

# BIBLICAL ECONOMICS TODAY

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## LEADERSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP

Part 6: Dominion Through Tithing

by Gary North

*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that they 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 (Mal. 3:10).*

Without access to a growing quantity of economic resources, Christians will not be able to exercise dominion. If a person cannot afford to buy or lease the tools of production, he will remain a salaried worker in someone else's enterprise. He will remain, economically speaking, a second-class citizen.

The passage in Malachi makes it clear that if Christians refuse to pay their tithes to the local church, God will bring negative sanctions against them. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (w. 8-9). But if His people obey God in this pocketbook affair, they will receive His economic blessings in history. Building personal wealth begins with tithing, and not just tithing as such - the whole tithe delivered to the local church: a single storehouse.

### Tithing and Dominion

There was a time, well over three centuries ago, when the Puritan merchants of London exercised national influence far out of proportion to their small numbers. They were the English capitalists of the seventeenth century. They were also the source of almost half of the charitable giving of the nation. This gave them considerable political influence. Cromwell's militarily successful revolution against the crown added to their influence, 1650-1660, but they had not gained this influence militarily they had gained it economically and charitably, beginning in the sixteenth century. W. K. Jordan has discussed the influence of Puritan businessmen in his book, *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1959).

In this century, the State has replaced private charity as the primary source of money and support for the poor. The State is perceived as the primary agency of healing. For as long as its money holds out - and still buys something - the State will continue to be regarded as the healer of the nation. But this ability to heal rests on political coercion and bureaucratic control. The State is now reaching the limits of its ability to confiscate the wealth of nations, all over the world. If its ability to exercise dominion by creating dependence by means of continual grants of money is ever interrupted by

economic or other social disruptions, there will be a temporary void in society. That void will be filled by something. Power flows to those who will exercise responsibility. Who will that be?

Who should it be? Christians. But Christians are ill-prepared today to exercise such responsibility. They are themselves dependents of the State. They, too, send their children to public schools, collect Social Security checks, and plan their lives on the assumption that the State will serve as an economic safety net. The State's wealth-redistribution system has steadily eliminated competition from private charitable and educational associations. When the State's safety net breaks, as it surely will, most Christians will find themselves as economically unprepared as everyone else. They have been taught to trust that which is inherently untrustworthy: the modern messianic State. When this trust is finally betrayed, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in churches, Christian college classrooms, and other supposedly sanctified places.

In that day, there will be a shift in local and national leadership, as surely as there was during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Regarding this coming shift in leadership, the question today is: Who will inherit authority? The answer is: those who bear the greatest economic responsibility in the reconstruction of the economy.

Will this be the Church? If not, why not?

### Redemption: Definitive, Yet Progressive

The basis of biblical dominion in history is the redemption of the world. To redeem something is to buy it back. This process of long-term repurchase began at Calvary.

At Calvary, Jesus paid God the full redemption price. He did not pay it to Satan. Satan had occupied the world only as a squatter occupies it: until the owner comes to evict him. When Adam fell, he lost title to everything, including his own life. God, by grace, granted Adam an extension of his temporal life. But by having subordinated himself covenantally to Satan through his act of rebellion, Adam had brought whatever God had granted to him under the temporary domain of Satan. While Satan did not gain lawful title over the earth, since Adam had forfeited title back to God, Satan has gained administrative control for as long as Adam's heirs remain alive and also remain under Satan's covenantal authority. Satan would have lost administrative control had God executed Adam in the garden, for Satan's legal claim was dependent on Adam's legal claim. Adam's claim was null and void except through God's common grace in history life,

knowledge, authority over nature, and capital.

Jesus definitively paid God the full redemption price. This did not authorize His heirs the right to collect immediately on their inheritance. The world redemption process is a process. It is progressive, although grounded legally in a definitive act. In this sense, it mirrors sanctification. At the moment of his redemption in history, the redeemed person receives by God's judicial declaration the moral perfection of Christ's perfect humanity. But this moral perfection, while definitive and judicially complete, must be developed over time. Sanctification is progressive: a working out in history of the moral perfection of Christ. This is why Paul wrote of the Christian way of life as a race with a prize at the end:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight 1, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you (Phil. 3:14-15).

