

A Church beyond imagination

Part 1: Koinos

Introduction

Does the perfect church exist? There is common joke made that if such a church exists; then you should not join it, or else it won't be perfect anymore. Remarks like these do give one the impression that it would be an unrealistic ideology to find the perfect church; because of the inherent imperfection of human beings that make up the church.

Yet there is something wrong with this thought. If we say that there is not such a thing as the perfect church, what then does it say about the ability of Christ to build His Church?

Jesus said in:

Mat 16:18 “*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*”

Is Christ not able to use rough but living stones like us and even despite of our imperfection, still able to build a glorious and perfect church? What if we tell you that the perfect church does exist, even though it is being built with imperfect living stones like you and me? This is the church where in the core of our being where Christ is central we long to be part of. This is the church that is beyond imagination!

But if all we use to is the imperfect church, then it might be that the church as we know it is not actual being build by Christ but by imperfect men. Here is something to consider. With all the sincere church activities, programs, revival meetings and so called spiritual experiences there seems to be a spiritual emptiness ruling our institutional church today. More and more saints are wondering if what they are busy with are actually real or just emotional hype. Why is that? Would you consider the possibility that what most people consider to be church might not be the church that Christ is building? You might ask well where is this perfect church? Why have we never heard of it or seen it?

Well in embarking on this quest to find this perfect church that Christ is building, we would invite you to do something that is very frightening to many. That is a willingness to read Scripture like you might never have read it before; reading the Scripture in its roughness of the text of what is actually written without the contamination of man made religion.

In this series of teachings concerning “A Church beyond imagination” we are going to investigate a couple of the so called acceptable institutional practices of today and see what Scripture really does teach about these practices. You see the only way for us to be part of the church that Christ is building is to rid ourselves of those things that are contaminated by man and the traditions that are not of God.

We do warn you before hand though- that some of these practices are very holy cows to many in the man made church. To even question there scriptural bases is like the unpardonable sin. It is not always going to be easy to face some of these facts about these practises, but we trust that as you trust the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and you sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart, you will be able to hear and discern the truth. You are now at the cross roads where you either going to express the church that Christ is building or be complacent with an earthly and carnal church that is built by the traditions of man.

The good news however, is that you have always been part of the church that Christ is building since the day you were born of the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus. In the process you've just got yourself entangled in this man made religion and by this, lost the capability to express the church that Christ is building.

History of tithing

The first practice that we are going to look at from the man made church, is the practice on tithes and offerings. We are starting with tithing, not because it is the most important practise to deal with, but because it is the foundation on which the man made church is being built today. You see without this practise of tithes and offerings the man made church cannot function.

Where do you think today's practice of tithing to the church first originated? If you think it is from the bible, then unfortunately you are mistaken. You see the first mentioning of tithing in the church was by the third century writer, Cyprian of Carthage who suggested that: as the Levites were supported by the tithes so the Christian workers were to be supported by tithes. Tithing only became a main stream thought around 567 AD at the council of Tours and, then again in 585 AD at the council of Mâcon. It was only in 787 AD under Pope Adrian I that tithing became an official church practise.

Why then only? Well the financial support from the state to the institutional church was drying up, and as with any institution of man, the church needed money to function. So with some twisting of Scripture the practice of tithing in the church was born. Paul writes in *1Tim. 6:10: The love of money is the root of all evil.*

We will need to have a deeper look at the historical events of the church to understand the context to which the institutional church is built, but this we will do in much greater detail in the following parts of this series of teachings.

The question remains that if tithing was such a biblical practise why was it only instated as an official church practise 787 years after Christ? Would you be surprised to learn that nothing of what is practiced in the church today about tithing can be found back in Scripture? Not even in the popular quoted passage in Malachi chapter 4. Unbelievable you think, well would you prayerfully consider all the Scripture carefully that deal with tithing as we read them to you and then see if what is practised in church today really is found in Scripture?

