

Why We Tithe (Part 1)

The Spirit of the Law

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I am going to be talking about money today. Money is one of those subjects that one used to not speak about in polite company. It used to be that, if you came into a fairly formal situation, money was one of those things that you just didn't mention. Like religion, one's money was one's private affair and very personal; and it wasn't anybody else's business. So you just didn't talk about it. People never disclosed their income. They never told you about the killing they made in the stock market last week (last month, last year). Or they never told you about their lucrative tax shelter, because they wanted the secret all for themselves. They didn't want it to be past around.

And now, don't you know, we have cable television stations devoted to twenty-four hour coverage of the world's business markets. Everything you ever wanted to know about money and finances, taxes, or you name it—you can get information about it 24/7. In one aspect, you might say that we are "money crazed." We don't mind talking about it at the drop of the hat.

When we talk about money in the context of religion, then things really start to become unglued. We are really flouting convention. We (in the Church of God) speak about money on the holy days—normally, in the context of *offerings*. And it is usually in a fairly general way. We talk about the principles of money and giving to God.

It is far less usual for us to speak about *tithing*. As a matter of fact, in the Church of the Great God, there hasn't been a sermon preached on tithing since February of 1995. That's five years, plus; and that was given by John Reid. So I figured that it was time for a sermon on TITHING.

I am entitling this sermon **WHY WE TITHE**. It's very interesting—my father's sermonette, here in San Jose, was "Why We Worship." We didn't compare notes before hand; and he didn't tell me what he was going to give as a sermonette. So I just thought it was interesting that he would title his "Why We Worship" and I've entitled my sermon "Why We Tithe." As a matter of fact, for those of you here in San Jose, his sermonette was the perfect introduction to my sermon—because many of the same principles come out.

But I don't want to approach this sermon in the typical way that it (tithing) has been approached in the past. I don't want to just explain tithing. I want to emphasize **why** we tithe. As a matter of fact, in this sermon I don't think that I'm going to be explaining

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"tithing" at all. I've been thinking of actually making this a short series, where this will be the introductory sermon—to get down the principle of **why God wants us to tithe**. That is, what it is—about tithing—that is important to God—not the nuts 'n bolts of the law of tithing that God gives in the Bible.

What I want to talk about are **the reasons** God wants us to tithe. And I hope that, by doing this, I can pull tithing out of the financial realm (out of the subject of "money") and into the spiritual realm—which is far more important than "money." Maybe an underlying subject—that you may want to keep in mind as we are going through this—is that we are going to take tithing from *the letter* to *the spirit*. That will come up quite a bit during this sermon.

Now, before we go any further, I do want to emphasize (and I want to say this right off) that I am NOT giving this sermon because the Church of the Great God needs your money. This sermon is NOT because we need money. God has **always** provided just as much as we need, and a little more for growth. We have never had a problem with money. We've never gone beyond our means. We've never had to go get a loan. God has always given us the money we need from the tithes and very generous offerings of the people who have been with us—not just since 1992, but all throughout the history of this church.

Nor am I giving this sermon because there are people out there who are demanding changes on the tithing doctrines. It used to be that there were several such people. We got papers, AD nauseam, about why we should do away with tithing. That's not happening (as far as I know) these days. I don't know if we have received anything on tithing recently. At least, it hasn't crossed my desk.

But I do want to start out by saying that TITHING is a subject that many of us misunderstand. This misunderstanding results, first, from our predisposition towards money. This money crazed feeling that we have in these days. We consider what we earn and what we accumulate to be "**ours**." This is a normal, carnal way of looking at money. We think it is "ours;" and we want to keep what is "ours." And we want everybody else's hands (including God's) **off** "*our* money."

We hear people saying, "*Get your hand out of my pocket.*" to the government. We put padlocks on our safes, which is probably a good thing to do. But you understand what I mean. We want people to stay out of our financial life. But, according to God, it is **not** "our money." **Everything in the universe is His!** Please go to Psalms 24, where God just comes right out and says it. He doesn't beat around the bush.

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The earth is the LOORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. (Psalm 24:1)

We have the earth and everything that fill it up. We have the world. And he specifically points out the men—those who dwell in it (the men, the women, and the children). Everything is God's.

For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. [Now He's taking in all the animals, and the fish, and the birds.] 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (Psalm 50:10-12)

He repeats what He said there in Psalms 24. As the Creator God of everything, God has a prior claim to everything. He made a universe; and He **owns** everything in it, by reason of being the Creator. It's His!

