

TITHING AND GIVING IN THE SCRIPTURES AND CHURCH HISTORY.

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Preface.

I want to make it very clear that I am not against church organisations, for there are many good churches and ministers that are worthy of financial support. Nor am I against generous giving, or tithing, for those who can afford it, and feel that they should tithe, particularly if their gifts are used to help the poor, as they were in the

early Church. However, I am appalled that some preachers have distorted both the facts of Church history and the Scriptures, by saying that God commands all Christians to tithe, and that even poor Christians are under a curse if they do not tithe. Compassionate Christian leaders will appeal to Christians to give to worthy causes because of the constraint of the love of Christ, not by threats of curses and judgement. I wrote this study when I heard that some poor Christians, including old age pensioners, had been without food, because they had been told that they were under a curse if they did not tithe. Such oppressive demands are intolerable, and the authority for them certainly does not come from the Scriptures. God desires to bless, not burden people, His yoke is kind and His burden is light. Mt.11v28-30. It is an historical fact that giving in the early Church was on a voluntary basis, and that early Christians did not tithe, and that there was no tithing in the Church for several centuries, and that some parts of the Church never tithed.

I am not a recent convert to the thoughts expressed in this study. I have been very concerned for almost fifty years by the way that some preachers have fleeced Christians of their money, by a twisted exposition of the Scriptures. The truth has been corrupted by various evils, ignorance, party spirit, pride, a love of power and money, a false prosperity gospel, personal kingdom building, and a stress upon buildings. I appeal for a return to biblical financial integrity; where being of one accord, having all things in common, and a caring love that ministers to the poor, are the most important priorities for Christ's Church. W. H. Turner. January 10th. 2001.

Introduction.

The scandal of extortionate demands for money in the name of God.

Christians awake and beware! There are many wolves loose in the Church, who by their plausible appeals, and a twisted and dishonest exposition of the Scriptures, are extorting money from Christians in the name of God. Some causes, which they put forward, seem to be almost essential, until you compare them with the practice and example of Jesus and His early Church. Some preachers have such huge financial needs, through putting into operation every idea that comes into their minds, so that they cannot minister to small Christian groups. Their financial needs direct them, not God, and some extort money from Christians to finance their organisations. Their insatiable demand for finances has hindered ministry to the poor, and has depleted the finances of good churches, and other worthy causes. It is very sad that some who have had genuine ministries have ignored our Lord's command, "Freely you have received, freely give," Mt.10v8., and have become financial wolves, and the resulting deterioration of their characters and ministries has become obvious to all discerning Christians.

Jesus said the Scribes and Pharisees were full of extortion ("harpage," robbery) and unbridled greed, and pronounced repeated woes upon them. Mt.23v14,25,27,28. Woe to those who follow their example, for Jesus warned that judgement and Hell await religious robbers who make merchandise of people in God's name. Jn.2v16. Mt.21v12,13. 23v4,14,23,33. The name of God and the Gospel are blasphemed among worldly people by such financial extortion and wickedness. Rom.2v4. Jesus said people can work miracles, but if they consistently practice iniquity, on judgement day He will bear legal witness against them and publicly proclaim ("homologeso," see Mt.10v32.), "I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." "Knew," is "egnon," the aorist of "ginosko," to know by experience and relationship, so Jesus was saying, "I never at any point of time have been in any relationship with you, or recognised or approved you as my servants." Mt.7v21-23. To use God's gifts and twist God's Word, to dishonestly fleece people of their money is a very serious sin. Jesus warns us that we have to do God's will and obey His Word, and bear genuine fruits of character to stand on the day of judgement. These fruits include the weightier matters of the Law, which are, judgement, mercy, faith, love of people and God. Mt.7v16,21,24. 23v23. Lk.11v39-44.

We should not be surprised that there are ravenous wolves in God's Church, for our Lord, Paul and Peter have warned us about them. Mt.7v15-20. Acts.20v28-30. In 2Pet.2v1-3,15-17., Peter warns us that there are plausible false prophets and teachers in the Church, "who motivated by covetousness and greed for money; will, with forged words and cunning false arguments, exploit and make merchandise of you: for whom their long pronounced sentence and judgement does not linger, and their destruction is awake and ready to seize them.-to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever." In 1Pet.5v1-4., Peter exhorts Christian leaders, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint, but willingly, not from the motive of fondness for dishonest gain, but eagerly and willingly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." Some methods of extorting money from Christians are positively evil. Peter's warning about correct financial motivation in Christian service needs to be heeded.

Unreasonable demands for money usually spring out of personal kingdom building.

Some Christians have been put under extreme financial pressure because their leaders have had big plans for building and expansion, and have claimed divine inspiration for these plans. These leaders feel that to have influence, they have to imitate the building programmes of other denominations. They forget that our Lord, His apostles, and Paul, never built any church buildings, and never said that they should be built.

Paul said that he had never coveted other people's gold or silver; indeed, coveting and using other people's money and resources to put our plans into operation is a sin. Acts.20v33-35. How often people claim that they are building for the glory of God, when, in reality, they are only building a kingdom for themselves, and a monument to their pride. God hates the pressure that is put upon Christians through excessive building plans; the real motives for these building plans will be manifested on judgement day.

We read in Acts.20v28-31., that Paul warned the Ephesians with tears for three years, that after his departure fierce wolves in would enter in and ferociously attack the flock, but, unfortunately, they did not heed his warnings. False teachers appear to have succeeded in turning all the churches in Asia against Paul. Mt.7v15. 2Tim.1v15. Paul also warned the Ephesians that some from among them would want a personal following, and would draw disciples after themselves. A great deal of church building and denominational expansion is tainted with this doubtful motivation of kingdom building. Two people can preach exactly the same truth, but with totally different motives, one can preach to build a kingdom for men, or themselves; another can preach out of love for God, purely to bless people and build God's kingdom.

The costly nature of competition and duplication in Christian circles.

The competition and duplication of effort between different Christian groups has been very costly and used up vast amounts of finances. The need to pay for the building and upkeep of competing religious structures and ministers, has resulted in excessive and unscriptural demands being made of Christians to give finances. The people of Israel desired to be like the nations about them and have a king and kingdom. In 1Sam.8v6-22. N.B. v17,18, Samuel solemnly warned Israel that kingdom building is a very costly business, and that they would groan under the burden of it. Israel did groan under the demands that were made upon them by Solomon's expensive building projects, and one can hear the groans of Christians who have been over-burdened by expensive church structures. The grievous yokes of Solomon and Rehoboam resulted in the division of Israel; and some Christians have also rebelled against similar heavy yokes and financial extortion, and have voted with their feet and left the churches that have laid these appalling unscriptural demands and burdens upon them. Mt.23v4. 2Chron.10v3-19. N.B.v4,10,19. Lk.11v37-54. N.B. v46,47. Let us return again to biblical simplicity, honesty and integrity.

1. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY ABRAHAM'S TITHES TO MELCHIZEDEK.

Systematic tithing is certainly not authorised or justified by appealing to the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek about 430 years before the Law. Gen.14v18-20. Heb.7v1-11. N.B. v4. This tithe was almost certainly given to Melchizedek to give him some financial security, **however, it was a voluntary once only gift.** We also need to remember that Abraham's tithe was not a tenth of his wealth; it was a single gift of "the tenth of the spoils" of victory in war. In Heb.7v4., "the spoils," is "akrothinion," the top of the heap of spoils. Melchizedek had the first choice of a tenth of the best of the spoils. Abraham obtained these spoils through a miraculous military defeat of the four kings who attacked Sodom and captured Lot. One king was Amraphel king of Shinar (Babylon), who has been identified as the great king and renowned law-maker Hammurabi, whose "Hammurabi Code" was a landmark in history, for it not only stated legal rights and responsibilities, it also fixed the rates of wages. There was also the great and famous Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Arioch king of Ellasar (Larsa), and Tidal king of Goiim, usually rendered as "nations." Abraham won a miraculous victory over the vastly superior forces of these four kings and successfully rescued Lot out of their hands. Gen.14v5-20. Those who use Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek to demand tithes, must realise that this would mean that we would only have to give tithes of the spoils of victory in war, and then only once!

2. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY THE TITHES THAT JACOB GAVE TO GOD.

Jacob promised to give God tithes of all that God had promised to give him in the wonderful vision of the ladder to Heaven at Bethel. Gen.28v11-22. This again was a voluntary gift, and not demanded by God. Jacob obviously used this tithe to minister to the poor and needy people that he came across in his travels, for there was no Levitical priesthood to support; Jacob himself was the spiritual head of his family. There is no record that Jacob gave tithes to the successors of Melchizedek, indeed, according to Heb.7v1-3. Melchizedek had no genealogy, and his priesthood was confined to himself.

3. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY TITHING UNDER THE LAW.

a. The tithe was the means of supporting the Levites and priests.

Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah. Gen.29v34. 35v23. Ex.1v2. 1Chron.2v1. The three sons of Levi, Gershom, Kohath, and Merari, were born before Israel's exodus from Egypt. The family of Levi had some nasty skeletons in their cupboard. When Dinah, the sister of Levi, was assaulted and violated by Shechem the Hivite, Levi and Simeon pillaged the city of Shechem and killed all the males there. Jacob condemned this evil act at the time, and in his final prophetic blessing and estimation of his sons, he pronounces God's curse upon Levi and Simeon for this cruel and evil act. Gen.34v1-31. 49v5-9. The priests in the Temple settled into a state of formal worship and hypocrisy, and became the opponents of true spirituality; the martyr Stephen said that they had always resisted the Spirit of God. Acts.7v51-53.

We read in Deut.14v28,29. and Numb.18v21-24,27., that the tithe was to be used to financially support the Levite, because the Levites had "no portion nor inheritance with you." In Numb.18v21., God states, "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." cf. Heb.7v5. The Levites service included caring for the poor in Israel's welfare state, and they had more than enough for this, for Hooker says that the tithes given to the Levites meant that their worldly estate was four times as good as any of the other tribes of Israel. Even if Hooker was speaking of a double tithe, then a single tithe meant that the Levites still had twice as much as the other tribes to service Israel's welfare state. The tithes were a tithe of the seed and crops of the land, the fruit of the trees, the oil and wine, and the herds and the flocks. Deut.14v22,23. As the herds and flocks passed under the rod, every tenth animal was taken. Lev.27v30-33. Jer.33v13. Ez.20v37. The animals could not be redeemed, but the fruit and seed of the land could be for an extra fifth on the tithe price. In

Numb.18v26-32., we read that the Levites were to take a "tithe of the tithe --- from all the best of them" and give it to the priests. Neh.10v39. Some have suggested that a second tithe of the remaining nine tenths of the tithe was given for the feast at Jerusalem, they feel that this would harmonise the accounts. But this is not necessary, it seems clear enough that the Levites shared the tithe with the people who gave it, and with the poor, fatherless, stranger and widow, and saved the rest for themselves and the needy. God's laws are very thoughtful and kind.

b. The place where tithes were taken to under the Law.

Tithes were to be brought once a year, "to the place which the Lord your God shall choose." However the tithes could be eaten and distributed locally, "within thy gates," if the Temple was too far away. Deut.14v22. 12v5,11,14,18,21. The tithes of corn, wine, oil and animals were to be eaten not only by the Levites, but also by the people who brought the tithe. Deut.12v17,18. Some think it better to distinguish between tithes and first fruits; however, Deut.26v1-15. mentions them together, which implies that they are the same, or that the first-fruits could be part of the tithe, they were given to the priests. Deut.18v4.

Every third year all who tithed were to give their tithes to the Levites and poor and needy from "within their gates." Deut.14v28,29. However, they still had to go to worship at Jerusalem after distributing their tithes in their local community, and there proclaim that they had given their tithes to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. Deut.26v12-19.

We read in Deut.12v20,21., that if the distance to Jerusalem was too far to travel, the tithe was to be shared among the poor and the Levites and eaten "within the gates" of the person who tithed them, the tithe was to be used as a contingency fund for the poor. Have you ever heard any Bible teachers tell you that you are to invite the poor and needy to your home and consume some of your tithe in a religious party of thanksgiving and worship, and the rest of your tithe is to be used as a contingency fund to provide for the poor? How different from the modern teaching and demands on tithing!

c. The tithe was also Israel's Income Tax to be used for Israel's welfare state.

In Deut.10v16-19., God commanded the Levites to administer justice for the stranger, fatherless and widow and feed and clothe them. We read, "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. For the Lord your God is a God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt." These are strong words, and emphasise God's loving concern for the poor and needy. This is why our Lord was so angry with the Jews in Mal.3v7-10., and said there would be a curse upon them, if they failed to bring the tithes into the storehouse. God said that they were robbing Him, when they robbed the Levite and the poor. The Levites and priests also came under a curse if they robbed the poor.

In Deut.14v28,29., we read that our Lord gave the Law on tithing to Moses out of a concern for the poor, we read that the tithe was not only for the Levite, but also for "the stranger and the fatherless and the widow." Our Lord castigated the Jews for their arrogant pride and self-deception over their tithing, and pointed out that it availed them nothing when they omitted and neglected the weightier matters of the Law, judgement, mercy, faith, and love of God. The judgement and mercy mentioned here is undoubtedly the ministry to the poor mentioned in the Scriptures. Mt.23v23. Lk.11v39-44. Our Lord was very angry with Israel's religious leaders, because they devoured widow's houses, neglected the poor, and turned God's Temple into a "den of robbers," and He warned them that they were bound for Hell because of it. Mt.21v12,13. 23v13-39. N.B. v14,33. Lk.20v46,47.

d. God told Israel to use part of their tithe for a religious holiday at Jerusalem at His expense.

If we only had Numb.18v21., to guide us on tithing, we would think that "all" of the tithes were to be consumed by the Levites, but other Scriptures show that this was not so, for we read that others, including those who tithed, partook of some of the tithes. In Deut.14v24-27., we read that if the distance was long, but could be travelled, the tithes were to be changed into money, and the person who tithed was to use part of their tithe to buy food and drink; **"And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat them there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates;** for he hath no part or inheritance with thee." The tithe belonged to the Lord, but he gave a great deal of it back for a religious holiday at Jerusalem, not only for the household of the person who gave the tithe, but also for the local Levite, and the poor, fatherless, stranger and widow. Deut.12v6,7,18. In Deut.16v10-17., God said the poor, the widow, fatherless, and stranger, were to be taken to Jerusalem to the three feasts of Israel, for three weeks of joyful holidays whose aim was physical and spiritual refreshment, and God paid the expenses out of the tithes and offerings. This shows the beautiful giving goodness of God. The tithe was Israel's income tax, and God was the tax inspector; however, God is the only tax inspector I know, who says, "Use some of your tithes and offerings for a religious holiday at Jerusalem." No worldly tax inspectors do that!

The 1957 edition of "The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge," under the heading "Tithes," Confirms, on page 453, the philanthropic and generous nature of God's Law on tithing. Schaff states that Deut.14v22ff., teaches that the tithe was used to provide for a joyous communal meal at the

Temple at Jerusalem with the Levites of the tither's locality, because Levites did not own landed property, and this part of the tithe did not go to the priests or Temple officers. God required the celebrations and participants to be pure. **Schaff confirms from Deut.14v28,29. and 16v12-15., that in the third year the tithe was deposited and stored at the tither's home, and not at the sanctuary, for the consumption and benefit of the Levite, stranger, fatherless, and widow. Schaff makes the very important point that this was NOT a second tithe, but a special employment of the third year tithe for charitable purposes; and that Deuteronomy knows nothing of a second tithe expressly for the Levites.** Schaff also states that Deuteronomy does not make clear what is the relationship between the tithe and the first-fruits offerings, but thinks that they are identical, because it is unlikely that each generation of the herd was subjected to a double tax, and Deut.26v1-15., closely connects the first-fruits and tithe, the basket of first-fruits which is brought to the priest is part of the tithe which is devoted to the joyous communal meal. End of synopsis.

