

TITHING IS NOT A KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

By

Orlando Mostert
Kingdomvision.co.za

Within evangelical churches, the topic of “tithing” is probably the most preached on individual topic. It is presented as both the prescribed Biblical means for financing the ministry of the church as well as the Biblical key to financial prosperity. But there are several problems with this teaching: It is not scriptural, it does not properly finance the ministry of the church and it ignores the real Biblical principles of wealth creation. Then there is the further small problem that your preacher has not told you about...there are actually four different tithes mentioned in the Old Testament. So have you really brought “all the tithes into the storehouse”?

I am writing this to you from my own peculiar background. From my own ministry experience I know what it is like to try to preach the gospel while desperately poor (YWAM is also known as Youth Without Any Money) and as a businessman I have learned through painful experience that there are Biblical principles for creating wealth that you cannot by-pass with hopes for “miracle money”. All around me I see wonderful ministries that are really making sacrifices to preach the gospel who are in dire need of financial support. I also see incredible financial struggles of families in all our churches that are in desperate financial need.

The solution offered from the pulpit to both the financial need of the people and the ministry is...tithing. In all sincerity and with Biblical backing I wish to say to my fellow evangelicals: Tithing is not a scriptural basis for financing the needs of the ministry nor is it a scriptural prescription for creating the prosperity that the Lord wants us to have (and I fully agree He wants us to prosper!).

After decades of “prosperity preaching” and tithing in America as well as here in South Africa you would expect to see an overflowing abundance of finances in our families and churches from faithful believers who have been giving and tithing faithfully and sacrificially. Well to be honest with you I don’t see it. Instead I see ministries everywhere are really short on finances and especially now as world economic systems are imploding the need to help the poor is greater now than ever. I see family incomes drying up as one spouse or both lose their jobs. The problem we are facing is a new world depression that will be greater than the depression of the 1930’s and “tithing” is not going to solve the problem. Nations are bankrupt, governments are bankrupt, companies are laying off workers and families are bankrupt. The church of the 21st century is living Rev. 18 ...Babylon is Falling! The world economic system is falling apart.

And yet in the midst of this economic crisis I say that the Lord has created a world of abundance for us. The gospel is good news to the poor because if we follow Bible laws for creating and distributing wealth there will be no lack among the people of God for both our own needs as well as the needs of the ministry.

Now let’s look at the scriptural problems with tithing from five perspectives:

- There were actually four tithes outlined in the Old Testament and so paying just one of them (10%) does not mean you have fulfilled your obligation to “bring all the tithes into the storehouse”.
- Tithes in the Old Testament was the tax system of the nation of Israel and is not applicable today.
- Any teaching like tithing or “seed-faith” that implies you need to give something to God in order to be blessed is a gospel of works and denies the gospel of grace; Christ has already paid for all our blessings!
- Tithing does not bring in enough resources into the Church to do the work of the Kingdom.
- The Bible gives us economic laws for creating wealth which if we will follow them will bring in an abundance into the Kingdom. Tithing is not one of them.

The Four Tithes of the Old Testament

I find it strange that those who insist that tithing is still applicable today choose this one law and not the other 612 laws outlined in the Old Testament. Why not insist on keeping the Sabbath? To those who insist on keeping the law of tithing I say the same thing as I say to those who insist on keeping the Sabbath. If you are going to keep the Sabbath then you must keep all the Sabbaths which included not just the seventh day but also the seventh year and the 50th year. Are you refraining from working every 7th year?

To the tithe payers I ask; if you believe in paying your tithe are you going to pay all your tithes? Under the law of tithing as taught in the Old Testament you are actually obliged to pay three tithes that come to 23.3% of your income. That is right, your obligation is not 10% but 23.3%. To those of you who preach tithing from Malachi that “you are robbing God” if you do not bring “all the tithes”, are you going to tell your church that they must bring in all three tithes to be absolved from robbing God?

Paul says in Galatians 3:10 that if you are going to keep the law then keep all the laws. If you are going to keep the Sabbath then keep all the Sabbaths. If you are going to pay tithes then pay all three tithes you are required to pay.

Let me explain from scripture and history:

The First Tithe

The first tithe is clearly explained in Lev. 27:30-32. This was to be a tenth of all your increase to be given to the Lord (the Levites). You couldn't touch it. You couldn't exchange it, every tenth lamb, every tenth sack of corn; you couldn't change the good for the bad or the bad for the good. This is what you normally hear preached on in church.