There's an interesting little exercise that you might want to do sometime. Take any object. It doesn't matter what it is. Your glass of orange juice in the morning, your briefcase that you take to work, a piece of art that you happen to see in a museum, or the dirt on the sidewalk. Whatever it is that you consider **yours** (or someone else's even)—try NOT to trace that thing back to God.

Think about your orange juice. Who made the orange from which the juice was squeezed? Well, you might say, "*The grower.*" But that's not true. That's kidding yourself. God created the orange tree that produced the orange. All that the grower did (down in Florida, or in Texas, or here in California) was that he just planted the seed and cultivated it to make sure that it would produce. But it was **God** who gave the sun and the rain, and the minerals in the soil. Everything that there is can be traced back to God eventually.

There's a common saying, that Mr. Armstrong used to often say, is that "*all wealth comes out of the ground.*" And who made the ground? Who made all the minerals that are in it? God, of course! Everything from the silicon chips that are produced here, and all the computers, to the just basic things of life (like food and water, the clothing that we wear, the houses that we live in) all can be traced back to God, eventually. So if **He made it**, [then] **He owns it!**

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Now when they say (and this might be another argument), "*Possession is nine-tenths of the law. I have it in my hand, so it must be mine.*" ? well, that's a factitious argument. **Who owns us?** We are slaves, don't you know? We'll get to that in a minute. IF God owns us, THEN He owns everything that we "own." He is our Overlord, and Master. So anything that we have is ultimately under His control—[because] He owns us.

Let's go to Haggai 2, just to pick up one verse here. Some may say, "*Well, we have money now. The money is mine. I earned it with the sweat of my brow.*" But God says:

'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:8)

So not even the money that we have earned, from our own sweat, is "ours." Silver and gold are common currencies with metals; and they have been for a long time (at least, back to the fifth or sixth century B.C.) in the form of coins. And before that, they were the currencies by weight (rather than in coins). So even the money that we jangle in our pocket, ultimately, is God's.

Just like those other things that we talked about, the silver and the gold are things that come out of the earth. It's His! And, as I mentioned before, because we were bought by Christ—because we died and were raised to a new life with Him (in baptism)—we are His. And so He owns us—and even our silver and our gold. Let's go to I Corinthians 6, where Paul says this very plainly.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

He owns us—body, soul, and spirit. Even the spirit that He put in us is His. We don't really have any claim to the things that we think are ours, because He bought us.

Drop down to chapter 7. Paul, once again, drives this home to the Corinthians. In this case, he's talking about the difference between being a physical slave and being physically free.

For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. (I Corinthians 7:22a)

In this context, in Corinth, these people came into the church while they were still physical slaves of (let's say) the Romans in the city. So they were physically slaves. But when they joined the church—when God called them and they were baptized—God freed them. That's true—because they were "slaves of sin" and He made them "free" of that sin. Then, the second part of that verse:

Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. (I Corinthians 7:22b)

Isn't that ironic? Even if you were a free man and God called you, you then became a slave—not physically; but you became a slave of righteousness (a slave, a servant, a bondslave of Christ). Then, in verse 23, he repeats:

You were bought at a price... (I Corinthians 7:23a)

A very costly price! —The very blood of the Creator God, Jesus Christ. That was the highest price that could ever be paid for a slave. It was more than 20 or 30 shekels of silver. It was **the life, the blood, of the Creator God**. So costly a price that was, that He owns us now and forever. It buys us for all time. So it says:

...Do not become slaves of men. (I Corinthians 7:23b)

Don't go back to the way you were before. So what do we have here? We have this principle that "*we are not our own.*" ***We are purchased property of another.*** That's just another way of saying that we are a slave. Now, this slavery is a righteous slavery—a slavery that is kind, a slavery that works to bring us into "sonship" (just like Christ). It is all part of the way that God wants this to work to bring us into His Family. But we must be redeemed; and so we are not our own.

And, as we've seen recently in the sermons that my dad has been giving, we are in no way owners (not masters) but *stewards*. Stewards of ourselves (our bodies—as in the last couple sermons). But we are also stewards of everything that God has given us—both to use and to do. We are stewards of the tools that He gives us—the talents that He gives us. We are stewards of the opportunities that He places before us. We are stewards of the rest of our lives, which have been **devoted**—because He bought us at a price—to living the proper way, and growing, and coming into the image of God. So we are stewards of time. And, of course, we are also stewards of money—the money that

God has allowed us to have and to use.