Later on in Israel's history, Israel's greedy religious leaders, like some modern preachers, demanded two tithes a year, however, Schaff's statement here refutes that conclusion. The tithe of the third year was not a second tithing, but a use of the tithe for charitable purposes; and the offering of the first fruits was part of the tithe and not a double tax.

e. The corruption of God's beautiful laws on tithing by Israel's leaders.

God's simple, beautiful and thoughtful laws on tithing were distorted, corrupted and changed by the kings and priests of Israel. They not only stopped the people using the tithe for a religious holiday; they greatly increased the burden of taxation upon the people of God. In Christ's time the greed of the High Priests even impoverished ordinary priests. Josephus tells us in his Antiquities, Book 4, chapter 8, paragraph 22, that in his time the people were paying two tithes each year, and a third tithe in the third year. Some modern theologians have incorrectly suggested that this was true in the time of Moses. The Talmudic rabbis laid down elaborate and burdensome rules, even for the smallest products of the soil. They said that great personal merit was obtained through following these man-made rules on tithing. The tithes of mint, anise and cummin was an enforcement of the Talmudic rabbis, they said that even the leaves and the stalks had to be tithed. This went far beyond the teaching of Scripture, and Christ condemned them for it. Mt.23v23. Lk.11v42. 18v12. They also made rules as to the time of tithing for cattle, fruit and produce. They rigorously enforced these tithing laws, and offended God by making His house a den of robbers by their extortion of finances from people; some modern preachers have followed their evil example.

4. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY TITHING UNDER THE MONARCHY.

a. Samuel warned that having a king would lay heavy burdens upon the people.

When Israel demanded a king like the nations around them, Samuel forewarned them by prophecy, that the kings would take their tithes, and misappropriate them to themselves and their friends. 1Sam.8v11,15-22. After the monarchy was set up, the kings, as Samuel had warned, did appropriate the tithes for themselves. The burden upon the people was greatly increased by the greed of Israel's kings, and some of them badly neglected the priests and Levites and Temple worship. When Israel forsook God for idols, the Levites and priests suffered badly from neglect, Hezekiah rectified this and built rooms in the Temple for the tithes, and Nehemiah followed his good example. 2Chron.31v4-21. Neh.10v37-39. 12v44-47. 13v5-14.

God said that Israel had rejected His gentle rule, when they rejected Samuel's spiritual oversight, and chose to imitate the heathen's system of government by kings. 1Sam.8v6,7. This ungodly choice made the corruption of God's Law inevitable, for as Jesus said, heathen rulers dominate and tyrannise their subjects, and their systems of government are based on greed and love of power, not service. Mt.20v25. The heathen structure they had embraced had permanently destroyed the divine beauty of the use of tithes under the Law. When churches accept heathen methods and standards the same thing happens.

Christ's life of service and caring ministry demonstrated the gentle rule that Israel had rejected, and Jesus said the leaders of His Church must exactly follow His spirit of service. Mt.20v20-28. Jesus warned His apostles that the leaders of His Church must not follow the example of heathen kings, and dominate and tyrannise God's people, "It shall not be so among you." Mt.20v25,26. It is a tragedy that Christians have often followed the example of Israel, and chosen to imitate the kingdoms and hierarchies of men in their structures; rather than Christ's New Testament pattern, and in doing so have rejected God's pattern and rule, and have inevitably brought great financial burdens upon God's people.

b. The Solomon and Rehoboam Syndrome.

Solomon's extravagant demands compared with Christ's undemanding poverty.

God would not allow David to build the Temple because he had killed so many people in war, and so God told David that his son Solomon would build it. 1Sam18v7,8. David was determined to ensure that the Temple would be "exceeding magnificent," and so he "prepared abundantly before his death" for the Temple. 1Chron.22v1-22. N.B. v5,8,9,14-16. This must have put a heavy burden upon God's people. We cannot help but question both David's extravagant preparations for the building of the Temple, and Solomon's extravagance in the building of the Temple, particularly when the divine pattern of the wilderness tabernacle was so simple and comparatively inexpensive.

God certainly directed Solomon to build the Temple, 1Chron.22v8,9., but the Lord certainly did not inspire

Solomon to put huge burdens upon the people of God by extravagance in building the Temple. One fears that Solomon built a magnificent Temple as a work of architectural showmanship, to demonstrate his abilities, and enhance his own reputation, rather than for the glory of God. Solomon spent seven years in building God's Temple, and thirteen years in building his own magnificent palace, twenty years in all; and then followed this with twenty years of other building plans. 2Chron.8v1-5. 1Kings.6v38. 7v1. Solomon had many plans, and He used other people's resources to bring them to fruition, and a lot of Christian leaders have followed his bad example, and have grievously burdened God's people. 2Chron.8v1-18. 1Kings.9v10-28.

Compare Solomon's heavy yoke on Israel through his extravagant building plans, with the financially undemanding organisational simplicity of Christ's ministry. Solomon made other people poor to make himself rich; Jesus voluntarily became poor to make us rich. 2Chron.9v9-28. 2Cor.8v9. Christ is our example, and he did not make one appeal for money, and His financial integrity and the way that He chose total poverty, rather than be a financial burden upon anyone, is beyond praise. Our Lord's yoke is easy and His burden is light, and He proved it by the total lack of financial demands on people during His ministry. Mt.11v28-30. Praise His wonderful Name.

An anointed ministry does not authorise unreasonable financial demands on God's people.

The anointing of God on people's ministries does not authorise them to make unreasonable financial demands of Christians. The glory of God that fell on the Temple did not authorise Solomon's extravagance in building it, or authorise him to fulfil all his other ambitious plans. Was not the sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep at the dedication of the Temple very excessive and an appalling burden on the people of God? 2Chron.7v1-5. The queen of Sheba may have been very enthusiastic about Solomon's kingdom, **but the burden that he put upon the people of God in the fulfilment of his ambitious plans, and in the accumulation of his wealth, was a great sin.** 2Chron.9v1-28. The Queen of Sheba said Solomon's subjects were happy to have him as king, but they were anything but happy, and complained over the grievous burden and heavy yoke that had been put upon them by Solomon. 2Chron.9v7. 10v4,10,14. **Heathen kings came to hear Solomon's wisdom and see his kingdom, probably to learn how he had out-financed them in exploiting the people of God.** 2Chron.9v22-27.

Solomon's horrific and burdensome levies on God's people.

In Numb.31v25-47. N.B. v28,30,47., God told Moses to levy a small percentage of tribute from the spoils of their victory in war over Midian for the Levites, one purpose of this would certainly be aid for the poor. As Samuel had warned, even David made levies and took tribute. 2Sam.20v24. However, Solomon took the imposing of levies to extortionate lengths in building the Temple, his palace, and the store cities, and for a period of forty years these levies were an horrific burden and heavy yoke on God's people. A levy was taken to support Solomon's extravagant standard of living. 1Kings.4v7. 12v18. A levy was made upon people's time in the form of forced labour. **Solomon demanded one month of labour on his projects out of every three months by tens of thousands of Israelites; and had over one hundred thousand Israelites working for him. Solomon also compelled captured inhabitants of the land to do forced labour, and be his slaves.** 1King.5v13-18. 9v15-23. 2Chron.2v1,2. The word, "mas or mees," is translated, "levy" in 1Kings.5v13,14. and 9v15., and "tribute" in 1Kings.4v6. and 9v21.; Strong says it means, "properly a burden (as causing to faint) i.e. a tax in the form of forced labour, levy, task, tribute."

Rehoboam admitted that his Father's rule was oppressive and tyrannical, and Solomon certainly caused God's people to faint with burdens. In 1Kings.12v11., Rehoboam said to Israel, "my father did lade you with a heavy yoke,---my father hath chastised you with whips:" Solomon may have had great knowledge and wisdom, but he appears to have been totally lacking in compassion and consideration for God's people. Solomon will have a great deal to answer for on judgement day for the oppressive yoke that he put upon the people of God; and so will many ambitious preachers, who have put similar heavy burdens and grievous yokes upon the time and finances of Christians.

