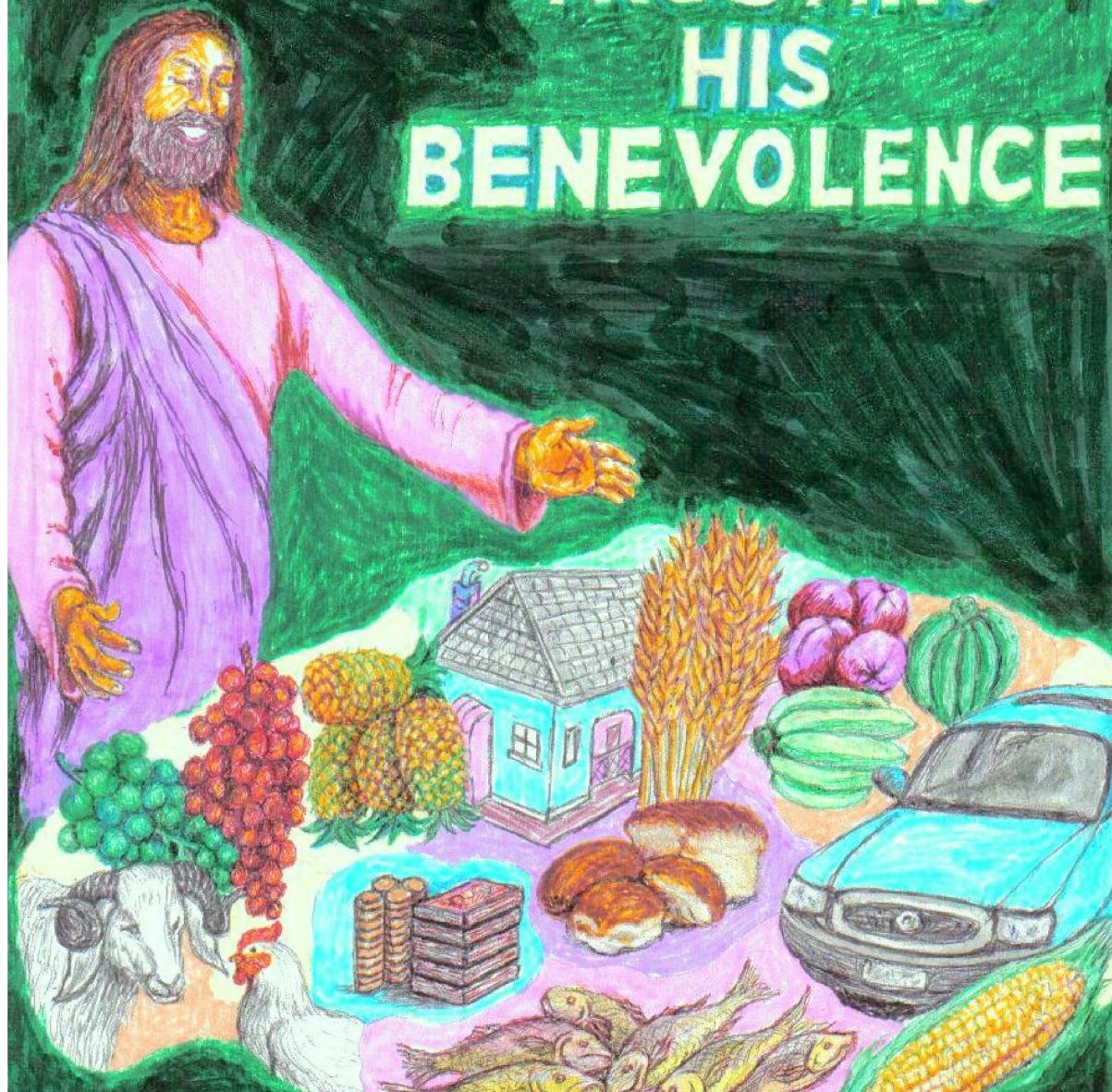


TRUSTING HIS BENEVOLENCE



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CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: TRUSTING HIS BENEVOLENCE

Chapter One:	Labourers in the Vineyard	5
Chapter Two:	First Love and Trust.....	11
Chapter Three:	Latter Changes	15
Chapter Four:	Some Causes.....	20
Chapter Five:	Some Results.....	24
Chapter Six:	Conclusion.....	27

SECTION TWO: TITHES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Chapter One:	New Testament Truth.....	31
Chapter Two:	Full-time Gospel Ministers	36
Chapter Three:	Meaning and Practice	43
3.1 -	Acknowledgement of God's Ownership	47
3.2 -	Means of Blessing	48
3.3 -	Covenant of Security	49
3.4 -	Provision for Full-time Temple Workers	51
Chapter Four:	Implications for Present Day.....	55

FOREWORD

Please have a bible beside you as you read this book. Many bible references are given – don't just skim over them but take pains to look them up as they occur. You will then have a better and deeper understanding of what is being discussed.

Happy reading and God bless you!

The following **abbreviations** are used herein for various Bible versions:

RSV	-	Revised Standard Version
KJV	-	King James Version
NIV	-	New International Version
NEB	-	New English Bible
DARBY	-	Holy Scriptures & New Testament Bible by J. N. Darby
KIT	-	Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures
GNB	-	Good News Bible

SECTION ONE

TRUSTING

HIS

BENEVOLENCE

CHAPTER ONE

LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is found in Matthew 20:1 – 16.

*'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.**2** After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

***3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; **4** and to them he said, "You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you".**5** So they went.*

*Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.
6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, "Why do you stand here idle all day?"*

***7** They said to him, "Because no one has hired us".*

He said to them, "You go into the vineyard too".

***8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first".*

***9** The labourers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. **10** So when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the landowner, **12** saying, "These last have done only one hour's work, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat".*

***13** But he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? **14** Take your pay and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. **15** Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"*

***16** Thus will the last be first and the first last'.*

– (Matthew 20:1-16. RSV, NIV, NEB)

Jesus told this parable to illustrate or buttress his statement made in Matthew 19:30 that “*many that are first will be last and the last first*”. This is evidenced by the fact that Matthew 20 starts with the word “For”, which means “Because”. Hence, at the end of the parable in Matthew 20:16, Jesus concluded by reiterating his earlier statement of Matthew 19:30.

But Matthew 19:30 itself is part of the response Jesus gave to the question asked by Peter in Matthew 19:27 as follows: “*Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?*” Thus the parable is a continuation of that response.

Further still, Peter’s question had arisen in response to the comment Jesus had made to his disciples, which comment came on the heels of what had transpired between him and the rich young ruler. That comment, found in Matthew 19:23, was: “*Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven*”.

Hence, a full context of the parable that begins at Matthew 20:1 should be taken from Matthew 19:27 to Matthew 20:16, or better still, from Matthew 19:23 to Matthew 20:16.

Some people fail to get a full, rounded meaning of passages they read in the bible because they read with broken lines of thought arising from the chapters and verses divisions of the bible. They have the idea that the end of a chapter always means a particular discussion has ended, and a new chapter begins a new discussion. But this is not always so.

The original Greek of the New Testament had no chapter or verse division. The current chapter and verse divisions were provided by the early bible translators of 1551 and have efficiently served the wonderful purpose of helping us locate any desired portion of the bible. Most of the chapter divisions occur just at the right points, while a few occur at points that can make an undiscerning reader miss the continuity of a message. Modern translations have

tried to overcome those shortcomings by introducing both paragraphing and sub-sectional headings.

The break between Matthew 19 and Matthew 20 is one such break that occurs right in the middle of a message. However, as was earlier explained, the context of the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard should be taken **from Matthew 19:23 to Matthew 20:16.**

What then is the parable all about? What connection has it with Peter's question in Matthew 19:27? And, how does it explain Jesus' assertion in Matthew 19:30?

In the parable, various sets of labourers were called to work in the vineyard at various times. The earliest set to be called were, of course, the 'first', and the latest set to be called were, of course the 'last'. That is time-wise. But a pun was also played on the words 'first' and 'last' because in the final rating of the labourers by Jesus at the end of the parable, 'first' and 'last' were no longer in terms of time.

Most people easily recognize the differences in the seasons of call and much has been taught about the 'early morning call' in youth, the 'midday call' in mid-life, and the 'eleventh hour call' in old age or death-bed.

Indeed, the call and its timing are the prerogative of God (see John 15:16 and Romans 8:30). 'Our times are in His hand' (Psalm 31:15). Nobody has the right to complain or challenge God saying, 'Why was I not born at such-and-such a time in history?' or 'why was I not rather called at such-and-such a stage of my life?'

Consider Paul's example. In Galatians 1:15-16, Paul said, "*But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, . . .*" Paul recognized that God reveals himself to people and calls them at His own chosen time. Paul didn't complain and say: 'why did Jesus not reveal himself to me all the while he had been here on earth?' or, 'why had he

not called me to be among his first disciples?’ Paul rather rejoiced in God’s great mercy shown to a former persecutor like him, and served God even more zealously.

The prerogative of God concerning calling and time of calling is also reflected in the answer given by the labourers in Matthew 20:6-7 as follows: “*Because no one has hired us*”. They were idle, not because they were lazy or weren’t looking for employment, but just because nobody had yet employed them. The Master himself recognized that and did not fault them on it. Without being engaged by the owner, you cannot get into somebody’s vineyard and start working. This underscores the fact that nobody should enter God’s service without God’s calling. Don’t jump into the ministry without receiving a call from God.

In the parable, it is seen that the Master did not place emphasis on the time of call. This shows that Jesus was NOT using the parable to teach us different seasons of call, but something else. In the final part of the parable, when evening came (Matthew 20:8-16), Jesus no longer mentioned the labourers employed at the 3rd hour, 6th hour, and 9th hour. The contrasts between the earliest set and the last set of labourers were sufficient to bring out the lesson to be learnt from the parable, which of course was not ‘different seasons of call’.

Many people do not grasp what actually caused the first set who were called to be rated as last when evening came. In the final rating of the labourers by Jesus at the end of the parable, ‘first’ and ‘last’ were no longer in terms of time but in terms of the degree of beneficence enjoyed, which, in turn, was determined by attitude to the Master and to the service. (This underlying attitude also determined the *spiritual quality* of the service rendered).

The lesson embedded in the parable is linked to a difference in attitude between the first set of labourers and all the others. Hence, if someone was called ‘first’ in time and exhibited a good attitude, he would still be rated ‘first’.

And if someone was called last in time but exhibited a bad attitude, he would still end up being ‘last’.

What, actually, was that attitude to the Master and to the service which the labourers exhibited? Did the earliest set of labourers not do a good job or much work? They did! In Matthew 20:12, when they claimed that they had borne the burden of the whole day in the burning heat, the Master didn’t argue. Did the last set of labourers work more zealously, do a better job or more work? The bible doesn’t say so! In Matthew 20:12, when it was asserted that “these late-comers have done only one hour’s work” (NEB), the Master didn’t argue.

The real issue is that when the first set of labourers were called by the Master (Matthew 20:2), it is said that **after** he had **AGREED with the labourers** for a denarius a day, he then sent them into his vineyard. However, concerning all the other sets of labourers, we read in Matthew 20:4, 5, 7 that the Master simply told them that whatever was right he would give them, and “**so they went**”.

