

Podcast Episode 10: Tithing

QUESTION: What is the proper way to handle tithing? What should tithes and offerings be used for, and what should they not be used for?

DENVER: Unlike the institutional Christianity of the 1500s, early Christians were called the *ecclesia*, meaning “a congregation or an assembly.” But early Christians were not institutional and certainly not hierarchical. The first century of Christianity had no formal organization and no central control. Christians met informally in small groups and worshipped together in homes or public places. In this earliest form, small groups led by both men and women, who were called *diákonos*, a word that is translated into English as either “deacon” or “deaconess,” that Greek word means “servant.” It was in these home meetings where original Christians worshipped and learned of Christ and Christianity.

Original Christians had no professional clergy. They operated in a way akin to a method described in the *Book of Mormon*:

"And when the priests left their labor to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priest had imparted unto them the word of God they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers, for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted..." [Alma 1:26-27].

This is how I believe Christianity ought to be practiced today, without a professional clergy diverting tithes and offerings that ought to be used to help the poor, needy, sick, and afflicted. We need to, and can return to, those early days of Christianity.

There was a remarkable event that occurred during the last two weeks of Christ's life. I want to read [to] you and then talk about that:

"And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. And he said, All these

have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, [that] thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

“Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” [Luke 18:18-24, 31-34].

That incident occurred when Christ changed the trajectory of His ministry and determined to go up to Jerusalem to be killed. And He knew that’s what He was doing. He invited the young man to “dispose of your property, give it to the poor, and come and follow me.” In the scriptures Luke calls this fellow “a certain ruler.” Matthew calls him “the young man.” Mark describes him as “one who came running.” John doesn’t mention him at all.

What if he had done as Christ invited him to do? He would have been with Christ during the final two weeks of His life. He would have seen Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He would have heard the crowds shout, “Hosanna!” He would have heard Christ denounce the scribes and pharisees as hypocrites in the temple. He would have been there for the anointing of Christ to prepare Him for His death. He would have eaten dinner and seen Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. He would have been there when the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was first introduced by Christ. He would have witnessed the crucifixion. He would have seen the resurrected Lord. And perhaps, most importantly, we would know his name, because he wouldn’t have been able to participate in all those events and remain unnamed in scripture. Now, it’s possible, had he accompanied them, that we would have another gospel having been written by him, as yet another witness of Christ’s passion and resurrection. Instead, he left sorrowful because he cared for his riches.

What Christ asks of us today is no different than what Christ asked of the unnamed man who left sorrowful as he turned to head to Jerusalem. It’s never convenient to follow Christ. It’s never without its anxieties and its sacrifices.

There is a small group of us who believe as we do, in an original form of Christianity. We believe in gathering tithes and donations and then using them to help people among us. We don’t

own any buildings, and we don't anticipate ever owning a building, unless God commands that that new temple in Zion be built by us. But that would be the only thing. We rent places like this [with help] from people who donate to allow the rental to take place. This is being broadcast on the internet by people who have voluntarily come here, brought the resources to do it, and are broadcasting this event right now—people who came down here to prepare the way, paid their own way, and sacrificed to do it.

The only way you can have faith is through sacrifice. You can believe a lot of things, but faith requires you to act on your belief and to act consistent with that belief, which is exactly what the young man did not do. The only reason why he came to Christ as an advisor, to ask of Him, “What can I do to inherit eternal life?” is because he had confidence that Christ could answer the question and give him the truth. He respected Christ. He believed in Him as a messenger of eternal life. But when he heard the message, he stopped short and retained whatever belief he had-- but he did not develop faith, because faith is acquired in one and only one way, and that is by sacrifice.

“And this Melchizedek, having thus established righteousness, was called the king of heaven by his people, or, in other words, the King of peace. And he lifted up his voice, and he blessed Abram, being the high priest, and the keeper of the storehouse of God; Him whom God had appointed to receive tithes for the poor. Wherefore, Abram paid unto him tithes of all that he had, of all the riches which he possessed, which God had given him more than that which he had need” [JST Genesis 14:36-39].

If you meet in homes, as the early Christians did, and if you gather your tithing (one tenth of your surplus after you have taken care of all your responsibilities, all your needs, whatever is leftover, one tenth of that is your tithe)-- after you gather your tithe, then you ought to look at your brothers and your sisters who are there in your meeting, and you ought to help those who have needs-- who have health needs, who have education needs, who have transportation needs, who have food needs, who have children that need care.

