

Body Life - #7

Tithing

Introduction – Another good subject to consider, when there is no ‘urgent need’ in the church, is the requirement of the tithe. Some think of it as ‘membership dues’, and it isn’t. It isn’t the fee for this ‘lecture series’, it isn’t a ‘bribe’ to pay off God, and it isn’t a legalistic form of works-righteousness. But it also isn’t relegated to the annals of Old Testament ceremonial law either, with no application for today. The tithe, with its principals, purposes and promises, remains in force today for all of God’s people.

Tithing Before Moses (Gen 14:20, 28:22) – Before the Mosaic law gives detailed instructions on tithes and offerings, the practice of giving ‘a tenth’ was already in place among God’s people.

Instructions on the Tithe (Deut 14:22-29) – We will not study each passage on tithing in one message. But this passage addresses many of the major principles surrounding the tithe.

From Your Increase (v22) – With each harvest, you are to remember to ‘tithe a tithe’, truly, before the Lord. This is the increase from your labors – “What do you have that you have not received...” (1 Cor 4:7). From the moment you get a paycheck, you must remember, it is all the Lord’s, for it is all from the Lord.

Learning to Fear God (v23) – How does tithing do this? (Deut 26:1-11). Tithing expresses that everything you have is because of God and His grace. It is all His, not just the tenth, and you remember you are always completely dependant upon His grace for everything. God isn’t one of your creditors, exacting his tax from your earnings. He is your Provider – and you are not.

The Joy of Giving Enjoyed (vv24-26) – The worshipper was to come to the Lord’s place and feast with his household (and others). Giving your tithe shouldn’t look like a trip to the post office on April 15th. Giving your tithe should look like a full table, the best wine, and generous hands rejoicing in God’s goodness again and again.

Don’t Forget (vv27-28) – Surrounding the tithe and the feast is the local care of those who minister in the gospel, and those who are under hard providences who are in your midst. And this is done with an eye to even greater blessing (v28).

New Testament Teaching – The NT assumes the same principles are in place in its writings. While the Mosaic economy is gone, the tithe is the principle, not one of the details.

Proportionate Giving (1 Cor 16:1-2) – “as he may prosper”, that is, on the increase.

The Support of Ministers (1 Cor 9:14) – ‘Even so’, or in the same manner as the OT priests received their support.

A Heart of Celebration and Generosity (2 Cor 9:7) – Tithes and offerings, rightly given, come from hearts overflowing. And here, the giving is being directed to relieve the poor.

Expectation of Further Blessing (Phil 4:17) – Paul’s eye is not on the gift, but the fruit that will come to the givers. We give, that we might reap again, that we might give again.

FAQ’s on Tithing – When these questions are asked from hearts leaping with desire to serve the Lord, there are helpful guidelines. When the questions are really smokescreens for legalism, covetousness and greed, they only heap upon you greater condemnation.

Net or Gross? – These are not ‘biblical terms’, but in general, remember that the tithe is on the increase. But remember that the tithe is treated as ‘seed corn’(2 Cor 9:6) – you will reap what you sow.

Where do I tithe? – It appears that lawful recipients of the tithe would include those who minister to you in the gospel and the surrounding ministries of that work, those who are providing you with biblical teaching, brothers and sisters in particular need, and the poor in your midst. It also appears that part of the tithe is to fund some form of feasting before the Lord.

What if I am in debt? – Again, generally speaking, what these passages teach us is that when you think you cannot afford to tithe, the truth of the matter is that you cannot afford not to.

What Does This Have To Do With Body Life? (Mal 3:8-10) – These are not simply warnings and promises to individuals, but to the covenant gathering of believers. We are that holy nation, and we will experience the curses and blessings of God as a people, not simply as individuals. Are we robbing God? Or is our whole life as ‘one body’ an expression of overwhelming gratitude, marked by particular opportunities to express that as in the giving of tithes and offerings. Do we fear God? And have we learned to feast before Him with thanksgiving in that fear?

Biblical tithing is not simply a ‘personal issue’ between you and the Lord, although it is that. Biblical tithing is a measure of the body’s understanding of God’s immeasurable grace, absolute sovereignty, hope in future grace, and our call to imitate our Lord’s generosity. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (1 Cor 9:15).