

Common Objections to Tithing

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1. “I can’t afford to tithe”

This objection is usually summed by this comment – “You don’t understand Pastor Rob, there’s no way; I can barely afford to pay my bills, let alone tithe; I just don’t have the money.”

And that’s not true; You *do* have the money

Granted, after your mortgage, car loans, entertainment, clothing, and credit cards – there may be nothing left; But that doesn’t mean you don’t have the money
It just means you’ve chosen to spend it on yourself instead of God

In which case, you need to change your priorities

You can’t just choose a lifestyle that consumes all your income, and then say . . .
“Oops, sorry God, I can’t afford to tithe;” That’s not legit

If you need to downsize your home in order to tithe, downsize your home

If you need to get a cheaper car, get a cheaper car; Go out less; Spend less
Apart from that, apart from changing your lifestyle and priorities, you’ll *never* be able to afford it

And you’ll continue to live in the drudgery of disobedience, suffering the consequences, and wondering why you always *have* less, when you *give* less

2. “Tithing is part of the OT Law, and doesn’t apply to me.”

Which usually betrays a hardness of heart, or a control issue, or an authority issue
And no amount of reasoning will change that
But setting those aside, let me just address this at face value

The first part is correct – tithing *is* a part of the OT Law

And we are no longer under the Law – in that it is not the means of our salvation, nor the constraint of our life (See Galatians)
But that doesn’t necessarily mean that it has no bearing on our lives, or no applicability for how we live – especially when it comes to tithing

• There are 5 reasons for that:

1. Tithing pre-dates the Law

Abraham practiced it with Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, in Gen 14:17-20 – by giving him *a tenth of everything* . . .

And Jacob committed to it with God, after his dream in Gen 28:18-22

Both, well before God gave Moses the Law at Mt Sinai; 5-700 years before
IOW it was a universal principle that God’s people were practicing well before it was ever included in the Law

2. The OT Law is not entirely passé

Jesus said in Mt 5:17 – *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

And in Luke 16:17 – *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

Jesus rebuked people for twisting the Law, and adding to it, and misappropriating it – but he didn’t dismiss it

And therefore, neither can we; It’s not passé

3. Malachi 3, as with the rest of the Law, is a part of Scripture

And 2 Tim 3:16 – *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for . . . training in righteousness*

All Scripture includes Malachi; Which means that it too is useful for training us in righteousness; In this case, the righteousness of tithing

Fourth, Malachi and the tithing it teaches specifically applies to us, b/c . . .

4. Tithing is affirmed by Jesus in the NT

In Mt 23:23 he says – *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin [tiny seeds and herbs], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*”

You ought to have observed God’s standards of justice and mercy and faithfulness in the OT Law, without neglecting his other standards like tithing

And then 5th, contrary to the objection . . .

5. The Law in general still applies, but not like it used to

That’s the implication of 1 Cor 9:8-10 where Paul appeals to the OT Law to support his NT argument

*Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰Does he not speak *entirely* for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.*

Notice that he appeals to the OT Law, both generally and specifically, to support his NT argument

Which he couldn’t legitimately do if the Law didn’t still apply to us in some way, shape, or form; In fact, Paul says it was written *entirely* for our sake

Not so much for those in the OT, but us, on this side of the cross

And in so doing, he indicates it’s the principle *behind* the law that remains pertinent

That is, if we can discern the *heart* of God and the *purpose* of God in writing the law, like Paul did – then we can discern our application of it

Which is not always easy with the OT laws, but in most cases it’s possible
B/c the Law, as with any law, reflects its author

Just like the laws of a government reveal the nature and desires of those who govern . . .

So too the laws of God reflect *his* nature and desires, for those *he* governs
Laws always reflect the nature of those who write them

• So when God says in Mal 3:10 – *Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house* . . .

His obvious *purpose* was to provide sufficient means in the temple, to minister to the people and support the priests

And his *desire*, his heart, was to do so through the equitable and measurable giving of his people
Equitable b/c it's a percentage as opposed to a flat amount for everybody . . .
And measurable b/c it's specific – it's 10% as opposed to 9 or 11, or whatever you want

That's God's heart in the matter – his heart behind the law if you will
That his primary work of ministry, be provided for through the *tithes* of his people

- So while the Law is not the means of our salvation, nor the futile constraint of our lives – the *heart* of the matter, the heart of God *behind* the Law, still applies
And in this case, it's even affirmed by Jesus
So how foolish would we be, to forego the *blessing* of God, b/c we reject the *heart* of God?

Don't do that; Give his way, and test him in this
And see if he doesn't *open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

3. “If we were really following the OT pattern we'd be tithing 23%, so we should be doing all or nothing.”