There are about four places in the New Testament where tithing was mentioned and none of them refers to or teaches Christians to tithe. For instance when Jesus spoke about tithing it was in the context of the Jewish Law, and when the author of Hebrews spoke of tithing, it was in the context of a covenant of promise made by God with Abraham. Yet one needs to make a whole lot of unbiblical assumptions to force those scripture to mean that Christians ought to give 10% of their income to a church institution.

Let us first read 3 passages of Scripture where Jesus spoke about tithing:

The first is from

Mat 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The second passage which refers to a similar account is found in:

Luk 11:42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The 3rd passage of scripture We are reading from is where Jesus referred to a hypocritical prayer of a Pharisee. The passage is from:

Luk 18:12: I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

After reading these 3 passages can we answer some basic questions that will help us formulate a proper interpretation?

1. What actually was tithing?
2. What were the tithes used for?
3. To whom were the tithes paid?
4. When were tithes paid?
5. Who paid the tithes?

In actual fact, the only question that vaguely can be answered from these passages is that of: who paid tithes? The Pharisees, who neglected the more important commandments such justice and love, were the ones who paid tithes. None of the other questions can accurately be answered without looking at the context of Jesus' words.

So what was the context? Well Jesus was dealing with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees concerning the law of God. Would you then agree that we would need to look at God's Law concerning tithing, found in the Old Testament, to understand what Jesus was actually talking about?

What tithing was

We will start of by dealing with the question of what tithing actually was. One of the passages that deal with tithing quite thoroughly is Deuteronomy chapter 14 from verse 22 right up to 29.

Let us first read:

Deu 14:22 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.

According to you what does the increase of the grain mean?

A: it means everything one has.

B: it means in what one has improved or prospered in.

Well according to the dictionary **increase** means: *advance, boost, hike, increment, jump, raise, rise*, in other words getting more than what one usually has.

Israel had to tithe on what God had blessed them with agriculturally. They never had to tithe in times of decrease, such as during a famine or bad harvest. And there was a reason for that.

Let us read now from:

*Deu 14:23 And you shall **eat** before the LORD your God (Let me repeat that), And you shall **eat** before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.*

So, what did the Israelites do with their tithes?

A: They gave it to the church

B: They gave it to the pastor

C: They ate their own tithes.

Wow, imagine that; the tither ate his or her own tithes before the Lord. You better read that again for yourselves just to make sure.

You may say "well that is then, today you can't eat your money". Well let us now read from verse 24 up to 26 and see what God commands the Israelites concerning money when it comes to tithing.

Deu 14:24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you,

Deu 14:25 then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

Deu 14:26 And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.

So what did the Israelites do when they stayed too far from the place they were commanded to eat their tithes? They sold their tithes for money.

What then were they to do with the money once they arrived at the place where God would place His name? They were to buy whatever their hearts desired for food and drink.

What were they to do with what they bought? You better go and read this again for yourself... **They were to eat and feast before the Lord!**

In other words tithes were a feast to celebrate God's increased blessings on Israel's agriculture. It was not money that was given for Church building, programs and salaries.

The third year tithe

A question that you might be asking at this point is: were the Levites and the Priests not supposed to live from the tithes? Well let us read further from.

Deu 14:27 You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.

Deu 14:28 "At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates.

Deu 14:29 And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Here are some important questions that we need to look at from this passage of Scripture.

First of all; which of the tithes were not eaten by the tither, but were set aside to be given away and when were these tithes given? Was it perhaps given every month, perhaps every year, or was it every third year?

This passage of Scripture shows us that the tithes of the first two years were eaten before the Lord by the tither. It was only the third year's tithe that was given away.

The next question is; to whom was this third year's tithe given?

Was it given to the church or the Pastor?

Or was it all given to the Levites and Priests?

Neither! The third year's tithes were distributed among the strangers, the orphans and the widows and only a portion of the third year's tithes came to the Levites. Can you believe it? Only a portion of the third year's tithe came to the Levites. Most of the tithe went to those who are not in a position to provide for themselves.

Another passage of Scripture teaches and confirms this, and is found in:

Deu 26:12 "When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled,

Deu 26:13 then you shall say before the LORD your God: 'I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; we have not transgressed Your commandments, nor

have we forgotten them.

