

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT AFFORD TO TITHE

There was a proud man in the 1930s who liked to discuss doctrine with his neighbors. There was one problem - he was not a believer and did not claim to be a Christian. But he lectured them on the need for them to send a tithe - one tenth of their income - to the preacher. One day, however, he became a believer and became convinced about the subject of tithing. Here's how it happened.

by Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1996)

IT was late in 1933 – the very depth of the great depression. Ed Smith was a well-driller by profession, but nobody seemed able to afford to have wells drilled.

Ed and his wife, Emma, attended services I was then holding in a one-room country schoolhouse twelve miles west of Eugene, Oregon. Ed made no profession of Christianity until later. But he attended services and went up and down the countryside discussing Bible doctrines with his professing Christian neighbors.

"You've got to pay tithes and obey God," he insisted. "The Bible says so. It's PLAIN!"

One of his neighbors became irritated.

"Look here, Ed," the neighbor exploded, "why do you come around here trying to talk me into these things, when you don't obey the Bible or pay tithes yourself?"

"Because," came Ed's quick and ready answer, "I don't profess to be a Christian, and you do. Besides," he added, "I can't afford to tithe, anyway."

Thousands Like Him

There are thousands who, like Ed Smith, reason in their own minds that they can't afford to tithe, even though, like Ed Smith, they realize the Bible commands it.

I heard about the above conversation and preached a sermon on the question of whether the unconverted should obey the Ten Commandments and pay tithes, or whether, as Ed had reasoned, these things were only for Christians. I pointed out that God's Law was put in motion for man's *good*. It *is* the WAY of life that brings peace, happiness, prosperity; the full, abundant, interesting life; success, joy here and now, as well as eternal life through Christ for the saved.

I showed that it PAYS and is the only sensible way of life, entirely apart from the matter of salvation – and that he who sins little shall be punished with *few* stripes, but he who sins much, with *many* stripes (Luke 12:47-48). I pointed out God's promises to prosper the tithe-payer, and that this is a definite law God has set in motion, which operates inexorably and automatically, on the just and the unjust alike.

Ed began to obey the Bible. At the very next service (we were holding services at this little schoolhouse three times a week, and three other nights a week in a hall in downtown Eugene at the time), Mrs. Smith smilingly handed me a one-dollar bill.

"That's Ed's first tithe," she said triumphantly. "We are now down to \$10, and Ed decided to start tithing with what we have on hand."

The very next service she came to me with another happy smile.

"Here's a five-dollar bill," she said. "The very next day after Ed gave God's Work a tenth of all he had, a customer who had owed him \$50 for a year came and paid up. So here's the tithe of that \$50. After paying the total \$6 tithe, we now have \$54 on hand instead of the \$10 we had the other day."

It was beginning to *pay* – but only *beginning*. By the next service, as I remember it, Ed had received his first order in one or two years to drill a new well, for which he received cash payment. Before he finished that job, another one was contracted. Soon he had three or four jobs coming in at once and was forced to begin employing men to work for him.

Ed Smith was only one of *many* I have known who learned *by experience* that one cannot afford *not* to pay God the tithe that belongs to Him! I remember Ed Smith did encounter some troubles of a different nature later, when his wife and son were sent to the state tuberculosis hospital, and he finally broke down in real repentance, accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour. He came to me, according to the command of James 5:14, and both his wife and son were completely healed and returned home.

This is a true story, and the name is not fictitious. Ed Smith died several years ago, but I'm happy to remember these incidents in his life, in the hope that they may start many others on the right and profitable, as well as the Christian, way of life.

Why did God ordain tithing? Was it to place increased burden and taxation upon us? Let us not misunderstand God's love and wisdom!

It isn't that God really needs your first tenth. He could have established some different system for carrying on His Work. But to have done so would have robbed us of the blessing that flows back to us if we are faithful in tithes and offerings!

The tither is invariably a prosperous man. I do not mean necessarily wealthy – but one whose actual needs are always supplied. Tithers, if faithful and obedient to the Eternal, are not often found in want. "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to *your* account" (Phil. 4:17). God promises that His children will always have something to give (Deut. 16:16, 17). It is only when they withhold and misappropriate tithes and offerings that He fails to prosper them. For through John He tells us, "I wish above all things that thou mayest *prosper* and be in health" (3 John 2).

"Honour the Lord [Eternal] with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Prov. 3:9-10). Try it! "Prove me now herewith," challenges the Eternal to us, in a

prophecy for our day (Mal. 3:10), "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" – financial blessings! Are you behind financially? In debt? Your unfaithfulness in tithing and offerings may be the reason!

Tithing While in Debt

Yet so many say: "I don't think it would be right for me to tithe while I'm in debt." Yes, it is right, and the other way is WRONG. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). God's Word tells us what is right, and God tells us to pay to His Work the first fruits of all our income (Prov. 3:9-10). Regarding our material and financial needs, even debts, God says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

The tithe is the debt that you *owe* God. This debt is first in time and principle. Pay your debts to God, make Him your partner in your finances, and receive His blessing in temporal affairs. This will enable you to pay your debts, or to get a job, or to have your needs supplied more quickly than if you evade His debt.

Remember your ALL belongs to Him, not to you (Deut. 10:14). You are in the position of a steward handling that which belongs to another. He is your silent partner, and the first tenth, in addition to offerings, is His share. The rest he gives freely to you. But if you appropriate for yourself His share, you are stealing, and robbing God (Mal. 3:8). Would you pay your debts with money another man had left in your trust? If a man working in a bank does that, we call it embezzlement!

The only sure way to know you have God as a partner, and that He is taking care of your interests, is to obey Him in tithing.

When God receives His portion of all your income, God becomes your partner, sharing in your profits. He causes His partners to prosper, so if you are in debt, take God into partnership first, and watch Him prosper you until finally you are out of debt! Remember the debt you owe God comes FIRST.

Your Glorious Opportunity

Some will say, "I never tithed, and I know God never frowned on me, for I have the feeling in my heart that I am His child without having to tithe." God has blessed you according to how you have yielded to Him, according to the light He has revealed to you from His Word! While you have the light, WALK in it, lest darkness come upon you! (John 12:35-36). "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord" (2 Pet. 3:18). See also Romans 11:22. If every professing Christian would accept this plain instruction from God, honoring Him instead of themselves with their substance, the Work of the Eternal would go forth with such mighty power that the world would be shaken to its foundations!

Seek ye first the Kingdom, and your material needs shall be added. Try it! Take God at His Word! PROVE HIM! (Mal. 3:10). See how you begin to prosper! Be a faithful

steward; make God your PARTNER! Receive His blessing! God's Work is waiting on you!

[For further explanation about tithing, even now in the New Testament age, read the article now on the Study Topics – Five Foundational Areas of Truth – IV – Success section on the Bible Fund website. The booklet is titled, [Ending Your Financial Worries.](#)]

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