

Grace Giving Part II

By Denise Bostic

(Abraham's Tithe)

In Part I of Grace Giving, we learned through the scriptures that tithing is a work of the law and not of faith. We also learned that Jesus did not command the Church to tithe and that we do not find it recorded in the New Testament that the early Church taught or practiced tithing. In this second part, we will address the subject of Abraham's tithe or what many call *pre-law* tithing. There are those who say that they tithe, not because they are under the law, but because God instituted tithing *before* the law, during the time of Abraham. Some will even go back before Abraham's day to the time of Cain, Abel and Adam to teach believers about tithing. Tithing, they say, is an *eternal law* that has been established by God therefore it applies to all Christians today as well. Did God command Abraham to tithe and if not, then why did he give a tithe to Melchizedek? Did Cain, Abel and Adam practice tithing? In Part II of this series, we will address these subjects and more to understand these teachings in the light of the New Covenant and to find out whether these things are so...or not.

Is Tithing An Eternal Law?

Some teach that tithing was a *law* put into effect by God even before the giving of the Mosaic Law. They point to Abraham's tithe in the Book of Genesis as proof and some go even farther back into the biblical timeline to Cain and Abel then to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Such teachings have been used to reinforce or strengthen the tithing doctrine in the Church today. Let's find out if there is any scriptural basis or validity to these teachings.

Teaching # 1.

Since Abraham tithed before the Mosaic Law was given, this means Christians should tithe today as well.

Is there any scriptural validity to this teaching? It is recorded in scripture that Abraham tithed only one time and that was off the spoils of war, not his personal income or wealth. (*Genesis 14:16-20*) God had already made Abraham very wealthy before he ever tithed. (*Genesis 13:2*). It is important to note that Melchizedek gave Abraham the blessing *before* he gave the tenth and not after. (*Genesis 14:18-20*) These scriptural facts fly in the face of the teaching that God will not bless us financially unless we tithe. Obviously God had blessed Abraham, not on the basis of the law of tithing, but on the *law of faith*. Abraham was not under law and even if he had been, his works wouldn't have justified him before God or helped him to receive the promises anyhow, which teaches us a great lesson in the Church today. (Romans 4: 1-5) (*There will be more about this later.*)

Did Cain and Able Tithe?

Teaching # 2.

Since Cain and Able brought God offerings, this is symbolic of the tithe and this proves that Christians should be tithing today.

Did Cain and Abel tithe? Abraham was not under law and neither were Cain and Abel. It is recorded that they both brought *offerings* before the Lord, which were common for all the righteous who lived before the giving of the Mosaic Law. (*Genesis 4:1-4, 8:20, 22:13*) Offerings, tithes and first fruits were defined under the Mosaic Law as distinct and separate from one another so this teaching cannot be used to prove that Cain and Abel were tithing, since it was specifically recorded that they brought *offerings*, not tithes before the Lord. (*Nehemiah 12:44*)

Did Adam And Eve Know About Tithing?

Teaching # 3.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden represented the tithe and when Adam and Eve ate of the (fruit) or tithe they were punished for eating what belonged to God.

Did Adam and Eve have knowledge about tithing? They, too, were not under law and it was never recorded that God had given them the knowledge about the tithe or tithing. This teaching is purely theoretical and is a fabrication of man to reinforce the tithing doctrine within the Church. This type teaching brings people into bondage with added threats of punishment and curses if not complied with. As we learned in Part I of this teaching, God has delivered believers from fear of punishment through the sacrifice of His Son; He is no longer imputing sin against us but is offering forgiveness and cleansing of them by the blood of Jesus. (*1 John 1:7-9*)

If tithing is an eternal law established by God as some claim, then it is strange indeed that Jesus was silent on the subject of tithing with the Church. The Apostle Paul, whose writings are highly regarded and respected by virtually every Christian and Minister of the Gospel, was silent as well about tithing and never wrote about it in his Epistles nor did the other Apostles. Instead he taught that our beliefs and practices in the Church must line up with the truth of the Gospel or Law of Christ. (*Galatians 2:14*)

The question to ask concerning this matter then is, does tithing line up with the Gospel of Christ? It can only be concluded that it does not since:

1. Tithing was an ordinance of the law and these ordinances have been abolished and blotted out by the sacrifice of Christ. (*Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14*)
2. Jesus did not command the Church to tithe.
3. It was not recorded in the New Testament scriptures that tithing was ever taught as a doctrine of the Church.
4. It is not recorded that the New Testament Church ever practiced tithing.

