

The Economy of the Tithe Why God Blesses the Tithe

I want you to get your eyes on God's plan not your own plan because things are not always stable in our country economically. The stock market goes down; the stock market comes back up. For those of you whose trust is in your IRA and in your 401K, get your trust back in the Lord.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Riches aren't wrong, but where is your *trust*? God does give us richly all things to enjoy, but keep your trust in Him, not in uncertain riches. There is a better way to live than by putting your faith and trust in uncertain riches. We've come through a multitude of years where riches were escalating faster than we could almost imagine. Keep in mind the wealth of this world is based on the economy of this world, which can fluctuate. Paul is telling us whether the times are good or bad, put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The way we enter into God's economic plan is simply through the tithe. God desires to use seed. This is how He blesses us. Of course, God could go outside of that plan, and has many times in the Word of God. He rained down manna from heaven, and He sent quail, but that was not His best nor His desire. His desire was for them to enter the Promised Land and work with seedtime and harvest. That is why when the children of Israel came into the Promised Land of Canaan, after forty years in the wilderness, the first thing that happened was that the manna ceased and they begin to live off of the fruit of the land. That is seedtime and harvest. That was God's best. Instead of working *for* the children of Israel, God's plan was to work *with* the children of Israel. Instead of God doing all the work *for* you, He desires to work *with* you. The entry level of this plan is to give tithes to the Lord.

You may be asking why we should teach on money at all. Jesus talked a lot about money. However, tithing is not one of the major areas of the Word of God. Some people make it the major area and teach on money all the time, but Jesus warned against this.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, but not to leave the other undone.

Matthew 23:23

Notice he is saying that teaching on tithing is important, but it shouldn't dominate our teaching because there are more important issues in the Word of God such as judgment, God's mercy and grace, and faith. In the next verse he says that all they teach on is the gnats and they ignore the camels. He's saying they should actually teach on both, but one is weightier than the other.

These men were teaching on tithing all the time and it was getting worse and worse. The people were paying tithe of mint and anise and cumin — their spices. What if I said, "Next week bring ten percent of your cinnamon to the church for your tithe."? You would think we've gone just a little bit too far. What if I said, "Bring ten percent of your salt and sugar."? But this is what happens when you continually teach on one thing. Soon, you start getting more nit-picky over things that really don't matter to the daily Christian life. Jesus said it's time to shift over to these other matters. Yes, you should teach on tithes, but do not leave the others undone. Tithing is a foundational area that causes our life to be so blessed, so I teach on tithing at least once a year. But the rest of the year we teach on faith, on the judgment of God against sin, on the love of God, the mercy of God, and the grace of God.

A foundational text regarding tithing is found in Malachi 3, but I want to take a new look at it. I believe that another reason why Jesus chewed out the scribes and Pharisees is because they taught on tithing because they were money hungry. They wanted more money in the coffers. As a pastor, I want you to tithe; I want you to be obedient to

God. But ultimately, God prospers this church. You are used as an instrument of God, but God is the One from which prosperity comes.

The Bible doesn't say every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from the congregational member. It says every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from God. When God gives to you, He gives through the hands of men. When we give back to God, we give through the hands of men. But ultimately it comes from God and it goes back to God even though we give through people. People are an agent through whom the finances come from God or come from people back into the kingdom of God. In both cases God receives the glory.

The scribes and Pharisees were simply looking to the people as their source. They thought of every trick they could to get money out of them. We live in an age today where there are many tricks to get money out of people in the body of Christ? We must come back to the fact that our giving has to be because we love the Lord, and we have to give because we love the work of God and we want to see people blessed.

Part of the reason Jesus went to the cross was to bring finances to us, but the main reason Jesus went to the cross was for people. He went to relieve people of their sin, of their sickness, and also to bring finances into their life. This is all part of the work of the cross. John 3:16 doesn't say, "For God so loved *money* that He sent His only begotten Son." It says, "For God so loved the *world*." He loved the people in the world so much that He gave Jesus Christ. That must be our motive also. The love of God needs to be shed abroad in our heart towards people, which is why we give into the kingdom of God.