That that was the real issue is evidenced by the fact that it was the very thing the Master made reference to when he was finally giving the labourers their remunerations (Matthew 20:13). And, recall that the parable was meant to illustrate Matthew 19:30 and was a continuation of the response to Matthew 19:27.

The first set of labourers stated their terms, made their demands, drove hard their bargain, made sure the Master agreed with them, secured a contract; upon which conditions they then did the work. But what about the other sets of labourers? When the Master told them he would give them whatever was right, they acted on that his word and worked, **trusting the benevolence of the Master!**

But why was that difference in attitudes so important that it made the first to become last and the last to become first? We shall understand that by and by.

In human transactions, a need to reach an agreement (or sign a contract) before things can further proceed shows the existence of mutual doubt between the parties involved, in which case none would like to take the other for granted. An agreement is for the protection of interests. It is a safeguard against default by either party.

But in relationships with God, God can only swear an oath at will and call man into covenant, as he did with Abraham, David, etc. God is quite sure of himself, his immutability and his faithfulness; he makes covenants or swears in order to give fickle mortal man knowledge of His will and a basis for faith. On the other hand, it is never right for man to demand that God should first swear to him or agree with him before he obeys God or serves God. That would mean a distrust of God's integrity, and is an insult.

In the Bible, whenever it was man who initiated a covenant with God, it was always a vow by a repentant or faithful people to be more dedicated to God; or it was a vow by a supplianting man to show God gratitude when God would grant his heart's earnest desire (Genesis 28:18-22, Judges 11:30-33; 1 Samuel 1:10-11, 1 Samuel 7:3-6, Joshua 24:21-27; 2 Kings 11:17-18; 2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chronicles 15:8-15, Ezra 10:1-5, Nehemiah 9:32-38). Even Moses' request in Exodus 33:15-17 was not an aggressive demand but a humble plea of a faithful man expressing his absolute reliance on God's presence, guidance and help.

The attitude exhibited by the first set of labourers in Matthew 20 was that of distrust of the Master's character or integrity. It was akin to the one displayed in Luke 19:20-21 and showed that they feared the Master could be an 'austere' man who could in the end try to 'reap where he had not sown'. They felt they were too clever or too big to be taken for a ride, and had to make sure they received a befitting reward for their labours.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST LOVE AND TRUST

Peter was the one who had asked the question that brought about the parable. Let us now use his example to illustrate the initial good attitude to Christ's service. We shall later use again his example to see how the wrong attitude can later develop even in persons who had started out well.

John 1:35-42 records Peter's earliest acquaintance with Christ, while the other three Gospels record when Jesus subsequently called Peter to follow Him; to leave being a fisherman to become a fisher of men; to leave his occupation and work in Christ's vineyard. When we read the summary account of Peter's call in Mathew and Mark, we may wonder why they left everything and followed Jesus 'just like that'. But the detailed account of how it all happened, as given by Luke, sheds the light. Luke 5:1-11 says:

'On an occasion when the crowd was pressing close upon him and listening to the word of God, he was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret. 2 And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch".

5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets".

6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, 7 they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord". 9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. But Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men".

11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.' – (KIT, RSV)

Obviously, Peter's earlier acquaintance with Christ recorded by Saint John is what gave Peter the basis to exercise the faith recorded in Luke 5:5. However, the resulting miracle was greater than what Peter could imagine. By that miracle, Jesus revealed himself to Peter as the Messiah, the very Son of the Living God, the creator of fishes. From the revelation of the true Person before him, Peter was completely broken, fell down at Jesus' knee, and confessed his sinfulness and unworthiness (verse 8). He was right then of a very contrite, humble and willing heart. Thus, when Jesus then called him to follow Him, Peter saw and knew that to be an undeserved great privilege. We can figure that Peter was then thinking as follows:

'The Messiah, the King of Israel has arrived. And can it be that I, an undeserving, sinful, ordinary fisherman am called to be his close associate? What is toiling for fish as compared to working with Him who can even speak manna into existence and has just demonstrated his wonderful beneficence by providing me with two full boat-loads of extra large fishes? This privilege is too great to be spurned. What other thing can compare with my being great in Messiah's Kingdom?'

With such attitude of mind Peter couldn't think of stating terms, making demands, giving conditions, pressing a bargain, securing an agreement; but saw it as an honour to accept such a gracious offer. That was Peter's initial attitude towards Christ and His service when Peter was called.

That, also, was Saint Paul's attitude when he was called on the road to Damascus. Christ's revelation to Paul made him so broken and contrite that he humbly and willingly asked: "*Lord, what would thou have me do?*" (*Acts 22:6-11*). Paul confessed that he was unworthy to be called because he had greatly persecuted the church. He confessed that his call was an exceedingly abundant grace of God being shown to him. He knew that he was the **last** of those Apostles to be called. While others had known the Lord, known the truth and started serving Christ in time, his own salvation and new birth came long afterwards— out of due time, not prematurely but long overdue! Whereas all others had seen the risen Lord earlier, his own sighting occurred much later. (1Timothy 1:12-15; 1Corinthians 15:8-9).

With such good attitude did Paul accept Christ's gracious offer and continue to work in His vineyard. Of course, it is now common knowledge that though Paul was the 'last' to be called, he was finally rated among the 'firsts' by God when he maintained it and did well to the end. (1 Corinthians 15:10, Philippians 3:7-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

That, too, was the state of mind of the returning prodigal son in Luke 15:17-19. With all that he had done, he realized he was no longer worthy to be called a son. He also realized that to be a hired servant of his father was far better than what he was experiencing. He also trusted that the kind-hearted father would listen to his plea, and that he would not be disappointed on meeting the father. Thus he arose and went. And truly, the father's reception was more than he deserved or had imagined!

The last set of labourers who were hired to work in the vineyard (Matthew 20:6-7) had that good attitude towards the Master and the work. Imagine people who had stood from 6am to 5pm but were not hired, and the day was about to end at 6pm! Their hopes were as good as gone, and they must have written off the day as a bad day. Then came a man who, on hearing about their plight, offered them a job. Which business-like employer would hire a worker when

work was just about closing? They immediately sensed that he was a very sympathetic man and was graciously trying to save them from returning empty-handed to their families.

Thus, when he told them that he would give them whatever was right, they worked, **trusting his benevolence**.

And did he prove them right? Certainly! They received more than they deserved or could have bargained for. Those who had been called first some time before 7 am knew their rights, pressed for those rights, had a good bargain, and made the Master agree with them. But what rights had people who were graciously given a chance at 5pm? The most they could have bargained for was one-twelfth of a day's wages, but they couldn't think of that in the prevailing circumstances. However, the Master, out of his own goodness, gave them twelve times that, while the first set of labourers got just what they had demanded!

The humble attitude Jesus expects of his servants is expressed in Luke 17:10, “*so you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’*”.

The desirable good attitude is what is called “FIRST LOVE” in Revelation 2:4-5. Jesus requires that we should try and maintain that spirit – anytime we notice our hearts changing we should check ourselves, repent, and return to our “first love” lest our work be all in vain (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

CHAPTER THREE

LATTER CHANGES

Some persons may have a bad attitude to God's work right from the word go, but in most cases the bad attitude develops at some point later. Those who have such attitude from the outset are usually those who were not called by God. They just get into the ministry with their personal plans and goals, and right from the start, pursue those goals unabashedly. They know what they are and have no scruples about excesses and scandals. They are those to whom Christ will say "*I never knew you; depart from me, ye evildoers*" (*Matthew 7:22-23*). That will mean they were not even His own in the first place, let alone having been called into the ministry by Him! (Admittedly, even someone truly called by God can initially have a bad attitude toward God's work that may make him either reject the call or start off on the wrong foot).

However, generally, the passage of time brings about changes. The longer one waits for something the more his hope wanes; questions, doubts and anxieties increase; attitude and heart may change; disenchantment and apathy creep in; frustration and despair then set in. Proverbs 13:12 says that "*Hope deferred makes the heart sick*".

The Jews had for ages awaited the coming of the Messiah, and had high expectations of him. Then came Jesus of Nazareth, son of a carpenter. Although the forerunner, John, had declared him the Messiah, the Lamb of God, yet many people, especially the religious leaders, had many doubts about him. Even those who initially believed him started doubting when things were not happening as had been expected. In fact, almost everybody stumbled and fell – their various hopes and expectations had been ‘dashed’ (*Luke 24:21*).

Consider the fact that even John the Baptizer who had originally unveiled him had to send people to ask him whether he was really the expected one. John could not fathom how the all-powerful Messiah could be around and yet allow his forerunner to be held in prison by Roman authorities (*Matthew 11:2-3*).

However, Jesus' reply to John is still applicable to us today: "*blessed is he who takes no offence at me*" (*Matthew 11:6, RSV*) OR "*happy is he that finds no cause for stumbling in me*" (*KIT*).

People had expected that Messiah would form his army, overthrow the Roman tyrants, and set up his Kingdom immediately (*Luke 19:11, Acts 1:6*). But there came he preaching another kind of kingdom (*John 18:36, Luke 17:20-21*). He rather taught about peace, love for enemies, and that his followers should sheathe their swords. Even when the people felt he was delaying for too long and wanted to forcefully make him king, he escaped and hid himself (*John 6:14-15*).

His closest disciples, including Peter, were not left out. They also thought of a material kingdom and even had some selfish competitive spirit (*Matthew 20:23-28*). But Jesus told them that the greatest had to become the least. He told Peter that he had to forgive his neighbour, not only seven times, but seventy times seven (*Matthew 18:21-22*). His teaching on marriage and divorce made the disciples wonder that if such were the case, it would then be better not to marry at all (*Matthew 19:10*). When he taught the disciples that it would be very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, they expressed their great astonishment by asking him: "*who then can be saved? (Mathew 19:23-25)*". When he told the disciples that he was going up to Jerusalem to meet a shameful end, Peter called him aside and rebuked him (*Matthew 16:21-22*). When, finally, everything seemed over, it was Peter who led the others to go back to their fishing (*John 21:2-3*). But we thank God that Jesus had already prayed for his subsequent restoration (*Luke 22:31-32*), and did restore him (*John 21:15-19*). In that restoration, Jesus had to once again demonstrate to Peter that He could always provide them with needed food, whereas without Him they could achieve nothing. In *John 21:15* the word "these" actually meant 'these fishes, these food items, this breakfast, this fishing to fend for yourself and family'.

In Matthew 19:16-22, the disciples had heard the conversation between Christ and the rich young ruler, in which Christ finally asked the rich man to “*go sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me*”. Of course, the man couldn’t do that. Christ then turned to his disciples and directed the words of Matthew 19:23-24 to them. They all expressed their consternation in the question in Matthew 19:25, which revealed the doubts and fears they were then having about themselves and their futures. Peter then voiced his dismay-cum-complaint: “*Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?*” (Matthew 19:27).

Christ thoroughly discerned the significant shift in Peter’s heart condition and attitude towards the whole cause, and the dangerous implications of that. In effect, Peter was saying: ‘now that things are taking these surprising turns, what then about our fond hopes of living comfortably in Messiah’s kingdom? With these His statements, what financial security can we expect? It is high time we really sat this Man down and heard clearly from him so that we wouldn’t regret in future for having messed up our lives. I think we had better discuss terms and be agreed on certain things so that we know what is what, where we actually stand, and where we’re going. Having left all and come this far, what have we yet to show for it? How much longer should we still be hoping? We had better be sure of something in hand’.

