

Tithing - The Curse for Today

"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" Galatians 3:10

Tithing today is what practicing the Sabbath was during Jesus' day and what circumcision was during the apostle Paul's time. During Jesus' ministry, the Sabbath Day had become a religious cornerstone for those who believed that righteousness was attained by observing the Law. Jesus recognized the Pharisees' religious attachment to the Sabbath and did not shy away from this controversy. Instead, He deliberately confronted the Pharisees by healing the sick on the Sabbath. He used the Sabbath to show the difference between God's righteousness and man's self-righteousness. Jesus' refusal to conform to their misguided interpretation of the Sabbath was a lightning rod that incited their anger and hatred toward Him. Since Jesus had dealt with this controversy, the Sabbath did not become the religious flashpoint for the first century apostles. Instead, circumcision became the sacred symbol for those who believed you must do something to establish your own righteousness. Paul also could have avoided this controversy and the persecution that came with it. However, he directly confronted it since he knew circumcision undermined the truth of the cross of Christ and the righteousness of God.

The tithe ("a tenth" in Hebrew) is the Old Covenant practice of giving a tenth of your profit (crops or animals) to support the Levitical priesthood. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites for neglecting important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faith - yet carefully tithing their spices. Jesus definitely was not endorsing tithing to us here. Since He had not yet been crucified, the New Covenant had not yet begun. Since Christ was born under the Old Covenant, he honored the Mosaic Law during His life. For example, in Matthew 8:2-4, Jesus instructed a leper He had healed to present the

priest with two pigeons as an offering according to the Law of Moses. However, if we now applied this Scripture out of context, all of us would be raising pigeons in our backyards to give to our pastors whenever we are healed.

Tithing is not of the New Covenant just as the Sabbath and circumcision are not of the New Covenant. By His completed work on the cross, Jesus Christ fulfilled these mere shadows of true righteousness. For example, Christ has now become our Sabbath rest. When Christ died, we died with Him (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). Now that we no longer have a sinful nature and Christ lives in us, we can rest from our works and enter by faith into His rest and His works (Hebrews 4:10). Jesus Christ also fulfilled the practice of circumcision. Through Christ's death, God circumcised our sinful nature and removed it from us (Colossians 2:11). In God's eyes, we are now circumcised in heart (Philippians 3:3; Romans 2:29). By His death, Jesus Christ also fulfilled our obligation to pay the tithe. When Jesus died, we died with Him to sin (Romans 6:7-8) and to the Law (Romans 7:4-6). Since we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, He now owns us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). All of our income and possessions, not just one-tenth, belong to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

Those who would compel Christians to tithe say that tithing preceded the Law of Moses by four centuries because Abraham once tithed some spoils of war to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-20). Yet if this were true, then circumcision also surely preceded the Law and every disciple of Jesus would have to be circumcised to fulfill the righteousness of God. However, Paul expressly refuted this false doctrine in his letter to the Galatians. It is important to remember the controversy over circumcision did not only concern salvation. The Galatians were already saved - they had begun in the Spirit and were running the race of faith well (Galatians 3:3; 5:7). But they faced a crucial question: Should they now try to live righteously by practicing religious principles and practices? For the Galatians, those

religious practices included circumcision. Today, some say it includes tithing. Yet Paul knew it was impossible to be righteous apart from Christ's completed work on the cross. Only Christ's death on the cross makes us righteous and complete in Him (1 Corinthians 1:30; Romans 10:4). If we think we initially become Christians by faith but then try to be good Christians by practicing religious principles, the truth of the gospel is distorted and Christ died in vain (Galatians 3:3). This is why Paul would not compromise even an inch on circumcision and warned, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough (Galatians 5:9)."

The first century church never tithed; it practiced giving. Jesus never taught His disciples to tithe and the apostles never taught new Christians to tithe. The practice of tithing did not take hold until seven centuries later in the Catholic church. The Protestant church later carried this "tradition" forward to support a salaried clergy and the construction of church buildings. Just as circumcision perverted the gospel in the first century, tithing distorts the gospel and subverts the righteousness of God that we can only receive by faith. Some believe that even if tithing is no longer a law, it should be a principle. This is also wrong; it is actually a sin because tithing undermines the grace of God and the cross of Christ. If you practice tithing as a means of attaining righteousness, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Therefore, we cannot compromise on tithing which clearly burdens believers with a yoke of slavery. We entered the Christian life solely by faith in Jesus Christ and His completed work on the cross and we must live the Christian life the same way - by fixing our eyes on Christ and His work on the cross.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given through Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." Galatians 3:13-14