

Tithes and Offerings – What’s the Difference?
Pastor Joe Oakley
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Journey to Financial Freedom. Our biblical definition of financial freedom comes from 2 Corinthians 9:8 in the Amplified version:

God is able to make all grace (every favor and earthly blessing) come to you in abundance, so that you may always and under all circumstances and whatever the need be self-sufficient (possessing enough to require no aid or support and be furnished in abundance for every good work and charitable donation).

Financial freedom means all your needs are met – you require no financial aid or help from anyone else – and you have such abundance that you able to give to every good work.

We learned that there are many mile markers on the road to financial freedom, but the starting place is God’s Word. We’ve talked about the first three mile markers on the road to financial freedom.

The first mile marker is that we must take the slow road to financial freedom. The point is that financial freedom is a journey that takes work and self-discipline over time. But if you stay on the journey, you can be financially free!

Mile marker 2 is recognizing that God owns everything. To become financially free we must realize God owns everything and we are stewards who manage God’s resources. God will hold us accountable for how we manage His resources.

The third mile marker on the road to financial freedom is: Give to God First. I didn’t have time to deal with this thoroughly in one sermon, so today is part two which is entitled: Tithes and Offerings – What’s the Difference?

Many people think if they give anything they are tithing – but they are wrong. Many people think that because we are under grace and not law – we don’t need to give anything – but they are wrong. I’m going to show you from the Bible today that God expects all of us to give – and that includes you.

First, I want to show you some statistics about giving. According to research from The Barna Group very few Americans tithe. In fact, less than 4% tithe. And less than 2% of those under the age of 40 tithe. Over 40% of Christians give absolutely nothing to the church!

Barna’s research found five reasons people do not tithe.

1 – Some give to other causes rather than the church

2 – Some don't tithe because they don't see a return on their investment

3 – Some don't tithe because they don't know that the church needs their money to be effective. Their church has done an inadequate job of asking for money and explaining how important giving is.

By the way, research shows that if church attendees tithed 10% of their income, it would be enough money to end ALL welfare programs, and the church would still have four times as much money left over as it does now!

4 – Some don't tithe because they are ignorant of what the Bible teaches about our responsibility to tithe.

5 – Some don't tithe because they are selfish. They believe their money is theirs to spend as they please and their priority is themselves.

But we've already seen God owns everything and we should give to Him first. In Malachi 3:8-11 God asks:

Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it." And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the Lord of hosts.

I see three things God is saying here:

- All the tithe belongs to God. We give it to Him by bringing it to the storehouse, that's your local church where you get fed.
- Those who do not give tithes and offerings are robbing God.
- When we tithe, God promises to pour out blessing and rebuke the devourer on our behalf.

In others words, when we do not tithe – there is blessing from God that we do not receive because Satan is devouring them.

The word "tithe" literally means a tenth. A dime of every dollar we make belongs to God. And that ratio never changes.

If you make 10 dollars, 10 dimes belong to God.

If you make 100 dollars, 100 dimes belong to God.

If you make a million dollars, a million dimes belong to God.

The ratio never changes; a dime of every dollar belongs to God.

So – if you give less than 10% of your income – you are not tithing. You are giving an offering.

If you make \$1000 and give \$50 – that’s an offering, not the tithe. You can donate 2% or 4% or 6% of your income – but you cannot tithe it! The tithe is always 10%.

Now before I go too far into this – I know a lot of people think tithing is part of the Old Testament law and we do not have to tithe anymore. If that’s what you believe... I won’t argue with you. But I do want you to see a few things today. So, listen with an open mind and open heart.

The principle of the tithe was established before the law was given. And I can show you three places where the New Testament teaches us to tithe. Jesus confirmed the truth of tithing in Matthew 23:23

Woe upon you, Pharisees, and you other religious leaders - hypocrites! For you tithe down to the last mint leaf in your garden, but ignore the important things - justice and mercy and faith. Yes, you should tithe, but you shouldn't leave the more important things undone.