We Are To Follow Christ And The Truth Of The Gospel

If we truly want to be obedient to the Lord (and most Christians sincerely do) we must not be confused about what He has already told us to do. Jesus has given specific commands to the Church through the Apostles and they are recorded for our benefit and we should obey them. At the other end of the spectrum however, since Jesus did not tell the Church to tithe, we cannot presume to speak for Jesus where He has been silent. In light of this, how are we to give under the Law of Christ in the New Testament? Because Jesus is our ultimate authority, then we must look to Him and His Word for our answers. He has not left us without instructions and we need to understand how we are to give, as He would have us to. We will address this in greater length later.

Why Did Abraham Tithe?

So why did Abraham give tithes to Melchizedek? We will find the answer in the Book of Hebrews. In chapter seven the writer speaks of this priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek and gives

insight as to who He was. In verses two and three, He is identified as a King of righteousness and peace. He is eternal and it is stated that He abides as a Priest continually. Melchizedek is clearly a type of Christ and many believe that He was Jesus Christ pre-incarnate. According to the Genesis account, Melchizedek met Abraham when he was returning from winning a great battle against many kings and then blessed him. After Abraham received the blessing, he gave a tenth to this mighty King of Peace. (*Genesis 14:17-20, Hebrews 7:1-4*)

To understand why Abraham tithed we must first understand who God said Abraham was. He was a **prophet** and therefore God led him into actions that were *prophetic* in nature. Examples of this include when he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac upon the altar as a type of Christ, when he was physically circumcised as a sign that was later required under the law for all the males of the Nation of Israel and when he gave Melchizedek the tithes. (*Genesis 20:7, 22:1-18, 17:9-11, 14:20*)

Again, these acts were prophetic in nature and had to do with God's divine purposes and the future of Abraham's descendants. The first act mentioned pointed to the sacrifice of Christ and the New Covenant and the latter two pointed to the Mosaic Law. To understand which prophetic acts pointed to which covenant, we must rightly divide the word. We must remember that God promised Abraham that he would not only be the father of one nation (Jews) but the father of many nations (Gentiles) also. It is clear that the Nation of Israel became his *descendants of the flesh*. He not only has natural descendants but Abraham would also be a father in the faith to his *descendants of the spirit*. (those who have faith in Christ).

This is clearly explained in the Book of Genesis when God changed Abraham's name from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. When God changed Abram's name, this had great significance. God told him that he would no longer be the father (Abram) of only one nation (Jews) in the future, but also the father (Abraham) of many nations (Gentiles). (*Genesis 17:1-5, Romans 4:11-12*) His spiritual descendants would be all of those (of many nations) who would put their faith in Christ as he had, both Jew and Gentile. God has brought this word to pass as attested to by all those who have come to faith in Christ since the Atonement nearly 2000 years ago.

God had also promised Abraham's wife, Sarah, that the promise of spiritual adoption in Christ would come through her *son Isaac* and not the natural children. (*Romans 9:6-8, Galatians 4:21-31*) Jesus and the Apostle Paul both understood and taught this distinction between Abraham's descendants. Just because one may be a physical descendent does not automatically make them a spiritual descendent unless they receive spiritual adoption. (*John 8:37-44, Romans 9:4-8, Galatians 4:21-31*)

With that being said, we can now understand the reasons behind the actions of Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek. To receive greater clarity we will quote from the literal Greek translation:

