

# GRACE RESPONSE VERSUS TITHING BY LAW

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# GRACE RESPONSE VERSUS TITHING BY LAW

The spirit of discipleship is summed up in 2 Corinthians 4:15. *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”*

**The church of our Lord is a community of grateful people. It is a community of people who respond with thankful service to the grace of God that was poured out through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary.** In their freedom from sin and the necessity of being justified by perfect keeping of law, Christians are moved by the grace that set them free. They are characterized by “paying forward” because their sins were paid for in the past. In Christ they live, and thus, are living a life of thanksgiving, not burdened with a meritorious quests for reward through works.

When digging through the Holy Scriptures in order to discover the awesome privilege of expressing our gratitude for the sacrificial offering of Jesus, the profound meaning of sacrificial giving springs from the pages of the Holy Writ. When we discover the emotional wonder of giving out of love instead of law, we experience the spirit of Jesus that was poured out as a gift for us. His giving has inspired “thank you” in our

hearts. When we understand how much God so loved us through the cross, our response is to so love by giving to others as we have been given to (See Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:19). This is the true spirit of Christianity. Our offerings, therefore, are out of love, not compulsion or law.

The “willing spirit” of responding to God’s giving was first mentioned by Paul in reference to his preaching of the gospel. *“For if I willingly do this [that is, preach the gospel], I have a reward”* (1 Co 9:17). This is the spirit of giving. Notice how this willing spirit is brought by Paul into the context of giving. *“For if there is first a willing mind, it is acceptable according to what one has and not according to what he does not have”* (2 Co 8:12). What a wonderful concept, a wonderful deliverance from the bondage of law. A willing mind is the foundation of a cheerful giver. When we fully understand the cross, we are frustrated if we do not express our thanksgiving through giving as our salvation was freely given to us.

With the nation of Israel, however, it was somewhat different. Israel lived under the bondage of law that legally tutored the nation to the cross of grace (Gl 3:19-25). In reference to offerings, therefore, the Israelites gave according to the requirements of the law. In contrast to

law, however, the Christian gives because of his gratitude for the grace of God. God, through the Old Testament law, defined for the Israelites the specific amount of their offerings. But under the grace of Christ, Christians themselves define the amount of the offering. The Jews gave because of commandment. The Christian gives because of thanksgiving. Therefore, **those Christians who seek to live under the tithing restrictions of the Old Testament law have cheated themselves of the joy that comes in bringing free-will offerings before the Lord out of a willing spirit and a heart of thanksgiving.** They have actually robbed themselves of a “willing spirit.” And without a willing spirit there is no joy when we make our offerings. We view our offerings as a burden and not an expression of joy.

In our giving, we must always have a sense of knowing that we have given our time through our offering in order to advance the work of God. We must appreciate that our contributions indicate our labor for the Lord to continue His mission to preach the gospel to the world and care for the unfortunate (Jn 1:27; 3 Jn 5-8).

It is for this reason that we must take another look at the practice of tithing that has been so corrupted in the frenzy of religious priests and pastors who would stir up guilt, rather than free-will, in order to move their adherents into submitting to their obsession for money. There are too many M & M religionists among us, that is, “Miracles” and “Money” religionists who seek to gain wealth at the

expense of sincere hearts who simply want to be pleasing to God. They are religious predators who, as the sons of Eli, take advantage of the spiritual obligations of the sincere in order to profit themselves (See 1 Sm 2:12-17). They do so to the point that the people “*abhorred the offering of the Lord*” (1 Sm 2:17). The people come to abhor that which they are obligated to do, that is to bring an offering before the Lord. When the people start to view the preacher as a profiteer, then they begin to “abhor the offering to the Lord.”

We were once living in the West Indies when an “M & M” predator came through the island of Antigua where we were living in the early 80s. Upon arrival, he and his cohorts first went to the hardware store and purchased several large buckets for the meeting. To begin the meeting in the early hours of the evening, the “M & M” preacher stood up and cried out, “God wants a miracle tonight!” The people responded and shouted, “Amen!”, not realizing that the preacher was using “miracles” as a bait to get the money of the people.

After about an hour of raving, the preacher and his cohorts pass out the buckets to collect the money. The buckets were then returned to the preacher. He looked in the buckets, and then cried out, “There is not enough money for a miracle to happen tonight!” So he raved on that the people must give in order that they be blessed with a miracle. He shouted that God would bring a miracle if they had enough faith, and their faith must be expressed through their giving.

