

CHAPTER 1

Why We Must Destroy the System of Mandatory Tithes and Manipulated Offerings

The modern system of mandatory tithes and manipulated offerings is false and built upon tradition supported by lies and lies supported by tradition. It must be destroyed.

Debating tithes is like debating the subject of Santa Claus. What is his Christmas Eve route? Does he really know who's naughty or nice? How does he read all of those letters? How does one (and why would anyone) debate these issues?

Modern tithes, like Santa Claus, have no basis for an intelligent argument. It's nonsense to argue about religious fiction. This gives credence to a myth. Yet we preachers desperately argue the merits of our tithe myth because it is scandalously profitable, and because American Christianity is obscenely dependent on money.

A money mentality governs the American church. Many Christian ministry decisions are based more on cash flow than on love for Christ and people. Some will label these statements extreme. Others will see them as stating the obvious: A large part of the American church is greedy and exploitative.

We Do Not Condemn the Good with the Bad

We don't need an anti-tithe version of the Salem Witch Trials or of the Inquisitions. Jesus warned us not to hurt true Christians in unwise zeal for purity.¹ It is irresponsible to condemn all ministers who raise funds for ministry. But it is also irresponsible to remain silent about harmful fundraising schemes of most of the church's leaders. Therefore, I try to distinguish clearly between the innocent and guilty.

The visible church consists of true and false Christians, strong and weak Christians, intelligent and ignorant Christians. The accusation of church greed and exploitation, as well as clergy manipulation and extortion, must be considered within this context. The church is one body, but comprises hundreds of millions of parts, or members, who are at varying levels of individual commitment, spiritual growth, and health.

The left hand may be diseased, but the right hand may be healthy. Or the right shoulder may be damaged, but the rest of the body is fine. So I joyfully acknowledge that a few parts of the body have escaped organized and systemic greed, manipulation, and extortion.

Nonetheless, although the entire body is not diseased, the disease affects the entire body. The disastrous effects of church greed and materialism have made virtually every Christian leader and ministry look like thieves and hypocrites. The sad thing is that many Christian leaders and ministries are thieves and hypocrites and don't even know it.

We easily understand that a Judas will create clever ways to steal money. He may raise funds in the name of Christ for his own purposes. Or he may simply grab the money bag and run off to Mexico. It breaks our heart. It shocks us. But it doesn't permanently confuse us. We simply conclude that our former leader is a thief.

Some *Good* Preachers Are Stealing from Us

What we find more difficult to discern and process is that true Christian clergy with good hearts can and regularly do steal from us.

Different methods may be used, but the result is the same: God's money is wasted, misappropriated, or stolen.

When I say *stolen* I don't mean that good ministers purposefully commit theft or fraud. Relatively speaking, I don't believe many ministers do this. Actually, on Judgment Day we will probably find that a commendable percentage of clergy served God with integrity.

Nonetheless, we will also find that pervasive false financial doctrines devastated the collective integrity, effectiveness, and efficiency of the church, especially in America. We will see these doctrines as spiritual fraud. We will also find that these frauds were vigorously taught by many good preachers who earned our respect through their moral lives and apparent commitment to Christ and His church.

These *good* preachers may be wonderful people and genuine Christians, but they are so blinded by church tradition that they can't see the wickedness of their fundraising tactics. Their overdependence on money distorts their ability to discern right from wrong, at least where money in ministry is concerned. They never see that much of what they teach about Christian giving is based on traditions of men rather than commands of God. They also never see that the real reason they are incredibly interested in our giving habits is self-interest: They covet our money.

This is the intoxicating power of money in ministry. It is a spendable liquor that perverts judgment and turns wise men into fools. It even makes good men behave as bad men. Men who would choose death before committing an actual theft of church funds regularly steal God's glory by corrupting His image.

This corruption steals not only God's glory, but the church's inheritance and the world's salvation. Thus, these otherwise *good* men are guilty of the grossest spiritual thefts and frauds.

Cash Flow Has Taken the Place of the Holy Spirit

The American church is rife with financial false doctrines. The foundation of these doctrines is mandatory tithes, and not far behind are

coerced and manipulated offerings. These doctrines of demons must be challenged.

You may question the wisdom of debating such effective ways of raising funds. What would happen to Christian ministries if mandatory tithes and manipulated offerings were exposed as heretical and ungodly? Would this not severely damage the work of God? Is this book's purpose the repossession of church properties? Do we want to see missionaries abandoned? Are we advocating bankrupting the church?

Certainly some in the church would admit that reform is needed in the area of soliciting offerings. But the tithe? The tithe is untouchable! It's the backbone of the ministry! We can't make it without the tithe! Everything we do depends on the mandatory tithe! *And that is exactly why we must challenge this sacred error.* It has replaced the Holy Spirit.