#### The Greatest Commission System Structure

God has given to the Church a Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, 10, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28: 18-20). This commission is well known among Christians. What is not recognized is the commission system by which the Great Commission is carried out.

When a company establishes a commission payment system to reward its sales force, it designs it so that the individual salesman has a financial incentive to stay on the road for long hours. He is expected to develop continually his powers of persuasion so as to make more revenue for the company per appointment. The higher the commission, the greater the incentive. The higher the commission, the better the salesmen who will be attracted to join the sales force. The company must balance the rewards offered to salesmen with the rewards offered to other members of the operation: salaried personnel, investors, bankers, and suppliers. But to maximize the number of sales, there is no doubt that a large commission paid to salesmen is the great motivator. Some companies may pay as much as 20 percent of gross revenues to its sales force.

God, the owner of the whole earth, has established the most generous commission structure in history: 90 percent after business expenses is retained by the sales force. Any business that would offer its sales force 90 percent after business expenses would attract the most competent salesmen on earth. The firm would be flooded with applicants for any position that might open up.

#### The Con Artist

Satan appears on the scene and makes a more attractive offer: "Keep it all" He can afford to make this offer: he does not own the company. He is like the con artist who walks

into a temporarily empty office and signs up salesmen as if he were the president of the company. He makes his money on the back end of the transaction when he sends his goons to collect payments from the salesmen. The salesmen have kept all the money from their efforts. The goons then make the salesmen an offer they cannot refuse. The Mafia calls these goons "enforcers." Civil government calls them "revenue agents." Their purpose in each case is the same: to extract far more than 10 percent of net earnings from the naive but now-trapped salesmen. He who refuses to pay faces unpleasant consequences: broken bones or a bullet in the head (Mafia); fines, tax liens, or jail sentences (civil government).

The victims went into the deal thinking they could get something for nothing. They firmly believed that someone would gladly provide them with productive capital and also allow them to keep everything they earned from their own labor. Any wise man would have spotted the offer as fraudulent as soon as he heard it. But there are not many wise men in history, at least not so far. Wide is the gate that beckons the unwise of any generation, and they rush through it.

So, Satan comes to men with a proposition: "Keep everything you earn. I have no legal claim on your wealth." The second statement is true; he has no legal claim on anything. The first statement involves making a gift to man of God's lawful share of the business. Satan is not in a position to make such a gift, but billions of people believe he is. They believe that God has no legal claim on them. They also believe that God has no economic claim on them. They are incorrect on both points.

#### The Might of My Hand

Men are not content with God's grant of 90 percent after business expenses. They see this as an infringement on their property. They want to keep all of it. They have not heeded God's warning to the Israelites of the generation of the conquest of Canaan:

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deut. 8:17-18).

Men resent God's demand that they pay Him ten percent. They do not see themselves as working on commission. They see themselves as sole owners of the company. They think the tools of production are the product of their own hands: a combination of land and labor overtime. Men are supposedly allowed by God to keep all of the appropriate payments to each of these factors of production: rents, wages, and interest. Educated men today are asked to believe that land and labor arrived by way of eons of cosmic evolution. Many of them do believe this. They do not see themselves as in debt to God. They do not see themselves as God's sharecroppers. So, they look at the 90-10 arrangement and do not conclude: "The greatest commission structure in history" Instead, they conclude: "God is trying to get into my wallet"

#### Who t-awfully Collects the Tithe?

The civil magistrate collects taxes. Paul identifies him as God's minister (Rom. 13:4). He is collecting taxes in God's name, whether he names God or not. God has ordained him. He is a subordinate to God. In his capacity as the representative of God to men through the State, he lawfully collects taxes. Men complain about today's level of taxation, as well they should - it constitutes tyranny (1 Sam. 8:15, 17) - but

they rarely rebel. They do not blame God. They accept their burden as members of a democratic political order. They fully understand that they do not possess the authority as individuals to determine where their tax money should go. They dutifully pay the tax collector.