The bucket team again passed out the buckets. The buckets came back, and again, the preacher was not satisfied. "There can still be no miracle tonight," the preacher cried out, "for there is little 'appreciation' in the buckets." He continued to bait the hook by promising miracles, and then, passing out the buckets hour after hour.

The sadness of the story is that the people were so emotionally caught up in the frenzy that they cried out, "Amen, Amen!" They had been baited with promises of miracles, and thus, were fully hooked. At about midnight, the preacher was emotionally wasted. Finally, some unfortunate and beguiled person came forward to be "healed." He too who had been worn down by the endless ranting and verbal abuse of the preacher.

The next morning the preacher and his bucket team boarded an airplane and went on to the next island to carry on again to extract money from the innocent for the purpose of gain. The people in Antigua were left with empty buckets and a feeling of guilt because they were convinced that they did not have enough faith to be healed. They were victims of a re-

ligious predator.

The unfortunate truth about what we might consider a unique event of a Balaamite preacher in Antigua happens almost every Sunday morning in thousands of religious meetings throughout the world (2 Pt 2:15). People have been burdened with so much guilt by the Balaamite preachers who preach for gain that they simply throw money in the bucket in order to find some relief from being harangued about giving. In their unwilling contributions they find a token of relief until next Sunday morning when the whole rampage of imposed guilt and profiteering continues. While the Balaamite drives to the meeting in a fine vehicle, saying to the people, "God will bless you too if you will give," the people continue to be burdened with the guilt of a false hope that they also will some day be "blessed" to have a fine vehicle. The unbelieving world turns away in disgust from these religious charlatans. It is time, therefore, that we take another look at the concept of "tithing" that was initiated in ancient times when thankful people expressed their gratitude to God for all that He had done in their lives.

## Chapter 1

### The Tithe

Tithing (a tenth part) of one's produce, livestock and spoils of war originated before the giving of the Old Testament law to Israel on Mount Sinai. Over four hundred years before the giving of the written law of tithing on Mount Sinai, Abraham tithed part of the spoils of

war to Melchizedek, who was a king and priest of God (See Gn 14:17-20; Hb 7:4). Because Abraham tithed, it seems that the principle of tithing was given by God to those who walked according to an unwritten revelation law that God gave to His people before the giving of the written

Old Testament law to Israel (See Hb 1:1). However, it is not known exactly where tithing a tenth part to rulers and religious leaders originated. The practice existed in ancient Babylon, as well as in Persia and Egypt. Even in ancient China there is evidence that tithing existed in the religious culture. Therefore, our first conclusion would be that the concept of “tithing” was not a unique practice among the Israelites. Also, we would conclude that tithing was not always in a religious context, but a practice of paying taxes to the state, as in the tithe that Abraham paid to Melchizedek who was the king of Salem.

In the law that was given to Israel at Mount Sinai, tithing was enjoined on Israel that they give of the produce of their land which included tithing from both crops and livestock. In the early years of the existence of Israel as an agricultural state, there was no use of money for exchange purposes. Tithing, therefore, was of their crops or livestock which manifested the giving of their labors. The purpose for their tithing was to support their religious leadership, the Levites and priests, which Levites functioned as the “governors” of the state to carry out the law of God among people. The Levites were in turn to support the priests who administered to the religious affairs of the people.

In reference to the produce of the land, the Israelites were to tithe the fruit of their trees, oil and wine, and of their herds and flocks (Lv 27:30-33; see Dt 14:22,23; 2 Ch 31:5,6). At the time of tithing, when their livestock went out to pasture, every tenth animal that passed

under the rod was tithed as holy to the Lord (Compare Jr 33:13; Ez 20:37). In the process of determining the animal to be tithed, the owner did not have the right to choose which animal was to be given to the Lord. He could not exchange any tenth animal that was tithed. Neither was the owner allowed to buy back any animal that was tithed. However, tithes of the seeds of the crops and the fruit could be bought back. If they were bought back, however, twenty percent of the value of the tithe was to be added to the cost of buying back the tithe. We would assume that the reason for their being allowed to buy back the seeds of the crops was for the purpose of maintaining the people’s survival during times of famine.

