the word for profit, while they preach an erroneous prosperity gospel, yet to embrace “the gospel of grace”.

6. It’s a blunder for well intentioned preachers

Preaching on tithing puts a bad taste in the mouths of those who are listening and know better. And it brings questions to mind. For example:

- Are they spending enough time in the word?
- Are they lacking knowledge about sound principles of hermeneutics?
- What other doctrines are they in error about?
- Are they having a difficult time trusting God for church finances?
- Are they trying to do ministry in the flesh and so, naturally, reverting to a law of the flesh to sustain their ministry?
- Are they lying or are they sincerely deceived themselves?
- Do they have the congregation's best interest in mind?

I heard a preacher online, who I believe meant well, say that if you don't tithe, "you can't keep it anyway...you'll have to give it to a car mechanic who does", suggesting that your car will break down so that God can get the money out of your hands and bless an obedient tither with it.

This same preacher also said, "those who intentionally break laws, whether they are of God or of man, are rebellious and they are rebels...God won't bless a rebel". He went on to say that, "if you're not tithing, you're driving a stolen vehicle...living in a stolen house...wearing stolen clothes" and you're "in possession of stolen property".

He even tried to make a case for generational blessings passed down to him because his parents and grandparents were tithers.

I wanted to cry listening to him!

(BTW - These quotes are from the sermon aforementioned in the preface titled "Breaking the Power of Lack" that I listened to just before I started writing this book)

Promoting tithing is, without a doubt, a blunder for well intentioned preachers.

7. It's divisive

"(13) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (15) by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, (16) and

in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-16)

Paul said that Jesus “has made the two groups (that is the Jews and the gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations”.

Unity in the church is contingent upon the removal of that which separates - “the law with its commands and regulations”.

Reintroducing laws (or their oftentimes more widely accepted counterparts, e.g., commands, regulations, rules, obligations, standards, expectations etc.) that we’ve already been set free from, only serves to rebuild “the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility”, that Jesus’ death on the cross has removed.

God desires unity; the church shouldn’t teach divisive false doctrines.

8. It confounds conscience

Many Christians who have been deceived by false teachings on obligatory Christian tithing feel as though they’re not right with God if they don’t tithe. They think that God may be upset with or angry at them if they withhold or forget to include even the smallest portion.

Let’s consider what Apostle John had to say about having a clear conscience:

“(19) This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: (20) If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (21) Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have

confidence before God (22) and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. (23) And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” (1 John 3:19-23)

John taught that we can have a clear conscience before God if we:

- Have faith in Jesus Christ
- Love others

That’s it.

If you believe in Jesus Christ and do your best to love your neighbor, let your heart be at peace as you rest in God’s grace; no need to tithe.

Let’s stop trying to guilt trip the church into tithing.

9. It can become an unnecessary cause of dissension within a marriage relationship

Because obligatory tithing is of the law it demands immediate obedience. There’s no room for growth on either partner’s behalf. If one partner is convinced that there is an obligation to tithe and the other is not, it can cause bitterness, hardship, and even distrust in a marriage.

It’s a shame that marriages in the church have been stressed by a false doctrine we never should have been teaching in the first place.

My wife and I struggled with this ourselves. As a young believer, I accepted the teachings passed down to me by my mentors, sometimes without having studied them for myself. For some time, I religiously gave ten percent, and oftentimes, more. My wife, who had not yet

been saved, disagreed with how much I was giving. At the time, living in an apartment with two small children, I would give a tithe of all our income regardless of any other need we had. This made my wife feel as though our family was not a priority to me. I thought I had to tithe or God would be displeased. Eventually, we sought counseling from a psychologist who was also a member of our church. His advice was to stop tithing and give a lesser amount that we could incrementally increase over the course of time until we worked together to get back up to the 10%. I wasn't happy about it, but, trusting that it was sound counsel, I took his advice and lowered our monthly donations to 3%.

However, convinced that I was in disobedience to God's command to tithe, over the course of a relatively short period of time, I increased our donations back up to 10%, without gaining my wife's approval in the process.