So – Jesus says we should tithe. And if Jesus said we should tithe, what other reason do you need to tithe? Another New Testament teaching on tithing is found in Matthew 22:15-21. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus so they asked Him if they should pay taxes or not. He asked them for a coin.

And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The word render literally means give back. Robertson’s NT Word Pictures translates it:

Give back to Caesar what is already Caesar’s and give back to God what is already God’s.

That brings us to the question: what is Caesar’s and what is God’s? What belongs to the government that we give back? Taxes? What belongs to God that we give back? The Bible tells us in Leviticus 27:30

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

Tithes belong to God. A tithe of what? Everything. Some people believe that since we are under grace – not law – we can just give what we want or even not give at all. But, the fact is that every New Testament example of giving goes beyond the tithe. Being under grace does not mean living by lower standards than the law.

In Matthew 5 Jesus addressed many issues and made it clear that His standards were higher than the law. For example – He said in Matthew 5:21-22 that the Law says:

Do not murder... But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

He said in Matthew 5:27-28 that the Law said:

Do not commit adultery... But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus raised the bar on everything. Why do we then think that the one thing He lowered the bar on was giving and now you can give whatever you want or give nothing at all?

By the way – the tithe is actually the starting place for giving and most people who argue about tithing are actually trying to justify the fact that they give very little or nothing at all! They say they can't rob God because He no longer requires us to tithe. To which I ask, "Does He require us to give offerings?" And they say "Yes." And then I refer them back to Malachi 3:8 where God said:

Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings.

So – if you don't believe in tithing – you can still rob God by not giving an offering.

Before I talk about the blessings that come from giving, let me say this: I think we should give regardless of the results. Don't tithe just because of the results, but tithe because it's right! Tithe because it puts God's first. Give as an act of worship, not an act of investing.

Yes, when we give, God blesses us – but God's blessing will not just do something FOR you; it will do something IN you!

God's blessing is not just to grow your bank account; it's to grow you!

God's blessing is not just to build your equity; it's to build your integrity.

God cares about your cash flow – but He cares more about the Holy Spirit flow.

God's priority is to bless us spiritually – then every other area of our lives.

Deuteronomy 15:10 says

Give generously and do so without a grudging heart. Then, because of this, the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.

I don't know about you, but I want everything I do to be blessed. That blessing comes when we give generously with a good attitude.

Listen – I'm not saying if you tithe you will have no problems. And I know it takes faith to give God 10% of your income when money is tight. But remember the way The Phillips New Testament translates 2 Corinthians 9:13: *Your giving proves the reality of your faith.*

Pastor Deb and I have been committed to tithing for years and we are committed no matter what. Whether we get a dime back in blessing or not – we tithe because God says tithe! We are committed to tithing in tough times.

We've tithed most of our marriage. Before I went into the ministry, I had a great job making great money. When I went into ministry, I was making half what I made before. Money got so tight that we quit tithing and things went from bad to worse.

I know what it's like to have your electricity cut off!
I know what it's like to have a car repossessed!
I know what it's like to have no money for Christmas presents.

We've had all that happen to us. But one day we made a commitment to tithe no matter what! And God turned our lives around! It wasn't overnight, but it turned when we started tithing. That's why I preach with confidence the word of God about tithing. It's not just theory to me – I've seen the results in my life!

I know I'm better off living on a blessed 90% than an unblessed 100% because I've done it both ways! That's why tithers say they can't afford NOT to tithe.

Many non-tithers think – I can't afford to tithe. But the fact that you can't afford it proves the truth of tithing. Because you are withholding God's tithe, you are missing a blessing. Proverbs 11:24-25 says:

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, And he who waters will also be watered himself.

God's principle is: give to Him first and you will receive. Sowing always precedes reaping. And here is always a time of waiting between sowing and reaping. Galatians 6:7-9 says:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ... Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Some say they'll tithe – but they quit if they don't see an immediate return. I believe many people give up before their harvest comes in and they forfeited their blessing.