The church's work should not depend on the guaranteed cash flow of mandatory tithes. When it does, leaders are reduced to servants of cash flow instead of servants of Christ.

Two False Assumptions of Cash Flow

Cash flow is wonderful. I'd rather have it than not have it. But when ministry decisions are based on cash flow instead of the dictates of the Holy Spirit, we make ourselves slaves of cash rather than of Christ. The decision-making process becomes poisoned by false assumptions. Namely, that money ultimately determines what can or should be done for God. These assumptions produce two unwanted results: overdependence on money and direction by cash flow.

First, money does not ultimately determine what can be done for God. It is only one of many tools that may facilitate or accomplish a goal for Christ. Examine the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you will find surprisingly little money being used to accomplish God's will. The use of money was incidental and not critical, and nowhere do we find our great God's hands tied for lack of money. On the contrary,

we are given many examples of God performing His will through, to, or for His people whether they had money or were flat broke!

George Muller was a 19th century English preacher who gave the universal church a timeless and invaluable gift: a testimony of what can be accomplished by faith and prayer alone. Over his long life—1805 to 1898—he housed more than 10,000 orphans, distributed tens of thousands of Bibles, and was the sole support of hundreds of missionaries. Today organizations do similar things through fundraising, but he used nothing but faith and prayer.²

George Muller absolutely refused to advertise his needs, drop strategic hints, or go into debt. In fact, his primary goal was not to care for orphans, distribute literature, or support missionaries. It was to prove to the church that God is faithful and can be depended on to keep His Word. Two of his diary entries powerfully make this point:

I want to be the servant of the Church in the particular point on which I had obtained mercy—in being able to take God at His Word and rely upon it.

This seems to me best done by establishing an orphan house—something which could be seen by the natural eye. If I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith obtained, without asking any individual, the finances for establishing and carrying on an orphan house, this might strengthen the faith of the children of God. It would also be testimony to the unconverted of the reality of the things of God.

This is the primary reason for establishing the orphan house. I certainly desire to be used by God to help the poor children and train them in the ways of God. But the primary object of the work is that God would be magnified because the orphans under my care will be provided with all they need through prayer and faith. Everyone will see that God is faithful and hears prayer (p. 73).

Second, the availability or unavailability of cash flow should not determine our direction in ministry. Ministers and churches that do not walk closely to the Lord are more prone to trust in their funds than in the ability, timing, and methods of God. They are unskilled and undisciplined in the art of praying, waiting, and recognizing the voice and moving of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they make decisions

based on protecting and increasing present or anticipated cash flow. Yet cash flow for a project does not validate it or prove that God agrees with our plans.

The False Dilemma of Either-Or

Here is where my position will inevitably be challenged on the false dilemma of either-or. A false dilemma is when two options are erroneously presented as the only available. You can have either this or that, but not both, and never an entirely different option. The false dilemma in the church is that we must choose either the extreme of overdependence on money or the extreme of not enough money. However, there is a third option.

This is to radically change our ministry model. Presently our model is to subjectively, and sometimes arbitrarily, get a vision (of course, we'll say it came from God) and then raise money to bring it to past. We do this by telling God's people overtly or subtly that they must finance our ideas or be directly or indirectly cursed by God. Of course, every appeal for financial support isn't as brash and crude, but unfortunately, many are sickeningly close.

Others use the softer approach of appealing to their followers' greed and love of pleasures. This is done by carefully presenting scriptures out of context. The tactics used depend on the charisma of the manipulative leader and the sophistication of the manipulated Christians.

Some Christians tolerate and even embrace strong-arm fundraising tactics. They are predisposed to slavery. So you can abuse them in the name of the Lord and get away with it. For some reason, many of them are perversely satisfied by ministerial abuse.³

Others, who are naturally turned off by domination, will not tolerate such foolishness for one moment, so a more subtle approach is used.⁴

A New and Honest Way to Raise Money

Here is where we must fundamentally change how we do business. Instead of getting a grand idea and coercing or manipulating God's people to finance it, why not be honest? Why not present the idea as just that, an idea? Why not deal with our followers the way God deals with us? He tells us the truth and is patient, kind, and loving, and never does He put anything on us we can't bear.

Ministers, however, often see no problem with placing the burdens of their financial decisions on God's people. Would it not be a better testimony to the world, and a better demonstration of love and integrity in the church, if we humbly presented our ideas and allowed Christians to give based upon what they hear directly from the Holy Spirit?