Then, something happened. I began to think about the doctrine on a deeper level and eventually decided to search the scriptures for myself. It didn't take long for me to come to the conclusion that, contrary to what my mentors had taught on the subject, there's zero evidence in the Bible of any obligation for Christians to tithe.

Now we know that when God teaches us something, he tends to put people in our path that may benefit from what we've been taught.

It wasn't long before an old friend, that I hadn't seen or spoken to in several years, messaged me. Apparently a friend of his, whose wife just so happened to attend the same church that I did, was struggling in his marriage and at the center of it was the fact that she was giving large sums of money to the church against her husband's wishes. I passed along the advice that I received, to lessen the amount and perhaps gradually increase it as they agree together over the course of time and added what I had recently learned, that there's really no specific amount required in the NT. He thanked me and let me know

how much he appreciated my advice. I was even able to bounce off of that to share the gospel with him!

Let's stop repeating what we've heard about tithing (and everything else for that matter) and start studying the scriptures for ourselves.

And let's stop placing undue stress on marriages in the church; marriage can be challenging enough without introducing unbiblical requirements.

10. It hinders grace giving

Suppose your household budget is \$5,000 per month. Tithing takes about \$600 right off the top (If you're tithing from gross). Let's say you also typically give another \$100 each month in other offerings. The remaining \$4,300 per month is used for living expenses (Housing, transportation, food, etc.).

Now, let's imagine that the family next door has an unexpected emergency and is in dire need of immediate financial support.

For the most part, you're already maxed out. Maybe you could stretch another \$100 or perhaps give the budgeted \$100 in offering money to them instead of giving it towards the usual, if you haven't already done so. But you can't give them the money reserved for your housing or the electric bill etc. when the Bible instructs us to "give to everyone what you owe them" (see Romans 13:7). And you can't give them money reserved for food for your family when you know that "anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). And you definitely can't give them any of the tithes when you believe you'll be cursed if you don't "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" (see Malachi 3:10). Realistically, you'll prob-

ably just end up pointing them in another direction where they might eventually get some of the help they need; perhaps the county assistance office can throw them a bone.

You see, what ends up happening is that people choose to follow the tradition of men by tithing of their monetary income to the institution of the church, instead of obeying the command of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and teachers of the law for just such a thing: “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions” (Mark 7:8).

In an attempt to encourage the church in Corinth to set aside a gracious offering for the poor in Jerusalem, Paul wrote, “But since you excel in everything — in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you — see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

We can’t excel in the grace of giving unless we’re giving under grace.

11. It’s an antecedent of legalism

Belief in an obligation to uphold parts of the Mosaic Law can produce a pharisaical mindset in a believer.

Those under the law tend to major in the minors and minor in the majors:

“(23) Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without

neglecting the former. (24) You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” (Matthew 23:23-24)

They were tithing of tiny spices while remaining unjust, unmerciful, and unfaithful. (Keep in mind that Jesus was not advocating tithing for the church in this passage, rather he was speaking to those still under the law before his death and resurrection that brought with it freedom from the law for all who believe.)

And it seems as though pharisaical legalists can't help but to correct those who don't subscribe to their error. When Jesus healed a man invalid for 38 years, instead of rejoicing that he could now walk, Jewish leaders scolded him for carrying his mat on the Sabbath:

“(8) Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” (9) At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, (10) and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” (John 5:8-10)

A short time later, instead of acknowledging that Jesus healed the man, and so paying him due respect as one sent from God, the Jewish leaders proceeded to persecute Jesus:

“So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.” (John 5:16)

Whether it concerns a sabbath day, tithing or any other command found in the OT, placing Christ followers under laws they've been set free from serves to produce within them the same legalistic mindset that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees had.

Even the smallest hint of legalism has the potential to negatively impact an entire fellowship of believers. Consider Paul's warning: "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." (Galatians 5:9)

Since I began sharing my beliefs on social media, against a mandate for tithing in the church, I've been attacked by multiple people, some from my own congregation. They've suggested I should change churches, called my pastors to warn them about me, unfriended and blocked me on social media, and have labeled me a heretic. One individual even suggested that I'm in danger of condemnation for my beliefs against tithing! Recently, after several years of leading an evangelism team at my home church, I was stripped of my leadership responsibilities by the lead pastor and the board of trustees, simply because I didn't agree with their position on the topic of tithing!