The inevitable division of Israel through Solomon's and Rehoboam's heavy yokes.

Solomon's heavy yoke was laid upon the Israelites for forty years and it caused great resentment. It is not surprising, therefore, that when his son Rehoboam came to the throne, the people asked for this "heavy yoke" to be made lighter. We read in 2Chron.10v4., **"Thy father made our yoke grievous, now ease somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee."** In 1Kings.12v6-19. Rehoboam rejected the advice of the older and wiser men to ease the burden of the people, and followed the advice of the young men, and threatened an even more oppressive rule, and even greater demands on the people. The Israelites were appalled at the threat of an even more demanding reign, and an even more ambitious building program, and as a result Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom. Ten tribes, quite rightly, withdrew from his kingdom and made Jeroboam king over them; only Judah and Benjamin, and a remnant of the other ten tribes of Israel who lived in Judea, submitted to the reign of Rehoboam. When Rehoboam sent Adoram to collect the tribute money from the ten tribes, forty years of pent-up anger and frustration erupted, and Adoram was stoned to death. Sensible Christians will withdraw from Churches that make unreasonable demands of them. 2Tim.3v5.

God's lack of enthusiasm over Temple building.

On many occasions God told Israel that he was not impressed by Temple building. 1Kings.8v27. 1Chron.17v4-6. Is.66v1,2. Hos.8v14. Acts.7v48. 17v24. God knew that Israel's Temples would become the centre of

resistance to Him, being dominated by unspiritual and carnal men under the control of Satan, whose man-made traditions made God's Word of none effect, and the worship in the Temple vain and empty. Mt.15v5,6. Mk.7v3-13. Acts.7v45-60. Col.2v8. We are now the temple of God. 1Cor.3v16,17. 6v19. 2Cor.6v16. The glory had long since departed from the temple that rejected Jesus, God took up his abode in the praying believers in the upper room of a house, and poured out the Holy Spirit upon them. Acts.1v13. 2v1-4.

It was the glory and presence of God that gave value to the Temple buildings, not their expensive materials and architectural beauty. God said that Zerubbabel's poor Temple architecture, which was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, would be greater in divine glory than the glory of the former magnificent Temple of Solomon. Haggai.2v9. Zerubbabel's Temple was a very basic building, and quite devoid of the material glory, splendour and beauty of Solomon's Temple. The old people, who remembered the beauty and magnificence of Solomon's Temple, wept in sorrow when they saw Zerubbabel's unimpressive and comparatively poor Temple. Ezra.3v12. However, God's greater glory was there and this was all that mattered.

It is a tragic fact that both Solomon's and Herod's magnificent Temples took the people's minds away from the divine typology, and worship of the divine presence, to admiration of human achievement. Jesus warned His apostles not to be deceived by the architectural beauty and splendour of Herod's Temple, for the Temple they admired so much was soon to be destroyed. Mt.24v1,2. Mk.13v1,2. Lk.21v5,6. They were awed by the beauty and architectural splendour of the Temple and failed to recognise that without God's presence and glory, this beauty and splendour meant absolutely nothing. The Temple was spiritually bankrupt and devoid of God's glory, and quite unwilling and unable to help the sick and needy; and, even worse, it was the source and centre of rebellion against God, and resistance to Christ's ministry.

5. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY OUR LORD, AND HIS EARLY CHURCH.

a. The financial integrity and simplicity of Christ and His apostles.

Christ and his apostles did not start one building project, or make any appeals for finances for their ministries. The financial integrity and simplicity of Christ's wonderful ministry is seen in His instructions to His apostles, "Freely ye have received, freely give." Mt.10v8. This is in stark contrast to the heavy financial demands of many modern preachers. There has been a complete distortion of the New Testament teaching on giving in order to finance and upkeep financially demanding organisational structures and buildings. The Christians in the churches of Macedonia abounded in liberal giving, even in their poverty, in order to "minister to saints," who were in even greater need. 2Cor.8v1-6. There is no such constraint of love upon Christians when great financial appeals are made for bricks and mortar.

When we compare the practice and teaching on giving in the early Church, with the practice and teaching on giving today, we see a great difference in both the amount of requests for money, and the purposes for which it is requested. This great divergence of practice comes from either a failure to realise, or a failure to obey, the New Testament principles of giving. Our Lord's apostolic band did not appeal for money for their mission, or for themselves, there were no collections from their congregations, indeed, they carried a bag of money, which they gave to the needy poor. The vast majority of finances in the early Church were given in response to appeals for the poor, which is certainly not true in most churches today.

b. The early Church leaders told Christians that they were not under the Law.

When the church at Jerusalem was dealing with the relationship of the Church to the Law, it totally omitted any reference to tithing. In Acts.15v10. Peter said, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" Is not tithing part of the yoke of the Law? The Gentile churches were delivered from the yoke of the Law, for we read in Acts.15.28,29., "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; v29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." These simple restrictions were made so as not cause offence among the Jews, as is made clear by v21, "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in their synagogues every Sabbath."

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. Gal.3v13.

This study has been written to defend Christians, particularly the poor, from the lie that they are under a curse if they do not tithe. It is those who try to deceive Christians by insisting that the Law on tithing still applies, who are under a curse, not those who do not tithe, for Paul states in Gal.3v10., "Those who take their stand on observance of the Law are all under a curse." Gal3v1-5. Paul assures us in Gal.3v13., that "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law," so Christians cannot be under a curse for not tithing. Those who demand tithes on the basis of the Law are really Judaizers in disguise. Paul clearly states in Gal.3v6-9,13-18,25-29., that believing Gentiles receive the blessing of Abraham, and are under the covenant of promise like Abraham, and are Abraham's seed, and not under the Law. Paul again writes in Gal.5v4., "If you try to be justified by way of Law, your relationship with Christ is automatically completely severed: you have fallen away out of the domain of God's grace." Is it not a falling from grace to state that Christians who do not tithe are under a curse?

In Col.2v14-16., Paul tells us that Christ has blotted out, annulled and nailed to His cross, the ordinances of the Law which were opposed to us. Paul states that we are not to allow anyone to sit in judgement on us over matters of the Law, in respect to eating or drinking, or over feast days, new moons or Sabbaths, which were a

shadow of what was to come. In Rom.14v4-6., Paul again states that it is even a matter of conscience whether we keep the Sabbath or not, he says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." These Scriptures prove that the Law no longer binds Christians, and this includes tithing.

c. The early Church priorities and motivations compared with today.

When we compare the New Testament practice of giving with today, it becomes obvious that the reason for this difference of practice is a result of a difference in motivation and priorities. The delightful spirit of "one accord," and "having all things in common" is, sadly, usually missing. **Concern for man-made kingdoms has taken the place of concern for people.** The change in the practice of giving is not just due to the fact that the circumstances and patterns of life have changed, it is due more to the many competing church organisations. These often look and act like the kingdoms of the world, and often have a closed-shop attitude to Christians outside of their groups or denominations. Paul says that Christians who manifest a sectarian bigotry are dominated by the evil carnal nature and are spiritual babes. 1Cor.1v11-13. 3v1-4. 2Pet.1v9. There are, thank God, many exceptions in all denominations to this blinkered and myopic sectarian outlook; large-hearted leaders recognise other Christians groups beyond their own, and work within the framework of the whole body of Christ. However, many others cannot see beyond their own denomination, and compete with an ungodly and worldly spirit for people to be members of their churches. David's sin of numbering is executed weekly by many Christian leaders. 2Sam.24v1-25. 1Chron.21v1-30.

d. Most pastors and leaders in the early Church worked for a living.