Christians should take care of the poor among them, and no one should be looking at the flock and saying, “I need your money to support myself.” Christian charities should be used to take care of the poor among you and not to engage in acquiring the cares of this world. This is why all Christian churches have become corrupt. They love money and acquiring financial security and church buildings more than caring for the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

Like the early Christians, we meet in homes. We ask for tithes or 10% of what you have leftover after you've taken care of all your needs, but anything collected is then used to help anyone in

the fellowship meet their needs. We hope for there to be no poor among us because we use donations to help one another.

I should explain to those who are listening to this or participating in this for the first time, a little about this group. Everything that goes on is voluntary among us. No one is paid for any service that they provide. Tithes that are gathered among us are used for the poor. Therefore, we have no funds because the tithing money goes to assist the poor.

Tithes ought not be used to support a man. Tithes ought be used to help the poor, and the weak, and the infirm. There is enough and to spare according to the revelation given to Joseph Smith, but only if the purpose for which the tithes are paid are satisfied first-- not to enrich men. It is better to pay than to receive tithes and offerings. It is better to give than to take. And the things of heaven were never intended to be given into the hands of men so that they might profit from them. We are expected to sacrifice for God. A religion that does not require sacrifice is a religion that will not produce faith. And if there is one thing that is going to be necessary for the establishment of Zion, it is going to necessarily be faith.

You obtain it through sacrifice. You do not obtain it through adoration. You do not obtain it through the praise of men. You do not obtain it by sitting in chief seats. You don't obtain it by fairing sumptuously and administering the wealth that is surrendered to you as if you were God. It belongs to God. It is His. You should go get a job to support yourself if you're going to administer the tithes, and leave the tithes alone.

The Lord is exceptionally positive. But He is positive in stating affirmatively the standard that is acceptable to Him. *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my [name] sake"* [Matt 5:11]. He expected us to be misunderstood, misapprehended, assessed very narrowly just as He was, cast out-- not to be handed money and to be given a chief seat, to be adored, and to be respected.

Our challenge among ourselves, however diminutive we may seem to be, priestcraft can invade our little fellowships every bit as much as it can invade multi-billion dollar institutions.

Beginning in verse 14 of D&C 70, here we have, separate and apart from the description of Zion (they're one heart, there are no poor among them, they are one people), a commandment that says in your temporal things you're going to need to be equal, otherwise the abundance and the manifestation of the Spirit is going to be withheld.

In the section about Zion, this is Doctrine and Covenants section 59, beginning at verse 18, the Lord has this to say: *"Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for*

the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion” [verses 18-20]. Or in other words, excess, meaning “wealth”; extortion, meaning “to compel the poor.”

“I am willing to give unto you some charitable thing if you will...” The poor are not to be extorted. It’s all His! And He gave it for our use, and our enjoyment, and our betterment, and our blessing. He did not give it to give me power over you.

Moses 7:18 we read before, “One heart, one mind, dwell in righteousness, no poor among you.” I know you’re all very religious, or you wouldn’t be here. Can you be one because you believe in the theory of equality? Can you be one because you believe in the theory of sharing with one another? Can you be one because you believe in the doctrine, or must you act?

James chapter 2, beginning at verse 14: *“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works”* [verses 14-18].

There is an enormous gulf between the content of the material that was revealed to us in the restoration and the religion that you practice daily. That gulf is going to need to disappear.

In order to get from where we are to where we need to be, you can’t do it inside the institutions that have trapped your minds. I am not preaching against your faith if you're some fundamentalist, some RLDS member, some Latter-day Saint. Honor your churches. But by degrees you need to begin the process of, by your works, showing what your faith is.

One of the things that happened as a substitute for the law of consecration was a replacement commandment that required the payment of tithes. Doctrine and Covenants section 64, beginning at verse 23 says: *“Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming.”* This is the statement from which that cliché that “tithing is fire insurance” is drawn from-- because if you're tithed you won’t be burned at His coming.

“For after today cometh the burning—this is speaking after the manner of the Lord—for verily I say, tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of Hosts; and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon. Wherefore, if ye believe me, ye will labor while it is called today” [verses 23-25].