The Tithe of the Tithe

When the Levite received the tithe from the people he was to take one tenth of that and give it to the priests for the work of the temple ministry.(Nehemiah 10:38). This was known as the tithe of the tithe. Question: Don't you think it more accurate to say that the ministry now taking place in our churches has more to do with the priestly ministry rather than the Levitic ministry and as such should rather be paid the tithe of the tithe (or 1%) rather than the tithe (10%)? Pray about it!

The Second Tithe

The second tithe was an interesting tithe. It is explained in Deut. 12:17,18. This was the tithe you could spend on yourself and your family to take them three times a year to Jerusalem to celebrate the three great holy festivals; the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. You could convert your tithe into money and then spend it in Jerusalem on whatever you desired as long as you shared with the Priests and Levites.

The Third Tithe

The third tithe is explained in Deut. 14: 28,29. This tithe was to be collected every third year and was to be spent on the support of the sick, poor and needy. It was a social welfare tithe.

My interpretation of the four tithes is supported by Josephus the great Jewish historian of the first century who, incidentally, was also a Levite and Pharisee and therefore understood the Law well. He writes in his book "Antiquities of the Jews" (Ant. 4:4) on the first tithe:

"...according to the will of God, the people should pay the tithe of their annual fruits of the earth, both to the Levites and to the Priests.....Accordingly He commanded the Levites to yield up to the Priests... the tenth part of the tithes which every year they receive of the people." (The tithe to the Levites, the tithe of the tithe to the Priests).

On the second tithe he writes (Ant.4:8):

"Let there be taken of your fruits a tenth besides that which you have allotted to give to the Priests and Levites. This you may indeed sell in the country, but it is to be used in those feasts and sacrifices that are to be celebrated in the holy city."

On the third tithe Josephus has this to say (Ant.4.8):

"Besides those two tithes which I have already said you are to pay every year, the one for the Levites, the other for the festivals, you are to bring every third year a third tithe to be distributed to those in want; to women also that are widows, and to children that are orphans."

There is a further historical confirmation of this threefold tithing system practised in ancient Israel in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit (not part of scripture, but certainly an old historical Jewish document.) Tobit 1:5,8:

"And I alone went often to Jerusalem at the feasts, as it hath been ordained unto all Israel by an everlasting decree, having the first-fruits and the tenth of mine increase and that which was first shorn; and I gave them at the altar to the priests, the sons of Aaron. The tenth part of all my increase I gave to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem; and the second tenth part I sold away and went and spent it each year at Jerusalem; and the third I gave unto them to whom it was meet."

So that comes to 20% per year of your income and 30% every third year. Do you still want to practice tithing?

Tithes Were the Taxes of Israel

God called Israel in the Old Testament to be a peculiar nation which He had formed to be a testimony to all the other nations of the earth. Their peculiarity lay in the fact that unlike other nations serving false idols and ruled by despots, Israel was to be ruled by the revealed law of God (the Torah), they were not to have an earthly king, the Lord was to be their King (1 Sam.8:7). In today's language we would call such a political arrangement a Republic; that is, a nation ruled by law. The constitution of this unique nation was to be the Torah, the five books of Moses. The Lord gave the responsibility of the civil administration of the nation to the tribe of Levi. The priestly duties and the administration of the temple was the responsibility of the descendants of Aaron.

While each of the tribes of Israel were allotted a portion of the promised land the Levites were not given any land, only 48 cities which formed administration centres. The Levites were in actual fact what we today would describe as the civil servants of the nation. They were responsible for administering justice, education, health, welfare as well as certain economic functions. For this critical ministry of keeping the civil administration of the nation running smoothly, they were to be paid a tithe of everyone else's income. The Levites were then to take this tithe and pay a tithe of this to the priests for the upkeep of the Temple ministry (a tithe of the tithe or one percent of the income; Nehemiah 10:38).

Let me explain how this relates to the much quoted Malachi 3:10. The Lord says if you don't pay your tithes you are robbing Him and you cannot be blessed. What does this mean? Since the Lord plainly stated that He is the King of Israel then that portion of the nation's income which belongs to the King for administration of the nation clearly belongs to the Lord. The Lord designated the Levites as His representatives to receive the tithe income and

administer it according to His prescriptions. If enough citizens of a nation refuse to pay their legitimate taxes for the administration of the nation then chaos and anarchy will soon follow and any money you thought you were saving by not paying your fair share will soon be lost in the ensuing violence. This tithing tax system was a voluntary payment system.

Even later when Israel had its own earthly kings in the form of David and Solomon, the Bible says they were the Lord's representatives seated on the Lord's throne (1 Chron.29:23). That means the tithe still belonged to the Lord, He was still the King of Israel, the administration fees to run the nation belonged to Him. If you did not pay your taxes (tithes) you were robbing God (Mal. 3:10).