The Church historian, the Rev. Edwin Hatch states on page 147 and 148 of his book, "The Organisation of the Early Christian Churches:" **"The funds of the primitive communities had consisted entirely of voluntary offerings. Of these offerings those officers whose circumstances required it were entitled to a share. They received such a share only on the ground of their poverty. They were, so far, in the position of the widows and orphans and helpless poor. Like soldiers in the Roman army, or like slaves in a Roman household, they were entitled to a monthly allowance. The amount of that allowance was variable.** When the Montanists proposed to pay their clergy a fixed salary the proposal was condemned as a heretical innovation, alien to Catholic practice. (Eusebius H.E.5.18.2.: 5.28.10:) Those who could supplemented their allowances by farming or by trade. There was no sense of incongruity in their doing so. The Apostolical Constitutions repeat with emphasis the apostolical injunction, 'If any man would not work, neither should he eat.' Const. Apos. 2.62. 2Thes.3v10,12. 1Thes.4v11. There is no early trace of the later idea that buying and selling, handicraft and farming were in themselves inconsistent with the office of a Christian minister. The bishops and presbyters of those early days kept banks, practised medicine, wrought as silver smiths, tended sheep, or sold their goods in the open market. **They were like the second generation of non-juring bishops a century and a half ago (about 1730), or like the early preachers of the Wesleyan Methodists.** They were men of the world taking part in the ordinary business of life. The point about which the Christian communities were anxious was, not that their officers should cease to trade, but that in this as in other respects, they should be ensamples to the flock. The chief existing enactments of early councils on this point are that bishops are not to huckster their goods from market to market, nor are they to use their position to buy cheaper and sell dearer than other people."

In his notes at the bottom of page 148, Hatch continues to tell how the leaders of the primitive Church usually worked. He states, "among the latter are the case of Spiridion who tended sheep in Cyprus,--of a bishop who was a weaver at Maiuma,---of one who was a shipbuilder in Campania---one who practised in the law courts,---of a presbyter who was a silversmith at Ancyra.--- **Basil, Epist.198 (263), vol.4 p.290 speaks of the majority of his clergy as earning their living by sedentary handicrafts, and Epiphanius,---speaks of others doing it in order to earn money for the poor.**" End of quote.

So we see that the gifts and offerings of the early Church were voluntary, and that most of the early Church leaders worked for their living; and that those who did not work to keep themselves, were supported on the same level as the poor.

6. CHRISTIAN TITHING IS NOT AUTHORISED BY EARLY CHURCH HISTORY.

Tithing was totally absent from the first few centuries of Church History.

Historians state that for several centuries there was no support or demand for systematic tithing. The following encyclopaedias confirm that demands for people to tithe arose many centuries later in order to sustain the religious empires made by men.

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible. States under "Tithe," **that there was no support of the clergy by the systematic giving of tithes for several centuries, and that it was some time before the tithe was regarded as patterned upon the Jewish synagogue.** The practice was justified by appealing to such Scriptures as Mt.10v10. Lk.10v7. 1Cor.9v7ff., **however, Church leaders, like Irenaeus and Epiphanius, proved the arguments from these texts were not valid. Instead, they emphasised freedom in Christian giving.**

The New Catholic Encyclopaedia. States on the article on "Tithes," on page 174, of the 1967 edition; states that the early Church did not have a tithing system. The Old Testament tithing was regarded as being abrogated by the New Testament law of Christ. However, as the church system expanded and became more complex and was more financially demanding, it became necessary to introduce a definite rule on giving which

people followed out of a sense of moral obligation or by enforcement of law. The Old Testament practice of tithing was an obvious model, and it began to be taught, mainly in the Western churches, that believers should give tithes of their income. When this view had gathered sufficient support, it was given legal support in parts of the Church. **In A.D. 585, the council of Macon threatened excommunication on those who refused to pay their tithes.** Other local councils made similar decisions, but the repeated warnings of penalties that were to be imposed on those who failed to pay their tithes suggests that they were paid irregularly and reluctantly. **End of synopsis.**

The 15th. 1992 edition of The New Encyclopaedia Britannica.

This states that there was serious resistance to tithing as Christianity spread across Europe. We learn that it was as late as the sixth century before it was enjoined by ecclesiastical law, and was enforced by secular law in Europe as late as the 8th. Century. It was only in the 10th. Century that payment of tithes was made obligatory in England under threat of ecclesiastical penalties by Edmund 1st., and with temporal penalties by Edgar. To control abuse of tithing, lay ownership of tithes was outlawed in the 14th. Century by Pope Gregory 7th. Gradually opposition to tithing grew. France repealed tithing after the French revolution (April 4th. 1789), and no compensation was given to tithe holders, and other countries later followed suit. Tithing ended in Italy in 1887, and was abolished in Ireland in 1871, when the Anglican Church was disestablished there. It was 1936 before the tithe rent charges, based on the price of grain, were abolished in England. Tithing was never made a legal requirement in America. The Eastern Orthodox churches have never accepted that tithing was obligatory upon them, and have never paid them. End of synopsis.

The 1957 Edition of The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge.

We read under "Tithes," on page 454 and 455; that after the reformation the Protestant Churches took over the tithes that had been paid to the Roman Catholic Church, and the Catholic Church suffered momentous losses in tithes in consequence of the Reformation. The reformed churches took these tithes, and hardly anyone stated that the exaction of tithes was reprehensible. Only **the Swiss Anabaptists maintained that Christians owed neither tithes nor interest.** It was surprising that the German peasants did not deny their obligation to tithe in their twelve articles of A.D. 1525. Luther looked upon tithes as a practical and expedient form of taxing, but felt that they should be paid to the temporal sovereignty, but it appears that Luther was overruled, and the Evangelical State Churches retained tithes, but with more strictly redefined adjustments. **End of synopsis.**

How revealing! The Protestants took on board the Catholic legislation on tithing to build their religious kingdoms. They based their demand for tithes, not on the practice of the early Church, but on the practice of the Roman Catholic Church! These encyclopaedias give striking proof that the early Christians were not obligated to tithe. They prove that tithing was first demanded by the council of Macon in 585 A.D., and much later in other parts of the world, and never by quite a large section of the Church. Tithing came about, not because of the constraint of divine commands, but because of the pressure of men's demands; men needed large amounts of finances to build and upkeep their church organisations. It is very interesting to note that the Orthodox Church never accepted that tithing was taught by the early Church, and never expected Christians to tithe.

When worldly people see money hungry churches, they say with feeling, and with good cause, "It is your money they are after." Worldly kings and rulers may well admire large church power structures, just as Solomon's kingdom was, however, seeking hearts, who are looking for spiritual reality are not deceived by them. **Greedy, "grab-all," man-made structures, do not manifest the "give-all" love of God, and, like Israel's religious robbers, they hinder people from knowing and following God. 2Chron.10v4. Mt.21v12-14. Rom.2v23,24.**

For centuries the Church was based around the homes of believers.

It is a fact of history that the emperors did not allow church buildings to be built until Constantine supposedly became a Christian in about 313-315 A.D., and it was at this time that he gave wealth and power to the church leaders. John Wesley, and many others, say that this was a disastrous day for the Church, when it lost as much purity, holiness and power, as it had gained in wealth and influence. Up to this time most of the fellowship and evangelism of the church, had been based around the homes of believers. This had resulted in wonderful fellowship between Christians, and a remarkable growth of the Church. Acts.2v1,2,46. 5v42. 12v12. 17v5. 18v7. 20v20. 28v23-31. 10v22. Rom.16v5,23. 1Cor.16v15,16,19. Col.4v15,16. Philemon.v2

Because early Christians met in homes, and did not build churches, financial demands for church buildings did not occur, and this meant that real financial aid could be given to the poor. **Paul tells us in 1Cor.16v1,2., that the homes of Christians are God's storehouses for the poor. Bloomfield translates 1Cor.16v2., "Par heauto, 'by him.' French, 'chez lui,' 'at home.'"**

Vincent translates 1Cor.16v2., "Lay by him in store," "par heauto titheto thesaurizon," Literally, 'put by himself treasuring.' Put by at home." End of quote.

A.T. Robertson translates 1Cor.16v2., "Lay by him in store," "By himself, in his home." End of quote.

Christian, God liberates you from putting your treasure in another person's storehouse. If God has prospered you, put some of it in your treasure chest for the poor, and dispense your treasure from

your home, as God guides you.