Then who lawfully collects the tithe? The minister of God. But this minister is not a civil officer; he is an ecclesiastical officer. He comes as God's designated, ordained agent and insists on payment. That is, he should do this. In fact, he is too timid to do this in our day. Why? Because he has adopted - or at least acceded to - a modified view of Satan's offer: "Pay whatever seems fair to you. God has no legal claim on ten percent after business expenses."

This outlook transfers authority over the distribution of the tithe to the tithe-payer. This transfer of authority is illegitimate for two reasons. First, the giver defines the tithe's percentage as he sees fit, but somehow this figure is usually less than ten percent. Second, he reserves to himself the authority to distribute this tithe to those organizations that he approves of. This violates God's system of hierarchical authority. The tithe-payer assumes that not only does God not have a legal claim to a full ten percent. God has not identified any single organization as the sovereign agent of collection and distribution. This leaves the individual completely in control judicially - exactly the arrangement which Satan has announced.

#### Storehouse or Storehouses?

Some Christians deny that the institutional Church has a lawful claim on all of a man's tithe. To take this position, they must reject the common interpretation of Malachi 3:10 which insists that the reference to a storehouse - singular - is evidence that the Church alone is to be the recipient of the tithe. They have persuaded themselves that they can ignore the text - the word is singular - and substitute another word. This violates the warning Rushdoony offered in *The Institutes of Biblical Law*

*Scripture is never given to the idle use of words, or to their careless use. Paul placed the weight of doctrine on the singular form of "seed" (p. 406).*

Unfortunately, Rushdoony's hostility to the suggestion that the local church alone has lawful claim to the tithe had caused him by 1979 to become contemptuous of those who point to the singular form of storehouse in Malachi 3:10 as a defense. He wrote in *Tithing and Dominion* (1979):

The tithe was given to the Levites, who stored the animals and grain in storehouses (Mal. 3:10) until they could either be used or sold. It is a silly and self-serving modernism which leads some clergymen to insist that the *storehouse* is the church. . . . The Levites had very broad functions in Israel: they were the teachers (Deut. 33: 10), the musicians, the judges at times, the medical authorities and more; superintending foods and their cleanliness was part of their duty (p. 17).

#### CaMn on the Tithe

The issue is not, in Rushdoony's phrase, "silly and self-serving modernism." The issue is the actual text of Scripture. Men must not become self-sewing when they read the text of Scripture - liberals or conservatives. The text speaks of a storehouse: singular. This is how Calvin interpreted the passage. Speaking of the Israelites, he wrote: "They had been sufficiently proved guilty of rapacity in withholding the tenths and the oblations; as then the sacrilege was well known, the Prophet now passes judgment, as they say,

according to what is usually done when the criminal is condemned, and the cause is decided, so that he who has been defrauded recovers his right." (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, 5 vols. [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, [1 559] 1979], V, p. 588.) Was Calvin silly? Was he a modernist? Was he a silly modernist?

The Israelites had paid the priesthood its tenth of the tithe, Calvin surmised. It was what was owed to the Levites that was in question. "Bring, he says, to the repository (for this is the same as the house of the treasury, or of provisions) *all the tenths*, or the whole tenths. We hence learn that they had not withholden the whole of the tenths from the priests, but that they fraudulently brought the half, or retained as much as they could; for it was not without reason that he said, *Bring a//, or the whole.*"

Calvin understood exactly what crime against God was involved in withholding the full ten percent from the Levites: sacrilege. Paying the priests their tenth of the tithe was not sufficient to avoid the crime of sacrilege, Calvin said. They had to pay the entire remaining nine-tenths to the Levites. Sacrilege is an attack on God's sacramental institution, the Church - an attack on the sacraments. Calvin understood clearly that the tithe went to the Levites and priests because of their judicial offices as guardians and administrators of the sacraments. This economic entitlement was grounded judicially in the sacraments, and only in the sacraments. Any other duties performed by the Levites and priests were incidental to their administration of the sacraments. Calvin never referred to these supplemental social activities in his discussion of the tithe.

