

TITHES, OFFERINGS, OBLATIONS

By Stanley C. Phillips

Among Old School Baptist churches there is one subject on which there has been universal agreement throughout our long history: — a guarded view of tithing. Never once have we found any of the churches of Jesus Christ bound to a hireling ministry, nor to the lucrative tithe which is necessary to maintain a career-oriented, or professional ministry. From the beginning for Baptists in America, it has been a matter of conviction in that tithing is dangerous to both the truth and religious freedom. As Roger Williams said before the court in 1652, “He that makes a TRADE OF PREACHING, that makes the cure of souls and the charge of men’s eternal welfare a TRADE, a maintenance, a living, and that explicitly makes a covenant or bargain. . . the Son of God never sent . . .” (A Hireling Ministry None of Christ.) And, Obadiah Holmes said he was a “craftsman” or artisan or “farmer,” so that he not be guilty of “making a trade out of preaching.” In Isaac Backus’ letter to George Washington urging religious freedom be annexed to the United States Constitution by amendments, he stated, “religious ministers when supported by force are the most dangerous men on earth.”

Thus, the question of tithing began to expand itself during the rise of the Modern Missionary Movement in the 1830’s. But, tithing was not forcefully advocated until the first two generations of apostatized Baptists had passed away. By 1900, however, tithing among some Baptists began to gain momentum.

Today, millions actually believe and practice tithing; hoping to commend this “will-worship” to God. It is our intention in this article to set forth, and to

defend, the historic position of the church of Jesus Christ on this subject. First, we will deal with the Levitical practice; second, the negative arguments; and thirdly, the positive aspects of ministerial support.

Firstly, tithing is a Jewish practice under the Law of Moses, as commanded of God. The first mention of tithes is given in Genesis 14:20, where Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. It is noteworthy, that Abraham paid tithes, not of his own substance, but of the spoils of war against the five kings of Canaan.

Under the law of Moses, the land of Canaan was divided among the tribes of Israel. Jacob gave a double portion to Joseph through his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, thus in reality creating thirteen tribes. (Genesis 48:17) In the subsequent division of the land, Manasseh and Ephraim each received a land grant or state. But Levi and his sons which made up the Levitical priesthood were scattered throughout the other twelve tribes. They were given certain cities with their suburban areas and the tithe. Thus, God said *"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi ALL the TENTH in Israel FOR AN INHERITANCE, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."* (Numbers 18:21) By His commandment the tithe belonged to Levi so long as the Levitical priesthood served.

A favorite text used by Arminian ministers to injoin tithing upon their congregations is: *"will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."* (Malachi 3:8) It is robbery to seize upon the property of another unlawfully; and especially serious is it when God Himself has given it as an undeniable inheritance. This text clearly charges the Jews with robbing God when they refused to pay their tithe to LEVI; for the children of Levi had performed the services required and were rightly and divinely due their promised reward for this service. But, it is NOT required for Gentiles nor children of grace who are not under the legal dispensation to pay a tithe to Levi. If it were, then it would equally be a sin to pay it to any other than Levi to whom it belonged.

The tithe was Levi's by the legal requirement of the Law which God gave to Israel. It covered far more than ten percent of one's money. In addition to the tithe, the oblations (freewill offerings) and certain portions of the sacrifices were also given Levi. An "oblation" is a "freewill offering" and often called such in the Law. It is giving of one's own offering freely of his own volition. It goes beyond the tithe which could not be legally withheld. (Leviticus 22:18-23) The whole subject is very extensive, so for brevity we must forebear to deal with it here.

God's attitude towards the sacrifices and oblations after Christ' OFFERING (which they typified) is prophetically given in Isa. 66:3 : *"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth AN OBLATION, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have CHOSEN THEIR OWN WAYS, and their soul delighteth IN THEIR ABOMINATIONS."* Notice that God considers the dog and the swine to be unclean beasts — How can He then respect the tithe and "offering," or "oblation?" Members of Christ body cannot burn incense, allow their children to commit such sacrilege, nor pay tithes and offerings "to the Lord."

In reality, the tithes and oblations, (or freewill offerings) were ordained of God as a tax upon the twelve tribes to maintain His legal government among the Jews, AND to typify the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ. In the former sense, it is as our own national tax, with the exception that ours may not be given to support a state religion. Thus, in that sense, all of us pay tithes, and far in excess of a tenth in most cases! The tithes and offerings were Levi's portion, seeing that he was excluded from the partitioning of Canaan. God granted it to him and to his family, and required it of all other tribes. A point is made that under the New Testament, no tribes exist, nor are ministers deprived of lands or wealth any more or less than others.