To kind of wrap up this first point, is that a common misunderstanding of tithing begins with the false notion that what we give to God is "ours." It might seem a technical point, but it is not. That money is, and always has been, *God's*. We just return it for His use. He's very willing to allow us to use the 80 or 90% that is left over. All He asks for is a *tenth*.

Now, a second misunderstanding results from thinking of tithing as paying a bill—as an expense. An accountant would say, "*This 10% of your money has to be accounted for as an expense, because you pay it.*" But that gives us the wrong mental approach to things, because we are not paying a bill. It's not something that we give to God for a service, necessarily. We are not supposed to approach it in the same attitude that we do when writing a check to the Electric Company, or to the Telephone Company—or the Mortgage Company, which normally takes a huge chunk of our money every month.

If we look at it that way, all we are doing is giving it with grudging compliance (that it's got to be paid); and that's just carnal. This is the way a human being, without God's Spirit, approaches tithing. It's grudging. You can hear the wallet just moan and groan when we have to give that tenth. It's carnal; and, at the same time, it's disrespectful to God—Who is the giver of all things.

All He asks for is one-tenth back of all He gives. That's not very much. He says, "*Give Me back a tenth; and I'll use that for My business.*"

So we have to start thinking of this not as an expense, but as something else—something greater. If we think like an accountant, then it's going to be an expense. But if we think like a Christian, then it's going to be something more—something greater. And when we think of it from this angle, it is just so much better. Tithing is a wonderful thing. And the negative aspect of tithing disappears, when we begin to think of it as something more than an expense.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 6. I thought of this, this morning, when I was going over my notes—because I thought this point needed a little bit more backing. Look at it from the angle of ancient Israel. Remember that this was forty years after they had been redeemed (just like we have been redeemed) from Egypt; and they were about to go into the land. Moses is reiterating things to them. Here in chapter 6, we have the "**Shema**" (as it's called in Hebrew).

"Hear, O Israel: The LOORD our God, the LOORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4)

Meaning, He is the only God. The Jews repeat this quite a bit. And then he talks about us loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might. And then he tells us to teach our children these things. Now, let's go down to verse 20.

"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statute, and the judgments which the LOORD our God has commanded you?' (Deuteronomy 6:20)

TITHING is just one of these. It is an ordinance of God. It's a statute. And here is how the Israelite is supposed to explain to his child why he follows God's way. This is the answer.

Then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LOORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 and the LOORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. 23 Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in [meaning, into the land], to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. (Deuteronomy 6:21-23)

This is what I have been calling, so far in this sermon, **redemption**. The first thing you are supposed to tell your child, when he asks why you keep God's way, is what it says here in DEUTERONOMY. It's because God redeemed us and bought us completely. We keep God's law because we are totally His. He bought us, **And** because He's going to bring us into the Promised Land. Not only did He take us out of sin (of bondage), but also He's going to lead us into the Land of Promise (into the Kingdom). We tell "why" from the standpoint of our beginnings **and** of the end that God is leading us towards. Not where we came *from* alone, but also where God is leading us *to*. We obey God because He called us out of the world and is bringing us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

And the LOORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LOORD our God, **for our good always**, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. 25 Then it will be **righteousness for us**, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LOORD our God, as He has commanded us. (Deuteronomy 6:24-25)

Now in this answer does God say, *"Okay, Israelite. You're suppose to tell your son (or*

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*daughter) who asks you this that we keep this law because He commanded us"? Yes and no. The thought it there. But God brings up another whole set, or more, from "just because God said we should." He said because He redeemed us, because He's going to bring us into the Land of Promise, because it is righteousness for us. It is right doing. It is the way that will please God. And so that we will **live!** If you take this to the spiritual plane, looking at it from a spiritual Israelite, so that we might have **eternal life.***

There's a whole lot more to WHY WE TITHE than just because God says so. That's just the very beginning of understanding of WHY WE TITHE—because God commands it. We tithe for these other reasons that are mentioned here in Deuteronomy 6—because He's redeemed us, because we are going into the Kingdom, because we want eternal life, because it's righteousness.

And he might as well have added here "holiness." ***It's the way God functions!*** Remember that once or twice already I have said that He's the Giver of all things. **We tithe because God gives.** That's how He is.