The Israelites were instructed to tithe in order to support the Levites since the Levites did not receive an inheritance of land in the land of promise (See Nm 18:21-32; see also Hb 7:5). The tithe the Levites received from the people was for their service to the people in teaching the law and service at the tabernacle (Nm 18:21,23). They were to receive tithes from the grain of the threshingfloor and wine from the wine press (Nm 18:27). From the tithe that was given to the Levites, a tithe of this offering was to be given by the Levites to the priests who served in the ministry of making sacrifices for the people. This was a tithe of the tithe (Ne 10:38,39). The Levites who received tithes were also to tithe of that which they received.

The tithe was to be brought to the tabernacle, wherever the tabernacle was alternately set up in the territories of Is-

rael each year throughout their history (Dt 12:5,6,11,18; see Am 4:4). When this tithe was brought to the tabernacle, it was to be eaten as a sacred meal. It was to be eaten by the one who brought the tithe, his household, and the Levites. If the journey was long to the location of the tabernacle in a particular year, then one could sell his tithe of crops or livestock where he lived. He could then bring the proceeds he received from the sell to the tabernacle and buy oxen, sheep and wine in order to eat the offered tithe with his household and the Levites (Dt 14:22-29). Unfortunately, by the time of Jesus this practice was greatly abused (See Mt 21:12,13; Mk 11:15-17).

There was also the third-year tithe. This tithe was for the Levites, the foreigners, orphans and widows (Dt 26:12-15). This was often referred to as the “poor tithe.” According to some Bible students, the “first tithe” was to be given to the Levites, from which tithe the Levites were to tithe to the priests. The “second tithe” was to be taken from the remaining nine-tenths of the owner’s livestock and crops. This tithe was to be taken to the tabernacle meeting and eaten with one’s household in fellowship with the Levites. In the third year, that which composed the “second tithe” was to be given to the Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows, as the “poor tithe.” But according to Josephus, who wrote the latter part of the first century, the “poor tithe” was actually an additional “third tithe” that the priests and Levites were also required to give to the foreigners, orphans and widows (See *Antiquities*, IV,

v; 3; VIII:8;22).

Though tithing took place before the giving of the Old Testament law, it was legislated under the law for the preservation of the Levites and priests who ministered to the spiritual well-being of national Israel. Tithing was also legislated for benevolent causes, specifically for orphans and widows. Since the proselyte (the foreigner, a convert to Israel’s faith) had no land inheritance, then it seems that in some ways he was to be supported with the “poor tithe” until he was financially established so that he could support himself and his household in the land of Palestine. This was never a tithe that was to continue indefinitely. The foreigner was simply sustained until he could support himself and his family.

Tithing was thus a legal system of support to sustain different social structures of the Israelite society, specifically the religious leaders who had the responsibility of spiritually leading the people and administering the law of God in a theocratic system of government. The tithe for Israel, therefore, was based on the Old Testament law that was given to Israel alone. The law specifically defined the tithe, or tax, that was to be paid in order for the nation of Israel to function as a nation in the land of Palestine.

The tithes that were to be consumed by the one who offered the tithe were meant to maintain the social interaction between the people, and the spiritual leaders, the Levites and priests. The sacred meal that was provided by the tithing Israelite was to keep himself and his family in fellowship with those who had

the responsibility of spiritually leading the nation. Other tithes were given in order to sustain the families of the priests in their service at the tabernacle. God established the tithing as a law in the Old Testament. He did this in order to guarantee that the Israelites be spiritually led by those who had the responsibility of teaching the people the law of God. He also wanted to make sure that the unfortunate of the land be cared for until they could sustain themselves.

When we transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament in reference to tithing, most people make a fatal mistake of interpretation. Most people seek to live under law, and thus, they bind law in reference to tithing on themselves as believers in Christ. This is particularly true of those predator preachers who obsess over money in order to extract contributions from the free for the sake of gain. Balaamite preachers who seek gain will take the free back into the bondage of law in order to generate “tithes,” particularly in reference to their personal support. But we see something different in the New Testament for the free that was made possible by the sacrificial cross of Jesus.

Unfortunately, too many people have confused the concept of the “tithe.” They have taken a word that was used in the Old Testament in order to define a concept of the New Testament. It is true that the practice of giving the tenth part (the tithe) to the Lord existed before its first recorded mention in the Old Testament. The “tithing” practice existed before the giving of the Old Testament law

to Israel. The practice was brought into the Old Testament law as a recorded statute with the giving of the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. However, when we come to the new Testament, we must understand that the principle of giving to the Lord continued, but giving in reference to the restrictions of the tenth part of the tithe did not continue.