Remember this: The law produces Pharisees; grace produces disciples of Jesus Christ.

12. It can become a distraction

When preachers overemphasize tithing, it diverts attention away from other more important details of a passage of scripture. Proponents of tithing can completely miss parts of a passage themselves, or fail to share details with others, because they're too focused on a mention of tithing, oftentimes due to their attempts to justify the false doctrine.

For example:

In Genesis 14:18, the fact that a mysterious "priest of God Most High" named Melchizedek, a foreshadow of Jesus and his eternal priesthood, brought out bread and wine when he blessed Abraham, which just so happens to be the same two items Jesus chose to represent his body which would be broken and his blood that would be

shed for the sins of the world, is often overlooked due to the overemphasis placed on Abraham's one recorded tithe to him of the spoils of war.

There's certain sections of scripture, such as the one above, that I've often heard mentioned in support of tithing, but rarely for any other reason. This is a great disservice to the saints that happens all too often in the church today.

Tithing is also a distraction when teaching/preaching on the topic of giving in general. I've heard entire sermons, from more than one series on giving, dedicated to the topic of tithing.

There's enough scripture on generosity and its benefits to preach for weeks without a mention of tithing. Why direct people's attention to a false teaching, based primarily on the Mosaic Law, to persuade them to give when the Bible is loaded with passages encouraging generosity in accordance with the NT principles of grace, liberty and love?

It Should be Noted

1. An overwhelming majority of Christians who support contemporary tithing are well-intentioned. They've simply been misguided and are unaware of their error or the dangers of the teachings they've accepted.

Some of the most dedicated believers I've fellowshiped with are tithers. They've sacrificed much for the cause of Christ and I'm convinced that if God asked them to give away absolutely everything, they would.

My hope is that God will use this book to open their eyes to the truth about tithing, along with the harmful effects of the false teachings on tithing they've embraced, that they might break free from error, and believe and teach the true Gospel of Jesus Christ with complete clarity.

2. Although tithing is not, in and of itself, considered an essential doctrine, clearly, false beliefs about tithing can negatively influence the church's understanding of doctrines that are essential, such as the very gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is why it's important for the church to combat all false teachings, including those on tithing, following Paul's example, as "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

On a Side Note

The so-called "prosperity gospel" promises not only material wealth, but good physical health along with it. This "health and wealth gospel" claims that all believers have access to healing by faith, in this life, through Jesus' atonement, along with financial prosperity and an abundance of material possessions.

Let's see what the NT says about this:

"(6) But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (8) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (9) Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some

people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

Instead of encouraging the church to pursue financial gain Paul said, “if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” because “godliness with contentment is great gain”.

He referred to the pursuit of wealth as “a trap” that can lead to “ruin and destruction”, warning that some who have engaged in it have “pierced themselves with many griefs”.

It doesn't sound like Paul agreed with the wealth part of the prosperity gospel!

Let's see what the NT has to say about all believers being physically healed in this life:

“(23) Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. (24) For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? (25) But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:23-25)

Paul points out that part of the “hope” of our salvation is “the redemption of our bodies”. But he says, “who hopes for what they already have?”

He admits that we do not yet have the “redemption of our bodies” and so encourages us to “wait for it patiently” for it. Healing will come for all believers when we're with the Lord, but for now, we “wait”.

The NT has much more to speak against the false notion that all believers have access to complete healing in this life. (See Philippians 3:20-21, Revelation 21:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:7-10)

To clarify, I do believe that God, sometimes, according to his own purposes and will, does still heal select people of some of their ailments; I've seen it with my own eyes. However, scripture does not promise all believers 100% complete miraculous physical healing in this life.

But hold on, it's coming!

“Yes, I can see a light that is coming for the heart that holds on
And there will be an end to these troubles
But until that day comes
Still I will praise You, still I will praise You”

Oh, what a glorious hope we have in Christ!