Secondly, the negative arguments: A favorite text of the hireling ministry in support of a money-based religion is found in Matthew 23:23: *"Woe unto*

you, SCRIBES AND PHARISEES, HYPOCRITES! for ye pay TITHE of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters OF THE LAW, judgment, Mercy, and faith: these OUGHT YE TO HAVE DONE, and not to leave the other undone." This is the ONLY New Testament Scripture commanding tithing. (The text in Hebrews cannot be so applied.) It is all they have; and it seems sufficient! Yet, Jesus in speaking to the "scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites," who were JEWS; shows that tithing is under the law; and that they had broken it! But in no wise can an honest man apply this to non-Jews. Jews WERE REQUIRED to give Levi his tithe. We are not so required. Besides, would any dare lump Pharisees and hypocrites with the elect of God?

The concept of tithing and offerings has been so well indoctrinated among religious people today that when one of them reads, or preaches upon "collections," the mind quickly makes the connection with "tithes and offerings." Hence, this text is so understood: "*Now concerning the COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do 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 GATHERING WHEN I COME.*" (I Corinthians 16:1-2)

We need not say much to that! The text no more teaches tithing than it teaches changing the Jewish Sabbath to the First Day of the week! (Incidentally the purpose given for "*laying by him in store on the first day of the week*" is that "*there should be no gathering*" when Paul came. Knowing the nature of preachers, it is rather too much to believe that Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, a father to the Corinthian church, would not arrange to be there on their day of worship!) It simply declares that the collection for the poor saints which was during the great "*dearth throughout the world*" during the "days of Claudius Caesar" should be laid by for its gathering when he and those with him arrived. (Acts 11:28-30) The gathering was to be upon the First Day of the week, and if this was a new Sabbath day, then such a gathering would have been a violation of the law of the Sabbath. It is nowhere commanded that the churches of Christ are to take up a collection each First

Day for the next 1900 years, for this was to be done prior to Paul's arrival in the area. (It would be hard to resist a further comment: It was NOT for ministerial support, cooperative programs, missions, hospitals, stocks and bonds, and such things which are now advocated! It was for the RELIEF of the saints!)

Tithing is a NEW PRACTICE, and is root and branch to the Modern Missionary Movement. It is condemned in the following Scriptures:

1. Speaking of those who would bring in damnable heresies, such as Arminianism, Peter wrote: *"And through covetousness shall they with FEIGNED WORDS MAKE MERCHANDISE of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. ... which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of BALAAM of Bosor, WHO LOVED THE WAGES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS."* (II Pet. 2:3, 15)

2. Jude wrote of those *"certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ"* and says of them: *"Woe unto them! for they have gone the way of Cain, and ran GREEDILY AFTER THE ERROR OF BALAAM FOR REWARD, and perished in the GAINSAYINGS OF CORE. These are spots in your feasts of charity (love-feasts), when they feast with you, FEEDING THEMSELVES without fear"* (Jude 11, 12) And what is the error of Balaam? He was willing to curse Israel, or PROPHECY against him, for reward; but God stopped him and turned his cursings into blessings err they left his mouth! (Numbers, chapters 22 & 23) And, What is the connection between Balaam and Core (Korah)? Korah taught (as modern hirelings) that anyone had a right to prophesy whether he was called of God or not. (Numbers 16) Thus the Scriptures connect unholy ministers with greed over filthy lucre.

It ought to be expected, for why else would an unsanctified man "preach." The Scriptures says: "*Buy the truth and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23) Ministers are to "*freely give as they freely received.*" What grateful man will sell a gift?

3. John wrote to the church at Pergamos "*where Satan's seat is*" (Rev. 2:13) and rebuked them. One of the things Christ had against that church was "*because thou hast there them that hold the DOCTRINE OF BALAAM.*" (vs. 14)

4. When Mystery Babylon, that false religion of the antichrist shall fall, it is written: "*And the MERCHANTS of the earth shall weep and mourn over her, for NO MAN BUYETH THEIR MERCHANDISE ANY MORE.*" (Rev. 18:11) "*And the fruits that thy SOUL LUSTED AFTER are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The MERCHANTS of these things, which were MADE RICH BY HER, shall stand afar off for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.*" (Rev. 18:14-15).

5. It is God alone who calls and qualifies His ministers, and if any are called of Him they will be found having His qualifications. All others, not having these qualifications "*run when they have not been sent*" and are guilty of the sin of Korah (Numbers 16:3)

Of all the qualifications of God-called men, one is: "*not greedy of filthy lucre.*" (I Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7) Seeing there is no New Testament Scripture that teaches tithing, we conclude it to be un-Scriptural and not to be taught or practiced in the church of Jesus Christ. In fact, the church has NEVER held such a view, not even to this day.

Thirdly, ministerial support: We maintain that the support of the gospel ministry is an act of free and sovereign grace. In fact, it is sometimes called "*grace;*" and if it is of grace then it is NOT of works or duty!