The Peter of Matthew 19:27 was different from the Peter of Luke 5:11 (when first he was called). The Peter of Luke 5 knew he was unworthy and undeserving, while the Peter of Matthew 19 felt he had then come to have some rights and ‘locus standi’. The former Peter thoroughly believed that the One who had provided such fishes could always provide any needed thing at anytime. But the latter Peter had come to feel dissatisfied and not so hopeful, sought to protect his interests and safeguard himself against possible default. He felt some definite agreements and arrangements ought to be in place. He had become more material-minded. Christ discerned that, and had to tell him the

parable of the labourers in the vineyard which explained why a person who had been called first could become last, while the last could become first.

Once a person's attitude towards God, His ways and His work makes a downward turn, God knows. The person may still be doing all that he had been doing, but before God the quality of his service has dropped seriously and is no longer first-rate.

The resultant changed attitude is usually a business-minded and legalistic one which is devoid of hope, trust, love or any virtuous sentiment. It does not believe in self-sacrifice and can never go any extra mile, for, to it, that seems like fooling oneself, being cheated or working for no reward. It is lacking in commitment, initiative, warmth, drive and serious burden for the souls of men.

The person involved then starts to insist on being given 'due respect', demands to be paid a 'befitting salary', and firmly resists being 'ordered about anyhow'. (Remember Korah et al of Numbers chapter 16?). The person's heart then becomes dominated by philosophies and adages like: 'seeing is believing', 'look before you leap', 'a bird in hand is worth two in the bush', 'the heart is happy when the belly is full', 'heavens help those who help themselves', 'the end justifies the means', 'money answereth all things', 'the hand of the diligent maketh rich', 'the kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent take it by force', 'a stitch in time saves nine', 'make hay while the sun shines', 'a fool at forty is a fool forever', etc.

The person would seem to suddenly realize that 'ministry needs money' and would see the need to 'use wisdom'. He then gradually becomes more and more of a burden to his flock (Luke 12:45-46; 1 Peter 5:2-4; 2 Corinthians 12:13-18). He may practice extortion and start charging for spiritual services rendered. He would no longer like his reward to be in heaven but would want to enjoy it all now. [Of course, ministry does need money. However, there is difference between '*needs*' and '*wants*'. "Need" should not be taken to the extent that **moneymaking** becomes a deciding factor in a minister's choices of

the courses of actions he takes. And, certainly, it should NOT get to the extent that seeking and abiding by God's perfect will and timing becomes an "impractical waste of time and opportunities" when, really, with the '**god**' amply there in his pocket or bank account the minister can do almost anything anytime].

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME CAUSES

There are many things that can make a person's attitude towards the work of God to turn sour. Some of those things originate from the individual while some come from others and the environment around him.

Though an individual started out well, his attitude towards the work may later worsen if he, originally, had not 'counted the cost'. Some people start out with wrong ideas and false expectations of the work. As is explained in 1Timothy 6:5, some people see God's work as a means of material gain and worldly honour. Such people would later be disenchanted with the **true** work of God. That was why Jesus stressed in Luke 14:27-33 that we have to count the cost right from outset and decide whether we are ready to carry the cross to the end. One has to first sit down, realize, and accept the fact that he's entering into 'charitable service', turning his back on the world and all its allure, entering a narrow and strait way that would entail counting all things but loss and firmly guarding one's heart from worldly lusts and ambitions. Jesus said that whoever cannot do this cannot be his disciple. Even though called first, he would later become last and may not be chosen.

However, the false standards and teachings of modern Christianity now present the exact opposite. The modern Man of God (M.O.G.) is expected to be the richest man and the ruler of his community. Covetousness, aggressiveness, grabbing, competition are all encouraged. The minister's mind-set now is that he is "in business" with God. Little wonder then that he would have the attitude of the first set of labourers of Matthew 20. [Of such ministers are some who arrogantly challenge God and threaten to quit the ministry if God doesn't give them certain things they demand or do certain things their way! Was that Paul's attitude? Did Paul so threaten Christ when He refused to take away Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' even after three special occasions of earnest entreaty? (2

Corinthians 12:7-10). Rather, Paul even said “woe is me if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).]

Some people’s attitude to God’s work changes when they leave looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2, John 21:20-22) but look at fellow-ministers and others and envy them and their ways. But Proverbs 24:19 says, *“fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked”*.

Another aspect of personal matters that can result in changed attitude to God’s work is the growth and development in life. The worker may have been called when he was young, strong, healthy, agile, energetic, smart, and had little or no burdens. Then he was free. But by the time he gets to middle age, he is a man encumbered with various family responsibilities. The more he advances in age, the weaker he becomes and may even have one health problem or the other. All these, together with various failures and unfulfilled dreams, would get him into ‘thinking twice’ and he may end up with an entirely different attitude. That was why Jesus told Peter in John 21:17-19 to work hard when he was young because in old age he would no longer be able to do some of the things he would have loved to do.

However, most attitudinal changes result from the influence of others and the environment. Consider a little fellowship of few brethren who are so loving, self-sacrificing, sincere, and dedicated to the Lord and His work. When the organization grows and money starts coming in, the love of money sets in and the leaders start becoming megalomaniacal. Very soon, extortion, cheating, power-play and other vices appear and the situation becomes like the one so well presented by George Orwell in his classic novel *Animal Farm*. (I would like to recommend that church leaders and laity should read that revealing classic so that we would avoid the various intrigues and manipulations that plagued and scuttled the initial great expectations of that farm of animals).

Hearts would surely turn sour when it is noticed that *monkey dey work, baboon dey chop*. When the worker is not cared for, he, like the Levites of Nehemiah 13:10, may be forced to help himself in ways that are not the perfect will of God. When the local pastor is robbed of the tithes of his congregation that are his rightful due, because he has to remit them to headquarters, then attitudes may change when he's always hard up but an avaricious President/Founder is wallowing in untold wealth. When some people live in fantastic affluence and splendour while those who help to create that wealth are deprived, then attitudes would change.

When ‘Napoleon is always right’ and any suggestion or input from others is prevented or rejected, then attitudes would change and a worker would lose his sense of belonging and see the work no longer as his own but “their own”. The situation would be like that of 1 Kings 12:16 in which the marginalized peoples shouted, “*What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents O Israel! Look now to your house, David*”.

When a leader exhibits a character of wanting to be a ‘big fish in a small pond’, attitudes would change. And, if care is not taken, the ‘pond’ may remain small.

When what is sauce for the goose is NOT sauce for the gander, then questions would arise. When rules are strictly and severely applied to some people, but are usually bent and modified for some other ‘favoured’ people, then attitudes may change.

When the workers see that they’re being used and dumped, then attitudes would change. It would no longer be about what one can do for the organization but what one can get from it.

When the followers notice very well that the whole church is too commercial and exploitative, they too would want their share of the cake and would not do anything free as being done for God. This would give rise to paid singers, paid instrumentalists, paid Sunday school teachers, paid ushers, etc. in

God's house. I once attended a church crusade at which a young organist refused to play the keyboard until he was paid cash down. When I tried to convince him otherwise, he narrated to me incidents in which their pastor himself wouldn't do certain spiritual 'assignments' for them (members) until they had paid him cash down. You see?

It is sad but true that the leadership in some churches is the cause of the changed attitude, doused love, and downfall of some upcoming workers who had started out very well in God's service.

What we've highlighted in this chapter are only *some* of those things that can engender poor attitudes to God's work. However, I would advise every Christian worker that no matter what people do, he should always remember the following: 'Who called you? Whom are you working for? WHY are you doing the work you are doing? Who will reward you?' Hence, whatever people do (or fail to do) to you, don't have anything against, or cause any offence to, God and His work because God has never wronged you and did not tell those people to so wrong you. Rather, pray God to help you people to straighten things out and do well, even as was done in Nehemiah 13:10-14.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOME RESULTS

The attitude of the first set of labourers to the Master and His work caused them to first make sure that adequate arrangements were in place to guarantee they would get befitting wages for their services. To them, the day's wage they made the Master agree to pay them was a very good deal. But little did they know that the benevolence of that Master surpassed human expectations. The bible says that:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him”— (1Corinthians 2:9). It is also said about God that He “*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*” – (*Ephesians 3:20*).

When those labourers later saw the beneficence of the Master displayed and bestowed on those who had simply trusted him and worked in hope, they longed to also enjoy it, but couldn't. Their attitude had closed the door against them. The Master told them:

“Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go.” (Matthew 20: 13-14a)

God can do all things, but, usually, the things we can get from God are limited by what we can believe God for (Matthew 13:58, Mark 9:23, Hebrews 11:6).

Those labourers had been working for their day's wages – and they received what they desired! Jesus said in Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 that if one has any selfish ulterior motives when doing any religious service, immediately the person achieves that motive he has received his reward. God does not owe him anything else.

If you perform at a religious occasion for payment or as an avenue to project and showcase yourself as an artiste, then immediately you receive that acclaim, recognition or payment, you have received your reward. God owes you

no further blessings. Truly speaking, you were not really singing unto God or performing for Him.

A bad attitude to God's work makes people miss God's best for their lives. Apart from its robbing the individual of God's blessings, the individual would in turn be robbing the church of God's blessings. This is because with all the dissatisfaction, bitterness, grudge, covetousness, jealousy, questions, doubts, depression, despair, argument, complaint, criticism, grumbling, slander, etc. in his life, the individual would surely be a stumbling block to others and may even lead a subversion and breakaway. When he doesn't defect outright, his continued presence in the group would still block many spiritual things and prevent growth and success.

The bad attitude turns the 'first' into the 'last' and can even make someone who was among the many who were called fail to be among the few who are chosen (Matthew 20:16, KJV). It can ultimately result in failure to enter heaven if allowed to prevail in one's heart and life to the very end. Recall how frequent murmuring and distrust of God made many Israelites ultimately miss Canaan (1 Corinthians 10:1-12, Hebrews 3:7-19).

Some people who believe in some brands of 'eternal security' may argue that it is impossible for someone who had been a servant of God to perish. But let us check what the bible says. In Exodus 32: 32-33, Jehovah God himself told Moses that it is possible for Him to blot out from His book a person's name that had already been written! Think about that. In Matthew 25:30, Jesus said that an unprofitable servant would be cast out into the outer darkness where men will weep and gnash their teeth. Hebrews 6:4-8 says that well-grounded and mature Christians who later willfully reject the Lord can no longer be restored to repentance, but their end is to be burned. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul said he was always careful so that after having preached to others, he himself would not be a castaway. Was Paul a baby Christian who unnecessarily feared things that could not happen? No! He knew the deep truths. Can we today claim to know

Christian truth more accurately than Paul? No! Or can we claim to have stronger faith than Paul? No!

Therefore, brethren, let us guard our hearts so that, having been called, we would not end up like Judas Iscariot. Let us with fear and trembling labour to make our calling and election sure and ensure our ultimate salvation (2 Peter 1:10, Philippians 2:12)

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This conclusion will be quite brief.

In Matthew 20:1-16 (the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard), the difference between those who won ‘first’ position and those who took ‘last’ was that the preferred ones worked in the vineyard **trusting the benevolence of the Master**, while the other set demanded a contractual agreement with well-spelt-out terms. Such attitude, instead of ‘securing’ the goodies for them, rather limited them from enjoying underserved and unexpected goodness from the faithful and charitable Master.

