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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
 #22

JUST THE WAY IT IS
1 CORINTHIANS 9:13-14

INTRODUCTION

Last week we heard Paul defend his Apostleship to the Corinthian church [Acts 9:1-18]. Essentially, he was defending his right to be paid for preaching the gospel even though he did not desire to be paid. In the course of his defense, Paul explains that those who preach the gospel should be financially provided for in the same way as the Old Testament priests were provided for [1 Corinthians 9:13-14]. This points us to the biblical concept of the tithe. Obviously, the tithe plays a prominent role in the Old Testament and here, Paul extends those same operating principles into the New Testament Church. In other words, God has made the world in such a way that the tithe plays an important role; that's just the way it is. Additionally, God has made the church in such a way that the tithe plays an important role; that's just the way it is.

1. THE TITHE IS A PART OF THE WAY GOD MADE THE WORLD

When God created the world, on the seventh day, He instituted the Sabbath, a day for rest and worship. The Sabbath was woven into creation as a part of the way the world would function until the end of time. One out of every 7 days is to be set aside for rest and worship. In fact, God blessed this one day and He sanctified it [Genesis 2:3]. There are distinct blessings for those who observe the Sabbath [we may call it the Lord's Day] and there are curses for those who refuse to do this. One distinct blessing is that proper observance of the Sabbath delivers us from slavery to work [Exodus 20:8, 11]. Just as God rested from His work, we must rest from ours. On this day, we are to do the work of worship. From the very beginning, God established a day when men, women and children were to refrain from all normal, laborious actions [except those acts of necessity and mercy] and present themselves before God to offer the first fruits of their labor.

We do not know precisely when God commanded specific Sabbath observance, but clearly He must have done so or else the 4th Commandment would have made little or no sense to the people because here God commands Israel to *remember* the Sabbath that their forefathers had failed to keep [Exodus 20:5-8]. We do not know when or how God commanded humans to bring animal sacrifices, but clearly He must have done so [Hebrews 11:4]. Neither do we know when God commanded a tithe, but we find it to be a central part of worship as early as Genesis 14:20 when Abraham tithes 10% of all he had to Melchizedek. We also find Jacob giving 10% of all he has to God in an act of worship [Genesis 28:19-22].

God formalizes the tithe under the Mosaic Law [Leviticus 27:30-32] and here, God plainly declares that the first 10% of all Israel possessed *is holy to the LORD*. In Numbers 18:25-26, God instructs Israel to support the priestly families, the Levites with the tithe and that is what Paul refers to here in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14. The support for the Lord's work in the temple was never left to the whims of the people. The tithe was formalized to ensure that work would carry on.

Israel constantly failed to properly tithe, but on occasions when God sent revival, obedience to the tithe was one result.

2. THOSE SAME PRINCIPLES ARE APPLIED TO THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Under the New Covenant, believers are free from all ceremonial and civil laws which governed Israel, but I have demonstrated that the tithe existed prior to the nation of Israel and the Mosaic Law. The principle of the tithe is woven into the fabric of how God made the world; that's just the way it is. Hence, we find money compared to a seed in the New Testament and *he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully* (2 Corinthians 9:6). Paul puts that same principle like this in Galatians 6:6-8, *6The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. 7Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.*

In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, Paul teaches us that we are to support the work of the church in the same way Old Testament Israel supported the work of the temple. Our giving must be accompanied by the right attitude; *7Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed* (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Again, Paul speaks to the Corinthians regarding their giving when he writes, *1Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). There is a time and place for spontaneous giving, but the Lord's Day is not that time and the church is not that place. Your giving here should be planned, saved for and in proportion to your income.

3. TITHING FUNCTIONS TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL

When the tithe is given, it is to be used to support the work of the gospel. This happens in various forms. First of all, the tithe is a regular means of defeating greed in our hearts. The gospel is concerned with conquering sin that enslaves our hearts. Giving is the best means of overcoming greed. So there is a sanctifying effect that comes through giving. Secondly, the tithe solves practically every financial problem a church faces. As Doug Wilson illustrates in his writings, *Just imagine a congregation of one hundred households with an average income of \$25,000 annually. Such a church (if tithing) could support two full-time staff members and one missionary family at a very reasonable wage and still be able to save \$750,000 in five years.* Thirdly, the tithe goes toward meeting benevolence needs within a local congregation and community [Acts 6:1-2]. Fourthly, the tithe is used to pay for occasional celebrations that the body of Christ enjoys [Deuteronomy 14:22-26]. I'm sure there are other reasons to tithe, but God commands the tithe explicitly for these.

4. TITHING TEACHES US TO BETTER HANDLE GOD'S BLESSING

The point of the tithe is to give to God from the blessings He has given to us or enabled us to receive. This is why we tithe the first-fruits and not the leftovers. One of the realities of tithing is that it comes with the blessing of God. Tithing goes hand in hand with not sinning away your money. God promised blessing for those who tithe under the Old Covenant [Malachi 3:10] and under the New Covenant [2 Corinthians 9:7-8]. We must be careful to handle those blessings

because certain temptations come with money. First of all, we must not forget God once He gives us financial blessings [Deuteronomy 8:17-18]. Secondly, we must not begin to trust in our savings accounts or mutual funds instead of trusting in God [1 Timothy 6:17-19]. Thirdly, we are not to allow material concerns to choke out spiritual concerns [Mark 4:19]. God makes us materially rich so that we can be rich in good deeds.

CONCLUSION

For just a moment, contemplate the Sabbath and the tithe, both ordinances of creation. To properly observe one, we must observe the other. At this point, someone may say, "Well, don't all our days belong to God and doesn't all our money belong to Him as well? So why must we observe a Sabbath and tithe?" Both of those statements are true in some very real sense, but they do not convey the whole truth. The whole truth is that while everyday belongs to the Lord, we are required to set aside one-seventh of our time for gathering with the body of Christ for corporate worship and other such activities. And, every dollar we make belongs to the Lord, but one-tenth is to be used to directly support the work of the gospel in our local congregation. This is the revealed will of God to His people.

We must not get the idea that we are bound-up in some kind of new slavery to laws concerning Sabbath observance and tithing. Both of these creation ordinances are given to free us from slavery to labor and materialism. That is why we are commanded to rest and give on a weekly basis. Just listen as Moses elaborates on the freedom God's people have concerning their money, under the Old Covenant no less.

22" You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. 23" You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. 24" If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you, 25 then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 26" You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household. 27" Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you (Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

You don't need to have a seminary degree to figure out what Moses is saying here: (1) Tithe from all you have (v22), (2) enjoy what you are to tithe in the presence of the Lord and with the people of the Lord (vv23-25), (3) once your obligation to tithe is met, then follow your heart's desires [within the bounds of Scripture] (v26), (4) let your giving and feasting be characterized by a great attitude (v26), and above all else, (5) don't neglect to include your pastor in the festivities (v27)!