The “prosperity gospel” is really no gospel at all; it's a lie that has the potential to ruin people's faith. We should allow no room for false teachings, such as the prosperity gospel, in the church.

An Introduction to Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Proper hermeneutics are extremely important for understanding scripture and its application for our lives.

I sincerely believe that if all Christians faithfully practiced the basic principles of interpretation mentioned in this chapter, they would no longer embrace false teachings about tithing.

Paul encouraged Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Translations vary:

NIV - “correctly handles”

NLT - “correctly explains”

CSB - “correctly teaching”

NASB - “accurately handling”

KJV - “rightly dividing”

Whichever translation you choose, they all reveal this same truth: Paul understood the importance of hermeneutics and we should too.

Basic Principles of Hermeneutics:

- Practice exegesis, not eisegesis
- Consider the context
- Consider the whole of scripture
- Consider the genre
- Discover the writer's intended meaning
- Use tools
- Discover the practical application for today's readers

Practice Exegesis, not Eisegesis

Exegesis is an interpretation that “reads from” the text what is actually written. On the contrary, eisegesis” is an interpretation that “reads into” the text what is not there.

For example: Pretend with me that you're new to the faith and you happen to bump into Mr. Bible Trivia at church who asks you what the shortest verse in the Gospel of John is. You shrug your shoulders. He proudly quotes John 11:35, “Jesus wept”, before walking away with the satisfaction of having stumped you. Unfamiliar with the Gospel of John, you ponder the verse. You can either come to the conclusion that, until you study the passage, the only thing you know about it is that Jesus wept. You don't know why or for how long and you don't know if anyone else wept with him. You only know he wept because that's the only text you've been given (exegesis). Or you can speculate that Jesus must have cried for several hours along with all of his disciples, because, looking ahead, they were upset that Chick-Fil-A wouldn't be open on Sundays and felt terrible for all of those who would be leaving church hungry without the option to grab an Original Chicken Sandwich their our way home (eisegesis); oh, the irony!

As silly as that may sound, and it is quite an exaggerated example, some of the false doctrines that are derived from a failure to practice exegesis are even more ridiculous: merited grace (seriously, it's a thing; don't ask me how), the existence of purgatory, that the church has the authority to make extra-biblical laws, that the church should have a pope who is somehow God's representative on earth, the requirement to honor holy days, mandatory church attendance on Sundays, a works-based gospel and an obligation for the church to tithe, to name a few.

Oftentimes eisegesis erroneously comes into play when an individual approaches the Bible with a preconceived notion or predetermined position. Instead of letting the scriptures speak for themselves, they imagine that they support doctrine they've already adopted. They're not looking for the truth, they're looking to validate an opinion they already hold, even if it means twisting the scriptures.

Pastor Joe Fotch, of Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia, once said, "You can torture any verse enough to make it say what you want".

Practice exegesis; eisegesis leads to fallacy.

Consider the Context

Context! Context! Context!

Merriam-Webster defines context as "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning".

Considering the context is extremely important in coming to correct conclusions about a passage of scripture.

To consider the context is to ask questions e.g., who, what, when, where, why, and how. It is to consider the entire paragraph, chapter, and book a verse is found in. Sometimes an event is recorded in more than one book; we need to study the account in those other books as well. Considering the context of a passage should also include consideration of the setting, history and culture.

For a good example of how important it is to consider the context, let's take a look at a verse from 2 Chronicles:

“if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

We've all heard this verse quoted in reference to God bringing healing and restoration to our nation if Christian's will just humble themselves, repent, and pray. But, in context, is that what this verse is really about?

If we read just a few verses before and after verse 14 we can see that this was a promise from the Lord spoken to King Solomon after he completed construction of the temple in Israel. God was promising that if he finds the need to bring hardships upon Israel such as drought, pestilence and plagues, due to their sin, and the people of Israel respond to the hardships God caused with humility, prayer, and repentance, God would then hear their prayers, forgive their sins and remove those hardships.