So again, was it the tithe of their decrease or their increase that the tither tithed on? It was from their increase of course. Israel did not tithe when there was a famine, because tithing was a celebration of God's increased blessings. It is amazing the revelation one gets when one reads what is actually written in Scripture as appose to what others would want you to read into them.

According to this passage then; what tithes were given away? Once again we read, it was the third year's tithe, the holy tithes, because the other two years were eaten by the tither before the Lord.

Finally do we read in this passage that the tithes were only given to the Levites? No, it was also given to the strangers, the orphans, and widows.

Levites tithed

At this point we have only read that the Levites along with the strangers, orphans and widows lived from the third year's tithe. How then did the priests received tithes?

This time we will be reading from:

Num 18:25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 18:26 "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which we have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe.

Num 18:27 And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.

Num 18:28 Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest.

So then who was responsible to tithe to the Lord, in order for the priest to live from it?

- A) The church members
- B) The Israelites
- C) The Priests
- D) The Levites

It was the Levites and not the rest of Israel who were to give tithes to the priests. The Levites had to give a tenth of the portion of tithes they received from the rest of Israel to Aaron and his descendants who would be the priests.

If that is the case, then what was the difference between the Priests and the Levites? That is vitally important to understand if we are to understand biblical tithing.

You might recall that God commanded, in Exodus chapter 13, that the first fruit of all of Israel, whether it be, agriculture, livestock and the firstborn sons of Israel, are to be dedicated to God. This they had to do because God delivered them from the Egyptians using the 10th plague by killing the first born from all of Egypt; of man and livestock.

Then in Numb chapter 3:40-51, God commanded that instead of all the tribes of Israel having to offer up their first born son to do service for God, that the one tribe of Israel, the Levites, would substitute the first born of Israel. The Levites in place of the first born of all of Israel had to serve God by the tabernacle and later on by the temple in Jerusalem.

Aaron – Moses brother who, by the way, was from the Levite tribe was chosen by God to be the Priest for Israel. So from that time on, Aaron's descendants would be the Levitical priesthood. The rest of the Levites were then in service to the Priests of Aaron's decedents. For that reason the Levite tribe had to pay a tenth of the tithes they received from the other tribes on the third year and

give it to the decedents of Aaron, the Priests of Israel.

The store house of God

This leads us to the next very important question. Who then was responsible to bring tithes in to the storehouse of God? For that matter what was the storehouse of God?

Jerusalem was the city that God placed His name as we read in 1King 11:36, and so it was there where Israel was to celebrate the feasts of tithing. It was also in Jerusalem where the House of God or the Temple of God was built. The temple of God had store rooms all around the temple which were called the storehouse.

Let us now look who was responsible to supply to the House of God and in what way they were to supply to the House of God. As we read this, keep in mind that the first fruit offerings were to be given as a remembrance that God delivered Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, by destroying the first born of livestock and the first born sons of the Egyptians. Tithes on the other hand were a celebration of God's increase blessing over Israel's agriculture. First fruit offerings and Tithes are therefore completely different and were also given differently.

We read from:

Neh 10:36 to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God;

Neh 10:37 to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities.

Before we read on; at this stage what did Israel bring to the house of God? They brought the first fruit of all that is produced agriculturally.

Did Israel also bring the tithes to the store house of God? No, the tithes were to be given to the Levites. Let me read it to you once again verse 37 Nehemiah chapter 10:

*Neh 10:37 to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; **and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities.***

This is important to understand as we read the verse that follows in:

*Neh 10:38 And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and **the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.***

Now who were to bring "tithes" to the store house of God? Was it

- A) The Christians
- B) The Israelites
- C) Or the Levites?

It is very clear that it was the Levites who were to bring tithes to the house of God. We would like to stress this point that it was only the Levites and not the rest of the Israelites who brought their tithes to the store-house of God. The Israelites were only responsible to bring the first fruit offering to the house of God.

Now let us look at a passage of Scripture that is so often used to manipulate the saints to tithe to a church institution. It is:

Mal 3:8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

Mal 3:9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

Before we read on, let us just interject something here. How many times has it been said to you that you have robbed God, when you do not pay tithes to the church? ... Yet in reality you are actually being cursed because you pay tithes. We will explain this a little further on, for now let us read on.