This point is very confusing to many people. It is confusing because most do not understand that there is a difference between the Old Testament law that was given specifically to national Israel and the New Testament law of freedom under which Christians now live.

Bringing offerings to the Lord while the people were under any law of God has always existed. There is no argument about this, especially as we survey some key passages in the New Testament that relate to this matter. However, there is a difference between the legal “tithe” of the Old Testament law and the free-will offering of the New Testament. Therefore, if one says that we must “tithe” today because of what the Old Testament law commands, then he has missed the point of why Christians are to bring their free-will offerings before the Lord. However, to say that Christians must “tithe” in making an offering, we would be correct. If we understand that the word “tithe” is used in a generic sense to simply refer to contribution, then we could do such, though using this specifically defined word of the Old Testament to explain the Christian’s response to grace can be somewhat misleading. Christians give in response to grace, not in response to law.



“Tithe” is a specific word that is used in reference to law. Christians have been set free from the bondage of law, though they have not been set free from their responsibility to support the work of the

Lord. We must keep this clearly in mind as we move our studies from the pages of law in the Bible (the Old Testament) to the pages of grace (the New Testament).

## Chapter 2

### The Free-Will Offering

Tithing under the Old Testament law was a legal requirement of the law. It was thus a work of law that manifested one’s obedience to the law, which law was given exclusively to the nation of Israel. The Israelites’ legal obedience to the Old Testament law, therefore, was a signal that they sought to maintain the covenant that God had established with them at Mount Sinai (See Dt 5:1-5; Ex 19:4-6; Ne 8:1; Rm 3:1,2).

Christians are no longer under the Old Testament law (Rm 7:4). They have been freed from the limitation of law in order that they be able to work more abundantly in response to the grace of God (See Cl 2:14). And for this reason, **Christians are moved to give more than the required tithe of the Old Testament law.** They have been freed from the ten percent tithe of law in order to give according to their appreciation of grace.

Those who think that we are bound to the Old Testament law continue to live in confusion in reference to our responsibilities to serve God, especially in matters concerning tithing. Christians are under grace, not law. Paul wrote, *“And if by grace, then it is no more by works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if*

*it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work”* (Rm 11:6). Now consider this thought in reference to some among the Galatian Christians who were reverting back to certain ordinances of the Old Testament law, specifically circumcision, in order to be justified before God. *“You have been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law. You have fallen from grace”* (Gl 5:4). If anyone would seek to use any law of God as a legal means by which to be justified before God, then he has fallen from grace. The reason for this is simple. Paul wrote, *“For I testify again to every man who is circumcised, that he is a debtor to keep the whole law”* (Gl 5:3). In other words, if one would seek to use circumcision, or even tithing, as a legal means to justify himself before God, **then he must keep the whole Old Testament law perfectly in order to be justified before God.** The problem with this theology is that **no one can keep any law of God perfectly**, and thus, every man stands as a sinner before God (Rm 3:9,10). We all sin and fall short (Rm 3:23).

Paul reminded the Galatians, *“... a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus ... for by works*

*of law no flesh will be justified*” (Gl 2:16). “*But that no one is justified by law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just will live by faith’*” (Gl 3:11). Therefore, if any Christian goes back to the Old Testament law in order to tithe legally according to the restrictions of the law, **he is fallen from grace**. He is seeking to be justified legally before God by legally trying to keep law. If such a one seeks to be justified by the law, **then he is a debtor to keep the whole law**. In other words, he must keep the whole Old Testament law perfectly in order to be justified by the law. Those who would use the Old Testament law to bind tithing on the disciples of Jesus, are also debtors to keep the whole law, including the law of circumcision, animal sacrifices, the Passover, and the countless other laws of the Old Testament. “M & M” preachers need to keep this in mind as they take sincere people down the road of guilt in order to extract money from their pockets on the basis of law.