This isn't a promise given to every believer for all of time to apply at will in their current country of residence. It was specifically addressed to the nation of Israel under the old covenant. I think it's obvious, however, that we can apply this verse in principle. That is to say that from it, we can learn about God and how he responded to

his people's sin with discipline and then was merciful to forgive and restore them upon their repentance. But we should be careful not to misappropriate the verse in a more literal sense. What if God, for his own reasons, in his sovereignty, allows our nation, which is inhabited by mostly nonbelievers, to be overtaken? Christians who thought this verse was a promise for them as they prayed for the restoration of our nation could end up questioning their very faith in God.

Failing to consider the context is a serious mistake and, for many, a root of error concerning false beliefs.

Consider the Whole of Scripture

Historically, this is known as the “analogy of faith”. Since there are no contradictions in scripture we can let scripture interpret scripture, making the Bible itself our first commentary.

Jesus said, “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:14). Does this mean that we can ask for literally anything in Jesus’ name and he will answer our prayers just as we asked him to? Not exactly. After a quick search for other verses on prayer we come to the realization that, although God does answer our prayers, he will do so “according to his will”. 1 John 5:14-15 says, “(14) This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (15) And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

When we focus on a single section of scripture without considering the whole of scripture, we leave too much room for error. I’ve heard entire sermons preached using supporting verses that didn’t actually support any of the sermon points accompanying them. This is a terrible disservice to the saints that can be avoided by considering the whole of scripture.

The time and effort it takes to study well, is well worth it.

Consider the Genre

When it comes to literature, genre is basically another word for classification.

The genre should be considered before one even begins to read a book, let alone interpret it. Identifying the genre of literature helps us to determine what our approach should be in our attempts to understand it.

Biblical Genres:

Law - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

History - Almost every book in the Bible contains some history, but Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Acts are predominately history

Wisdom - Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes

Poetry - Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Psalms

Narrative - Ruth, Esther, Jonah and all four gospels

Epistles - There are 21 epistles (“letters”) from Romans through Jude

Prophecy and Apocalyptic - There are 15 books of prophecy and/or apocalyptic literature including Isaiah through Malachi (with the exception of Jonah and Lamentations) and Revelation.

A book should be interpreted in accordance with its genre. We should not attempt to interpret apocalyptic literature with the same literal approach we would use with historical. Nor should we approach a narrative as we would an epistle.

Keep in mind that many books of the Bible contain more than one category of genre. For example, Matthew is a narrative that also includes a bit of prophecy. Likewise, Daniel is considered prophecy, yet it includes history as well.

Discover the Writer's Intended Meaning

This is known as the “principle of intentionality”. Study the text, not to find a supporting verse to a predetermined position, but to discover the writer’s intended message. The true meaning of a text is determined by the sender of the message, not the recipient.

I once had a Catholic quote Revelation 22:19 to me: “And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll”.

He went on to suggest that Protestants are playing with fire since their Bibles are “missing” certain books that are included in the Catholic Bible (e.g. 1 & 2 Maccabees).

However, the writer of Revelation, Apostle John, was not referring to the entire Bible (the NT had not yet been compiled) when he penned the warning found in Revelation 22:19, but rather the “scroll of prophecy” in which the verse was written; he was referring only to the book of Revelation itself.

(It’s also worth noting that Jews don’t consider the extra OT books, that Catholics claim are “missing” from Protestant’s Bibles, to be

scripture, and they never have. It's generally accepted that there's some historical value in them, but they're certainly not on par with scripture.)

Remember this: "The text cannot mean what it never meant." - Anon

Use Tools

An exhaustive concordance, bible dictionary, parallel Bible, internet search engine, social media app, video sharing platform, etc. are all great tools we can use to help expand our knowledge of scripture.

A concordance is particularly helpful. It's used to discover the meaning of a word found in scripture from the original language it was written in. This may change our perspective on a passage. For example, take the English word "love"; in English we use the same word regardless of who (or what) we love. But there were several Greek words used in the NT that convey different types of love. There's "agape" which is the perfect love that God has for us and that he wants us to have for each other; "phileo" which is love one would have for a friend; and "storge" which is an instinctive love such as a parent has for their child. Discovering which specific word is used in a passage can help to deepen our understanding of the text.

