

Teaching 5 of 11

What About the Tithe?

Who was it for, what did Jesus say, and what changed at the cross?

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

Galatians 3:13

Maria sat in the back row with sweaty hands as the plate came down the aisle. She had paid rent and bought food for her kids. The man up front had just said, “If you do not give ten percent, you are robbing God. You are under a curse.” She went home afraid, wondering if her car broke down because she gave too little.

What was the tithe?

The tithe was part of the Law of Moses, mostly grain, wine, oil and young animals. Much of it fed the Levites, who had no land (Numbers 18:21). It was tied to a land, a temple and a priesthood.

Israel actually had more than one tithe: the Levites’ tithe, the feast tithe eaten in Jerusalem, and the third-year tithe for the poor (Numbers 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 14:22-29). Together they came to far more than ten percent. If someone says “keep the tithe,” we can kindly ask, “Which one?” You cannot keep one wheel and call it the car.

What about Malachi?

“Will man rob God?” (Malachi 3:8). God was speaking to Israel under the Law, and also scolding the priests (Malachi 1:6; 2:1). The tithe went into the storehouse, a room at the temple, “that there may be food in my house” (Malachi 3:10). It was not about your bank account. Lifted out of its home, a word for Israel becomes a whip for Maria.

What about Abraham?

δεκάτη

dekatē (deh-kah-TAY)

A tenth.

Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of one battle, once, then gave the rest away (Genesis 14:20-24). Hebrews 7 retells it using δεκάτη *dekatē*, “a tenth,” to show that Jesus is a greater priest. The point is Jesus, not money.

What about Jesus?

ἀποδεκατόω

apodekatoō (ah-po-deh-kah-TOH-oh)

To pay a tenth.

Jesus told the Pharisees they tithed mint, dill and cumin but neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). The word is ἀποδεκατόω *apodekatoō*, to pay a tenth. He spoke before the cross, while the temple stood and the Law was in force. His main point was that they were careful with mint and careless with people.

In Luke 18 the Pharisee boasted, “I give tithes of all that I get.” The tax collector begged, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Jesus said the sinner

“went down to his house justified, rather than the other.” The man who tithed the most went home lost.

Free from the curse

Jesus took the curse to the cross. No one can put back on your shoulders what He carried away. After the cross, no apostle ever tells the church to tithe. They talk about giving a lot, but never set a ten percent rule.

Not a license to be stingy

Freedom from the tithe law is not freedom from giving. The New Testament does not lower the bar. It moves it from your wallet to your heart. Under the Law people asked, “How much do I owe?” Under grace we ask, “How much can I give?” Love often gives far more than any law asks.

Remember this

The tithe was part of God’s promise with Israel. Jesus took the curse of the Law on Himself. You do not give to escape a curse. You give because you are free.