We have examined various things that may engender such bad attitude in a Christian. But all that notwithstanding, Jesus taught that God really desires and highly esteems service from humble, willing, unassuming and undemanding servants who would simply trust his kindness and faithfulness; and that they are the ones who will receive greater blessing from God.

Jesus used the parable to teach us the type of service to God that is more highly rated by God. How are you faring in God’s vineyard, dear Christian and fellow-labourer? With what attitude or arrangement do you **now** serve? Though men may see you as being ‘first’, I pray that may nothing make you and your service be rated as ‘last’ by God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As we labour, let us remember that everything does not end here. Let us always keep in mind that Great Day when the righteous Lord, seated on his throne, will reward his servants for all their labour. It may happen that some little and unknown Christians may then receive more than some big and popular Christians. Will there be any stars in your crown? O servants of God, let us work with loving and trusting hearts, singing songs of praise and hope, making melody in our hearts to our Lord as we work with willing hands.

Let us end this piece with a beautiful song by J.R. Baxter. Jnr.:

1. Pilgrims for Jesus in lowland of sin,
Hoping that we at last the life-crown may win;
Serving the Master through the morning are we,
Sunset is coming but the sunrise we'll see.
Sunset is coming but the sunrise we'll see,
Heavenly beauty makes the shadows to flee;
Glory is waiting when the spirit is free,
Sunset is coming but the sunrise we'll see.
2. Strangers, but happy in His vineyard today,
Trying to help our Lord and Saviour alway;
Serving the Master through the noon-time are we,
Sunset is coming but the sunrise we'll see.
3. Weary and footsore ere the battle is won,
Trusting the promise that we'll hear His "well done",
Serving the Master all the evening are we;
Sunset is coming but the sunrise we'll see.

And another song by Mrs. A. W. Cook, titled 'The Lord Will Provide':

1. In some way or other the Lord will provide:
It may not be my way, it may not be thy way;
And yet, in His own way, the Lord will provide.

Then, we'll trust in the Lord, and He will provide;
Yes, we'll trust in the Lord, and He will provide.

2. At some time or other the Lord will provide:
It may not be my time, it may not be thy time;
And yet, in His own time, the Lord will provide.

3. Despond then no longer; the Lord will provide:
And this be the token – no word He hath spoken was ever yet broken.
The Lord will provide.
4. March on then right boldly; the sea shall divide;
The pathway made glorious, with shoutings victorious,
We'll join in the chorus “the Lord will provide”.

GOD BLESS YOU.

SECTION TWO

TITHES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER ONE

NEW TESTAMENT TRUTH

The natural inclination would be to begin a work like this by defining and explaining what tithe is and then going on to examine its purpose, usefulness, and so on and so forth. This would naturally entail tracing the origins and practice of tithing right from the Old Testament to the New.

However, most people today who have problems about tithing know its meaning and do not deny the fact that it was demanded by God and was practiced in the Old Testament. What they argue is that it is not taught in the New Testament but had passed away with the abolition of the Levitical Priesthood of the Old Testament.

That is why I have chosen to rather begin this piece by meeting the challenge squarely, rebutting that argument, before going on to explain more things about tithes.

Is there any place in the Gospels where Jesus taught that tithes should be received? YES! Is there any place in the Epistles where the Apostles taught that tithes are being received in the New Testament? YES!

Please read the words of Jesus Christ in the New Testament at **Matthew 23:23** and **Luke 11:42**.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” – (Matthew 23:23, RSV)

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” – (Luke 11:42, RSV)

Two things are involved here, namely: ‘tithing’ and ‘love, justice, mercy’. Jesus said that ‘love, justice, mercy’ are weightier matters than ‘tithing’. Yes,

fully admitted! But yet whichever of the two things you choose to call “these”, and whichever you call “the others”, Jesus said that ‘these’ OUGHT TO BE DONE and ‘the others’ OUGHT NOT TO BE NEGLECTED. Hence, inevitably, Jesus said that tithing ought to be done or ought not to be neglected.

Did Jesus say that because love, justice, mercy are weightier matters than tithing, then the lesser matter of tithing should be discontinued? NO! He rather asserted that it ought not to be neglected.

This is a glaring and incontrovertible truth which any sincere person should accept without argument.

I’m glad that our all-wise Saviour added that last phrase of Matthew 23:23. But even with that, opponents of tithing now resort to claiming that Jesus made the statement to Pharisees (Jews) and it was about matters of the law, hence it does not apply to the New Testament and Christians. If one uses such reasoning to reject Jesus’ command to keep practising tithing as being applicable in New Testament Christian Church, then one has automatically rejected the practising of ‘justice, mercy, faith and love’ also. There is no way you can separate the two things. Jesus had said ‘justice, mercy, faith and love’ were also matters of the law that tithing was of. Be careful! If you affirm that ‘justice, mercy, faith and love’ still apply in the New Testament Church, then you must also affirm that tithing still applies in the New Testament Church. However, if you claim that practicing tithing does not apply to the New Testament Church, you are claiming also that practicing ‘justice, mercy, faith and love’ does not apply to the New Testament Church! Hence, resorting to the twisted reasoning cannot successfully help anyone to wriggle out of the plain statement of Christ that tithing ought to be done.

Now read **Hebrews 7:8**. The original Greek of this verse says: “And here indeed tenths dying men are receiving, there but (one) being witnessed about that he is living” – (KIT). The KJV, RSV and DARBY have retained the words “here” and “there” and render the verse more or less as:

“Here tithes are received by mortal men; there, by one of whom it is testified that he lives”.

However, the NIV, NEB and KIT have opted to change the words “here” and “there” to “in the one case (instance)” and “in the other case (instance)”, and render the verse more or less as:

“In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living”.

What really are the “here” (one case) and “there” (other case) that are being compared? It is the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant (Testament) and the Melchizedek priesthood of the New Covenant (Testament). The comparison of these two priesthoods started right from Hebrews 4:14 where Jesus was introduced as the Great High Priest. Hebrews 5 explains that his priesthood is Melchizedekian and, after some warnings against falling away, the priesthood comparison is continued at the last verse of chapter 6 and all through chapter 7 and up to chapter 8 which “sums up” or brings out the “whole point” of the long comparison, namely, a comparison of the Old covenant which passed away and the New Covenant which is abiding.

Hebrews 7:1-8 explains that just as the Levitical priests received tithes, Melchizedek is also a receiver of tithes. He was a receiver of tithes right from the days of Abraham and He lives and remains unchangeable forever. Hebrews 7:8 says that in this New Covenant, the living Melchizedek is the receiver of tithes!

Some people may insist that the two things being compared in Hebrews 7:8 are just the receiving of tithes by Levitical priesthood and the receiving of tithe by Melchizedek from Abram. Even if that were the case, it still says that THE MELCHIZEDEKIAN PRIESTHOOD IS A TITHE-RECEIVING ONE; AND THAT THAT PRIESTHOOD HAS NOT PASSED AWAY TODAY! Notice that I say “Melchizedekian priesthood” and not just Melchizedek himself

because Hebrews 7:12 clearly shows that it is a comparison of two “priesthoods”, not just two priests.

Hence, in the New Testament Christ and the Apostles taught that tithes are receivable. If anybody tells you that tithing is not taught in the New Testament but had passed away with the Levitical priesthood, show them the New Testament scriptures Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 where Christ said that tithing ought not to be neglected, and Hebrews 7:8 which teaches that our LIVING High Priest Melchizedek is a receiver of tithes, and is receiving!

It's not that Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42 and Hebrews 7:8 are ‘proof - texts’ which I’m trying to overstretch or bend, or I’m tenaciously and desperately clinging to. As we go further, the currency of tithing will still be clear from other passages of Scripture also.

It is amazing to hear people vehemently insist that all the statements about tithing were made to the children of Israel (or Jews) and hence they would have nothing to do with tithing, yet these same people faithfully claim and apply for themselves other statements made to Israelites. For example, *‘you shall possess the gate of your enemies / you shall be the head and not the tail / when I see the blood I will pass over you / touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm / thou shall decree a thing and it shall be established unto thee / call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee / though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow / the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing’*, and more were said directly to Israelites but they are so dear to the hearts of Christians today! But anything that comes with some obligation is vehemently rejected. Do you think the promised blessings, though written in the Old Testament, will fail if you give a tenth to God today?

The proponents of lawless ‘grace’ claim that Jesus was born a Jew and lived as a Jew and, hence, we cannot follow his example. They claim that Jesus’ ministry was to the Jews and, hence, all his words and commands do not apply to us. One of these proponents, the famous theologian C.I.Scofield, even went

as far as saying that Jesus was “a minister of the circumcision” and that His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 & 7) was “pure law, and gives neither the privileges nor the duties of the church”. He further claimed that “the most dangerous sect in Corinth were those who said, ‘I am of Christ’”.

Isn’t that unfortunate? If we cannot follow the example of Christ and his words do not apply to us, then just what are we doing and where are we going? Why still bear the name ‘Christians’? If we make the words of Christ inapplicable to our lives, what do we think of John 12:47-50?

Consider the following examples:

- The great command, “Ye must be born again” was given directly to a Jew, a Pharisee, Nicodemus (John 3:1-7). Does it not apply in the New Testament Christian Church?
- The great parable of the good Samaritan and the fact that we should be our brothers’ keepers and the command to “go and do thou likewise” was told directly to a teacher of the law (Luke 10:25-37). Does it not apply in the New Testament Christian Church?
- The great command, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6) and the statement in Luke 16:18 were both made to Pharisees. Do they not apply in the New Testament Christian Church?
- The list can go on and on. Check out the following examples of commands/statements also made directly to Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees or teachers of the law: John 6:52-53, Matthew 3:8, Matthew 12:7, John 7:24, Matthew 22:21, John 2:6, John 8:33-34, Matthew 12:12, Matthew 12:41-42. Are all these inapplicable in this our New Testament era?

CHAPTER TWO

FULL-TIME GOSPEL MINISTERS

It is believed by some people that with the abolition of the Levitical priesthood there no longer exists any priest to whom they have to give tithes. But I say that I have a Great High Priest, Melchizedek, on high who receives my tithes.

Moreover, Melchizedek has here many priest-kings, some of whom He has called to be full-time ministers in His vineyard just like the priests and Levites of old were.

Some others argue that in the New Testament there should not be any full-time ministers but that all Christians are priests of God (1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Revelation 5:9-10) and all those who have officiating responsibilities in Church should also do some other thing for their livelihood. But in the New Testament we find that Jesus called some persons to leave their occupation and all and follow him (E.g. Luke 5:10-11, Mark 1:17-18, Luke 5:27-28; Matthew 19:27, 29; Luke 9:61-62, Acts 9:15, Acts 26:16-17, Acts 13:2). Those were not to engage in any other things that would impose any obligations on them and their time and their concentration (John 21:15; Acts 6:2, 4). [The word “these” in John 21:15 meant ‘these fishes, these food items, this breakfast, this fishing to fend for yourself and family]. Do we think Jesus does not give some people similar calls today?