“And here dying men (the Levitical Priesthood) indeed receive tithes, but there it having been witnessed (by Abraham) that he lives; and as a word to say through Abraham Levi also, the one receiving tithes, has been tithed. For he was yet in his father's (Abraham's) loins when Melchizedek met him.” (*Greek translation is in bold type.*) (*Hebrews 7:8-10 Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*)

Wow! That is astounding! According to the insight given by the writer of Hebrews, when Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, it was *prophetic* because Levi [the priestly tribe] would be coming out of his loins. Abraham lived long before the giving of the Law of Moses to Israel and this act of tithing prophetically pointed towards the time when the Levitical priesthood would be serving God under the Mosaic Law. The author of Hebrews effectively proves the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus by stating that long before Levi [the father of the priestly tribe] received tithes from his brethren, he first paid tithes to the Lord through his father Abraham! Abraham's tithe was also akin to paying *tribute* (this was customary in those days) to this Eternal Priest/King and in so

doing he was declaring that God Most High was his peace and protection, honoring Him as greater than all earthly kings. This also stood as a powerful testament throughout time to prove the superiority of Jesus' eternal priesthood over the priestly tribe of Levi. (*Genesis 14:21-22, Hebrews 7:4-12*)

According to the scriptures, God the Father has made Jesus a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. God foretold of this honor that He would bestow upon His Son in the Old Testament through King David, who was also a prophet of God. (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:14-17) Although God had put the Levitical priesthood into effect under the Old Covenant, it could never perfect those it represented. The priestly order of Jesus (Melchizedek) is eternal and perfect and He is able to save all those who come to God through Him. The priesthood of Levi was, imperfect and unable to save the people it represented and was only put into effect temporarily until the coming of Christ and the New Covenant. (*Hebrews 7:11-28, Galatians 3*) Abraham may not have understood completely why he was doing all these things but he obeyed God, walked by faith and believed God to bring all these things to pass! All of his descendents have reaped and are reaping the blessings of God because of his faith.

Hebrews 7 Is Not About New Testament Tithing

Those that use Hebrews 7 to try to prove that believers are to tithe today do not realize that Abraham's act of tithing in Genesis was prophetic in nature and pointed to the time of the *Mosaic Law*, not the New Testament. The major point being made in Hebrews 7 **is not** about tithing. The writer never mentions tithing as a New Covenant doctrine. If anything, the author proved that tithing was exclusively an ordinance under the law. (*Hebrews 7: 5*) This teaching is more consistent with the rest of the scriptures and proves that tithing is a work of the law and not of faith. The flow and context of this chapter rather is that Jesus, our High Priest is greater in every way to the Levitical priesthood and the law.

The writer was going to great lengths to prove this point because this message had been given to believers in Christ that had previously been under the Mosaic Law. At that time they were being pressured by their brethren of the flesh (Jews) to come back under the old Levitical priesthood and return to Judaism completely. If they could grasp the importance of this vital message however, they could understand the superiority of Jesus' priesthood and not fall away from the faith. The writer later warns the Hebrews of the serious consequences of falling away from the faith and completely rejecting the perfect sacrifice of Christ. (*Hebrews 10:26-31*)

We Are Abraham's Children In The Faith

Just as God made promises to Abraham's descendents of the flesh, He also made promises to Abraham and his spiritual descendents. These promises given to Abraham could only be received by *faith*. We must understand that these promises were all handed down to the promised Seed, who is Jesus Christ and because of His complete and perfect sacrifice, all of those promises are now *fulfilled* and *found* in Him. All those who have received Him and believed on His name have obtained the right to be children of God and inheritors with Christ. (*John 1:12-13, Romans 8: 8:17, 9:6-11, Galatians 4:22-29*)

Many Christians today lack knowledge of the differences between the Covenants and also do not understand that we are not to follow after the fleshly acts of Abraham. Such fleshly acts include slaughtering animals on altars of stone, circumcision and *tithing*. These all pointed to the fleshly ordinances that God had temporarily imposed upon Old Testament Israel and were only in existence as long as the first tabernacle was standing. These fleshly ordinances were only imposed on Israel until the time of reformation. [Literally, the messianic reformation, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible] (*Hebrews 9:8-10*)