Let's look at a few examples here. Go back to Genesis 14. You probably know that this is in the area of Abraham's life story. To set the stage here, this is after Abram and Lot had parted. Lot decided to go down into the area of Sodom and Gomorrah. Not very long after he had gotten down there, these kings of Mesopotamia (Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations) came up against the kings of the area around Sodom and Gomorrah. There was a battle. The Sodom and Gomorrah people lost; and these kings of Mesopotamia took all of the booty. They took a lot of the women and the children. And they took Lot and all of his wealth.

So, someone comes and tells Abram, "*Your nephew, Lot, is being carried off—back to Mesopotamia—as a slave. What are you going to do?*" He gets his confederates—all of his servants, his 318 men; and he goes tearing off after Lot (to rescue him). He catches him around Dan. He defeats these kings in a running battle, it seems, between Dan (which is in the north Israel) and north of Damascus. He takes this battle quite far. He rescues Lot and he comes home.

Not only does he rescue Lot, but he also brings back all the booty that has been taken—and all the women and children, who had been taken as slaves. He brought everything back. Then we come to chapter 14.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (Genesis 14:18a)

Let's think about this for a minute. Here is the priest of God, Melchizedek (whom we think just may have been Jesus Christ in the flesh; and it seems like that is the case—as explained in Hebrews 7). What did He bring with Him? Think about what Jesus Christ brought in His first coming. What did He bring to His people? At this time, and in this chapter, God's "people" was Abraham and Sarah. What did the high priest of God bring to His people? ?Bread and wine. Bread and wine are the symbols that we use in the Passover—the broken body and the blood of Christ. They are symbols of **redemption**. We see this *pattern* is being shown here again. The priest of God brings out bread and wine. It's a symbol of redemption. It's more than just a meal. There's something greater about this offering from the high priest. This is something that the priest offers to the people (Abraham).

The second part of that says:

He was the priest of God Most High. (Genesis 14:18b)

Now it's interesting that within just a few words of "bread and wine" the word **priest** pops up. This is what priests do.

And he [Melchizedek] blessed him [Abraham] and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed by God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he [Abraham] have him [Melchizedek] tithes of all. (Genesis 14:9-10)

This is a very interesting scenario. Let's look at it as closely as we can. Abraham does this wonderful thing, and brings back Lot and all of the wealth that had been taken. Melchizedek comes out to meet him, and He gives him bread and wine—a symbol of redemption. And then He blesses Abram; and it is very interesting the words that He uses. He said, "*Blessed be Abram...*" Is that where He stops? [No.] He says, "*Blessed be Abram of God Most High.*"

Now what does that little two-letter word mean? It ["of"] means **possessed by, belonging to, slave of**. "Blessed be Abraham who was bought with a price—by God." So we have the second aspect here. (1) He was redeemed, and (2) he became a slave.

What is the next thing that Melchizedek says? He says, "*God Most High, **possessor of***

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heaven and earth." What does He reiterate? —That **God owns everything!** You see why this is becoming important in the subject of TITHING.

Then what does He say next? "*Blessed be God Most High.*" It's very interesting that He uses that term—God Most High. It's the term of Sovereignty! There is no one higher than God is. He could have said, "the Lord Almighty" or "the Sovereign God." He's showing that, not only does God *own everything*, He *rules everything*.

And then He says, "*God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.*" Back to what Abraham did—did Abraham do it? Yes, but how did he do it? God Most High (Who rules everything, and owns everything) allowed him to do it, and delivered his enemies into his hands. So even the actions of Abraham were actually something that **God did** through him. So not only were *his body* and *all the things that he had* really not his—[but] *all of his actions* as well, God possesses also.

Do you see how encompassing this idea of God owning everything is? It's like, when we become His, He has a copyright to our thoughts, and our words, and our actions. Because they are done by someone who is possessed by (or, belongs to) God—even those things, ultimately, can be traced back to God. He **owns everything**. He **rules everything**.

And so, what does Abram do? Being reminded of this: That there was the bread and the wine, that here was God's priest, that Abraham was possessed by God in total, that God possesses everything, that God is the Sovereign, and that even this great "work" that he had done was through God. Abraham said, "*Here, God, is a tenth.*" The tithe that he gave to Melchizedek (God's high priest, representative on earth) was **a response** to what God was (or, is) and does.