God promises to open the windows of heaven to bless us, but He doesn't say what that blessing is or when it will come. 1 Corinthians says we can sow in the natural and reap in the spiritual. Some blessings are financial; some are spiritual. Some blessings are for today; some are for eternity. Not all of God's blessings will be seen in this life! Some of it is stored up in heaven. Matthew 6:19-20 says:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

In other words, you can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.

I got some revelation this week on tithing that I had never seen before. I was studying the first time tithing was mentioned in the Bible.

Genesis 14 tells of a war that happened in the time of Abraham. Abraham's nephew Lot was captured along with his family. So – Abraham went after them, defeated the enemy and recovered all the captured people and stolen goods. When he got back home – he was met by two Kings: the king of Sodom and the king of Salem. Genesis 14:18-21 says:

Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

But Abram refused to take anything from the king of Sodom.

Now – there's some deep teaching here – so I want you to hang with me! In the Bible – Sodom represents worldliness and wickedness. It represents being under the control of Satan, sin and selfishness.

Salem – which is Jerusalem – represents the house of God and the people of God who are submitted to God.

In the Bible – Melchizedek is a type of Christ, our High Priest. In fact, many believe that Melchizedek was a Christophany – which is an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. That comes from Hebrews 6:20-7:4

Jesus has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.

First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder!

Since Melchizedek has no father or mother or genealogy – no beginning or end – but is like the Son of God – a priest forever – the King of peace - surely this can be none other than Jesus Christ Himself!

The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that we are no longer under the law or the Levitical priesthood which have passed away. We are under grace and our High Priest is in the order of Melchizedek.

What does this have to do with tithing? The Amplified version of Hebrews 7:8 says:

In the Levitical priesthood tithes are received by men who are subject to death; while in the case of Melchizedek, they are received by one of whom it is testified that he lives perpetually.

Wuest's Word Studies explains it like this: "The Levites are dying men who pass off the scene and are succeeded by others. The record concerning Melchisedec testifies that he is still alive. Thus, his office as priest does not pass on to another. He is still receiving tithes."

We are no longer under the Old Testament laws of tithing that required Hebrews to give three tithes equal to about 25% of their income. But we are under the principle of tithe that was instituted 400 years before the law was given when Abraham tithed to Melchizedek.

That priesthood has not passed away and never will! Our High Priest is Jesus Christ and He is the one who still receives our tithes today! Every time I give my tithes, I envision the nail-scarred hands of Jesus Christ reaching out to receive it. When I give on earth, I see it deposited in my account in heaven. When I give to the church, I'm really giving to God!

Here's another thing I want you to see about the beginning of tithing in the Bible: two kings came out to meet Abram. Melchizedek blessed Abram with bread and wine – which represent the body and blood of Jesus - Abram tithed as an act of worship. Melchizedek did not demand anything – Abram gave from a grateful heart.

Then the king of Sodom told Abram he could keep everything for himself. I want you to understand those two voices are still speaking today! The voice of our High Priest who wants to bless us when we tithe and the voice of the world that tells you to keep everything for yourself!

You've got to choose which voice you will obey! I encourage you to take God at His word today. For those who are receiving the Word and have faith to start tithing: Malachi 3:10 is the only place in Scripture where God TELLS his people to test him to see if he will not pour out blessings for their obedience.

I know that tithing is an act of faith! I know it's hard to give when your bills are stacked high and your bank balance is low.

I know it's hard to give when you run out of money before you run out of month!

I know it's hard to give when you can't answer your phone because bill collectors are calling!

I know it's hard to give when you're too broke to buy hamburger to put in your helper. But God says put Him to the test!

So out in faith and start tithing.
Then trust God to open the windows of heaven and pour out blessing.
Trust Him to rebuke the devourer on your behalf.
God can turn your poverty into provision!
God can turn your lack into abundance!
God can turn fear into faith!

For those of you who still believe tithing is only for the Old Testament – let me close with this New Testament passage from 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The part I want you to see is that each one of us should give!
And your level of giving will determine your level of blessing!
So – I'm going to pray that God will show you how much you should give.