There were two cases in the Word of God where the people of Israel had departed from the truth of God's Word. They had turned their back on God and gone their own way. Both times, they came back to the Lord because they were admonished by the king that they needed to start with the tithe.

One of those times was when they came back from Babylonian captivity and built the foundation of the temple. That foundation represented the foundation of their life, and before the temple could go up they had to have their foundations right. This is where they were admonished to bring the tithe. At the closing of the Old Testament this happened again in Malachi.

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return to you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:7-11

Here's how you begin to return to the Lord — by the simple act of tithing unto the Lord. Jesus said this is not one of the major doctrines of the Word of God. It is important, but it's not as major as love, grace, mercy, judgment, or faith. But here it's brought out so simply as to how we return back to the Lord.

Husbands, how many times has your wife accused you of not paying enough attention to her? To make up, we often want to go out and do some major thing, and she says, "It's not that difficult." Oftentimes you want to over compensate when that's not what she's wanting at all. Sometimes we think that if we've been away from God, somehow we need to commit ourselves to live in Africa for the rest of our lives and God says, "No, no, no. It's not that difficult. Start by giving Me your tithes. Give Me something to work with in your life. If you'll return to Me, I'll return to you, but the way you start is by simply giving of your finances to Me. I can have something to work with and I can begin to bless your natural life."

Natural curses usually begin with spiritual things, and natural blessings usually begin with spiritual things. Your heart attitude toward the Lord can determine your poverty or your prosperity. Your heart attitude is the key. He's saying in Malachi, "If you want to show Me your heart is back toward Me, start with something simple. Bring to Me the tithes."

The next statement bothered me for years because this has been shoved at us so many times. *You're robbing God.*

I used to think, "How in the world can we rob God?" First of all, I don't own anything. God owns it. How can I rob God who owns the money in my pocket? Next of all, I talk about my car, my house, my clothes. No, God owns all this. The Bible says He owns the earth, the cattle on a thousand hills, and all the gold and silver. How in the world can I rob God?

This verse isn't talking about the fact that we rob the money out of God's pocket. That's impossible because He already owns it. We're only stewards over His finances. We were born without anything; we will die without anything. We only use the finances here in this earth, and once we leave this earth our house and all our belongings go to someone else. Next of all, they don't own it. It's just passed down to them and it goes from generation to generation. The only thing we take with us is the things we've done for the kingdom of God.

Therefore, how do we rob God?

The first way is *we rob God of the ability to bless us*. His heart wants to bless us, but that's why He said, "I can't do anything until you start. I could circumvent my Word. I could go around it and do some supernatural miracle in your life, but I don't choose to do it that way. I want simple obedience." The tithe is simple obedience.

Why ten percent? I don't know. The Bible doesn't say why ten percent, but the people who gripe about ten percent would gripe if it was five percent, and the people who rejoice over the ten percent would rejoice if it was twenty percent. It's just a figure God chose and it's a figure to test our obedience, because He blesses obedience. If you are willing and obedient, He says you'll eat the fruit of the land. He says no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly before Him. It's a simple act of obedience when we do what God asks us to, and He says, "See if I just won't open up the windows of heaven and bless you. But if you won't obey, you rob Me of the ability to bless you. That's what you're taking away from Me."

Isn't it a pleasure to bless your children? Do you like it when they back off and won't let you bless them? That's robbing you of something. God is simply saying, "Don't rob me of the ability of blessing you."

My wife and I love to bless our grandkids, and they love being blessed. They don't run away from it. But we all know what it's like to try to bless a prideful person that won't let you bless them, a person who says, "I can do it myself." That's why he warned us in First Timothy 6, don't be arrogant. Realize that the blessings of life belong to God and don't put your trust in them, trust in God. If you'll trust in God and give Him some seed to work with, you open up this channel. He can begin to bless you and pour out more of a blessing than you can contain. And it all starts with simple obedience.