I want to, therefore, encourage you to pay tithing. And I want you, if you are satisfied in paying that tithing to whatever church or organization you belong to, to continue doing so. The act of giving that as an offering to the Lord, I don’t think, requires you to supervise what happens with it once you give it to someone. I think they become accountable. For you, it is an act of faith. For them, it is a matter of accountability.

However, some of us are forbidden from paying tithing to our church of choice. Some of us simply refuse to pay tithing because they don’t trust the church. Some refuse because they believe the church has neglected the poor. Some refuse to pay tithing because church leaders of the LDS church treat the return that they get on the tithing as investment income and then use it to build shopping malls and buy land holdings.

And by the way, on that, I believe the Lord anticipated that notion in one of the parables that He taught. In Matthew chapter 25, He says: *“The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents”* [verses 14-16]. The one that had two, he went, and he traded, and he got two. The one that had one, he went and buried it in the earth.

He tells this parable, and then He comes back. The one that turned the five into another five, he says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” [verse 21]. The one that did two, he gained another two. He commended him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a few things, I’ll make you ruler over many things” [verse 23].

And then the one that had the one that buried it and didn’t do anything to get a return for the Lord, he said:

“I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not

strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury” [verses 24-27].

In other words, He owns it. He owns it; He owns the interest, He owns the investment, He owns it. In this parable there is no such thing as investment income. So far as I know, the purpose of the Lord is not well-served by importing Tiffany’s to Salt Lake City, or Porsche Design, or the Rolex outlet in the shopping mall.

There is no divine purpose in neglecting the poor. The purpose primarily of collecting the tithes, and of the yield upon it, is to bless and to benefit the lives of those who are in need.

So, given the fact that you are commanded to pay tithing, and some of you refuse to do so because of the particular circumstances you see out there, and given the fact that the Lord has said “organize yourselves,” I would suggest that one small increment that you could begin, is for you to collect your own tithing. You manage it yourselves among yourselves. You assist the poor who are among you. You, as a group of common believers, pay your tithing into a common fund. And then by the voice of your own group dispose it by common consent, so that everyone knows everything that comes in and everything that goes out, and you begin to have no poor among you. You provide for those who need housing, and food, and clothing, and healthcare, and education, and transportation. And you do it without a leader. Do it by the voice of your own common consent, by your unanimous approval. You do it by united agreement.

You want to know how far you are at this moment, and you want an accurate barometer of what lack you yet? Then organize yourselves, and you, unitedly, gather your tithings into the storehouse that you maintain, and you, by your common consent, take care of those who are poor among you. You will learn so much, so quickly, that it will astonish you.

And the woman’s voice should be equal with the man’s. There should not be some ruler among you gentiles saying, “It’s this way, it’s gotta be this way. I prayed about it. The Lord said I get the money.” If that’s the way in which you conduct it, you’re no better than the rest of the gentiles. You may as well stay in whatever organization you have at present. You may as well pay to support red Cadillac Escalades and shopping malls. You may as well just do that. Dump your money where it does no good.

I know, I know. There are lots of people that get benefitted in lots of ways. But that doesn’t excuse the money that those strongmen spend on themselves. The highest paid clergies in the world manage the various denominations of the Latter-day Saint movements. It’s just the way it is. I hate to break it to you.

Take the money that the Lord intended for the poor, and you administer it for the poor among you. If you try this experiment, and if there is someone among you who receives rather than gives because they have not, then let me remind those who receive of another statement made in the revelations of this dispensation in Doctrine and Covenants section 42:42: *“Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.”* If you're the beneficiary, not only should you be grateful, but do what you can in turn.

I talked about paying and administering your own tithes. I want to remind you if you do that, that none of it should go to the priests. None of it should go to any other than to helping with the poor. I talked about organizing yourselves, collecting your own tithing, and managing it yourselves among yourselves. And for you to assist the poor who are among you, and to do this by the voice of your own local group. Do it by common consent. And to provide for those who need housing, food, clothing, healthcare, education, and transportation. Do it without a leader, but by the voice of the united agreement of you all.