I am sure this concept throws many ministers into a state of utter paranoid anxiety. The very idea that the untrained, unsophisticated masses should be allowed—and *God forbid, taught!*—to hear from God for themselves rather than through a burdensome, exploitative system of professional religious middlemen is heresy and anathema! And ministers' fears are well justified, for an incredible amount of God's money is routinely squandered on fleshly ambitions, runaway visions, obscene salaries, duplicated services, expensive real estate, and underperforming ministry.

These professional, religious middlemen know that an empowered church, or better yet a *Him*powered church, would put the brakes on much of what happens in the name of the Lord. Oh, there would still be funds raised for unneeded buildings, and salaries for people who should be working in what we mistakenly call "secular" jobs, and projects that never were approved by the Holy Spirit, but there would also be a revolution of accountability, integrity, and efficiency in the church.

This revolution would remove much of what religious middlemen use to empower themselves: Namely, guaranteed cash flow through the false doctrine of mandatory tithes and offerings. Absence of guaranteed cash flow creates an environment where professional ministers must use something other than threats of God's curses or bribes of His blessings to raise funds. Perhaps we could use the novel approach of

deliberating the proposal, waiting on God, searching the Scriptures, examining the character and track record of the person seeking our money, and deciding accordingly.

But Will Christians Give without Threats and Bribes?

Someone will inevitably bring up the possibility and probability that some Christians will use this freedom to say no to actually say no. How do we handle this concern?

Will people use their freedom irresponsibly? Some always have and some always will. This will go on until the Lord returns, but God's answer to irresponsibility has never been to limit our ability to make bad decisions. God didn't hide the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve from eating of it and suffering horrible eternal consequences. He placed them near it to prove their love. God did this knowing His creation would choose death instead of life. The Lord set this precedent and I believe it is safe to follow His example of freedom in our giving.

For some, this freedom will be a Tree of Life. They will use their newly found liberty to obey God. This will result in generous, spontaneous, and planned giving to causes approved by God, though not necessarily approved by man. The money will often not pass through clergy hands, but the support of professional, religious middlemen is not the priority. Obedience to the Holy Spirit is the priority.

For others, this liberty will be a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They will use their newly found freedom to justify selfishness. Many legitimate opportunities to give will come their way. Some will come through professional, religious middlemen. Others will come through direct contact with a person in need. Yet there will always be a seemingly good reason to not give. And if this latter category of people does give, the amount will usually be far less than what it should be (*less* not according to the demands of man, but the demands of love). But this is a matter for God and not us. Our job is to humbly

preach the gospel, and not to prematurely judge people for the amount of their financial gifts.

The freedom spoken of in this book is scary, but not new. It is as old as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Generally, professional, religious middlemen hate this freedom for several reasons. Here are a few of them:

It frees God's people to think for themselves. This breaks the unholy monopoly power that religious professionals exercise over Jesus' people.

It allows the Holy Spirit to directly instruct God's people when to give, how much to give, and to whom to give. This puts every fleshly financial project at risk of being stripped of undeserved cash flow.

It requires religious, professional middlemen to walk extremely close to the Lord. This means projects that don't come from God are no longer automatically supported by manipulated followers of Christ. Clergy would then have to spend considerably more time in prayer than in business meetings, conferences, Starbucks, or watching television. This is a terrifying thought for many fleshly preachers.

It places stringent qualifying criteria on financial appeals for buildings and salaries. This threatens the very foundation of superficial and misdirected Christianity. But financial accountability is not too much to ask of someone who demands our money.

It makes it harder for preachers to manipulate God's people into taking care of their ambitions and personal financial needs. This addresses one of the main stumbling blocks to salvation of intelligent people who see glaring contradictions in the life of Christ and the greed and materialism of His so-called followers.

It forces preachers to be patient in their ambitions. This takes away their ability to prematurely commit God's resources without at least being seriously scrutinized and questioned by the church.

A Revival of Financial Integrity in the Church Is Possible

I earnestly believe that *What Your Preacher Never Told You About Tithes & Offerings* is the articulated groanings of the heart of God and of multitudes of people who know that something is dreadfully wrong with the financial practices of the church. This includes Christians and non-Christians. All are fed up with the financial sins of the church.

This effort is by no means a perfect treatise against such an old, entrenched, and formidable clergy money-maker. Every page testifies of my imperfection. Still, as He did to the walls of Jericho, God may yet mercifully roar upon these words and miraculously crumble the impregnable walls of financial clergy domination and manipulation.

I pray that God will use this book to spark a flame that will devour every trace of financial waste and abuse in the church. The Reformation was sparked by men with a flame in their heart and a pen in their hand. Words on paper have changed the world before. It can happen again.