Abraham supported this principle by paying tithes (taxes) to the king of Salem, Melchizedek when he lived in the area. Jesus supported this principle by commending the Pharisees for paying their tithes to the temple which at that time was performing valuable social services. You pay for services.

For those ministers who still want to preach that tithing is applicable today, I wish to make the following challenge:

If you want a Livites tithe then do a Livites job!

I would be very happy to pay a tithe of my income to the church if they were to perform the Levitic duties which have been mostly expropriated by government. The government should not be in the job of providing health, education, welfare. This is the job of the church (the Levitic ministry). Instead we are paying enormous taxes for inefficient, wasteful government services that the church could and should be delivering more cheaply and more efficiently and with a lot more compassion and understanding.

An unbiased reading of scripture will clearly show this fact: The tithes of the Old Testament were the taxes of Israel. They rightfully belonged to the Lord because He was the King of Israel! (1 Chron.29:23; 1 Sam.8:7)

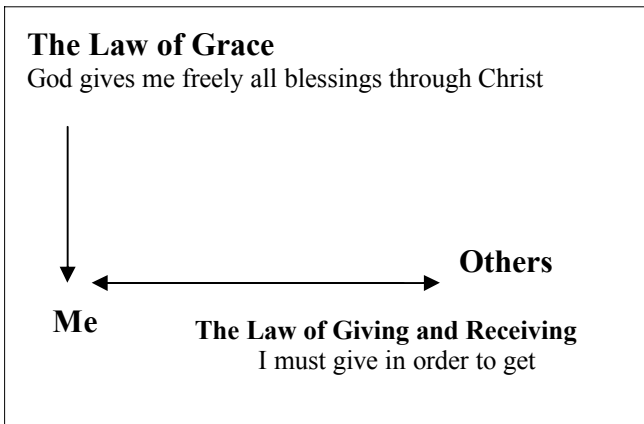
They cannot be applied to the church today because the church is fulfilling the priestly ministry and not the Levitic ministry. The Church **should be** doing the Levitic ministry, but Governments have wrongfully expropriated that ministry.

Giving to Get

The third problem that I have with tithing teaching is that it is presented as a qualification and requirement for financial blessing from God. If you don't give you don't get. The clear impression that I get from all this teaching on giving is that if I give to God then He will abundantly give to me. The further implication I get is that if I don't give to the Lord then I cannot expect to receive in return. This teaching, as Paul would say, "has the appearance of Godliness but denies the power thereof." (2 Tim.3:5) Much is made about your bank account in heaven which will give you a hundred-fold return; Luke 6:38 is quoted frequently, "Give and it shall be given unto you...". Then many references to seed-faith, giving from your need,

sowing and bountiful reaping etc. Of all the many scriptures used to support this idea of giving to the ministry in order to get financial blessing from the Lord, the most used and abused probably is Luke 6:38, "Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom; for with the same measure that you mete shall it be measured to you again."

To understand what our Lord was describing here let me give you an illustration that will clear up the misunderstanding:



I am going to make two important statements which will explain this diagram:

* EVERYTHING I RECEIVE FROM GOD HAS ALREADY BEEN PAID FOR BY THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS. I CANNOT ADD TO IT BY ANY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS SUCH AS TITHING OR GIVING.

* IF I WISH TO RECEIVE FROM OTHERS I MUST FIRST GIVE; THE MORE I GIVE TO OTHERS THE MORE I RECEIVE FROM OTHERS.

To get anything from God requires submission, prayer, faith and praise. To get anything from people requires giving to them first. Let me explain further:

LAW OF GRACE

The Kingdom of God operates by different laws than this world. In this world only the air you breathe is free, all else you work for.

But in the Kingdom of God all things you receive are freely given by God and paid for already by the death of Christ on the cross. You cannot add anything to it, you cannot get anything more from God than what Christ already paid for. You have received an incredible inheritance from your heavenly Father. You have received Him! What more do you want? That is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:22, "for all things are yours, whether...in the world or life or death or things present or things to come all are yours and you are Christ's' and Christ is Gods'." You know this is true! You know you cannot earn God's blessings of prosperity by giving money to God so why do you listen to preachers who tell you that you must?

Is prosperity one of the blessings of Abraham? Of course it is! Then read carefully what Paul says in Gal. 3:14:

"The blessings of Abraham (prosperity) does it come by keeping the law (Old Testament law of tithing) or by faith in Christ?" Gal.3:1, "O foolish Galatians who has bewitched you?" (the prosperity preachers have!).