Mal 3:10 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.

Mal 3:11 "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;

Mal 3:12 And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

Now that we have biblical understand of tithing does this passage in Malachi make more sense to you? Well let us go through some questions to help us formulate a proper biblical understanding of tithing:

1. Does this passage in Malachi refer to money or FOOD when speaking of tithing? Food of course, because it was to demonstrate God's blessing agriculturally.
2. On what did Israel tithe? They tithed on God's increase blessings agriculturally.
3. What did the tither do with the tithes in the first and second year of God's blessings? They ate the tithes before the Lord in Jerusalem.
4. What tithe was seen as the holy tithe of giving? The third year tithe.
5. What did the tither do with their third year's tithe? They distributed it between the Strangers, Orphans, Widows, and to the Levites.
6. Who gave tithes to the Store house of God? The Levites placed a tenth of the tithes they received from Israel in the storehouse of God.
7. What did the other tribes of Israel put in the Store house of God? They brought the first fruit offerings and not their actual tithes to the store house of God.
8. What was the purpose for the first fruit offerings of Israel and the tithes of the Levites in the store house of God? So that there may be FOOD in God's house.

Knowing this, how was God being robbed as explained in Malachi 3:8? The passage does not deal with money, but food. As food demonstrates God's provision agriculturally, Israel was robbing God of His honour as the Provider of Israel. The more food there was in the storehouse of God, the more people could notice how God had blessed his people.

The curse of tithing

You might ask; so what is the big deal if we twist the Scripture a bit? Well the effect is far more reaching than you might think. We are talking about being under a curse. Remember what is written in:

Mal 3:9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

Israel was cursed because they did not give exactly as God commanded them. Now look at what Paul writes concerning the curse of the Law in

Gal 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT CONTINUE IN ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO DO THEM."

According to Paul if we want to practice the Law such as the law of tithing, but tithe not according to all that is written in the Law, what will happen to us? You better believe it: we are cursed. If we are taught that according to the "word of God" we should tithe to the church, then we are not tithing

exactly to God's instructs, which will put us under the cursed.

In other words, if we bring tithes to the church and not to Jerusalem to feast before God, we are cursed. If we do not give a tenth of our increase to the orphans, strangers, widows and Levites on the third year then we are cursed. If we do not bring our first fruit to the temple in Jerusalem, which does not exist anymore, we are cursed. We are not trying to be sarcastic. Paul is very clear if we seek to follow the law and do not do all as it is written in the book of the law then we are cursed. We hope you understand the seriousness of this matter.

Let us read to you further what Paul writes 3 verses on in:

Gal 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"),

Do you see that it is a slap in Christ's face, who has redeemed us from the works of the law through His death on Calvary, if we try to follow the law of tithing?

Now, we hear people say, that God blessed them when they tithed. That is actually not true. First of all the curse is not necessarily to do with wealth but with our Spiritual standing with God. Just because one prospers financially is no guarantee that one stands right with God.

Secondly God does not bless us because we tithe. In actual fact there are more people who tithe faithfully in financial distress, than those who are so called financially blessed by their tithing. Yet there are equal numbers of saints who prosper financially who do not tithe. God lets the rain and the sun fall on the righteous as well as the unrighteous as we read in **Mat 5:45**.

Yet spiritual blessing comes from God's grace and not because we keep up some twisted version of God's law. Yet we are cursed spiritually if we put ourselves under the Law of which Christ has redeemed us. The bible is very clear about this.

Our intention is not to make you feel condemned. We ourselves also use to hold on to the unbiblical practises of tithing to the church. Yet if we repent from man made traditions and obey the gospel of Christ we are redeemed from the curse.

The covenant of Abraham

Let us just briefly look at another passage of scripture that many use to try and justify tithing. This time it has to do with the covenant between God and Abraham. It is found in

Heb 7:1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

Heb 7:2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace,"

Heb 7:3 without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

Heb 7:4 *Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.*

Heb 7:5 And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;

Heb 7:6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.