We need to be careful, however, when using online resources. There are plenty of false teachers and ill-informed believers out there with way too much misinformation that they're itching to teach others.

Also, it's important to research opposing views. For example, if I was studying the topic of baptism, I would watch videos and read articles that defend immersion baptism as well as those that defend other modes and then compare my notes from each point of view

with scripture. (FYI - Immersion is the biblical method, but we'll save that discussion for another time.)

In all of history, there have never been more tools so readily available to assist with studying the Bible than there are right now.

Discover the Practical Application for Today's Readers

Our studies typically come down to this: "What does this passage mean for us today?"

Some passages of scripture are easy to apply to our lives. For example, when Jesus tells his disciples to "love one another" (see John 13:34), we know that we, also being his disciples, are to obey his command to love our brothers and sisters in the faith. Or when Peter encourages the young men of the church in the Roman provinces to be "alert and of sober mind" (see 1 Peter 5:8), we, knowing that we still face similar dangers, would do well to receive his exhortation as if we were the original intended recipients.

Other passages of scripture may not apply to us quite as directly, but may contain underlying principles that apply to us. Discovering an underlying principle in a passage, even if it was originally written to an entirely different group of people, can help us to find an application for our lives. Paul does this when he uses Deuteronomy 25:4, a verse originally about oxen, to make a point about a minister's right to compensation: "(9) For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? (10) Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. (11) If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you" (1 Corinthians 9:9-11)?

We should, however, be careful to avoid contradictions with clear NT teachings when attempting to find an underlying principle in an OT passage; the NT makes it abundantly clear that we're not under law, but under grace.

If sound principles of hermeneutics are applied when studying the Bible, finding a life application should be a breeze.

It Should be Noted

1. Without the following we'll be prone to error regardless of how thoroughly we attempt to study the Bible:

Prayer - Only God, the author of scripture, can open our eyes to see the true and full meaning of scripture. Sure, anyone can understand the basics of the Bible without a direct revelation, but to properly appropriate scripture without error and to truly understand the fullness of its meaning, we need God's help. Prayer invites the person of God to help us study the word of God.

Humility - Humility is essential when studying the Bible. We must come before the Lord completely void of our own understanding, allowing him to impart to us all that is right and true. We subject to him that which we've formerly come to understand through him in order that he might build upon it as he continues to develop our working knowledge of scripture. We must leave room for the notion that, perhaps we've previously misunderstood something in the text, and allow God to speak to us as we continue to study.

Pride will prove to be a hindrance and must be avoided. Pride says, "I can figure this out on my own" or "I already know what this means and I know I'm right" or "I could be wrong but I would be too embarrassed to admit it so I'll just try to further justify my position regard-

less of the truth". Proudful people often don't realize they're prideful. Examine yourself and then rid yourself of any and all pride. To God belongs the glory in all things!

Love of truth - We are to approach the pages of the Bible seeking to learn truth and not to search for a supporting verse for some predetermined position on doctrine. We must disregard any position we've adopted which does not line up with the text itself.

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11)

"We must strive to be like the Bereans who were commended by Luke for searching the Old Testament Scriptures daily to make sure that what Paul taught was true." - Answers in Genesis

2. If you're not saved, if you have not surrendered your life to God, trusting in the crucifixion and death of his son Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and the resurrection of Jesus for the hope of eternal life, and in doing so received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, within you, then you can not and will not thoroughly understand the things of God. It is the Spirit of God within a believer who opens a believer's mind to the truths of God's word. Paul explains to the church in Corinth, "(12) What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. (13) This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. (14) The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

No doubt many false doctrines have come about throughout church history when unbelieving men attempted to apply hermeneutics to the word of God without actually knowing God or having his Spirit within them.

On a Side Note

Okay, it's another time.

There are three modes of water baptism commonly used today: Dunk (immersion), sprinkle (aspersion) and pour (affusion). But which is the correct mode; the biblical mode?