This time of reformation that the author of Hebrews is referring to is the spiritual reformation of the *New Covenant* that was ushered in by Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The New Testament scriptures

clearly make a distinction between these two Covenants and teach us that believers are to emulate Abraham's *faith* towards Christ, not his fleshly works that are in connection with the Mosaic Law. (*Acts 15: 9-11, Romans 4:1-4, 13, Galatians 2:15-16, Galatians 3*) The New Covenant is far superior to the Old Covenant because it was ratified with the blood of God's very own Son, the Lamb of God, which is far greater than the blood of bulls and goats. (*Hebrews 9:11-14, 10:1-18*)

Revelation About The Life Of Abraham

(Romans Chapter 4)

Many people say that they tithe today because they are following Abraham's example. But what did Abraham himself learn in this matter of works? Did Abraham's works (i.e. tithing, circumcision, sacrificing animals) justify him before God or help him to obtain the blessings of God? We can learn much from the great insight that was given to Paul by the Lord in these matters. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul addresses this issue of Abraham's works in *Romans 4:1-3*. He wrote, "**What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."**

Since Abraham's works did not justify him in the sight of God, ours works cannot justify us either. God has already declared all believers righteous and justified apart from works of the law because of the redeeming sacrifice of His Son. (*Romans 3:21-28, 4:1-3*) Let's read about what else Paul says about our works:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." (*Romans 4:4-5*)

Do you catch that? We can only have God's righteousness given to us if we do not "work" for it. The only way we can receive God's righteousness is by faith in Christ. We cannot obtain our own righteousness or be justified through works of the law because this would only be as filthy rags and not acceptable to a Holy God. (*Isaiah 64:6*) Remember, God has already declared us righteous and justified apart from works of the law. He is crediting his righteousness and justification as a free gift because of what Jesus' finished work on the cross. We cannot add one iota to His sacrifice. Only Jesus' works are sufficient and ours are insufficient.

All God wants us to do is receive His gift of grace freely. Think about this, after someone gave you a gift, would you turn right around and tell that person that you would work for it? No, you would receive it freely as a gift. The only way that you would work for it is if you were too prideful to receive it without paying for it. If we have a prideful attitude then we could boast about what we had earned but God will not allow us to do this though. (*Ephesians 2:8-9*) God will not wind up "owing" us because He has already given everything He had- His Son Jesus. We cannot earn His blessings because they are only given freely by His grace. The same holds true with the work of tithing. God wants to bless us, not based upon our own merits of tithing, but because He is fulfilling a promise that He gave Abraham and those promises can only be found in Jesus Christ. (*Galatians 3:16-18, Hebrews 6:13-20*) We must receive this all by faith in Him and what He has done for us.

Faith is what pleases God, not works of the law. (*Hebrews 11:6, Galatians 2:16*) God was pleased with the faith of Abraham and declared him "justified" in His holy sight simply because He believed what God told him. God gave Abraham the promise before he ever performed any works of the law. (*Genesis 12:1-3*) The reason that God did this was so the promise of salvation and our inheritance would come through faith in Christ and not the works of the law.

Do we really believe what God has said? Do we believe in all that Jesus has procured for us through His vicarious sacrifice? All we must do is receive these things by faith in Christ. We will be working in vain if we try to gain by self-effort what can only be obtained through Jesus. Know that God wants to bless us, not because we are trying to “earn” it or God “owes” us because we are tithing, but because we are His children and He loves us.