We had Oral Roberts speak in our church several years ago and he taught on the same subject, and this is what he brought out. He said this bothered him all his life because people used to hang this over his head: *You're robbing God. You're robbing God*. Does that mean that somehow I have power over God? I have the ability to rob Him? I can pull a gun (called tithing to Him) and say, "I'm not going to give." Thus, we rob God!

Folks, we do not take the money out of God's pocket. No, we rob Him of the greatest blessing He has. It's more blessed to give than it is to receive. God desires to give and to bless our lives. Tithing will open up the windows of heaven for us. It is an act of obedience out of love. We are not trying to buy God off. Tithes do not box God into a corner and force Him to bless us. He blesses us because of the attitude of our heart. That is why he tells us to return to God. Returning to God starts in our heart and an action follows — an entry level action of giving seed to God and saying, "Here God, You work with it. I tried. I failed. I can't work with this seed. I can't make it grow, but Lord, I'm going to give it to You and let You begin to bless me."

Despite the economy, despite Wall Street, despite First National Bank, despite the world economy, He can bless us because He blesses us not from the world. He blesses us according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Oh, Hallelujah!

There's a second way that we rob God.

Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

1 Corinthians 9:13

Paul is admonishing the Corinthians on why finances are given into a church. In this verse we have the priests and the Levites, two ranks in the Scriptures that God used to minister to the things of God. They all came from the priestly tribe. The priests operated within the holy place and the Holy of Holies, but the Levites were the ones who

ministered around the altar. They're the ones who took the sacrifices. They're the ones who cut them up. They're the ones who did all the work and then gave it to the priests who did all the spiritual things before God. These two groups offered up the sacrifice to God, but they operated off the gifts that were brought to them.

I'm so glad we're not under the Law any more. I'm so glad you don't have to bring a heifer to church. I'm so glad you don't have to bring a sheep to church. I'm so glad you don't even have to bring a turtledove to church. Not only is it bad for you, I'd have to kill the thing up here, and I don't want to get into that. I'm glad Jesus fulfilled all of that for us.

In this verse of Scripture, Paul is saying that in that day they lived off of that. What happened to the heifer or the sheep after it was brought in, sliced open, and offered to God? It fed the ministers. When the people brought grain, the priests and Levites took the grain and it became their grain. In other words, they lived off the sacrifices and offerings the people brought in. Everything from grain to the salt to the meals to the animals were all used by the priests and Levites.

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:14

Now he brings it to the New Testament. This verse is saying one thing has not changed. We don't bring heifers any more; Jesus fulfilled that part of the Law. But one thing that has not changed is that in the New Testament ministers still live off of what the people bring into the church. So how does your pastor make a living? I know many pastors who have a side job because the church isn't large enough to support them. But every minister I know who is in that position is praying for the day their church gets large enough to sustain them so they can offer themselves full time into that church and into the people's lives.

I'm so glad I don't have to have a secular job on the side to help with my income. We thank you as a church administration for the church body who is so excellent to give faithfully week after week. But you have to understand something; *if you don't give, you rob me*. Did you catch that? If you don't give, you rob me, and to rob me is to rob God. Why? Because to touch one of these, the least of his brethren, is to touch Him. We all know God has never been in jail, but Jesus said, "I was in jail and you didn't visit Me." When was Jesus ever in jail? How could God be in jail? He says, when it's one of these the least of my brethren, you've done it unto Me. Jesus has never starved yet, but He said, "If you feed one of these, you've fed Me." (See *Matthew 25:35-40*.)

When you rob God, you rob the ministry. You rob those who spread the Gospel. You rob those who minister to other people. By robbing the ministers you're robbing Him. Remember what He said to Abraham, "I'll bless those that bless you." (See *Genesis 12:3*.) In blessing Abraham you're blessing God because Abraham was a believer in God. He was called to be a minister of God. Abraham saw the same thing when he gave to Melchizedek. When he gave to Melchizedek he was actually giving to God.