1. We can learn something about baptism by looking at the original Greek:

The Greek word for baptize is baptizo meaning "wash".

The root word in baptizo is bapto which means "to dip" (also translated dipped, dip, and dipping).

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), the same word that was translated "baptize" in the New Testament is also used to describe Naaman's seven-time immersion in the Jordan River (see 2 Kings 5:14).

Greek words do exist for both sprinkle and pour. These words are used elsewhere in the NT, but never in relation to water baptism.

2. We can discover something about the nature of baptism by looking at the context in which it was administered:

“Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized.” (John 3:23)

The Gospel of John specifically mentions that there was “plenty of water” at Aenon where John the Baptist was baptizing. If the method of baptism were not immersion, this detail would seem to be irrelevant.

“Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.” (Matthew 3:6)

Why would John the Baptist need to baptize people “in the Jordan River” if he was just pouring or sprinkling water?

“The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to [John the Baptist]. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.” (Mark 1:5)

Again, they were baptized “in the Jordan river”.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.” (Matthew 3:16)

Jesus went “up out of the water” implying that he was baptized down in the water. Why not next to the water or someplace else where there’s simply a container of water? Why was he baptized down in the Jordan river (see vs 13)?

“(36) As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” (38) And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. (39) When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of

the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:36,38-39)

The one baptizing (Phillip) and the one being baptized (the eunuch) “went down into the water” and then “came up out of the water”.

3. Paul’s explanation about the symbolism of baptism gives us some clues as to the nature of its procedure:

“(1) What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? (2) By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (3) Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:1-4)

It says “we were therefore buried with him through baptism” and “just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too may live a new life”.

The picture here is that of a believer being buried under water so that they can be considered to have been “buried with [Christ]” in his burial. And then, “just as Christ was raised from the dead”, the believer, when brought back up out of the water, is raised from the dead so that they can now “live a new life”.

The point that Paul is making is that, if we died with Jesus and were buried with him, now having been raised with him, we should no longer live a life of sin.

“having been buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:12)

Again, Paul paints the picture of a believer being “buried with [Christ]” as he’s dipped into the water and then “raised with him” as he comes back up out of the water. You don’t get symbolism like this from any mode of baptism other than immersion.

4. Finally, early church history reveals some details about baptism:

“And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you can not in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” - Didache (approx. 65-80 AD)

The earliest known baptismal instructions, outside of the NT, distinguish between the option to “pour out water” in the event that there’s not enough water, from the usual mode of baptism, which, by deduction, would be immersion “in living water” (i.e. a river or a lake with both inlets and outlets). So then pouring was acceptable only if there was not enough water to immerse; sprinkling wasn’t even mentioned as an option.

Notice that it says “into” water, not “next to” water or “near” water or “using” water, but specifically “into” the water. In fact, it says: “in living water”, “into other water”, “in cold” (water), and “in warm” (water). The Didache makes it pretty clear that the earlier church baptized “in” and “into” water.

Conclusion:

Clearly baptism originally involved more than pouring or sprinkling. We’ve discovered, by looking at the Greek word used in the NT

for baptism, NT baptismal accounts, Paul's insight into the symbolism of baptism, and historical analysis, that the original mode of baptism was immersion.

Although it's not a matter of salvation — we're saved by grace through faith — if you have not yet been baptized in water, consider doing so the right way for the right reasons. And whichever mode you might choose, know that baptism is an opportunity for us to repent of our sins and surrender our lives to God through faith in Jesus Christ; after which we grow in God's grace, walking side by side with Jesus, learning to love as he loves.

About the Author

Jeffrey A. Lyons currently lives in Bucks County, PA, where he was born and raised, with his wife, Michelle, and their two children. As a school bus driver, he enjoys encouraging students and, when the opportunity presents itself, gently pointing them towards faith in Christ. His hobbies include spending time with his family, writing, playing the guitar, camping and completing tasks on Michelle's honey-do list. He does not consider himself to be a theologian, nor has he attended university; he's a believer who spends time with Jesus and his word.