Heb 7:7 Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

Heb 7:8 Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

Heb 7:9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak,

Heb 7:10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Many try and explain that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek before Moses gave the Law of tithing. Their argument is that tithing was practiced outside the Law of Moses, so it would mean that even if we are not under the law we still have to pay tithes because tithing was practiced before the Law of Moses.

The problem with that argument is that there were other Old Testament practices such as blood sacrifices for sin and the circumcision of the sons that was also practiced before the Law of Moses. Does that mean we also have to practice those? Obviously not, so let us deal with a couple of questions to see whether Heb 7 deals with tithing in the way that many claim should be practiced in the church:

Did Abraham pay tithes of his own earnings? No, not at all, in Genesis 14 we read that Abraham only gave 10% of the spoil he got from freeing Lot and the rest of Sodom. He distributed the rest of the spoil to his servants and gave the rest back to Sodom. He took none of the spoils for himself. Nowhere else in Scripture do we ever read that Abraham paid tithes from his actual earnings.

Was the author of Hebrews trying to justify tithing in chapter 7: No he was trying to demonstrate the superior covenant we have with Christ, of which Melchizedek was only a shadow of Christ.

Here is an important question concerning priests though. Do we read anywhere in Scripture where that priests pay tithes? The Old Testament is clear about this; priests do not pay tithes, but receive tithes on God's behalf. Now why does it matter whether priests gave tithes or not?

Well let us read to you what Peter writes in

1Pe 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Are the saints of God Royal priests? Of course yes; the bible does not call us Levites but royal and holy priests. So why do we suddenly now have to pay tithes if priests were to receive tithes and not pay tithes? The non Christians are to pay us tithes, which obviously is not going too happened, but the principle stays the same. If priests don't pay tithes in the Old Testament why do we, who are Royal Priest in the New Testament with a better covenant, now have to pay tithes?

Tithing promised by Jacob

Let us move on and look at the second example of the covenant of tithing. Besides honouring God for His blessings, Israel had to pay tithes because of something that Jacob did. As you recall Jacob's name was changed to Israel by God in Gen 32:28, and so his descendants became the nation Israel.

Now let us read an incident found in:

Gen 28:20 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,

Gen 28:21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.

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

After reading this passage can we find any indication that God asked Jacob to tithe? No, Jacob, out of his own choice, made a promise to God to give a tenth, only on that which God blessed him.

God therefore required Jacobs's descendants to fulfil Jacob's promise to Him. God held Jacob to his promise and therefore commanded his descendants to eat their tithes before Him where God would place His name. Does this passage give any indication of the church paying tithes? No not at all. The church is not even mentioned in the passage. Once again there are no biblical bases for Christians paying tithes to an institutional church.

Real issue of tithing

Besides putting a curse on the church, tithing also hinders us to do the will of God. Let us explain this by using an incident in Scripture where Christ was rebuking the Pharisees and the Scribes for their man made traditions. It is found in:

Mat 15:3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

Mat 15:4 For God commanded, saying, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO CURSES FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.'

Mat 15:5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"—

Mat 15:6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Mat 15:7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

Mat 15:8 "THESE PEOPLE DRAW NEAR TO ME WITH THEIR MOUTH, AND HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME.

Mat 15:9 AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.' "

How was God not honoured by what the Pharisees and Scribes taught? They taught that by given to a religious institution – supposedly to God, comes above taking care of ones family. Did God receive the money? No because the money was used for a religious institution. By doing this God did not receive honour, for they were neglecting what God really wanted.

Well is it not the same thing when it is preached in the church that we first have to give our tithe to the church and only then give what we have spare to meet the needs of our family in Christ? Well let us look at how the actual Christians dealt with money in the New Testament where they did not practise the traditions of man namely tithing.