Again, some people point to the fact that Paul did some other work (tent-making) to support himself, and then demand that all ministers should do likewise. But 1 Corinthians 9:5-6 gives the examples of Peter, the brothers of Jesus, and other Apostles who did no other work for a living. Verse 6 says it was their right to stop to do it. Paul explained that his doing some other thing to support himself was purely a personal decision to sacrifice his right to refrain from working for a living, and it was aimed at relieving the church of some

burden. It was his personal sacrifice, and he never gave any hint that other full-time ministers should be compelled to do same.

If we insist that all ministers must work since Paul did, then we should also insist that all ministers should sacrifice their right to marry, just like Paul sacrificed his. We would end up in forced celibacy!

Concerning those whom God has called into full-time ministry, Paul took time to explain in 1 Corinthians 9:1-14 that full-time ministers of the gospel are to live by the gospel just like the priests and Levites lived by the temple service. How did the Levites live by the temple service? Answer: **BY RECEIVING TITHES!** God's Word in the **New Testament** states that "**EVEN SO**" should full-time gospel ministers also live by the gospel. How should full-time gospel ministers live by the gospel? Answer: "**in the same way**" that Levites did during their temple service to God! Some may feel this is bending of Scripture, but let us closely examine 1 Corinthians 9:13-18 and realize the following truths.

- (i) The use, by various bible versions, of the words "ordained/commanded/directed/gave orders/appointed/gave instructions" in verse 14 indicates something to which people have been obligated, rather than something left entirely to one's free will. Indeed, one meaning of 'to ordain' is 'to make an ordinance'. Tithe is God's ordinance, whereas one is not under obligation in anything done at one's discretion.
- (ii) The use of the words "charge/cost/expense" and the words "right/authority/power/privilege" in verse 18 does not suggest something that may be received only as is freely given, but rather indicates something that can be authoritatively obtained as a stipulated right—something like the tithe!
- (iii) The Greek word '*misthos*' (mostly translated 'reward') that Paul uses in verse 18 is the same word God used in Numbers 18:31 when He said He was giving the Levites the tithes as the wages (reward) for their

ministerial service. This is why some bibles like the New Living Translation (NLT) render verse 18 as: “*What then is my PAY? It is the satisfaction I get from preaching the Good News without expense to anyone, never DEMANDING my RIGHTS as a preacher.*”

- (iv) The Apostles were Jews. In fact, Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews and had even been a Pharisee. Hence, when he spoke of the wages (reward) for ministerial service he could not mean anything other than the only known **God-ordained** wages for temple service, namely the tithe. He, a Jew, could NOT have meant ‘voluntary donations’, ‘votive offerings’, ‘salary’, ‘stipend’ or ‘allowance’.
- (v) Paul spoke of forgoing his ministerial rights. What was that right or privilege that he forwent? CAN YOU SAY HE FORWENT HIS PRIVILEGE TO RECEIVE VOLUNTARY GIFTS? Certainly not. A free gift can only be refused or rejected, not forgone! Only a right or privilege could be forgone. (And, of course, Paul could not refuse any voluntary gift, knowing that it was born out of love and the giver could freely afford). For Paul the Jew, what was that known God-ordained reward for temple service that could rightfully be obtained, but which he decided to forgo? Was it voluntary donations? No, it couldn’t be. It was tithe.
- (vi) 1 Corinthians 9:13-18, a New Testament passage, discusses the known God-ordained manner of getting reward (remuneration) for priestly service, namely **tithing**. Though Paul forwent this right and privilege, he NEVER hinted that the other Apostles or gospel ministers should also forgo or be denied the right. Indeed, The Message Bible (MSG) in 1 Corinthians 9:12-14 has Paul saying, “...*All I'm concerned with right now is that you not use our decision to take advantage of others, depriving them of what is rightly theirs....*” It was Paul’s personal sacrifice and, MOST IMPORTANTLY, HE DID NOT TEACH THAT

FORGOING THAT RIGHT IS THE STANDARD NEW TESTAMENT LAW AND PRACTICE. So, how can we use it to conclude that voluntary donation precludes tithing in the New Testament? Jesus did not teach so. The Apostles did not teach so.

Truly, Jesus had said, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). When a genuine and faithful servant of God who serves without charging receives tithes from people, he is not ‘demanding’ payment from them. Rather, it is God who has demanded his portion from them as the Owner and Giver of all and then turned that His portion over to His servant as reward.

2 Corinthians 9:7 does NOT speak against tithing at all. This verse should not be quoted in isolation and out of context. The context was that of making contributions or offerings to be sent to other brethren who were then seriously in want. Read 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and notice what verses 13 and 14 say. Paul taught them that no imposition should be made for that but people should give voluntarily, and he advised them on the blessedness of giving generously. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul was NOT referring to God-ordained reward for ministerial service, which he did in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18. Indeed, I urge everybody to be donating generously to God’s work and humanitarian services, but that does NOT preclude tithing!

It’s quite baffling how some people try to use Acts 4:36-37 to argue against tithing. That scripture says nothing at all about tithes. A certain Levite (Joses) rightly believed the gospel message and converted from Judaism to Christianity and made a donation to the church just like other members were doing. (In fact, he was not the only such person; Acts 6:7 says even some priests also converted!). But just how can somebody conclude from these that tithing has stopped or should stop in the New Testament?

Some ‘wise’ men today insist that only a modern blood-descendant of Levi can receive tithes; but 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 says God has now “ordained” that “even so” should full-time gospel ministers live by the gospel. Which one will you

take – human ideas or God’s word? By the way, did Abraham and Jacob give their tithes to Levites? An opponent of tithing once answered this question by saying that “Abraham gave tithes by faith”. I was thrilled by that answer. In this era of righteousness through faith, shouldn’t we the faith children of Abraham follow his example of giving tithes by faith? [Know very well that tithing existed and was practiced before the Levitical priesthood. The moral Laws of God that predated the temporary Levitical laws also do outlast/outlive them, and are still in place!]

Indeed, what is so special about the blood of Levi? Did Levites receive tithes as reward for having the blood of Levi running through their veins or as reward for temple service? Is the issue Levi’s bloodline or service to God upon being chosen by Him? Our modern ‘wise’ men should go ahead and insist too that nobody today (Jew or Gentile) should be in God’s service unless he’s a full-blooded Levite! They should also declare all serving ministers (Jewish or Gentile) “sinners” for entering God’s service when they are not from the special tribe of Levi! If a rabbi says he cannot receive tithes since he’s not from the tribe of Levi, why then could he enter God’s service in the first place? And should I, a Christian who believes 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 and Hebrews 7, follow such rabbinical thought?

An over-insistence on the Levitical priesthood betrays an ignorance of the fact that tithes were given to God and not to Levites. God says the tithes are His portion and He, God, chooses to give them to His chosen full-time ministers as reward for their service (Malachi 3:8, Numbers 18:8-32). If the Levitical priesthood is no more, is God no longer here? Has He said anywhere in the New Testament that men should no longer give Him His portion? (See section 3.1 of this piece). Does God no longer have any God-called and God-chosen full-time servants today?

If the Levitical priesthood has passed away, is the Melchizedekian priesthood not here today? And isn’t it a tithe-receiving one? I do not have to send my tithes to Melchizedek via a rocket or by burning them up to ascend to

him in a smoke. I give them to him via the channels he has designated – his called and chosen ministers.

Some people present the argument that in the New Covenant there is no special priesthood that should receive tithes, but that all Christians are now priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 5:9-10). If so, why should a special class of people be given stipends and other provisions? In that case, are all Christians no longer priests of God? Are those stipends given to and those provisions made for every member of the church? If the argument applies against tithes, it also applies against stipends and other forms of provision. Hence, it is a self-defeating argument.

Furthermore, the assertion that tithing was legalistic and meant to support the Levitical priesthood but in the new covenant era of grace has been replaced by voluntary donations to support gospel ministers makes it appear as if tithing and willing offering are never compatible but must preclude each other, and as if service to God in the Old Testament was never out of love but legalistic compulsion. Yet we find that under the old covenant, Levitical priests benefited from freewill, thank and votive offerings TOGETHER WITH the tithes! Why? In the whole New Testament, we cannot find even one statement that voluntary donations now PRECLUDE tithes! Rather, we find some direct statements that tithing ought to be done or ought not to be neglected. Also, the people in the old covenant, in their service to God, were to ‘LOVE the lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might’ (Deuteronomy 6:5) and ‘LOVE their neighbors as themselves’ (Leviticus 19:18). We find there examples of loving and willing servants of God like Abraham, Joseph, Job (Job 13:15) and David (Psalm 119:97, 127,128; Psalm 19:10-11).

Some people erroneously feel that the absence of the Temple at Jerusalem implies that tithes cannot now be given or received. However, in our next chapter on the meaning and practice of tithing, we shall learn that, even in the Old Testament, only one out of the three kinds of tithes needed to be taken to

the Temple and eaten there, while the other two kinds of tithes could be received and eaten by Levites in any place. Moreover, Jesus explained that in the New Testament neither the Temple in Jerusalem nor Mount Samaria is any longer God's CHOSEN place of worship (John 4:20-24), but wherever two or three are gathered in his name he is in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

CHAPTER THREE

MEANING AND PRACTICE

Books abound that present detailed theological and historical analyses of the various kinds of tithes in ancient Israel, but this chapter is more about a holistic consideration that aims to capture God's purpose and spirit in tithing, with a view to ascertaining how tithing could be practised in our present-day circumstances.

Tithe means a tenth part or 10% that is sacred to the Lord. God instructed his people to give a tenth of all their increase to Him. This included produce, grain, wine, oil, honey, fruits, flocks, herds, etc. Those instructions can be found in scriptures like Leviticus 27:30, 32 and Deuteronomy 14:22, 28. Examples of those who gave tithes to God are Abraham (Genesis 14:20), Jacob (Genesis 28:22), Judah in the days of King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 31:4-6), Israelite returnees in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:37-39; Nehemiah 12:44,47).

Actually there were three kinds of tithes in Israel:

- i. The first and most **basic** tithes were given to the Levites anywhere and constituted their wages for religious service (Numbers 18:21-32, Nehemiah 10:37). From this the Levite in turn gave a tenth to the High Priest as the Levite's tithe.
- ii. The second kind of tithes was those that had to be taken to the various Feasts at 'the Temple' and were to be eaten there by the giver, his family and Levites. (Deuteronomy 14:22-27; Deuteronomy 12:17-18). These met the needs of the festal aspects of those gatherings.
- iii. The third kind of tithes were to be given every three years and stored in the various localities and eaten there by the Levites and the 'less-privileged' (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, Deuteronomy 26:12-15). This

was just one of the various charitable provisions God made for the welfare of the ‘less-privileged’.

However, the most popular scripture on tithes is found in **Malachi 3:7-12**, and I quote:

“7. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them, Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, wherein shall we return?

8. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

12. And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts” ---- (KJV)

In the above passage, God informed his people that they had forsaken him through failure to observe his ordinances. That was quite a broad sentence; hence the people requested God to disclose their particular point of failure to them. However, God’s reply baffled them – God said they were ROBBING him! They wondered how mere earthbound mortals could possibly rob the Almighty God on high. God explained that it was all about tithes and offerings.

In fact, God is so interested in that his portion (one-tenth) that failure to give it to him is pronounced an act of robbery or stealing of his thing, and attracts a curse. It is not that God would say “woe unto you” anytime you fail to

give him the tenth. The fact is that devourers already abound in the world and it would be a woe for the devourer to devour your lot, and it is also a woe for you to miss the covenant blessings that go with the tithe-giving.