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the GRACE of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their LIBERALITY. . . Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the GIFT, and take upon us the fellowship of the MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS." (II Cor. 8:1-2,4)

Notice that the motive for giving liberally for the ministering to the poor saints IS THE GRACE OF GOD. It was also *"to the saints"* this liberality was extended, and this was a desire that they be included in the *"fellowship of the ministering to the saints"* along with others. It demonstrates that the moving cause was grace; and motivated by the *"abundance of their joy,"* (even though in carnal things were in deep poverty) which then abounded unto the riches of their liberality. It is noteworthy that the apostle had to be *"entreated"* to receive their gift, for he knew of their deep poverty. How unlike modern *"ministers"* for hire!

Paul cited the example of these Macedonians and the grace bestowed upon them to exhort the church of God at Corinth to do the same, saying: *"And herein I give advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness TO WILL, so there may be a performance also out of that WHICH YE HAVE."* (II Cor. 8:10-11) Following is a simple principle for ministering to the saints, to wit, *"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye be burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that there may be equality."* (verse 12-14)

Paul told the elders at Ephesus how he had . . . *"shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye (ministers) ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35)

All the above relates exclusively to our *"ministering to the saints,"* and seems to have reference to the same *"collection for the saints"* during the dearth that *"came upon the whole earth."* That this willingness to perform and to will was of GRACE is beyond doubt; and that the gift given is termed "grace" is made clear by verse 6, *"insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same GRACE also."*

We realize that those who believe in tithing must catch at any straw to support their view, and this text is often so used. But to the church, grace is the moving cause of their liberality to give aid to those in need among them; and according to Scripture this should be by equality according to what a man has. None of us desire our brethren with less means to feel it as a burden or necessity beyond their ability. This, other than the un-scripturalness of it, is our basic objection to tithing. It places an unwarranted and unreasonable guilt upon those who are less fortunate in this world's goods.

That the Scriptures are not silent relative to ministerial support is clear, but tithing is NOT the Biblical method should be equally clear. The Scriptures DO teach ministerial support as we shall now see.

"Who goeth a warfare any time at his OWN CHARGE? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" (I Cor. 9:7) All these things are reasonable. But balance is given in the Scriptures to prevent career-professionals from claiming such as a "right." *"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight, not by CONSTRAINT, but willingly; NOT FOR FILTHY LUCRE, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being EXAMPLES to the flock."* (I Pet. 5:2-3) Should the above Scriptures seem to imply the hiring of ministers, then compare: *"And let OURS also learn to MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS FOR NECESSARY USES, that they be not unfruitful."* (Titus 3:14) Paul labored in Corinth, *"and because he was of the same craft, he abode with them (Aquila and Priscilla) and WROUGHT: for by their occupation they were tentmakers."* (Acts 18:3)

Later, writing to the Corinthian church after it was established, he said: *"Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel FREELY? I robbed other churches, taking WAGES of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and WANTED, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was LACKING TO ME the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself."* (II Cor. 11:7-9) Continuing in I Cor. 9, *"For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doeth God take care for the oxen? (verse 9) The implication of the question's answer is found in its contextual argument, i.e., "No, God does not tend the oxen. Its owner feeds it." "Or saith He it altogether for OUR SAKE? For our sake, no doubt, this is written: That he that ploweth should plow in hope; and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your CARNAL things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have NOT USED this power: but suffer all things, LEST we should HINDER the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ORDAINED THAT THEY WHICH PREACH THE GOSPEL SHOULD LIVE OF THE GOSPEL."* (I Cor. 9:10-14)

Most Predestinarian Old School Baptist churches are exceedingly weak in this age in comparison with past ages. Few of them can supply the needs of their ministers. In the past, prior to the rise of the Modern Missionary Movement some churches had the problem of ministers serving for *"filthy lucre"*. Some elders went to the churches which supported them better; having not the care of the flock at heart, and were termed *"stay short preachers"* — that is, they migrated to greener pastures. But since the expulsion of the Modern Baptists, the Old School churches have been saved from the practice. Most, if not all, elders among us prefer to work for the same reasons Paul gave for his working. *"For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we*

behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but WROUGHT WITH LABOR and travail night and day, that we might not be CHARGEABLE to any of you: Not because we have not this power, but to make ourselves an ENSAMPLE unto you to follow us." (II Thess. 3:7-12)

There is danger in both extremes. Those churches which maintain ministers sometimes find that they serve their own bellies, and not the flock. It is almost universal among them that ministers are "not of them" and wander aimlessly around from church to church throughout their ministry. Such are the hireling ministers, and by this practice they are recognizable. On the other hand, among us, far too many take for granted that the elders have no additional burden in the ministry than what it takes to travel.

The neglect of the Corinthians in this matter is touched upon by Paul in a defense of his apostleship; he said: "*For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was NOT BURDENSOME to you? Forgive me this wrong.*" (II Thess. 12:13)