We are reading from:

Act 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

Act 2:45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Act 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Act 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Do you see today's church having favour with all people? Of course not! How will this money making business, that we traditionally call church, have any favour among people? Yet imagine what an affect we will have in our community if they see how we look after the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Real fellowship

What did it really mean for the Christians in Acts 2 to have all things in common? Having all things in common does not mean selling all our possessions and giving it to the poor. Many of the saints did sell their possessions to meet the needs of others, but selling their possessions to meet the needs of the saints was only because they had all things in common. Having all things in common

therefore means that when there are needs among brothers and sisters then we should do what ever it takes to meet those needs, even if it means to sell some of our luxuries.

Paul writes about it this way in:

1Co 12:24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

1Co 12:25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

1Co 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

1Co 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

We wonder how many of us really have a heart of having all things in common with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Here is a test. What would you rather practise? Sharing your goods with the needs of the saints, or pay your 10% fee for your religious entertainment? Do you still want to be part of the church that Christ is building or are you comfortable with that man made thing people call church?

John the Baptist puts it this way:

Luk 3:11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Paul writes about this type of giving again in:

2Co 8:12 For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

2Co 8:13 For we do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened;

2Co 8:14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.

2Co 8:15 As it is written, "HE WHO GATHERED MUCH HAD NOTHING LEFT OVER, AND HE WHO GATHERED LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

There is another side to this which Paul highlights in this passage. Is there any indication that Paul is saying that we should give in faith; even if we battle financially? No, not at all. He specifically teaches that one gives “according to what one has and not according to what one does not have”. Paul is not saying that one should be burdened because of the lack of others. What Paul was teaching was that saints learn to meet each others needs, with the things we have extra. It is those who actually do have extra that have the responsibility to give to those who have need. This is what it means to have all things in common.

Some would argue, that even if you don't have you should still give, by quoting for example:

Mar 12:41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

Mar 12:42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

Mar 12:43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

Mar 12:44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Did Jesus really give a command that poor people should give in this passage? No, not at all, or else Paul's teachings would be in contradiction. Jesus only illustrated who gave more of themselves; which of course are those who give everything. The object lesson was that the one who gives all gives more than the one who only gives a portion, no matter what the amount is. This was not an instruction from Christ that poor people who cannot afford it should give to a church institution.

Ok let us now read a little further on from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church in:

2Co 9:6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

2Co 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a

cheerful giver.

Does giving according to what one has purposed in ones heart mean the same as the obligated tithing that is practiced in church today? Of course not. Giving should be done from the heart and not by religious obligation. Given by religious obligation is an outward pretence and not an inward leading of the Holy Spirit. **Giving by the Spirit is not focus on a particular amount but meeting a particular need.**

Let us repeat this again:

Giving by the Spirit is not focus on a particular amount but meeting a particular need.

Let us read further from:

2Co 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

2Co 9:9 As it is written: "HE HAS DISPERSED ABROAD, HE HAS GIVEN TO THE POOR; HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER."

2Co 9:10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

2Co 9:11 while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

2Co 9:12 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,

2Co 9:13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

Do we read anything in this passage about Paul collecting for a church organization? No it was for the need's of the saints? You will see right though all of the New Testament, every time a collection was made it was for the needs of the saints.

Do you think that the religious-business practice that the church has today is glorifying God? You better believe, it isn't. Do you think, that if we let go of this man made tradition of tithing and we move to the power of God's word and look after the needs of saints; God would be glorified in the world? Not only our commonsense says yes by the Holy Spirit affirms it.

James teaches us a view of faith that is somewhat different to many prosperity teachers of today:

Jas 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

Jas 2:16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

According to James what do we do with our brothers and sisters that have need?

- A) We teach them to tithe so that God will bless them.
- B) We let them go to the charity comity of our church to access their case.
- C) We do what it takes to meet their needs.

We trust that your spirit is starting to open to what the Holy Spirit is teaching us?

Giving wisely

Will this: "having all things in common" not motivate others to just sponge off the church? Yes we suppose it might. But that is why Paul teaches in:

2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

2Th 3:11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

2Th 3:12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

So what does Paul say what we should do with people who do not want to work? We should not give them anything. It is as clear as that.

Paul writes to Timothy in:

1Ti 5:9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man,

1Ti 5:10 well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

1Ti 5:11 But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry,

According to Paul; who are we to support among the saints? Those who do not have the capability or the means to supply their own needs any longer, as long as they have proven themselves faithful to Christ.