Do you see, in these verses, any command from God to give a tithe? The first instance where tithing is mentioned in the Bible, and there is **no command**. All it is, is **a response** from a godly man—because of what God is and does. God didn't have to say, "*Abraham, give me a tenth of everything you have.*" He didn't have to. Abraham had the mind of God! And he said, "*Look Who this wonderful Being is—Who owns me, Who owns everything, Who rules everything, Who gave me the victory. I'd better give this wonderful Person a tenth of everything that I have.*"

It was a reaction—a response—to God being God! He didn't do it to fulfill a command. And this is very interesting, because Abraham is what to us? He's the father of our faith. Of all men (excepting Jesus Christ), he is the one we are told to follow.

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Abraham's action here is the ultimate response of a godly man to God—in terms of money, in terms of what we consider to be "ours." He had *the mind of Christ*. That's why he is our example.

So what we have here is Abraham showing a proper response to God—for what He is, for what He does. It is **appropriate** that we, slaves, give our Master a tenth. That is what He is—He's our Master. So we saw *the pattern* here (the connection) between the redemption, and then God's favor and blessing, and coming to realize what God is and what He's done; and then our godly response is to give Him something in return. And God has shown, throughout His Word, that He fixes it at A TENTH. Abraham was not compelled. He was not directly commanded to give a tithe. He just gave it in recognition of what God is and does.

This may seem to you like a splitting of hairs, but it really shows a difference in attitude. In a way, you might say that it's the difference between the words *paying* and *giving*. We frequently just used the word "paying" in terms of tithes. And that's not wrong, because we are paying tithes. But *paying* has, you might say, a negative connotation—whereas *giving* has a connotation of being free will, and beneficent, out of the goodness of your heart because you are trying to do right (not just because you are completing an obligation).

Let's go to the next place where TITHING is mentioned, Genesis 28. This is the example of Jacob. This is just at the beginning of where God is working with Jacob. This is almost immediately after he had taken the birthright and the blessing from Esau. And he had to get out of town, because Esau was after him. Isaac did not want Jacob to marry a daughter of the land. He wanted him to go back to his near kinfolk, back in Haran. And so Jacob was off to Haran, from where they lived.

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba [They were living in the southern part of the land of Israel.] and went toward Haran [up to the north, and slightly to the east]. 11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. (Genesis 28:10-11)

He must be of a better constitution than I am. My neck would be awfully sore after having a stone for a pillow.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and

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descending on it. 13 And behold, the LOORD stood above it and said: "I am the LOORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 28:12-14)

Mr. Armstrong explained frequently that this was the "race" and "grace" type of promise—where not only his physical descendants would be blessed, but with that (in that blessing) came the spiritual blessing of Jesus Christ—and grace.

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go [will guard him, protect him, and help him], and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." (Genesis 28:15)

This is the familiar theme of God calling someone. It implies redemption—of God buying him, of God promising something in a covenant way. What He was doing was offering to Jacob the ability, or the invitation, to make a covenant with God. So instead of symbols of redemption in this case, it's the symbol of making a covenant. After God said this to him, it says:

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LOORD shall be my God. (Genesis 28:20-21)

What he is saying here is, *"I accept the terms of the covenant. I will enter into this covenant that God has offered me."*

And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house [Bethel], and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth [a tithe] to You." (Genesis 28:22)

Abraham and Jacob were a lot alike. Jacob was a rascal—not that Abraham was. Abraham was much purer. But as God began to work with Jacob, he understood this principle: that when you enter into a covenant with your Master, your response is to give

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back to Him a tenth. We are hitting this from two different angles. From the standpoint of being redeemed and bought—and therefore our obligation then is to give a tenth. And now, with Jacob, we see that the same thing occurs when we enter the covenant—as a vassal to a leagued lord, you might say.

It is the custom to present the king with a gift, when you come before him. God has set this "gift" at the minimum of *a tenth*. That is our righteous responses to Him being our Leagued Lord, our Master—the One with Whom we've entered the covenant. IF God fulfills His part of the bargain (that He will give us food and clothing; and He'll protect us when we go out and when we come in; and He will bring us back to our parents—as in this case), THEN we, in response, will call Him our God. We will worship Him. (Remember the sermonette, that we already heard today.)