God always requires that preference should be given to him first in all things (Numbers 18:29, 32; Leviticus 22:20; 1 Kings 17:13-14), and that one should be sure to “set aside” his tithe (Deuteronomy 14:22, *NIV*, *GNB*, *Douay-Rheims*, *New Living Translation*). Actual giving of what had been set aside was not to be unduly delayed lest it became a default (Deuteronomy 26:12-13). Even in extreme adverse circumstances, one could not use that which had been set aside (Deuteronomy 26:14). One had to give God an additional interest of 1/5th of that 1/10th when redeeming his tithe (Leviticus 27:31). Can you now see how serious God is about that His portion, the tithe?

The fact that God differentiated tithes from offerings in Malachi 3:8 is IMPORTANT. There were many kinds of offerings that could be made to God. Some were appointed by God and detailed specifications were made, while some others like freewill offerings, thank offerings and votive offerings enjoyed some form of latitude. However, the tithe was well specified by God as the tenth part. That was not negotiable.

It also shows that one should not feel that once he has given his tithe, that is all. There are also offerings. Tithing does not preclude the giving of other kinds of offerings. No bible portion says or even hints that tithes and generous voluntary donations preclude each other. Rather, the bible actually requires that both tithes and offerings should coexist (Malachi 3:8).

Some people now wrongly condemn and reject tithing as not being a voluntary giving but an imposition. However, the tithes were meant to benefit servants of God who had no other means of livelihood, and poor orphans, widows and destitute aliens. Taking a closer look, then, reveals that tithing had a purpose and spirit of charity. God was demanding REGULAR charitable provision for those people, not just a one-time or sporadic ‘voluntary donation’

to the ‘poor’. No wonder God usually said “remember” and “do not neglect” (Deuteronomy 12:19, Deuteronomy 14:27).

If one grumbles that 10% is a legalistic imposition, is that the person who would happily sacrifice his ALL for God and his neighbour to his own hurt? Consider the widow of Zarephath. She was obeying a COMMAND of God when she gave that her last meal to Elijah. Read about it in 1 Kings 17:13-15. It was not what our modernists today would call a “voluntary donation”. It was by the OBEDIENCE of FAITH. But before God it was really a freewill act because she very well had the choice to have doubted, disobeyed God’s word, considered first herself and child. But God already knew her before sending Elijah to her. No wonder Jesus said, *“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Zarephath, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow”*. (Luke 4:25-26).

The fact that God gave man nine-tenths and required only one-tenth for Himself shows that He is not a God who turns round to get back from man what He had given him. Surely, 90% is much more than 10%, but some people would look at 10% of their increase and, behold, it is very much. They then feel that it is just too much to be given out and, hence, they hold back some of it and give what they like to God as tithe.

Such conduct is very improper; what they’ve given is not really their tithes; they are still robbing God. By implication, they are telling God: “Dear God, what you’ve given me is so much that one-tenth of it is too much for me to give out to you. Please, give me less so that one-tenth would then be small enough for me to be able to give out to you”.

Would it be any wonder, then, if their ‘real’ income starts to drop? I use the word ‘real’ to indicate that even though the actual income may not drop, the

amount really enjoyed or used positively and progressively may drop due to problems arising from left and right to take away parts of the income.

It is important to know the following truths about tithing:

3.1 Acknowledgement of God's Ownership

The acknowledgement of the fact that God is the owner and giver of all things (Psalm 24:1-2, Deuteronomy 8:18) is intrinsic to and explicit in tithing (Deuteronomy 26:9, 10, 15). This is because the tithe is like a tax, royalty, tariff or duty payable to God from whatever we obtain through exploiting the resources within His Creation. It is like the royalty a company **must** pay to a host country when the company extracts minerals or other natural resources from its territory. The company cannot just give anything it likes as tax to the host country; the tax it pays must be as stipulated by the host country. Only God has the right to fix the percentage He requires as tithe, and man does not have the right to give any percentage he likes as tithe. And we know that tax evasion is a punishable crime.

When one fails to give tithes, one should not consider oneself as being too wise to be “exploited” by “greedy” ministers. Rather, the one is too unwise to recognize God as the Owner and Giver of all in a way God has prescribed. Of course, tithing is not the only way to show that recognition, but it is surely one of the God-stipulated methods.

However, this tithe (10%) to God should not be given grudgingly but willingly and thankfully (Deuteronomy 26:10-11). That is the right attitude. When Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek, he did so in a spirit of gratitude to God for having kept his life, made him victorious in battle, enabled him rescue his relatives who had been taken captive, and made him return with much goods (Genesis 14:20). In Deuteronomy 14:26 and Deuteronomy 12:11-12, we find that the tithe-giving occasion was to be with rejoicing. God even said one could buy whatever his heart desired for use in the presentation and merry making.

3.2 Means of Blessing

As noted earlier, God is not a God who turns around to get back from man what He has given man. God can never be in want. His purpose in requiring something from man is to create an avenue for pouring more blessing upon that man. That was what God explained to the Israelites in Psalm 50:9-15. Paul took time to explain it to Christians in Philippians 4:11-13, 17-19. Indeed, it is a privilege and good omen for you if the Holy One Almighty would receive something from your hands. That was what Samson's mother explained to her husband Manoah (Judges 13:23).

In Malachi 3:10,12, we find God explaining that tithing is meant to provide an avenue for Him to pour even more abundant blessings on the giver. Hear Him:

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it”. – (Malachi 3:10, NIV)

(See also Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and Proverbs 3:9-10).

I know some faithful Christians (including students) who, though they are not earning any income, yet out of their knowledge of Truth and their love for God always give tithes of any pocket-money or gift they receive, with conviction that God would thus help them to derive optimal benefit from those gifts as well as open the way for more gifts.

So, dear friend, God can do much more for you. Believe God and enter into His covenant of abundant provision. Don't deprive yourself of blessings. Remember, God has even gone as far as saying you should just try Him and see. He, surely, will prove true!

3.3 Covenant of Security

One very important aspect of tithing is that it is a means devised by God, out of His goodwill, to be in a covenant with man, which covenant would make Him bound to provide security for the man and his belongings.

God covenanted as follows:

“I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.” – (Malachi 3:11)

Without God’s protection, the way would be open for various devourers to have access to your portion and devour it. You may then wonder why you have not had substantial progress or success in life despite all your endeavour and striving for money. You may not realize your case is like the one recorded in Haggai 1:5-11. You need to get under the cover of God’s covenant of security.

An excellent scriptural example of how God faithfully honours this covenant can be seen in the life of Jacob. The account is contained in Genesis from 27:41 to 35:29. A fugitive ready to perish was Jacob. Early in his flight and desperate condition he realized that to survive and succeed in life, he greatly needed God to stand by him. He made a vow to God who revealed Himself to him:

“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee.” – (Genesis 28:20-22)

Did God honour that covenant? Yes, indeed! When Laban tried to cheat Jacob and make him remain a servant, read in Genesis 31:6-13 about what God did and revealed to Jacob. Read also in Genesis 30:37-42 about how Jacob had

been acting by faith on the revelations and instructions from God. In Genesis 31:13, God openly stated why He was doing all that for Jacob: "*I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where YOU VOWED A VOW TO ME...*". The end result was that by the time Jacob was leaving Laban, he had "grown exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, maidservants and menservants, and camels, and asses". (Genesis 30:43). Jacob could have the testimony recorded in Genesis 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies".

Not only that; God also secured his life. When Laban pursued Jacob with murderous intent, God rebuked him and warned him not to attempt any evil on Jacob (Genesis 31:24, 29). Again, when Jacob finally met Esau, God melted Esau's heart and, instead of engaging in mortal combat, the brothers hugged, kissed each other, and wept (Genesis 33:4). All was peace.

God made Jacob finally return to his father's house safely and dwell there in peace and later take part in burying his father (Genesis 35:27-29). God performed all that Jacob had requested of Him in Genesis 28:20-21. O, what a covenant-keeping God!

He is still doing similar things today. Testimonies abound the world over of how He has been honouring the covenant of tithe. For instance, a sister in Christ once testified about how she once travelled from Eastern Nigeria in a bus full of merchants who were en route to Lagos for business. The people carried much money and valuables with them. Sadly, they were attacked in a remote bushy area of the way by a fierce gang of heavily-armed highway robbers. The driver and all passengers were ordered to lie face-down on the road and one passenger was shot dead to warn all others that the gang would not brook any delay in obeying of orders. Each passenger was systematically robbed of all their monies and valuables.

The sister was quietly praying and heard God clearly say to her: “*Don’t panic. I’ll honour your tithes that regularly come up before me. Be still and don’t move, whatever happens.*” Moments later, one robber walked towards her with pointed gun and ordered her to stand up and submit all that she had. She didn’t move, but silently pleaded the Blood of Jesus. Just then, the gang leader barked an order to the robber: “Hey, Sharpo, leave that stupid woman and come here immediately!” He turned and rushed to help their leader “unload” a man whom she later learnt had had a total of 10,000 Pounds sterling and US\$ 35,000 (hard currency) carefully hidden among the merchandize of three different bags. After “unloading” him, the gang seemed content and saw no need to stay longer. They then burst all tyres of the bus, took its ignition key with them, and took off in their saloon car. Only the sister and one other passenger had escaped being robbed.

They were all left stranded, but God continued to show his faithfulness by making the only church in the nearest village give them some shelter and succour till they could finally resume their journey two days later. Praise the Lord!

3.4 Provision for Full-time Temple Workers

As expressed by God in Malachi 3:10, tithing was meant for the availability of food in God’s storehouse. What was the food for? It was provision for those whom God had made to leave all other occupation and become full-time religious ministers (Numbers 18:21, 24, 31).

There were two classes of full-time ministers:

- (1) The priests, the male direct descendants of Aaron. Aaron himself was the first High Priest.
- (2) The Levites, who were mature males of Aaron’s wider native tribe of Levi, and were to assist the priests in some aspects of temple service.

Some people today argue that though the Levites owned no land on which they could farm, they could engage in other trades or businesses whenever it was not their week of service at the temple, and hence they were not full-time ministers. However, those arguments are irrelevant to us because whatever the nature of service God had required of (or allowed) them, they received tithe for that nature of religious service.

In Numbers chapter 18, we find that of all offerings made to God, the part which was not to be directly burnt up was meant for the priest. Hence the priests and their nuclear families and purchased slaves could not lack provision (Leviticus 22:10-13). The **basic** tithes were the Levites' portion – their wages for temple service. Other sets of people whom God, graciously, said could benefit from some tithes were poor orphans, widows, beggars and destitute aliens. (See also Deuteronomy 14:29).

We also find that the Levites themselves were to give the tithes of their wages (tithes) – that is, a tenth of the tenths – to the High Priest.

It is very important to notice that those portions given to the Priests and Levites were actually God's own, which God Himself decided to share with His full-time servants. It was God's gift to them and nobody had any right to challenge or question them about it. They were not to render any account of it to any other persons or class of persons. This portion was not to be officially diverted to or used for any other things like building projects, buying of temple furniture or vessels, developmental projects, etc. For those other projects, freewill offerings, contributions, levies, etc. were made as and when necessary (e.g. Exodus 35:4-29, Exodus 30:13-16; 1 Chronicles 29:1-17, Ezra 7:15-23, Haggai 1:7,8,14). If a priest or Levite decided to give something for those projects, it was his voluntary personal contribution from his God-given wage (portion) towards the work of his God. It was never an officially stipulated or arranged diversion or appropriation of that sacred portion to those projects. (However, it must be noted that any minister who finds it very difficult to spend

God-given money to further God's purposes has a big question mark on his love for God and the ministry!).