Paul also wrote to the Corinthian church the following in:

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as we have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

1Co 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when we come.

1Co 16:3 And when we come, whomever you approve by your letters we will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

This was in response to what happened in:

Act 11:28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Act 11:29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Act 11:30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Who else's needs should we meet besides widows? Those who are in a situation where it is not possible for them to find jobs like in the midst of a famine or in modern term: recession.

But however you want to fill in the details one thing is clear and that is you won't find anywhere in the bible where Christians tithed or collected money for a church organization or institution. It is unbiblical. The only time money was ever collected was for the needs of the saints, those who were really in need and not sponging of the church.

Supporting the ministry

Talking about sponging off the church though; how does this affects those who are suppose to be fulltime ministers such as Pastors? Does the bible really teach that Pastors can be fulltime ministers, or is this just another way of sponging of the church?

Well let us study some scriptures that deal with this issue. We read Paul's instruction in

1Co 9:14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

Is the word Pastor used here? No it isn't. You might accuse us of splitting hairs, so let us then read what the Lord has said about the preachers of the Gospel in:

Mat 10:7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

Mat 10:8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Mat 10:9 Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts,

Mat 10:10 nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

Mat 10:11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.

Mat 10:12 And when you go into a household, greet it.

Mat 10:13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace

return to you.

Mat 10:14 And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

According to this passage, who are those who preach the gospel?

- A) Those who give sermons on a Sunday.
- B) Those who preach the gospel from one place to the other such as apostles.

Well the context is clear that this passage refers to apostles and apostles are those who are sent out to preach the gospel and make disciples of the whole world. These passages do not refer to Pastors.

Let us read another passage that some believe justifies Pastors of making a living from the gospel. Paul instructs Timothy the following:

1Ti 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

1Ti 5:18 For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE AN OX WHILE IT TREADS OUT THE GRAIN," and, "THE LABORER IS WORTHY OF HIS WAGES."

Who is to be counted worthy of double honour for their labour according to Paul?

- A) The Pastor
- B) The Head Elder
- C) Or the Elders who labours well in preaching the gospel and teaching.

This passage refers to any elder and does not even mention the word pastor. Also the actual phrase “they who labour in word and doctrine” is also translated they who preach and teach. Preaching was done to the unbelievers and teachings were done to those who were still spiritually immature and needed spiritual milk as explained in:

Heb 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Heb 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

Heb 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Are you still one of those that need to be taught while you should have been a teacher by now? Might it be that that thing you call church wants to keep you spiritually immature so that they have an audience Sunday after Sunday and make a living from you? Well we leave that between you and God.

If you still need to have someone teaching you Paul instructs this in

Gal 6:6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

Never the less; sharing in all good things does not mean the same as giving pastors a salary. Sharing in all good things, means having all things in common. It means that if you are still being taught by an elder how to listen to the voice of our Lord, then you need to share the good things you have with the one who teaches you. Yet if you still need spiritual milk after a while then there is something wrong with either your relationship with God or the way you are being taught.

What is the reward?

So what does it mean for an elder to be honoured for his labour in preaching and teaching? When Paul was admonishing the elders in Acts 20 to “shepherd the flock well” he continued by saying to them in:

Act 20:33 we have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

Act 20:34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

Act 20:35 we have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Does this passage give any indication that elders lived from the gospel? Is it not maybe safer to conclude that elders were to do secular jobs like everyone else to support themselves, but may be rewarded for their efforts in preaching the gospel and helping the maturity of new Christians? This is a whole lot for you to consider, because the ramifications are quite drastic towards what you know about how the church that is being built by Christ is to function.

The problem that we are having today, is that we are reading the Scriptures with an unbiblical westernised mindset that sees the so called ministry as some kind of career one goes into. Yet most bible scholars admit that all the passages that talk about servants being supported financially are not written with the view of ministry being a career.

Look for instance what Jesus told the seventy he sent out to preach the gospel in:

Luk 10:1 *After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.*

Luk 10:2 *Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."*

To what did Jesus compare servants that are sent out to preach the gospel? One who was called to preach and teach the gospel, did it in the context of a day labourer, who is sent into the field to bring in the harvest.