And we, as part of that worship, will give *a tenth*. It's what's expected! He's our King. And so we must respond as to a king. When we come before Him (the Sovereign of all the universe), our hand should never be empty. In Hebrews 13, Paul says that we offer to Him our prayers and supplications, our thanks, our praise—as part of that offering when we appear before Him. But when it comes to our money, He says **a tenth**.

Now, I want to just add right here that both of these examples that we've just seen (Abraham and Jacob) occur before the Old Covenant. They happen before Sinai. In both cases, there is not a command at all to give a tenth. It is *what was expected*. Everybody knows that when you come before the King, you bring **a tithe**. So what we see here is that TITHING transcends the laws in the Covenant. Do you understand what I mean? It's a part of it, but it's also outside of it—because everybody should know that one should tithe to the King. One should give to the King. It's like giving tribute (using a feudal term). He's our King. He's our Overlord. We owe it to Him—just because of **the relationship!**

But then when we get to EXODUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY, and other places throughout the Scriptures—it's codified. It's put into law. Now, why did God say that He gave them the law? On their own, they wouldn't do it. Because of the hardness of their hearts, He had to put everything in a written form for them—for Israel. But as Christians, we have this law written on our hearts. We should know that the proper response to God (from a money standpoint) is to give Him back, in return, **a tenth**. It's the least that we should do.

Earlier, I told you to remember that one of the themes of this sermon is **from the letter to the spirit**. I want to go into that now—because we've begun to introduce the idea that, yes, this was written into law. (In EXODUS, NUMBERS, LEVITICUS, DEUTERONOMY,

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etc.) Yes, it was written into *the letter* of the law, but tithing transcends the letter of the law; and it is much more important in *the spirit* than in the letter. It goes beyond that.

Let's go to Matthew 5. Who was it that brought to us the understanding of the spirit of the law? Well, it was Jesus Christ—of course. Before that, there were just **a few** in the whole Old Testament that "got it." David was one of those. He had the law to look back upon. But as you can see from his psalms, and the way that he acted later in life as he began to understand these things (I'm thinking primarily of when he made that offering on the threshing floor of Araunah), that he understood this principle. Remember that he says there that you never come before the king without a gift. You never give the king something that was not yours to give. David understood *the spirit* of this principle here—*the spirit of the law*. And it took Jesus to come and to open it up to us.

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17)

How very plain that is! *"I did not come to destroy. I came to fulfill."*

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:18-19)

Now, I do not see how in the world any Christian could think that Christ came to do away with the law. It is just **so plain!** *"I didn't come to destroy it. I came to fulfill it. Not one jot or one tittle is going to pass away. Whoever doesn't do this, and teaches men not to do it, will be thrown in the lake of fire (basically). Whoever does it, and teaches men to do it, he's going to be great in the Kingdom."* How can anyone say that Christ came here to do away with the law? It's just asinine and mind-boggling to think that the One who is prophesied in Isaiah 42:21—that He would *"magnify the law and make it honorable"* ?would do away with it. How do people not get that? Well, because God hasn't given them the understanding. But it's so plain.

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness **exceeds** the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

Now we are getting somewhere. What are the scribes and the Pharisees known for? Their keeping of *the letter of the law* to the jot and to the tittle. They were known for being meticulous, down to the one seed of cumin, mint, and anise. (These aren't huge things.) They would make sure that they got "the tenth" exactly, at the smallest degree. And Jesus says that unless you **exceed that**—looking at the law, and keeping the law, in its rigid letter—unless you go beyond that, you won't be in the Kingdom. By no means! If you keep the law strictly in its letter (What does Paul say?) it kills. It does not give life.

Jesus is showing us something here that is so much more important. He said, *"I gave to you the law; and it is good. But I've come now to fill it to the full. And unless you keep it in that full sense, you will by no means enter into the Kingdom of heaven."* That's the distillation of all this. He says, *"You've got to understand the spirit of the law."* The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.

Let's try to understand this with a simple illustration. Let's say you have a kindly grandmother. And she brings to you a jar, in which she has placed candy. But you look at it, and this kindly grandmother has only given you one inch of candy at the bottom of this jar. This jar may be like a pickle jar (or, something like that)—5, 6, or 7 inches tall; but there's only one inch of candy at the bottom. You take one, and the candy is fine; but you wonder **why** she only gave you one inch. And your face shows it. It's kind of quizzical. *"Why only one inch?"* And she says, *"When I return, I'm going to fill the jar up with candy."* And so, when she comes the next time, it's filled to the brim.