Our Inheritance Does Not Depend On The Law

In this chapter, Paul continues to use the life of Abraham to illustrate that it is not works of the law that help us to obtain the promises and blessings of God. God had already declared Abraham righteous by his faith. In Romans 4 starting in verse 9, Paul goes through the timeline of Abraham’s life to prove a very important point as to when God credited righteousness to him. Was it before he was circumcised or after he was circumcised? To the Jews who had come to Christ, this would have significant meaning. If God had credited righteousness to Abraham after he was circumcised, then he could have taken credit for his works (and Jews doing works of the law could say this as well) but this was not the case. God credited righteousness to Abraham *before* he was circumcised- before he ever did any works that would later be equated with the law. God did this on purpose so that Abraham and all that who would follow in his footsteps could have God’s righteousness imparted to them by faith as well whether they were circumcised (Jews under the law) or uncircumcised (Gentiles who never had the law).

Let’s read further. God credited righteousness to Abraham before he was circumcised in order that he could become the father of all the Gentiles (uncircumcised) as well as the Jews (the circumcised). This divinely orchestrated plan that God carried out was for the benefit of all who would come to Christ by faith and they too could be credited the righteousness of God apart from works of the law. The way that He went about it, God would not allow *any man* to take credit for righteousness because it is a gift freely given by God for those who would accept His Son.

Our salvation and all of our inheritance with Christ was based on a promise that God gave Abraham and was not dependent on the law. **“For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his GRACE gave it to Abraham through a promise.”** (*Galatians 3:18*) God gives all of this freely by His grace, we cannot take any credit for our eternal salvation, and we cannot take any credit for the inheritance blessings, which includes trying to obtain blessings from God through tithing.

Back in Romans 4 Paul makes a powerful statement. **“It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is made worthless.”** (*Romans 4:13-14*) Our faith in Christ will be in vain and the promise of no value if we are trying to gain our inheritance through works of the law. We can only receive our inheritance through faith in Christ.

We find in the Genesis account that God gave Abraham the promise before he ever left his homeland. (*Genesis 12:1-1-3*) This has great significance as well. This means that the inheritance promise from God was not going to depend on the law. (*Galatians 3:18*) ***Since everything that God was giving Abraham could only be obtained by receiving the promise through Christ and not through works of the law (such as circumcision), we conclude that this also means that none of the inheritance promises would be received because of Abraham’s act of tithing as well, since it is also a work of the law.*** (*Romans 4:9-10*) We cannot earn the promises of God because they are given freely by His grace.

Giving For The Right Reasons

Jesus was silent on the subject of tithing with the Church because tithing was a work of the law and not grace. Who knows this more than Jesus? He died to set men free from slavery to the law and its rules and regulations. It is not His will that the Church live by legalistic, external rules and

regulations, but instead to live in the liberty of His Spirit and grace. We have learned that Abraham was not justified by his works; therefore works cannot justify those in Christ either. In light of this knowledge, the more important question to ask now is, "Since Jesus did not teach the Church to tithe, then how does He want us to give?" The answer my friend is that the Lord wants us to give inwardly from the heart in the spirit of love and by the empowerment of His grace.

The Lord wants the Church to understand His grace. We cannot earn the blessings of God because they are freely given by His grace. We must believe this and accept them by faith. This article has been specifically about tithing, but tithing is only one of the many legalistic works that the Lord wants His people to be free from. He also wants us to be free from everything that frustrates His grace and renders our faith impotent.

So many in the modern day Church have believed another gospel. A gospel of legalism instead of faith, a gospel of condemnation instead of God's grace. As we begin to gain more understanding of the totality of the sacrifice of Christ however, we will see an entirely different Church emerge in these last days, a Church that has a true revelation of God's grace.

The Lord is bringing a Greater Reformation to the Church in these last days. The Bible definition of reformation means *a time of setting things right*. [Interlinear Greek-English New Testament Third Edition] The Lord wants to "set some things right" in the Church, including how we are to give. It is not God's will that His people give by force due to the pressures of the strong-armed tactics of men, deceived by the cunning lies of false teachers or ruled by spirits of intimidation, condemnation and fear as we so often see today. It is His will that the Church give for the right reasons and with a free heart, full of love and grace. **There will be more teaching about this in Part III of Grace Giving.**