Finally, we also find that God said that some tithes had to be given only at the place where the name of the Lord was (Deuteronomy 12:5, 6, 11). In the wilderness, the only such place was the movable Tabernacle of Witness. All the people were then in one group. In the days of Joshua, the Tent was pitched at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1), but the people then lived in different towns and all the tribes of Israel gave the priests and Levites a total of 48 cities to dwell in (Joshua 21:41). Hence, priests and Levites could be found in many places in Israel. Those Levites received some tithes in the various towns (Nehemiah 10:37b), stored them there (Deuteronomy 14:28), and ate them there (Deuteronomy 14:29; Numbers 18:31). What they HAD TO remit to 'headquarters' was only the tenth of their portions, which was the tithe they themselves were giving to God from their God-given 'incomes' (Numbers 18:26-30, Nehemiah 10:38). In the days of Nehemiah, the arrangement that they found convenient was for a priest, a descendant of Aaron, to go and collect those tenths of tenths (Nehemiah 10:38-39).

When there were many Priests and Levites in one location, for example at the 'headquarters', there came into being some arrangement for pooling all offerings and tithes and appointing some priests and Levites to oversee their storage and equitable distribution to their fellows (2 Chronicles 31: 2-20). Such arrangements recorded about Hezekiah and Nehemiah were in times of restoration after long periods of breakdown. They were the initiatives of godly men using their God-given wisdom. Admittedly, they were good (2 Chronicles 31:20, Nehemiah 13:14) since they solved the problem at hand and especially as they did not contravene the letter or spirit of any express law of God. However, the arrangements should not be seen as standard, unchangeable commandments dictated by God, though they were quite exemplary.

The need for the storehouse arose from the fact that the people were predominantly crop farmers and pastoralists and crops were harvested seasonally. Thus, the tithes of a particular crop all came in at about the same time and, hence, had to be stored well for future use (2 Chronicles 31:5-12, Nehemiah 13:11-13). It also does suggest that the third-year tithes to be enjoyed by Levites and the less-privileged could not all be finished in a short while, nor could some be finished at once that were to be eaten by families on Feast days.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT DAY

What is discussed below is based on the meaning and practice of tithing which we gathered from the Pentateuch and Book of Chronicles and Nehemiah, as expressed in the previous chapter. It is assumed that readers are thus aware of those bible references, which may not be inserted again in the discussion below.

It is true, of course, that today's circumstances are different from those of bible times, though God is the same. These differences in circumstances clearly imply that we just cannot follow Old Testament practices of tithing to the letter. However, we can follow God's intent and purpose.

Today, the pattern of the priesthood differs from that in which only the tribe of Levi were the religious ministers. Today God can call any Christian of His choice into full-time gospel ministry. All such ministers who've been made to leave other occupations must, of course, live by the gospel and can and should receive tithes.

Today, people are no longer mostly pastoralists but civil servants, businessmen, technicians, employees, etc., whose increase is really in money, which is the convenient medium of exchange. Thus, it is sad for one to say that tithes were required specifically of agricultural produce and not of money, hence tithing cannot be practised today. If, in a country setting today, a farmer finds it convenient to give tithes of his farm produce in kind to a minister, the minister must not reject it since God does not reject it. It would be the minister's responsibility to later do as he likes with it. But if the giver converts it to money before giving as tithe, then what's the matter? What of in a metropolitan setting? Can one rightly say that an Israelite who was not a farmer but, say, a carpenter or cloth merchant never gave tithes to God? For instance, could the Israelite dare fail to attend the Feasts of the Lord? No, of course. What did he use in rejoicing with his family and Levite at those Feasts? Why did he give that tithe when he was not a farmer or shepherd but a tradesman or merchant and his

increase was not that of the land? The tithes that Abraham gave to Melchizedek, were they farm produce? Were they of the increase of his land or flocks? They were of the ‘increase’ from the exploits God enabled him to do! **Why did God receive it?** Whatever exploits you are doing today in your area of endeavour, do you recognize God only as the ‘owner of the land and giver of crops and flocks’ but not as the one who gives you ability and success in your exploits? (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Today, we are not giving Levitical tithes but Melchizedekian tithes. From father Abraham’s example, we see that Melchizedekian tithes were not in any way limited to agricultural products but were “a tenth of **everything**”, including goods (Genesis 14: 11-20). Hence, we can give tithes of money or of other things in their monetary value!

Today, we do not have just one church as they had in the wilderness but a multiplicity of independent denominations, some of which are large, highly organized and hierarchical, while some may have just one assembly. Some assemblies may not even have any full-time minister. Denominations are now so many that people have rightly wondered whether all of them are truly set up by God. Thus there has arisen the question of how now to know where the name of the Lord truly is.

Owing to the abundance of charlatans, insincerity and corruption in the ministry or for some other reasons, some people choose to give their tithes DIRECTLY to orphanages or to other charitable programmes. Is that completely right? How would their **tithes** be different from their other charitable donations? Don’t forget that the tithes were to be brought “*into the storehouse that there may be meat in mine house*”. Notice that the Levites featured well in God’s **directives** concerning **all** the three kinds of tithes. Hence, it is improper to exclude or bypass ministers in any kind of TITHE you are giving. You may do as you like with your other charitable donations, but the tithes must involve the priests of God.

How can tithing be correctly practised in our present-day circumstances? Of course, no one strict method can be prescribed since different churches have different organizational and administrative structures. However, one basic rule that must be observed is that whatever the arrangement we make it should NOT CONTRAVENE THE PURPOSE OR SPIRIT OF THE EXPRESS WORDS OF GOD about tithing.

Of very great help in this matter is the word of God found in **2Timothy 2:6**,

“It is the hardworking farmer who labours to produce who must be the first to receive a share of the crops” – (Amplified, NIV).

This is in strong agreement with 1Timothy 5:18, which says... “*The worker deserves his wages*”, and with what Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14. Let me here quote parts of verses 10 – 12.

“For our sake, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others partake of this right over you, should not rather we?” – (KJV, RSV, DARBY)

Yes, Paul was the minister who had first and foremost right to partake of their material benefits since they were DIRECTLY his ‘children in the Lord’, the ‘fruit of his labour’, over whom he ‘travailed’ and ‘laboured’. As far as it concerned them, Paul was not ‘entering into another man’s labour’, not ‘reaping where he had not sown’, not ‘glorying in other men’s work’.

What I am pointing out is that the shepherd directly in charge of a sheep or flock is the one who should receive its tithes. Biblically, the tithes of any local assembly are the rightful due of the pastor, reverend, evangelist, priest or whoever that is directly shepherding that local assembly. It must not be demanded that he remit the whole tithes to some higher priest somewhere. God said in Numbers 5:9 that whatever was given to a priest was his own. God

demands that he remit only the tenth of those tithes, as his own tithe which he is then giving.

For some reason or other, a local assembly may consider that there is no such shepherd among them, especially when all of them are engaged in their various occupations and there's no full-time gospel worker amongst them. In that case, they see themselves just as an 'outpost', a prayer cell, a study group or satellite fellowship. Let each sheep follow the Holy Spirit's guidance and give his tithe to any person anywhere whom God recognizes to be the God-ordained shepherd who is actually taking care of him. That person does not necessarily have to be a full-time minister, but must be God-called, God-ordained and God-sent.

If someone with a problem consults a certain man of God somewhere, and God solves the problem at that place and blesses him, 2Timothy 2:6 demands that it is that man of God and that place that should receive the tithes or thank offering in connection with that blessing. If it is given elsewhere, it would certainly be like 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. God wouldn't be pleased and the person concerned could be punished instead of being blessed.

This principle of 2Timothy 2:6 enables us to solve the problem of trying to know where the name of the Lord is concerning tithe-giving in these days when churches are mushrooming everywhere. WHEREVER YOU RECEIVED A PARTICULAR BLESSING, THE NAME OF THE LORD IS IN THAT PLACE CONCERNING THE GIVING OF THE TITHES FOR THAT BLESSING. Otherwise, why did He give you that blessing through that priest in that place?

What has been presenting a severe stumbling block to many Christians in this regard is one unbiblical feature that has now been introduced by man into tithing, namely the recording of individual tithes given. That is, the keeping of **individual** tithe payment records of parishioners by a chosen church official. The tithes of each giver is counted, confirmed and recorded in a PERSONAL

tithe card or register of **names**. Dates of payment are also stated and, of course, signatures appended. This is a rather unfortunate development. It has unlawfully encroached on the privacy of the covenant between the tithe-giver and his God. The tithe is a covenant between the giver and his God which must not be decided, manipulated or controlled by another man. Though it is received and used by priests, it is given directly to God. A priest's duty here is only to present the giver and his gift to God in prayer, invoking God's blessings on the giver.

By keeping these **individual records**, the receiver then knows the exact income of the giver and the regularity or otherwise of his giving. This is too great and too dangerous a knowledge and power to be had by human beings. It is a Nicolaitan practice (Revelation 2:15). The word Nicolaitan comes from two Greek words, *Nikao* (to conquer) and *Laos* (the laity), and means “to conquer the laity”. (Generally, any inordinate desire to know parishioners' incomes betrays covetousness. Why are you so inquisitive about it? Why are you so deeply interested in knowing it? Is it yours? What do you want to do with such knowledge?).

Knowledge gained from the personal tithe records has enabled some greedy and unscrupulous ministers and organizations to milk certain individuals, make various demands on them and shift various responsibilities onto them. Worse still, it has given them such a GRIP on the flock that has made the act of giving to be no longer willingly but out of compulsion. Can you believe that a certain minister once went through the tithe records and called defaulting parishioners individually and intimidated them, threatening suspension if they would not hurry up and clear their tithe indebtedness to the church? That was unfortunate. One should just teach the flock, then continue to please his God in faithful service, and see how God would in turn lead the flock to a loving practice of the truth learnt. Why harass parishioners? If you are diligently serving the God who truly called you, then go down on your knees

and strive with that God as Jacob did (Genesis 32:9-12, 24-30), and get the results. Never use unholy tactic.

Churches' record-keeping of INDIVIDUAL tithes paid has also been preventing some Christians from doing God's perfect will in some cases. There was a certain prominent businessman who was an official in his church. He once faced some serious obstacles to his winning a big State government contract. He couldn't get detailed personalized attention to his problem in his populous church, and had to go meet a dedicated and gifted servant of God for help. The man of God and his team laboured greatly and fought serious spiritual battles through prayer, fasting, tarrying at nights until there was breakthrough. God revealed many things about the businessman, promised to make him win the contract, but instructed him to give its tithe to that servant of God. The businessman knew and confirmed that all the revelations were true. Soon after, he was awarded the contract!

However, there was a problem. The details of that State government contract awarded were greatly publicized in the media, and the businessman knew that his failure to give exactly one-tenth of the contract amount to his church would be immediately detected through the diligently kept individual tithe records, and he didn't know how he could face the ire of his church's leadership about that. For fear of men, he couldn't obey God's instructions but deprived that servant of God of his due and frustrated God's plan to use him to provide material uplift for that ministry.