Okay, let's substitute the spiritual principles for these symbols. The grandmother is Christ, who gave us the jar. The jar is the law; and the candy is what this law is comprised of. When Christ gave them the law, He gave them one inch. And He said, *"Make do with this, until I come. And when I come the next time, I will fill it to the brim—to the full."*

Maybe a better way of looking at the candy is **our understanding**. *The letter of the law* is the bare base of understanding of God's way of life. The rest of it—what Christ brought—was the full understanding of God's way of life, *the spirit of the law*. I think it's a simple illustration, but that's what He means. *"I did not come to destroy."* He didn't come to take away your candy. He came to fill it all the way up to the top—to give you a broader understanding of His way of life.

And so He came, and He gave us an example. He died (the bread and the wine). He returned back to His Father in heaven, and there He became our High Priest. He is our

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Judge. He is the Dispenser of the Holy Spirit—without which we can't understand *the spirit of the law*. And so He tells His disciples, "*It's better that I go away, so that the Spirit can come to you and open your mind to all these things. And when the Spirit comes, it will do this...this...this...this...this; and you will have a fuller understanding of the way to live.*"

That's what He did. He gave us the knowledge, and the understanding, and **the means** to fulfill the law completely—not just *in the letter*, but *in the spirit*. That's what He means when He says that your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Otherwise, you won't enter the Kingdom. The Kingdom is for those whose jars are **full** (going back to the illustration).

Now, TITHING is no different. It's a law—an ordinance of God—given in several places throughout the Old Testament. Christ and Paul both confirm it (Matthew 23:23 and Hebrews 7).

Simply paying it "paycheck after paycheck"—that is, **by rote**, as a mere obligation to perform—is doing it *in the letter*. We are just following the law. But giving it joyfully, in faithful response to God for what He is and what He does—that is, learning to give out of our God-given bounty (as He gives to us)—that is tithing *in the spirit*. A lot has to do with our **attitude!** As a matter of fact, the spirit of the law seems to revolve almost entirely around our attitude. It's the letter, plus—if you want a simple way to put it. It includes *the letter*. *The letter [of the law]* is not done away with; but it is *the letter plus our attitude (our approach)*.

Back in Amos 4, let's just see an illustration of **GIVING** *in the letter*. AMOS is a book in the Old Testament that has very significant New Testament themes. These people in Israel, that Amos is coming to and telling them God's word, are a people who know what God expects of them. They are not ignorant. They've been given the law; and they've been living in the land for many years—hundreds of years. They knew what the priests taught. They knew, generally, what God's law demanded of them; but they weren't doing it. And Amos is showing that the plagues, the lack of rainfall, and the wars that were coming (everything that seemed to be descending upon the land) was because of the way that they were living. God was bringing these things upon them **to change them**—to make them see how to live, and to please God (how to worship Him properly). These people in Israel were a very religious people. Like I said, they knew what God expected of them; and so they did what they thought would be pleasing to God. Now, let's see what Amos 4:4 says.

Come to Bethel... (Amos 4:4a)

Do you remember? This is the place where Jacob set up the pillar stone. He said, *"Okay, God. I am going to keep my end of the bargain. I'll enter this covenant with you, and I will pay you a tenth."* Bethel is very significant. There was a feast site there, you might say. And so people would come to Bethel, and to Gilgal—which we'll see in just a minute, and which is also devoted to taking the covenant. Again, when they came into the land, they stopped at Gilgal; and they reaffirmed the covenant with God. So both of these things have to do with Jacob saying, *"I will keep the covenant with God;"* and the whole nation at Gilgal, under Joshua, also reaffirming the covenant with God. Listen to what they do:

Come to Bethel [this place of the covenant] and [**sin!**] transgress, at Gilgal **multiply transgression**; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days ["years" probably would be a better translation, than "days"]. (Amos 4:4)

Interesting! He says, *"You are coming to Bethel. And you are coming to Gilgal. And you are doing all of these things by rote. And **you are sinning!**"* The letter kills. There's something about the way they are giving their tithes (making their offerings, doing their sacrifices) that is not pleasing to God—even though they are doing what He told them. Something was wrong here; and it was the way that they were doing it—the "mind" that they were doing it in.

"Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with [**sin!**] leaven... (Amos 4:5a)

God says, *"There should be no leavening with My offerings, My sacrifices. My sacrifices and offerings should be unleavened, pure, holy, unblemished."* And so God says, *"You might as well go ahead and offer them with sin. That's all you are doing anyway. You might as well offer them with leavened bread—instead of unleavened bread—because I'm not going to notice them at all. You might as well do them wrong, because I have no respect for your offerings."*

Proclaim and announce the freewill offerings... (Amos 4:5b)

That gives you an idea of what they were doing. They were saying, *"Hey, all of Israel. Come watch me. I'm going to give an offering. What a good person I am. I'm doing everything that God told me. Pat me on the back. I'm a good guy. I give freewill offerings"*

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and peace offerings. Aren't I wonderful?" And God says, "You are sinning, and you are multiplying sins—even though you are doing what I said."

For this you love, you children of Israel!" says the Lord Good. (Amos 4:5c)

*"You just **love** that ole time religion! You just **love** being seen in the city streets—giving alms and praying, and being very fastidious in avoiding those who are 'impure'—being seen as the good guy." But God says, "All of this is **sin**." The letter kills, but the spirit gives life. "There is something more that you're missing, and it's your attitude—the reason that you are doing this. You are not doing these tithes, or offerings, to worship Me. You are doing it to be seen, and heard, and known as 'Joe, the good guy, Christian' (Isn't he wonderful!)."*

Do you think God needs your money? ("Your" money—I use that under advisement.) Do you think God needs it? Do you think [He's saying], *"Oh, let Me see. I've got 6 or 7,000 people in Israel. I think it's 7,000 and they each give Me—oh, let's see—about \$2,500 a year. Let's see, that gives Me...Okay...I'm going to have to call some more people because I don't have enough money to do My work."* And so He goes and He sends His prophets (His ministry) out into the streets; and He says, *"Okay, prophets (ministry). I want you to get...I need about 500 people. That ought to do it for the time being."* So God calls, then, 500 people. Is that how He does it?

Not on your life! He doesn't need our money. He doesn't call us for our money. He doesn't necessarily call us to support His work. That's **way down** on the bottom of the list of His priorities for calling us. What did John the Baptist say? He said, *"Look, you stupid unrighteous (self-righteous) Pharisees. Flee from the wrath to come—because, if God wanted to, He could pick up this stone and make it a child to Abraham."*

Get the point. He's not calling us for what we can do for Him. He doesn't need our money. He wants us to use our money and be a steward of our money for the right reasons. And part of those right reasons is to learn to **give** as He gives—and to learn to honor, and respect, and worship Him for what He is and what He does.

Do you remember the miracle that happened in Jesus' life, when the people came up to Him and said, *"You and your disciples haven't paid the temple tax."* Did Jesus seem concerned about that? *"Oh no, we need to do it because God's work is going to **stop** right now—because we haven't paid our temple tax."* No! He said, *"Peter, throw out a hook."* Peter throws out a hook, pulls in a fish, and there's a coin—just the right amount of money (right there in the fish's mouth) to pay both His and Peter's part of the temple

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tax, a whole shekel. God could put coins in millions of fish; and all we'd have to do is go down to the local lake, throw in a line, and get money to do the work—if that was the way God needed to do it.

We don't need your tithes to do the work, necessarily. That (like I said) is very low in the priorities of what we TITHE. God wants us to give them for a much greater reason—because **He wants us to learn to be like Him**. He gives! He gives to those who must do His work. Do you understand? He doesn't need the money; but He wants us to learn to support what He is doing. Like I said, we don't want your tithes just as a grudging obligation. We don't need your tithes to do the work. That's not necessarily a great reason for TITHING. The great reason is that you tithe ***because you want to be just like Him***.

Yes, there is a command to tithe, but that is that one inch of candy at the bottom of the jar. What fills the rest of the jar up is giving the tithe for the right reason—to worship God, to become like Him.

Let's close in Hebrews 13, which I think is a fitting idea to close this sermon off on. I will go into another sermon on this, because I didn't do but about two-thirds of my notes.

Now may the God of peace [Listen to what he says.] who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead... (Hebrews 13:20a)

That's our hope. After He died for our redemption, He was raised by the Father **for our hope**.

That great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant [redemption—our covenant relationship with God], 21 [May the God of peace] make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20b-21)

Just to put a capstone on this sermon: It's not just "compliance" that God wants when we tithe—but **GIVING as He gives**.