Now let us look at a parable of Jesus concerning labourers that were sent to bring in the harvest.

Mat 20:1 *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."*

Mat 20:2 *Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard."*

Mat 20:3 *And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

Mat 20:4 *and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right we will give you.' So they went."*

Mat 20:5 *Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise."*

Mat 20:6 *And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?'*

Mat 20:7 *They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'*

Mat 20:8 *"So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.'"*

Mat 20:9 *And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius."*

Mat 20:10 *But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius."*

Mat 20:11 *And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner,*

Mat 20:12 *saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.'*

Mat 20:13 *But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?'*

Mat 20:14 *Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you."*

Mat 20:15 *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?'*

According to this parable who determines what a labourer receives for his labour? It is the Land-Lord that determines what the worker receives and not the worker. Any historian will tell you that this is a fact in biblical times.

Commercializing the gospel

So what are we getting at? Well let us get some points straight. Day-labourers were hired by the Land-Lord when it was time for the harvest to be brought in. They were then paid as the Land

owner willed. When the harvest was completely brought in; the day labourers had to look for somewhere else to harvest the crops.

None of the passages in scripture indicated that pastoring a church was a career. Even the Apostles did not do it as a career but were called to bring in the harvest. The apostles did not determine how much they should earn, but Christ the Lord of the harvest would lay it upon the saints to give them what they need.

Furthermore the apostles had a trade they would do alongside their calling of making disciples. Most of the apostles were fishermen, Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila were tent makers, and Luke was a Physician. While the Apostles were busy preaching the gospel, discipling the converts and planting churches, the churches assisted them financially so that their needs would be met. When they were not busy making disciples and planting churches, they did secular work to supply their own needs through their own trade.

Some apostles like Paul would supply for their own needs even while they were planting and discipling churches as we see in.

2Th 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

2Th 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

2Th 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

2Th 3:9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

2Th 3:11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

2Th 3:12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

What did Paul try and teach us through his example? Well that we ought to work to support ourselves. This kind of example is rarely found in the institutional church today.

We read in:

2Co 2:17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

What is peddling the word of God? It is selling the word of God. Be honest with yourself; which topic gets spoken about the most in the institutional church; tithing, and getting financially blessed; or Christ being all in all? Why are those who are supposed to be servants of the gospel behaving like motivational speakers, selling their so called words of inspiration which were supposed to be given freely?

Who does the mainstream church really serve today; Mammon or God?

Conclusion

Let us end by putting some facts on the table. Would you be surprised to know that the church of the bible, the church Christ is building does not need one cent to function? You might think it impossible. Well think of it this way. The only time money was collected, was for the needs of the saints. While we live on earth in these mortal bodies, we have mortal needs, like food, clothing and a roof over our heads, and for that we do need money.

Yet the church is not mortal but a spiritual entity, built by Christ and empowered by the Spirit of

God. So it does not need money. This is the difference between the church that is being built by man and the church that Christ is building. Yet to fully understand this concept we need a paradigm shift in our thinking from our traditional institutional church of today to a biblical church. The church of the bible in relation to today's church, has accomplished much more without the use of money except to look after the needs of saints.

It is not only possible to practise a biblical church module; it is crucial if we are to have any relevance in our world today, and complete the great commission in the hard, financial distress and crucial times we are facings. Furthermore what is more important, being part of what Christ is building or being part of what man is building.

There are probably a lot of unanswered questions still in your mind. You might wonder how on earth can the church as you know it, actually function if we are to follow what the bible teaches about tithing and giving? What type of servant of the church will still serve the church if he does not have the security of a salary? Those are very good questions? But are you really ready for some radical answers to those questions?

Are you willing to move on from religious entertainment to actually being part of the body of Christ? Be warned it is not for those who just want to play church. We pray that even though this might go directly against what has been taught for so many years, that you are now experiencing a sense of freedom to serve the Lord in a way you always knew you ought to.

You are blessed in Jesus the Christ.

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