If you want anything from your heavenly Father then ask for it. Jesus said that anything you ask the Father in His Name He would give you. He did not say give money to your heavenly Father if you need finances! Don't try and bribe God!

So your relationship with God is governed by the Law of Grace. You submit to Him, you prayerfully and in faith make your needs known to him and you receive freely.

LAW OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

As you already know from hard experience, this world does not operate by the law of grace. Nobody is going to give you anything for free and they are not supposed to! God commanded us to work for our living. Work is wonderful. It is God's way to teach us all sorts of lessons in life. It is not drudgery for the Christian. It is a wonderful way for us to develop the fruits of the Spirit, minister to people, find out about the world God created and fulfil His original commandment to us to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth.

Successful work leads to prosperity. Successful work means creating new wealth and exchanging it with others for what they produce. Success in business is very simple, find a need and fill it! There are an untold number of needs in the economy. You have to find out what the needs are out there and fill those needs and you will prosper. You have to give something to the economy in order to receive, there is no consumption without production. This is basic economics and Jesus first taught it in Luke 6:38:

"Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom."

Notice that Jesus is talking about men giving to you, not God giving to you. If you want to receive from others you must give something to others that they want. You can give your labour, or you can trade skills or you can produce products and trade those. If you want more then give more. Upgrade your skills through study so that men will value your contribution more. Make better products than the competition. Give better service. Folks, this is the giving that the Bible says leads to prosperity.

The scripture is plain in its teaching on prosperity, the prosperity preachers confuse the issue. You get the impression from their preaching that you give to God (in the offering plate) and you mysteriously get from people (salary increase, unexpected cheque in the post etc.) when exactly the opposite is true: you give to people (good services and products) and you get from people those things they in turn produce. Do you want more? Then give more!

The Problem With Seed-Faith Teaching

The further problem with tithing teaching is that it is always coupled with "faith" as a means for gaining prosperity. Not faith in the Lord but faith in faith or faith in some mystical law of the universe that you can attract wealth with right thinking. This cultic nonsense is very popular today. Oprah Winfrey made a best seller out of "The Secret" which taught this nonsense. Every book I have read coming out of the "faith movement" having to do with prosperity pushes this idea of some "positive confession" coupled with tithing and giving (with the postal address provided in case you don't know where to give) will produce a hundred fold return of "miracle money" from somewhere. And since the "miracle money" invariably fails to arrive on time what follows are usually follow up seminars on how to release your stored up wealth (tithing plus sacrificial giving), new formulas for releasing wealth angels, binding poverty demons etc etc.

Folks I can go on and on but I don't want to appear judgmental or cynical. This is serious. There are multitudes of dear believers suffering under dire economic circumstances who have followed all the giving and believing formulas preached to them. Many of my own personal friends are in this desperate situation. And they are now caught in a terrible crisis of "faith". They have not received the hundredfold return, the bills are piling up but if they stop tithing they rob God and fall under His economic judgment as well as losing all that stored up wealth in heaven (deposited there through their "giving") through lack of faith.

There is such a thing as miracle provision from the Lord. His name is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who will provide. How many times in both my businesses as well as my ministry I have had to call on His wonderful name to grant me a miracle of provision. Anyone who has walked with the Lord will invariably be led by Him to a place where your strength and abilities cannot provide in your desperate need...and the Lord hears our prayers not because we have tithed but because He wants to prove His wonderful graciousness to us in Christ. Grace means unmerited favour! We did not earn it through our good works of giving. The testimonies you hear of financial blessing after tithing are not because of tithing but because of His goodness in spite of what we do or not do. That is what grace is...unmerited favour. You don't deserve it. Tithing says I deserve it because I obeyed some cosmic law of the universe that automatically rewards "givers".

This is the same doctrine in essence to what the Catholic Church was doing in Martin Luther's day...selling indulgences. An "indulgence" was a grace gift that came from the stored up graces of the saints through time and the church could dispense this grace from God through your contribution to the church. The moment you give to God (i.e. His representative on earth) you get from God. Tell me the difference between this and "seed-faith" preaching today? Tell me the difference between "faith" unlocking wealth and "The Power of Positive Thinking" or the metaphysics of "The Secret"; the right attitude will draw wealth to you! It is all the same and it is all wrong!