Christians are dead to the Old Testament law by the body of Christ in order that they be married to Christ (Rm 7:4). So when considering contributions to God for the continuation of His work under the law of Christ, our sacrifices of thanksgiving are based on the principle of 2 Corinthians 4:15. Grace causes thanksgiving. God’s grace causes thanksgiving in our hearts, which thanksgiving is manifested through offerings. **Christians give out of gratitude because of the grace of God that was poured out in their lives through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross**. The Israel-

ites tithed in legal obedience to the Old Testament law. Christians give in response to the grace that God has poured out in their lives. Christians give because they are debtors to the grace of God (Rm 1:14). They thus contribute liberally (2 Co 9:6-15), even out of their poverty (See 2 Co 8:1-4). Because they understand all that God freely gave to them through Jesus, they freely give in return out of a heart of gratitude. Here is the principle: “*Let each one give according as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Co 9:7). If one gives because of the compulsion of the preacher, then he is not giving cheerfully. He is not giving as one whom God would love. The next time you give because of the compulsion of law or the guilt trip of an “M & M” preacher, then think in your mind that God loves the one who gives cheerfully out of appreciation, not because he is bound by law to give. Keep in mind that **the free always give more than those who are in the bondage of law**. In order to inspire giving, therefore, we preach freedom in Christ in order to set people free to give as we were freely given to by Jesus.

Christians are not restricted to tithe ten percent, but by their ability to give according to their means, or ability to give (1 Co 16:1,2). Their love of others and appreciation for the grace of God in their lives, therefore, moves them to sacrificially give in abundance because they understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive (At 20:35). They thus give to the poor (At 20:35; Js 1:27), to

evangelists who preach the gospel (3 Jn 7,8), to those who are teachers of the word of God among them (Gl 6:6), to other Christians who are in need (At 2:44,45; 4:32-37), and even to unbelievers who are in need (Gl 6:10). Christians, therefore, **are not restricted in their giving by the ten percent of the Old Testament tithe.** Because of the abundance of the grace that was poured out upon them, **they give abundantly.**

Consider as an example of sacrificial giving the case of the initial few disciples in Philippi. When Paul, Luke, Timothy and Titus walked into Philippi, they encountered and led to Christ a traveling single business woman and her household (At 16:15). A humble government worker, the jailer, and his household also gave themselves to the Lord (At 16:33). Paul, Timothy and Titus stayed only a few days in Philippi before they went on to Thessalonica (At 16:12; 17:1). Now notice what Paul said of these few disciples many years later, among whom there were initially only two wage earners, the jailer and Lydia. *“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again for my needs”* (Ph 4:15,16). What makes newly baptized disciples do this? They had been Christians for only a few days, any yet, when the evangelists went on to Thessalonica they supported them. Was their support of the evangelists something that Paul taught them? Or, **was it inherent in the**

**nature of the message they received?** We believe the latter was the reason. They received a message of loving sacrifice and the only way they could express the same in their lives was to sacrifice for the continued preaching of the message of grace.

Even in hard times the Philippians were willing do give to the needs of others. Philippi was in the province of Macedonia. Now notice what Paul wrote of the Philippian church in reference to their giving to the famine victims of Judea.

*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace [favor] of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord ...* (2 Co 8:1-3).

What makes people do this? This is a concept of true Christianity that the “M & M” preacher will never understand if he persists in his “money making” sermons to bring guilt upon the people. We believe that the message of the gospel of Christ in the incarnation and cross is so great and powerful that it compels people to give (See Ph 2:5-8). Christians who clearly understand this message do not have to be taught to give. They only need to be directed to where to take their offerings. They would never dare come before the Lord empty handed, for the

Father in heaven came to them with a crucified Son in His hand. And because that crucified Son set them free, they freely give. If we would seek to increase our giving, then we must continually teach the message of freedom in the crucified Christ. Taking people back into the bondage of law restricts their willingness to give. Bringing people to a greater understanding of the willingness of Jesus to set us free through cross inspires free-will sacrifice on the part of those who have been set free by the cross.

Under law, it is the will of the law that tithing was to be made. But under grace, it is our own will that we give in response to what God has given to us through the cross. Free-will offering can thus never be the result of law. It must be willingly made from the heart of the free. We are free from law in Christ, and thus, fully willing to give all that we can.

We thus present our entire lives as a sacrificial offering before the Lord. Our offerings, therefore, are not a sacrifice, but a statement of who we are, the sacrificial flock of God. The Holy Spirit said it thus,

*Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

(Romans 12:1)

And again,

*I have been crucified with Christ. **And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

(Galatians 2:20)