See, 6. Is the storehouse always the church you attend? Page 13.

CONCLUSION.

This study is not intended to give people an excuse to escape from the responsibility of Christian giving. It is written to deliver Christians, particularly the poor, out of the hands of people who have plundered, yes plundered, the finances of Christians to fulfil their desires. Jesus said of these people, "You have made my Father's house a den of robbers." Mt.21v12,13. Mk.11v15-17. Lk.19v45,46. Jn.2v13-17. I believe that the Jesus way of being as financially undemanding as it is possible to be, is the right way, and that Solomon and Rehoboam style personal kingdom builders have no Scriptural grounds for their financial demands. Peter states in 2Pet.2v1-3., that God's judgement hangs over them.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON TITHING.

In many Christian churches tithing has become an established practice, and those who challenge the Scriptural veracity of this practice are looked upon as unspiritual rebels. The greedy religious leaders of Israel had increased the financial demands upon God's people, until in Christ's time they taught that God demanded a double tithe each year from God's people, and a triple tithe every third year. Many preachers today say that God demands a tithe from their congregations, and state that Christians who do not tithe are under a curse; some even advise Christians to follow the extortionate Jewish demand of double tithing. I wish to expose all these appalling teachings, which have deeply troubled and financially injured many dear Christians.

I recently read a book on tithing, which contained some of the questions that people ask about tithing. I have on many occasions been asked most of the very same questions about tithing and giving. However, my answers to these questions have usually been quite different from those given in the book that I read. **I almost wondered if we read the same Bible. I fear that some of the answers that these advocates of tithing give to these questions, are the result of a coveting of people's money that would make Scrooge and Marley jealous.** I briefly state the answers that the book on tithing, and many preachers who believe in tithing, give to these questions, and then show why these answers are unscriptural and untrue.

1. Should we tithe on our gross income or net income?

The advocates of tithing completely distort the Scriptures when they say, that those who tithe only on their net income after deductions are forgetting that the deductions ultimately belong to them, and that tithing only on the "net" income after deductions is giving grudgingly and undermines and militates against God's promise of blessing, and shows a person does not really believe that they cannot out-give God. **This is a complete distortion of the Scriptures.** The deductions that governments make are not ultimately for the person who gives them; they are for the welfare state and other government expenditure. These preachers ignore the fact that the tithe was Israel's income tax for their welfare state, and that those who tithe on their tax are paying tax twice on the same money. **As the tithe was the tax for the welfare state of Israel, so tax paid to our country for the welfare state must be taken into account in our Christian giving.** Some people I know have had real financial problems, because they were paying half or more of their income in tax, and were trying to tithe on their gross income. They were already paying over five times Israel's tithe towards the poor and needy and other needs of their country, and this must be taken into account in deciding the amount they give to the needs put before them. **Demanding a tithe from the net income of Christians in such circumstances is a sin; and asking them to tithe on their gross income is even more wicked. What a Christian pays in tax has to be taken into account in their giving to God's work.**

2. Many preachers rob the poor by saying that even the poor should tithe, or they rob God.

a. Should I tithe when my tithe is small?

Many preachers quote the story about the widow's mite in Mk.12v41-44., to justify taking tithes off poor widows. Our Lord said that in God's eyes the widow's gift of two mites amounted to more than all the other gifts put into the Temple treasury. God sees the heart, and not the amount that is given. This widow gave out of love for God, but she should, by command of the Law of God, been receiving tithes, not giving them. Tithes were to be given to the widow, poor, fatherless and stranger, not taken from them. Deut.10v18,19. 14v29. 16v11,14. 24v17-22. 26v12-15. God certainly did not want this poor widow to give all her money and living into the Temple treasury. It is quite intolerable and wicked to make the story of the widow's mite, a pretext for demanding tithes from widows and the poor. A curse comes upon those who oppress widows and the poor in this way. Deut.27v19. Is.1v17,23. Jer.7v6,7. 22v3-5. Ezek.22v7,8. Zech.7v9-14. N.B. v10. Mal.3v5. Our Lord said the religious leaders of Israel were going to Hell for their robbery of widows. Mt.23v14,33.

b. They blatantly and shamelessly say that it is not a hardship for the poor to tithe.

Some preachers say that the poor rob God if they do not tithe, and that it is fair, reasonable, and a high privilege for them to tithe, and no hardship. They promise the poor that tithing will bring them into a potentially intimate relationship with God. **This is a wicked doctrine!** It is the very opposite of the truth, **for God clearly states that the poor should receive tithes, not give them. God provided for the poor through the tithe.** Lev.23v22. Deut.10v18. 14v29. 16v11-14. 24v19-21. 26v12,13. Ps.82v3. Is.1v17. English law recognises that it is not fair or reasonable for the poor to pay taxes, and this is reflected in personal allowances. God's law is much more thoughtful, kind and just. Extortionate demands for tithes certainly does

not bring the poor into an intimate relationship with God, this unreasonable burden produces a spiritual barrier between the person and God, rather than spiritual intimacy. When the poor pay tithes they groan under a heavy yoke and burden, they do not think that it is a high privilege. 1King.12v3,4,13-15. 2Chron.10v4. **It is positively wicked to suggest that this heavy and grievous financial yoke is put upon the poor by our Lord, for we know that His yoke is gentle and kind. Mt.11v28-30.**

In Mt.23v13-39., our Lord castigated the Scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy; He said in v23, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." **Our Lord warns that a person can tithe diligently, and yet be a hypocrite and totally estranged from God, and bound for Hell. Mt.23v33.** When Jesus said in reference to tithing, "these ought ye to have done;" He does not mean that all should tithe; He was addressing the rich and covetous Scribes and Pharisees, who loved, and made, a lot of money. When Jesus warned them, "You cannot serve God and Mammon," they turned up their noses at Jesus and treated Him with contempt and derision. Lk.16v13-15. In Lk.16v14., "derided" is "exemukterizon," the imperfect of "ekmukterizo," to turn up the nose, to sneer and scoff at, to show disrespect and contempt. Those who say that God demands tithes from the poor are following the example of the unjust and greedy Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said the religious leaders of Israel had made God's house a den of robbers, and were bound for Hell because of their wickedness. Mt.21v12-15. 23v33. By claiming God's authority for their unjust and heavy financial demands on the people, the religious leaders of Israel had likened God to an unjust tax collector who extorted money from the poor.

It is a terrible lie and grievous sin to say that the poor, who do not tithe, are robbing God, and are under His curse. Indeed, the very opposite is true, Paul said, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law." Gal.3v13. **To accuse the poor of robbing God is a religious blackmail of the worst kind, and an appalling slander of the character of God; He is the defender of the poor. Ps.146v5-9. Those who mercilessly extort tithes from the poor can expect severe judgement from God.** Judas deprived the poor of money by stealing from the poor bag, his love of money ended up in apostasy and eternal judgement. Jn.12v6. 13v29. **In Mal.3v7-10., the Jews were robbing the poor as well as the Levite of their sustenance, and this is why God said that they were under a curse for not tithing. There was no food in the storehouse for the poor and needy, they were robbing the poor by not giving them the tithes. It follows, therefore, that Churches which demand tithes and fail to minister to the poor from their financial resources are under a curse.** In 1Cor.16v1-3., Paul said that only Christians who prospered should give, not the poor, for they received gifts. Paul tells the Christians at Corinth, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him." The home of the prosperous believer is now the place, where finances are stored for the poor. On this occasion the gifts were for the poor at Jerusalem; and even in this good work Paul tells the Christians not to give to such an extent that they are overburdened through relieving the poor. 2Cor.8v12,13.

It is a striking fact that the gifts and offerings, which were requested by the apostles in the New Testament, were used for the poor. Act.2v44,45. 4v32-37. 6v1,2. 11v27-30. 1Cor.16v1-3. 2Cor.8v1-9. Compare 1Cor.9v7-18. Jesus never asked for tithes or gifts from anyone, indeed Christ's apostolic band carried a bag of money to provide for the poor. The early Church followed Christ's example and aided the poor, this practical expression of love was one of the major reasons why the revival started and continued with such power. Churches cannot expect revival blessing if they fail to imitate this one accord love, which produces financial aid to the poor. **The early Church chose to minister to the poor rather than build expensive church buildings.**

c. Should we tithe when we are in debt? Should we not pay our debts first?