The New Testament tells us that men that die here received tithes but He receiveth them of whom it witnessed that he ever lived. But Jesus doesn't get the money out of our pocket. He wouldn't have any use for it in heaven; men on this earth use it. If you give it to men who represent the Gospel, in essence you're giving to the Lord. If you take it from men on this earth, you're robbing them and in essence you're robbing God.

Of course, we can't get into God's pockets. He owns everything, but he says how you treat My people is how you treat Me. When you give the tithe God blesses you. But you don't give the tithe to God, you give it to people who represent God, and in so doing God blesses the ministry. When you bless the ministry, you bless God because he said in this earth if you'll give a prophet even a cup of cold water, you receive a prophet's reward because you're giving to God. You're investing with God Himself.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

We should come to church prepared with our tithe to give. When your prosperity comes during the week, lay the tithe aside and bring it to church on the first day of the week. Paul instructs them to do this so when he comes to

them, he won't have to take any extra offerings. How often do we come to church and say, "I forgot the checkbook!"? This verse is saying it should be part of our thinking during the week that whenever prosperity comes into our life that right off the top we give and set it aside so when we come to church we can give it to the Lord.

This verse says, *as God has prospered us*. How many of you would vouch for it God has prospered and blessed your life financially? The time to think about it is not when you get to church. The time to think about it is the moment it comes in.

I've talked to many people and they tell me, "Well, pastor, I got a great amount of blessings in this week. My business was blessed and I've personally been blessed."

And I'll say, "Great! You can give some to the church."

They'll say, "Well, you know, I've already put it into this account and it's not liquid."

Folks, whenever you got it, it was liquid. Why do you think the Lord calls it *first fruit* — right off the top?

When did Melchizedek meet Abraham? Before he had a chance to put it into his 401K. (See *Genesis 15:18-24*.) Abraham was coming along down the road and along came Melchizedek and said, "Blessed be the Most High God, Abraham! God, who possesses heaven and earth and all that is in, who has blessed you." And of course, while Abraham is pulling all these wagons behind him filled with gold and all these other things, he's thinking, "Now I can pay that bill and this bill."

It's the same thing you're thinking of when you get your paycheck or when extra money comes in. You open up the mailbox one day and there's a check in there. "Look at there, three hundred dollars from the government, six hundred dollars from the IRS. Look at that! Boy, now I can pay off all these bills."

The words come into your mind. Melchizedek crosses your path. "Blessed be the Most High God who has brought your enemies into your hands." Oh, yeah. "And who has given you this great treasure?" Oh, yeah, God gave me this treasure. He's saying while it's in your hand, while it's still liquid, while it's still on the carts, while it's still heaped up around you, take it right off the top and give it to the ministry. Then go invest the rest, but give God something to work with, not just the bank. Give God something to work with, not just your 401K. Give God something to work with because God isn't tied to this world's economy

*Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all of your increase;
So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*

Proverbs 3:9-10

As prosperity comes in, set aside some for the Lord. Whatever day prosperity starts coming in, start setting that aside. God wants to bless you even when the world's economy isn't doing so well, even when the world's presses are not breaking through, even when the world's economy is not filled with plenty. God wants to fill you with plenty and your presses burst out with new wine because you give unto the Lord and honor Him with the first fruits of all of your increase. God is looking for a heart of giving toward Him, and in so doing you let God bless you. You don't rob Him of the ability to bless you.

Next of all, you give to the ministries that are the apple of His eye so that His prosperity can come to the ministry as well as come back to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.
Hallelujah!