First of all, the OT pattern was not a 23% “tithe” as some people try to advocate
That's the amount and practice advocated by Jewish rabbis, and practiced among the Jews by NT times – but that's not what the Bible says

They believed, and some still advocate, that 10% should be given to the temple each year,
10% should be given for social functions and feasts . . .
And 10% should be given every third year (hence the 3%) for the poor
For a total of 23.3% per year if you were setting aside that last portion each year

But getting that from the text, is a huge stretch, with Deut 14:22-29 often cited as support
The problem is, there's no evidence that the passage speaks of a different *kind* of tithe, just other *purposes* for it
Like eating some of it when they brought it to the temple at harvest time . . .
And giving it to their respective towns every third year for the poor and the priests, instead of giving it to the temple
It's not a different kind of tithe that's being spoken of, but a different purpose for it at that time

So the OT pattern was not 23% per year, but 10%
And it was to be used for different purposes, including provision for the temple ministry, provision for the priests, and provision for the poor

- But even if it *was* 23%, we'd still be following it in principle (see above, re how the OT Law applies in our day)
The difference being, that we give that money to different sources – our tithe to the church, our taxes to the government, and our offerings to charities that help the poor
And do so, b/c we live in a democracy, where social functions and religion and welfare are handled by separate entities

The Israelites however, lived in a *theocracy*, where that was all handled in a one-stop shop

– there was no separation between church and state, church and religion
Nor were there para-church organizations in addition to the government's provision of welfare, to provide for the poor; It was all combined

The point being, that even if 23% were biblical, which it's not – we'd still be honoring the principle behind the OT Laws . . .

By tithing to our church – to support the work of ministry
Paying our taxes (*more* than 10%) – to provide for social functions and celebrations
And giving to charities in addition to taxes – to provide for the poor (again, probably *more* than 3% per year when you combine it with taxes for that purpose)

What's more, even if the 23% were biblical, and we weren't abiding by part of it – that doesn't mean we should scrap the whole thing

- But all that is a moot point, b/c the Scriptures don't teach such a thing
It comes from a Jewish interpretation that infers far more than the Bible implies, or says

4. “The OT passages on tithing refer to *non-monetary* items, so it doesn't apply to our *money*.”

All I can say on this one, is “Wow”

1. Just b/c money didn't exist as a means of barter for much of the OT era, doesn't mean the concept doesn't apply
That's like saying, just b/c we don't use phylacteries any more (little boxes worn on the wrist and forehead with verses in them) . . .
We don't have to honor the principle of keeping God's word in mind, from Deut 6:8-9

In fact, we'd have to dismiss a whole bunch of the Bible, Old *and* New Testament, if this objection were legitimate
But we don't, and shouldn't, b/c even the biblical authors from one era to the next, accommodated the principles, despite the differences in culture
Again, see the example of Paul above, regarding oxen in 1 Cor 9:8-10

2. Proverbs 3:9 says – *Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce*
Notice he distinguishes between *produce* and *wealth*
Wealth obviously referring to everything other than agriculture produce and livestock
Which by Solomon's time, certainly included money in the form of gold and silver

3. 2 Chronicles 31:5 says – *The people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.*
I think it's safe to say that everything includes everything – even money

4. Jesus not only affirmed the tithe in Mt 23:23, but spoke of the people giving *money*
Like when the poor widow put two small copper coins in the temple treasury box (Mk 12:42)

Needless to say, this objection has problems from the get-go; And most likely is an attempt to hang on to that which is not ours

5. “The NT only says that we should give as we have made up our minds”

First of all, that’s not true; See the fourth reason under #2, above

Jesus actually *affirmed* the tithe in the NT (Mt 23:23), while exhorting us to not neglect weightier matters like justice and mercy and faithfulness

Second, this objection is based on 2 Cor 9:7, where Paul says – *Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

But he’s not talking not about tithing; He’s talking about a special offering to help the church in Jerusalem at the time; An offering over and above their tithe

So you can’t dismiss tithing altogether, based on this verse or passage

If anything, it affirms and emphasizes the motive of *joy* that God desires behind *all* our giving; all our obedience

Something explicit in the OT as well

- Like when Moses said to the people in Dt 28:47-48 – *Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart . . . you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lacking everything.*

They were serving him, they were giving, they were following the letter of the law – but their heart wasn’t in it

And God was like, “Uh-uh; That’s not what I’m looking for”

“I want your *heart*; I want *joyful* obedience; I want *happy* followers”

Or in the case of 2 Cor 9 – *cheerful* givers

People who give not b/c they *have* to out of *compulsion*, but b/c they *want* to out of *desire*

People who give eagerly and deliberately, and are *seriously* happy about it

That’s who God is looking for; That’s the kind of giver God *loves*

Not grudging ones, but joyful ones

So yes, we should give over and above our tithe as God prompts, and according to how we’ve made up our minds – willingly, cheerfully, and generously

But we should also give a tithe – willingly, cheerfully, and generously

The one, doesn’t negate the other