Many preachers say that it is a high crime and sin not to pay our tithes even when we are debt. **This disgraceful religious extortion totally ignores the facts on giving in the Scriptures.** God commanded Israel to feed the poor, and meeting the needs of the poor was a major priority of the early Church. Deut.14v22,28,29. 26v12-15. Gal.6v10. These modern extortionists do not differentiate between the wealthy and the poor, they are usually only interested in building their religious kingdoms; and they wilfully ignore the scriptural practice of giving food, and shelter to the poor and homeless. Thanks be to God there are many, like "The Salvation Army," who are shining examples of dedicated caring for the poor and homeless. Those who demand tithes from the poor have made the commandment and Word of God of none effect by their unscriptural tradition and doctrine on tithing. This was the very sin of the Scribes and Pharisees, they laid aside and rejected the commandments of God and taught as doctrines the commandments of men. Jesus shows the permanent and continuous rejection of God's Word by the Scribes and Pharisees by using "akurontes," the present active participle of "akuroo," which means to cancel or revoke, to render null and void. Mk.7v6-13. Mt.15v1-9. N.B. v6,9. **Woe to those who make void God's care and concern for the poor.** Teaching on giving cannot be Biblical when it omits any reference of giving to the poor, and contradicts the Scriptures on so many points. Paul informs us in 2Cor.8v12-15., that giving should be according to our resources, and that we should not give, if by easing the burdens of others, we ourselves are overburdened. 2Cor.8v12,13. Paul makes it very clear, that cheerful giving is for those who have the resources to do so; and that the giving that is mentioned here, is giving to the Christian poor. 1Cor.8v14. 9v9.

d. Should children or teenagers tithe?

Even those who believe in tithing should recognise, that if a child's parents tithe, then as a child's income is received from their parents, it has already been tithed upon. Some preachers say that children should tithe,

because God expects them to learn to tithe. **This is in direct contradiction to God's Law for Israel, which stated that only the head of the house should tithe. Deut.26v11.** Insisting that young people should give tithes to their church could put them off Christianity altogether, and make them feel that God, and their church, are only after their money.

e. Should a pensioner tithe their pension?

Many preachers state that pensioners should tithe, and say that a Christian would want to tithe to their last breath, even if their retirement income had already been tithed upon. This disgraceful statement reveals the covetous spirit of those who believe such things. I know of pensioners, who out of pure love for God save up their small finances in order to go to foreign countries to evangelise, these dedicated souls should be supported in their ministries, not expected to tithe. We are to honour such people, not rob them. Lev.19v32. The poor should receive tithes, not give them, just as they did in Israel. Deut.10v18. 14v29. 16v11,14. 24v19-21. 26v12,13. 27v19. Those who extort money from the poor never mention these Scriptures.

f. Should students tithe their grant? Some preachers challenge students to tithe on the net amount, which exceeds tuition fees, like a person in business would do. It is quite unjust to expect the same response from a poor student as a prosperous businessman. Most students are poor and often leave college or university thousands of pounds in debt; it is quite unreasonable to ask them to tithe. **Those who preach that students should tithe their grant are oppressing the poor.**

3. Should we keep personal records of our giving?

Many preachers say that Christians should keep records of their giving, however, this is often only a means of ensuring that all the tithes come their way. Jesus tells us that when we give, we are not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing, and that our giving must be in secret, or we have no reward. Mt.6v3,4. In many churches everyone knows exactly what people give, because a record is kept of the numbered envelopes, and there is a weekly checks on a person's giving. Can present day expediency cancel out this command of Christ? Many preachers advocate covenant giving, and tax returned can help needy causes, but covenanting can cause problems, for it can take away our flexibility of giving for several years, unless the charity that the money is covenanted to is one that allows you to direct your giving in the way that you desire. As we have seen, giving in the early Church was voluntary, so the keeping of records of giving is not necessary.

4. Should our tithes be paid weekly or monthly? Should we pay back tithes?

Many preachers say that we should tithe weekly if we are paid weekly, or monthly if we are paid monthly. This contradicts the Law, which said the head of the household should pay a tithe on their increase once a year. Some preachers say that back tithes should not be paid, for when God forgives, He forgets. However, we do not need to ask God for forgiveness over failure to tithe, for it is a fact that the early Church did not practice tithing, the demand to tithe was not made until five centuries later, and then only in some Western churches.

5. Has the New Testament ministry to be supported like the Old Testament priesthood?

Many preachers say that the New Testament ministry succeeded that of the Levitical priesthood, and that it has the right to be sustained in the same way as the Levitical priesthood. While it is quite true that, in 1Cor.9v9-14., Paul compares support of the Levitical priesthood with the Christian ministry. However, it is not true to say that the Levitical priesthood has been replaced by a Christian priestly ministry, for the Scriptures clearly state that in this age, ALL Christians are kings and priests, and have a priestly ministry with our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus. 1Pet.2v9. Rev.1v6. Heb.13v15. 1Tim.2v1. Col.4v12.

In Gal.6v6., Paul states the principle of Christian ministry support, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches." In 1Cor.9v13,14., Paul quotes from such Scriptures as Lev.6v16. and Numb.18v7-21., when he states; "Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the Temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? v14. Even so has the Lord commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel." "Commanded," is "diatassen," the aorist indicative active of "diatasso," to give an order, to command. The aorist tense shows it was referring to a past command by Jesus. Paul could be referring to Mt.10v8-10., and Lk.10v4-8., or some unrecorded saying of Jesus, such as Acts.20v35., where Paul quotes, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

In 1Cor.9v9., Paul uses Deut.25v4., "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn;" to justify support for the Christian ministry. In 1Tim.5v17,18., Paul again quotes Deut.25v4., and then writes, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour with wearisome toil in the Word and teaching. v18. For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his hire." In Lk.10v7. our Lord said, "The labourer is worthy of his hire," with exactly the same Greek construction as in 1Tim.5v18., "ho ergates tou misthou autou." In Mt.10v10., Jesus says, "The labourer is worthy of his food," using "tes trophes," i.e. food, instead of "tou misthou," i.e. hire, or wages. Paul quotes the words of Jesus to show the authority for his teaching. However, Jesus and his apostles were content to live at subsistence level for the Gospel's sake; this is totally different from the demands and expectations of many modern preachers. Paul does teach that the Christian ministry has a right to financial support; however, Paul was speaking of the simple and financially undemanding structure of the early Church, not the financially demanding, complex and competitive church structures of our present day.

Those who reject the organisational simplicity of the early Church and build expensive personal and

denominational kingdoms will find, as Samuel warned in 1Sam.87-22., that religious kingdoms can be very expensive to run and upkeep. **However, those who make this choice, and employ full time Pastors should support them. 1Cor.9v14. Sadly, some Pastors are badly treated by their congregations. God is certainly very upset when godly and devoted servants of God are defrauded of proper support by the Christian congregations that employ them. It is a fact that some members of churches have tried to "Starve out," genuine servants of God by withholding financial support from them. God is very displeased with this, and it can result in Divine judgement. In Mal.3v5., God says that the sin of oppressing the hireling in his wages and the widow, the fatherless and stranger, is as bad as sorcery, adultery, and perjury; we read, "And I will come near you for judgement; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien; because they do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts."**

James makes a similar statement in James.5v4., we read, **"Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." See Lev.19v13., "You shall not cheat your neighbour, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning." See Jer.22v13., "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, who uses his neighbour's service without wages and gives him nothing for his work,"**

It is lovely to see the sacrificial leadership of Nehemiah; he fed 150 people every day, and for 12 years did not take a penny for being the governor of Israel. Neh.5v14-19. Nehemiah, like Paul, did not take advantage of his rights; such people are a shining example of sacrificial service. Our Lord is the supreme example of this sacrificial love and service. Let us imitate Him.