His Word is for us. We hide it in our heart that we might not sin against Him. We hide it in our heart that we'll be blessed by it and we can grow by it. Perhaps you need to return to God and are wondering how to do that. Maybe you have tried to think of big self-sacrifices of returning to God, when He has made it so simple. Start with the tithe. Turn loose of some of that so He can begin to bless it. Give God ten percent so He can take the seed and bless you back many times over. Watch what God can do with ten percent. Your barns will be filled with plenty and your presses will burst out with new wine.

Prosperity is not just in your finances. In the Old Testament, Joseph was sold into slavery and immediately ended up in Potiphar's house. Potiphar bought him as a slave but the favor of the Lord surrounded Joseph. Folks, favor is

there if you have no money. He had no money. Favor is there if you have no clothes. Joseph was naked when they put him on that stand and sold him as a slave. He had no earthly possessions, but the Bible says he was rich and wealthy. The Bible wasn't talking about his finances. His prosperity was not in finances; his prosperity was in the blessing of God. When you're surrounded by the blessing of God finances will come your way.

Joseph was sold into slavery, put into Potiphar's house and Potiphar began to prosper. Potiphar looked around and said, "You know what? This is all because of the Hebrew that's part of my family that I brought in here." So Potiphar began to turn more and more over to Joseph to run the house. Potiphar's wife wanted to have sex with him so she chased him. He would not give into her and one day ran out of the room so fast that he left his coat there and she used it as evidence against him. Potiphar threw him into prison. What happened to him when he was thrown into prison? The prison began to prosper. Everywhere this guy went, prosperity followed. Later on when he was taken out of prison he rose up to the second position in the entire nation of Egypt and now Egypt was blessed for him being there.

Whether he was down in the dungeon or up on the throne, he was a blessing. He was surrounded by the favor of God.

Women have said to me, "My husband's unsaved. Please pray for me that my children will follow after the Lord and not after my husband. He comes home cursing at night after he's been drinking. Oh, Pastor, pray for me."

I tell them, "I don't need to pray for you. There's a verse of Scripture that already says you can sanctify him. He will not affect you." The Bible says in First Corinthians 7:14 that the unbelieving mate can be sanctified by the believing mate and whether that's the man or the woman you can affect the one you live with and you can turn that household around and cause a great blessing to come into that house.

The same thing is true on the job. Instead of the boss affecting you, you can affect the boss. Instead of the employees affecting you, you can affect the employees, and you can cause that place to prosper because you are there.

The Bible says God looked for one man among them that would stand in the gap and make up the hedge, and He would bless the nation. The sad thing was He could find no one, but if one person can pray and change a nation why can't one person pray and change a corporation? Perhaps there are no Christians in the company you work for. Instead of griping that there are no Christians, stand up and be the light. Stand up and be the salt and affect your area. If there are no Christians, make them! You still have the ability, supernaturally, to turn goats into sheep by presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Stand up for the Lord Jesus Christ and become someone who changes the area you are in.

Instead of being jealous and bitter toward those who seem to be prospering around you, realize your prosperity comes from God. Be a spiritual influence to those around you. Pray for His anointing to be upon you — that's what favor is. It's the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The anointing can break the yoke of bondage. It can bring prosperity and liberty. Let God's blessing be upon you and on your employer for His sake. Let God's favor be upon you as it was on Joseph. Walk in faith and in love toward your boss and other employees. Let your boss and others around you see Jesus Christ in you.

If you are a business owner or manager, I know you have laid your life and your finances on the line. Maybe you have even mortgaged your own home to pay for business, or you have taken out loans. Remember to keep your trust in God and not in the world. Keep your heart towards God in prayer. Seek the leadership of the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit so your ground can become prosperous. Give into the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You need God in your business as a friend and a partner, not as an enemy. As your barns fill, look for places to sow seed and to be a blessing to others. Be a good steward over your wealth. Ask for His wisdom to use your finances. It's okay to read the Wall Street Journal, but look to His Word above everything else. Watch the news programs and see what the stock market did, but know that the stock market is not your indicator. His Word is your indicator. In every aspect of your finances, whether personal or business, keep your trust in God.

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