There is no reason ever to pay for priesthood service. Serving should require sacrifice, always and continually. We do not pay for ministers. I would recommend that if you choose to participate in a tithing group, that you do it in the same manner that was described in Grand Junction, and you do it among yourselves. Community is necessary. I don't know how you can bear one another's burdens without administering your own tithes, without administering your own fast offerings, without doing things to help people in need. It's hard, I think, to give away what you have to an organization that is purchasing real estate and farms and purchasing and developing shopping centers, and then have anything left over to assist with the poor among you. But if you choose to do that, that's fine, too. But try and care for those among you who have needs.

“There shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord” [2 Nephi 28:9]. How might one better “hide their counsels from the Lord” than to conceal all the money that's gathered from the tithes, all the revenues that are paid to the authorities of the church, and even admonish the paid mission presidents that they must never disclose the revenue benefits that they are receiving? How better to hide your counsel than to conceal it from the very sheep that are being shorn by the people who sit in positions of authority? The church “seeks deep to hide their counsels.” None of them should do it. They should come clean.

“Seek[ing] deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark” [verse 9], is exactly what the authorities of the LDS church now do. It is exactly a description of the hierarchy of Mormonism. Put your budgets online! Disclose your revenue! Show us what

you do with the poor! *“Seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; their works shall be in the dark,”* indeed.

“And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. They have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted. Because of pride, and because of false teachers, and false doctrine, their churches have become corrupted, and their churches are lifted up; because of pride they are puffed up. They rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries; they rob the poor because of their fine clothing; and they persecute the meek and the poor in heart, because in their pride they are puffed up. They wear stiff necks and high heads; yea, and because of pride, and wickedness, and abominations, and whoredoms, they have all gone astray save it be a few, who are the humble followers of Christ; nevertheless, they are led, that in many instances they do err because they are taught by the precepts of men” [2 Nephi 28:10-14].

God loves all of us, and the agenda that you have, and the people that you can affect, and the relief that you can administer, and the needs that go in front of your eyes day by day, are uniquely yours. And the relief that you can grant to those around you, that’s yours. It was given to you by God as a gift. Don’t harden your heart. The relief that people need sometimes can only come from one source, and that is you, under the inspiration of the Spirit, relieving the burdens of those around you.

Be like your Master. Do what you can for those around you who are infirm. They are here in abundance-- the broken-hearted, the families that are in need. If you want to be saved, help the Lord save others. Not by preaching and clamoring and demanding that they view the world like you do, but by giving them a hand. Your most powerful sermon can be in the effort that you make and the time that you take to let people know that you care about them.

If you would like to repent of your sins, take a look around at those in need, and do what you can for them, because you’ve begun the first step. When your heart is like Him, then you open up so that He can enter in. And when your heart is unlike Him, well there’s no room, except if He break it, which He will do.

When He appears, you need to be like Him. Lay down the burden of guilt. Lay down the burden of sin. Stop focusing on that stuff, and become like Him. And you become like Him by doing His works. And you do His works by serving others, by ministering to the needs of others. And when you do that, it is a natural byproduct of that process ordained by laws established before the foundation of the world, that light and truth will grow within you. You will have compassion when you minister with compassion to the needs of others. Your heart will open to, and receive within it, light and truth when your conduct reflects the same conduct as a merciful and holy and

just God, whom you claim to worship. Worship Him by imitating Him. Worship Him by doing His works. Worship Him by making a living sacrifice. Set aside the junk that occupies you, and go do something that is holy for someone else.

However mundane and trivial it may seem to you, when you relieve the suffering of other people, something changes in you-- you become different, you become better, you become more like our Lord. Because when you give whatever it is you give away, you get more in return. But make sure that what you give goes to relieve the suffering of others. *Relieve the suffering of others.*

The foregoing are excerpts from:

- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #3 entitled "Repentance," given in Logan, UT on September 29th, 2013; Talk #4 entitled "Covenants," given in Centerville, UT on October 6th, 2013; Talk #6 entitled "Zion," given in Grand Junction, CO on April 12th, 2014; and Talk #10 entitled "Preserving the Restoration," given in Mesa, AZ on September 9th, 2014;
- Talk entitled "Zion Will Come," given near Moab, UT on April 10th, 2016;
- Talk entitled "Opening Remarks," given at the Covenant of Christ Conference in Boise, ID on September 3rd, 2017;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #1, given in Cerritos, CA on September 21st, 2017; and Talk #2, given in Dallas, TX on October 19th, 2017.