6. Is the storehouse always the church you attend? Almost all preachers say the storehouse is the church that people attend, and that it is wrong to give tithes to ministries like a missionary society, a Bible Society, a Christian organisation, or a Television ministry, or even the poor. They say that the local church is the storehouse and the tithes should be given into it, and that only offerings beyond the tithe can be given outside the church. This viewpoint ignores the fact that the Law stated that every three years the storehouse was the home of the believer, the tithes were to be given to the Levites and needy from "within the gates" of the person who was tithing, and they were not taken to Jerusalem. Deut.14v28,29.

In 1Cor.16v1-3., Paul tells the Corinthians, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him." The following Greek scholars make it clear that the Greek states that the storehouse is a Christian's home.

A.T. Robertson writes on 1Cor.16v2., in his "Word Pictures in the New Testament.." "Lay by him in store, ("par" heautoi titheto thesaurizon.") By himself, **in his home.** Treasuring it (cf. Matt.6v19f. for "thesaurizo"). **Have the habit of doing it, "titheto" (present imperative).** As he may prosper ("hoti ean euodotai"). Old verb from "eu," well, and "hodos," way or journey, to have a good journey, to prosper in general, common in Septuagint. In N.T. only here and Rom.1v10. and 3John.v2." **End of quote.**

Bloomfield translates this, **"Par heauto,' 'by him.' French, 'chez lui,' 'at home.'"**

Alford's Greek Testament translates it, "let each of you lay up **at home** in store whatever he may by prosperity have acquired (lit. 'whatever he may be prospered in:' i.e. the pecuniary result of any prosperous adventure, or dispensation of Providence)."

Christian, the storehouse is by you, at your home! If you are prosperous, save a hoard of treasure for the poor, "especially those who are of the household of faith." Gal.6v9,10. Paul said, that if we can, we should save up sufficient resources, to help out those who are in need, who come across our path. In 1Cor.16v1-3., Paul tells the Corinthians that they were only to give if they were prospering, and could afford it, and that these finances were to be used for the poor at Jerusalem, and not for the ministry. Notice how Paul made absolutely sure that others supervised the finances, he kept himself free from criticism. The insistence that the local denominational church is, "Some say "the storehouse," is an expensive church structure, whose building and upkeep totally swallows up all the finances that are poured into it, and which leaves no relief for the for the poor, which was the prime directive on the giving of finances in the early Church. Such churches are certainly not "storehouses" for people in need, and so they come under the condemnation and curse in Mal.3v7-10., that God threatened the Jews with. God's blessing came upon the Jerusalem Church because of their one accord, and caring love for the poor, as Is.58v5-12. promised and prophesied.

As we have previously stated, there are Scriptural grounds for the financial support of ministries; however, we need to examine very closely the integrity, honesty and spirituality of any ministry that we support. The excessive financial appeals of some Television ministries and evangelists are quite appalling, and they offend and disgust both Christians and unbelievers. Their financial appeals and wealth contrast sharply with the voluntary poverty of our Lord, and His instructions, "Freely you have received, freely give." Mt.10v8. It is also certainly wrong to support ministers who are morally corrupt, or deny the Scriptures, or oppose the work of the Holy Spirit; for Paul tells us to turn away from such. 2Tim.3v5. Such churches can hardly be called "God's

storehouse." There are ministries that are worthy of support outside of religious organisations, our Lord and His apostles were amongst them. The Israelites supported the religion that opposed and murdered Jesus; let us be careful who we support.

CONCLUSION.

THE SIMPLE, UNDEMANDING FINANCIAL STRUCTURE OF EARLY CHURCH ORGANISATION.

a. The poverty of Jesus and His early Church leaders.

Some preachers have built their own personal kingdoms and gone after wealth and prosperity. **They have tried to justify their greedy demands for money by saying that Jesus was wealthy. This is an appalling and positively evil lie; for it denies the totally sacrificial nature of the incarnation, life and ministry of our dear Lord Jesus Christ.** When Paul says Jesus "became poor" in 2Cor.8v9., he uses "epocheusen," the aorist active indicative of the verb "ptocheuo," (Strong 4433), to be poor, to be reduced to abject poverty. The adjective "ptochos," (Strong 4434), means cowering like a beggar, and it describes someone who is poor and totally destitute of the necessities of life, and who only manage to survive through the alms and kindness of others; (this is in contrast to "penes," which describes someone who is poor, but they are still able to provide for themselves). In 2Cor.8v9., the word for "poverty," is the noun "ptocheia," (Strong 4432), it speaks of abject poverty, and complete financial want. The aorist tense makes it clear that the whole event of Christ's incarnation is here referred to; Jesus became totally penniless, to give us heaven's riches. Praise his wonderful Name! Our Lord's love has always been totally sacrificial. Those who say our Lord was rich, not only deny the sacrificial nature of our Lord's ministry, they also reject both the facts stated in 2Cor.8v9., and the authority and inspiration of our Lord and Paul; it is another Gospel, and is under a curse. Gal.1v6-12.

We see from 1Cor.9v14., that the Lord Himself commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. However, as we have previously seen, the pastors and teachers of the churches usually worked and kept themselves. We read in 1Cor.9v12-18., that Paul himself gloried in the fact, that whenever possible, he preached the Gospel at his own expense, and continually renounced his rights to financial support. Paul writes in 1Cor.9v12, "Nevertheless we did not make us of this right of ours; but bear all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ." Again in 1Cor.9 v15., Paul says, "I have not made use of these things in even one instance, and at present I continue the same policy." K. Wuest. Paul continues to say He would rather die than let anyone deprive him of this source of glorying. In 1Cor.9v18., Paul said his pay and reward was the satisfaction of preaching the Gospel of Christ without charge, and states that he did not abuse, or use to the full, his right to be financially supported by those to whom he ministered.

Paul reminds the elders of Ephesus that he worked with his hands to keep himself and the other evangelists that were with him for the three years that he was at Ephesus. Acts.20v17,31-34. Many of Christ's disciples also suffered total poverty for His sake. Lk.6v20,22. The Christians at Smyrna suffered total destitution for their faith, Jesus said that they were materially poor, but spiritually rich. Jesus said the Laodicean Christians were materially rich but spiritually bankrupt. Rev.2v8,9. 3v14-22. Consider Mt.5v3., those who recognise their total spiritual poverty receive the riches of heaven.

b. Do our modern Church structures imitate the early Church structures?

This is the crux of the matter. The answer is that they certainly do not! The spirit of competition between denominations has resulted in the duplication of expensive buildings in modern day Christianity. We need to examine our church organisations in the light of the voluntary poverty of Christ, and the financially undemanding and simple structure of His early Church. It is quite wrong to use Scriptures that speak of ministerial support to justify the multiplied Church structures of today, which often vigorously compete with each other for members. Christ and His early Church placed no financial demands upon the people that they ministered to. They never asked for finances for church buildings, none were built before Emperor Constantine supposedly became a Christian in about A.D. 313.

Huge church organisations and expensive church buildings are diametrically opposed to the practice of Christ and His early Church. Stephen said Israel's religious leaders had always resisted the Holy Spirit, and throughout history men's religious kingdoms have resisted the kingdom of God more than they have aided it. Acts.7v47-53. Jesus said that Israel's religious leaders praised the prophets of the past, but opposed and murdered them in the present. The Jews revered Moses, but Moses would have been hated just as much as Jesus if he had lived in their day. Mt.23v29-35. Lk.16v31. However, thanks be to God, He does not forsake us, even when we go badly astray on church organisation, He tries to lead us to the old paths. The Holy Spirit is invading our present day denominational structures, and many churches have become centres of revival and blessing, and their ministers a great blessing to the whole body of Christ. I recognise that many denominational ministers of the Gospel have made great financial sacrifices to serve God. The early Church ministries were content to be poor, and just have their needs met, they did not go in for the best transport, or best hotels, or other expensive wants. They imitated the sacrificial ministry of our Lord. Let us do likewise, and make sure that we carry out God's work in God's way.

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