Kingdom Finances

My fourth problem with tithing is that it does not produce enough revenue for the work of the Kingdom. It might produce enough for the idea of church on Sunday morning with a pastoral staff to pay and a church bond but that is an era that is drawing to a close. The vision of the spreading Kingdom of God is that all creation is to be brought under His authority. So we need huge amounts of revenues for Kingdom schools and universities, investments into new businesses, job creation for the poor, building new communities, caring for the earth, investments into sustainable and renewable energies etc etc.

The issue is not me living on 90% and then giving 10% for the work of the Lord. I am already experiencing Kingdom prosperity and that means living on 10% and plowing back 90% into the expansion of the Kingdom of God. When we move our whole church communities into the future of Kingdom Economics there will be such an abundance of prosperity that none will lack anything. The surplus value that we will create which at present is wasted by governments, corporations and the banking system will instead be productively invested into Kingdom enterprises that will produce an abundant return for all of us instead of being squandered by the economic elites of society.

Bible Laws of Wealth Creation

The fifth problem that I have with tithing teaching is that it ignores all the wonderful scriptures in the Bible for prosperity and wealth creation. I have read many “tithing” and “seed-faith” books and have yet to see one that actually teaches proper Biblical Economics or the Bible laws for wealth creation. This is a real tragedy because most Christians do not realize what a radical book the Bible is in its unique prescriptions for how you achieve prosperity.

I am not going to go into depth here, I have another article on the Kingdom principles for wealth creation but let me just give you some ideas. The prosperity of western civilization which has spread east to China, Russia and Japan and all over the world is not the result of “Greek Civilization”. The critical foundation principles needed to create a prosperous free enterprise economy came 3400 years ago on Mount Sinai to Moses from our God. These are:

The Republic and the Rule of Law: you are not to have a king over you but you are to be ruled by law (long before Plato’s republic).

Separation of Powers: between the king, the Levites, the Priests, the nation divided into provinces.

Private Property: you may not steal, it is their property. Sound money: God hates unequal weights and balances.

Limited Liability: no debt valid for longer than 7 years.

Capital diffusion: all people were to own capital assets for income as well as income from labor.

And if you want personal prosperity my advice is to make an intensive study of the book of Proverbs. It is full of Godly wisdom such as seeking knowledge, working hard, avoiding fools, patience and endurance, wise investments, proper management of your assets like, time, family and resources.

I can list many more Biblical principles that have created today’s wealthy industrial societies but the point is this: It is by keeping God’s economic laws of the Bible that we create wealth not by tithing. In fact every heathen person or nation that practices Biblical laws will prosper to the extent that they are able to do so (they all however eventually fall because of their un-regenerated greedy human natures). As Paul says in Rom.2:14, “when the Gentiles who do not have the law do by nature the things contained in the law ...” then they can expect economic prosperity as well. Which is what happened to China and Russia after they abandoned communism.

The Principles of Godly Giving

Paul had to take up an offering from the Corinthian church to help the church in Jerusalem. His advice is still the Word of God to us today on how we are to give:

“Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of NECESSITY, for God loves a cheerful giver”. (2 Cor. 9:7).

Did you see that “NECESSITY”! Any preacher who teaches that tithing is a “necessity” is contradicting 2 Cor. 9:7. Paul as a trained Pharisee in the Law of Moses knew all about tithing. If he believed it was still applicable to the New testament church then this is where he would have said so. He in fact said exactly the opposite!

Give generously to those in the ministry. That includes all those in the ministry, not just your pastor and local church. There are apostles and evangelists and prophets and teachers that need your support. Then there are the many ministries that help the poor and needy. Be generous and cheerful in your giving.

Beware of Greedy Wolves

Paul warned in Acts 20:29 that after his departure wolves would enter the flock desiring their gold and silver. They are still here today. There are many in the pulpit and on television who are preaching for a paycheck. Paul says in 2 Cor. 2:17, “for we are not like many who corrupt the word..” The word “corrupt” comes from the Greek “kapeleuo” meaning “a huckster or peddler”. Watch out for those who peddle the Word of God. They constantly talk about money...their mouths run over with what is in their hearts. You see them on television offering you holy oil from Israel or special prayer shawls if you send in your “gift”; contrary to what Jesus said, “expecting nothing in return”. There isn’t a “seed-faith” preacher who will tell you what Jesus tells you to give expecting nothing in return (Lu.6:35). Others promise you special access to the preacher if you become a “gold or platinum member” contrary to what James said that the rich are not to have special place in the church. And yes, it is outrageous that some evangelists think they need private jets, body guards and five star hotels. Don’t waste your money on such peddlers of the Word.

You are not under Law you are under Grace! Give cheerfully, and abundantly to those in need. There is no “necessity” of tithing.