He gave the tithes in his big church, executed the contract, and all was well. However, 2½ years later, the succeeding State administration probed some past things, and the businessman and two government officials were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in connection with the execution of that contract.

That businessman is just one example. Many civil servants have been in similar dilemma and have lamented along the following lines: "I really appreciate what God has done for me here and I know the instruction is from

Him, but I can't stop to give tithes over there because my default will be known through the individual tithe records and I would have to face the church committee. Hence, I'll not be able to carry out God's instruction because as a poor civil servant I can't afford to give full tithes in two places, and I can't share it equally too because my records are there and I've not been demoted where I work".

Can you see the subtle but powerful Nicolaitan nature of the tithe card and what it has been doing? It is a pity that even some brethren who are against the organization of church assemblies purely through human intellect, decisions and control have introduced the recording of tithes for individuals with its terrible Nicolaitan characteristic.

The Nicolaitan grip on the flock and the resultant fear of men also manifest in other areas apart from tithes, as was the case in John 9:18-23. There was a certain rich and powerful lady who, due to her socio-economic standing, had been made an official in her church. She was there for many years without bearing any child. God pitied her and, through a prophet, gave her a special call to meet Him elsewhere. There, she was blessed with the fruit of the womb and was nurtured till her safe delivery.

Unfortunately, she found it too difficult to obey God's instruction that the child dedication should be performed there by that prophet. She explained that the high and mighty would be invited to the occasion, hence her big church would be the suitable venue. It was suggested to her that a low-profile dedication could be performed to fulfill spiritual requirements before her going to hold a big ceremony in her big church. But she argued that, as popular as she was, news of her appearance with her news-making baby in another church would surely filter to her bishop and that would mean great trouble for her.

She later had her baby dedicated in her big church but God was not in all that. God even said that her sin had caused the withholding of many gifts and

blessings from the child's life and given 'The Enemy' the chance to rob him of some that were already given.

The above examples of inability to do God's will result, partly, from the situation where Christendom no longer sees itself as one Body of Christ, but has become a Babel of competing denominations. The spirit of oneness and cooperation has been replaced by that of competition. If my pastor is a gifted teacher, what is wrong in my going as a Christian with my illness to another pastor who is a highly gifted miracle healer, receiving healing from God, testifying and thanking God there while I remain an active member of my church? Can't God use any servant of His to bless me? And shouldn't I, in turn, also bless that particular servant of God? [HOWEVER, be careful! I am not here teaching Christians to indiscriminately go here and there seeking 'quick' solutions to their problems. See Ephesians 4:14 and James 1:6-8. We should exercise faith in God and patiently wait for Him. Very many false things are going on today. Some things, rather than add together to strengthen, counteract each other to nullify. Pray and know God's will before doing anything. Truly seek God's face and beware of wolves in sheep's clothing].

Now, back to our main discourse on tithing. In many cases, there will be more than one person in one assembly who are biblically entitled to the tithes. In many cases, a 'tithe box' is employed. This is a safe and secure place (not necessarily a box) in the sanctuary where worshippers deposit their tithes, praying appropriately as they do so. This must be purely between the worshipper and his God. A day would then be fixed (perhaps once a month) for the collective special prayer for blessings upon all who gave God tithes in that month.

The 'box' should be opened only at agreed times in the presence of everyone entitled to the tithes. The whole process has to be very transparent and every eligible person must know the total tithes, which must then be distributed equitably. In everything concerning tithes, priests should be careful or they

themselves may incur wrath (Numbers 18:32). In fact, in Deuteronomy 18:8 God even said that, other things notwithstanding, Levites were to get EQUAL portions of benefits! During Hezekiah's and Nehemiah's arrangements, we do not hear that there was cheating, corruption, or infighting among the priests and Levites.

In these days of e-transfers, tithes could be paid (even across continents) into a bank account operated specifically for the tithes. Though there would be need for trustees and signatories, details of the account should be well known by ALL persons entitled to those tithes.

Nevertheless, out of trust and appreciation for the person and work of a particular minister, someone may choose to give his tithe to that minister (like Abram gave to Melchizedek) instead of to others or the church in general. In that case, Numbers 5:9-10 makes us know that it belongs to that minister and he is **not** under obligation to share it with others or hand it over to the church. It is unethical, though, for a minister to solicit or canvass for such things where he is not the only person entitled to tithes in the assembly; but even in such assembly that minister can rightly keep the tithe for himself as God's special blessing when the giver indicates that it is just for him.

Everything concerning tithes should be known and managed only by the ministers biblically entitled to the tithes. Anybody outside that fold should not seek to intrude into it and must stoutly be denied any intrusion into that sacred portion, lest wrath fall upon people.

This does not mean that only priests should know of or manage church finances. No! This piece is about TITHES. Church finance is much wider. There are many other things in church finances, like: collection, offering, special donations, levies, contributions, fund-raising programs, harvests, and various other sources like book printing and sales, estates or property management and development, and so on and so forth. The raising, appropriation and

management of all those funds to achieve the various goals of the church could be handled by any appointed persons.

However, **basic** tithes are a sacred portion given by God specially to his full-time servants as wages. Even in times of mass-arrangements made by Hezekiah and Nehemiah, we saw that only priests and Levites were involved in receiving, keeping and distributing tithes to their fellow priests and Levites. No outsider was involved or pressed for involvement.

Also, it does not mean that since the **basic** tithes were meant exclusively for the upkeep of the priests and Levites, then no other form of provision or blessings should come their way.

Indeed, today various churches make various arrangements for the welfare of their full-time ministers. But I believe, with good reason, that no other systems of provision can be as good as God's own system, which is **basically** the TITHES (plus, of course, various other blessings). My reasons for this belief will be explained as we go on.

In the usual human arrangement, churches place their full-time ministers on salary that is based on qualifications, years of experience and position in the church hierarchy, and which is subject to regular increments as the years go by. In big, well-established and longstanding churches, such ministers reside in church property and may, where possible, be assigned an official church car, driver and household servant, depending on the minister's position in the hierarchy.

However, these and other human arrangements have various flaws. For one, they have encouraged the existence of ministers who have not been called by God but who just choose the priesthood as a career by which they will surely live well and enjoy public respect too. All this they experience whether they serve God well or not. The only important thing to them is how to climb to the higher echelons of the church hierarchy where greater amenities and benefits

abound. In some cases, the climbing can even be done by bootlicking, politicking, graft, and by hook or crook.

The human arrangement sometimes results in the caging and frustration of a man of God and his ministry by a certain committee, council, board, etc. This results from the organization of religion such that the headship of Christ and absolute leadership of the Holy Spirit are replaced by human government, and the local pastor is no longer answerable to a God who called him and owns him, but to the church authority which appointed him and pays him. The pristine local Christian assemblies that grew from Pentecost had later suffered such organization and spiritual decline even before A.D. 380, when the Roman Empire under Theodosius organized Christianity into a State religion. Since then, churches have followed that pattern. [Local Christian assemblies ought to have a horizontal linkage, not a vertical one. The vertical link is with Christ. Of course, in the decentralized new testament churches, all the local assemblies still recognized the Apostles as being more knowledgeable about the Faith as regards directing them all in matters of doctrine and conduct (Acts 15:1-35). The Apostles were also recognized as people who could visit any local assembly and exercise authority in setting things in order concerning doctrine and conduct (Acts 16:4-5; 2Corinthians 13:1,2,10; 1Corinthians 5:3-5; 3John 9-14; Acts 8:14-25; Acts 19:1-7). However, the collections sent to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-29; 1Corinthians 16:1-4) were purely freewill aid sent to brethren who were then in special need, and not a standard, regular, official making of returns from ‘branches’ to ‘headquarters’. Christ’s churches did not become the religious or financial empire of the Apostles.].

The human arrangement can also encourage and cover up laziness and inefficiency when the minister is sure of his stipend whatever be the case. It has produced ministers who CANNOT say like Paul that they have learnt to be content with whatever circumstance (Philippians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Instead, they are among those who live the soft and

secure life (Luke 7:25). They have never ‘drunk from a brook’ and never been ‘fed by ravens’ and poor widows (1Kings 17:5, 6, 15, 16). They’ve never known God and His faithfulness to provide in personal and practical ways.

On the other hand, if we had operated God’s system, those who are not really called by God would not be able to perform and would naturally be weeded out. God would back anyone truly called by Him. He would also always prove himself faithful in supplying their needs. (This is not to say that worldly success is the measure of godliness, because in the current worldly systems even the vilest can be the most prosperous. However, that wouldn’t prevail in God’s system).

Even among those called by God, there would be greater fidelity, commitment, dedication, and obedience to God since all the hope of a minister would be on God, and the minister knows that “God honours those who honour Him, but those who despise Him will be disdained” (1 Samuel 2:30). The minister would also have greater passion for the souls of men, knowing that the more souls are saved the greater his blessings. He would also strive diligently for the welfare and uplift of his flock, knowing that their increased prosperity translates into his own material betterment.

Now, what about the highest priest in a denomination? To whom will he give tithes? Or is he even to give tithes at all? And what about the tithes of a whole assembly (or denomination) as a body? In the spirit of 2 Samuel 24:18-25 where David would not sacrifice to God offerings that cost him nothing, I strongly believe it is not morally justified for a priest to pay his tithes to himself, for then nothing would have truly left his pocket but rather still returns to him. Permit me to point out the example of a President of a denomination who disclosed that God directed him to be giving his personal tithe as well as that of his church to orphanages, and he has been doing so. Notice that the directive is not unbiblical since God graciously permitted poor orphans, widows and destitute aliens to benefit from tithes. Permit me to also suggest that the High

Priest can, out of benevolence, choose to give his tithe by distributing it to lesser priests that he knows are hard up. This, too, would not be unbiblical in the sense that those priests are entitled to enjoy tithes, and it would also resemble Almighty God who decided to give His sacred portion to His priests.

In any case, any man of God can always pray to God and hear from God what he ought to do.

I am fully aware that matters of financial administration are very delicate matters, but we must also admit that the bible STILL sets forth some standards and guidelines concerning tithes that we should try to follow.

It is a pity that some churches and ministers have been involved in various tithe scams. They'll answer for that before God. However, I invite you to start genuine tithing. Try God and see. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. You too will be among the many that give wonderful testimonies about the faithfulness of the covenant-keeping God.

GOD BLESS YOU!

*Dear friend, if this book has been a blessing to you, then own a copy for reference; and, please, do the good work of helping your friends and others get copies of this liberating truth.
May God bless you.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, an erstwhile university lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics, has been a full-time gospel minister for the past two and a half decades, and is now a bishop in Mount Olive Church of Christ, Nigeria – a full-gospel evangelical and deliverance ministry. He is married to Maddie, a co-minister, and they have five children.

NOTE TO THE PUBLISHERS

The cover design is by the author and features Christ smilingly and open-handedly supplying His bounty. The background is very deep green, the book title is in bright yellow and the author's name is in white; but you can improve upon it as you wish. This cover should be laminated and all or some of its figures or letters could be embossed.

The book itself could be about 18.5cm by 13cm, and its prints should not be too tiny or too compacted so as not to discourage the average reader. Its binding should NOT be by simply stapling.

These are my amateur suggestions but I request you to use your professional expertise and experience to make the book both attractive and easy to read.

Thank you.

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