#### A Hole in the Wallet

Covenant-breaking man affirms his self-professed autonomy by controlling his wallet. His control over the allocation of his money is the number-one manifestation of his faith. Money is the most marketable commodity, economist Ludwig von Mises argued. This means that money is the most representative form of wealth. This is why Jesus warned that men cannot serve two gods, God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). This is why Paul warned that the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). What a man does with his money reveals his priorities. Covenant-breaking man's number-one priority is to affirm his own autonomy. He believes that he has the right to decide what to do with his money. God tells him he is wrong about this. God has first claim through His institutional church.

Men in their rebellion do not accept this teaching. This is why the Israelites after the exile were "more concerned about their own homes than they were about building the temple, the place of sacrifice, the place where God dwelt among them. God responded to their tight-fisted, self-centered behavior by withholding His visible blessings from them. They would keep 100 percent of a shrinking economic base.

Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, 10, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because

of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I celled for a drought upon the land, end upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, end upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, end upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands (Hag. 1:3-11).

It is not surprising that we find Christians who deny that Haggai's prophetic warning is still valid under the New Covenant. Christians **still** seek to **affirm** theologies that defend man's **partial** autonomy before God. Anyone who **affirms** the mandatory tithe has to this extent broken with the covenant-breaking philosophies of his era. Christians are still so impressed with covenant-breaking philosophies of human autonomy that they have failed to obey God in this area. They cling to their wallets as tightly as the Israelites of Haggai's day clung to theirs.

But they have nevertheless felt guilty about this. They have therefore sought to justify themselves theologically. In doing so, they have abandoned the tool of dominion: God's law.

### To **Escape** the Obligation

There are many ways that Christian theologians have sought to escape the cause-and-effect relationship between tithing and wealth described by Malachi. One way is to apply to the theology of tithing Meredith G. Kline's theory of cause and effect in the New Covenant era. Kline denies that in the New Covenant era there is any predictable relationship between **covenantal** law and economic sanctions.

"And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways." (Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI [Fall 1978], p. 184.)

Kline self-consciously has abandoned the Mosaic Covenant's doctrine of **covenantal** predictability in history. He has substituted a theory of God's common-grace inscrutability to mankind in New Covenant history. Social cause and effect become mysterious from the point of view of biblical revelation. This theology of mystery, if true, would make biblical social theory impossible. Christians would then be forced to seek for reliable social theory - assuming that such a theory even exists - in the writings and speculations of **covenant-breakers**. This is exactly what Christians have been doing from the days that Christian apologists began to appeal to Greek philosophy as the foundation of common-ground truths. It is this quest for common-ground principles of reasoning that Cornelius Van Til rejected as a compromise with the devil.

Another way to deny the moral necessity of tithing is to

declare, with fundamentalism, "We're under grace, not law" The result of such a universal **affirmation** is the self-conscious surrender of history to covenant-breakers. Christians then find themselves under pagan laws and pagan lawyers.

A third way is to affirm that God's Holy Spirit will inform each Christian how much to give. This opens the Christian to feelings of guilt, either because he thinks he has to give more than the tithe - but exactly how much? - or because he gives less and worries about it. Guilt produces doubt. Doubt is not conducive to entrepreneurship and economic growth.

A fourth approach is to **affirm** the mandatory tithe, but then deny that the institutional church has any legal claim on it. This leaves the tither in control over the allocation of his tithe. This is an affirmation of man's autonomy, but in the name of **covenantal** faithfulness. Rushdoony's theory of the tithe is the best example of this line of reasoning: "It is significant, too, that God's law makes no provision for the enforcement of the tithe *by man*. Neither church nor state have [*sic*] the power to require the tithe of us, not to tell us where it should be allocated, i.e., whether to Christian Schools or colleges, educational foundations, missions, charities, or anything else. The tithe is to the Lord." (Rushdoony, "The Tax Revolt Against God," Position Paper 94, *Chalcedon Report* [Feb. 1988], pp. 18-17.) Amazingly, he then appealed to Malachi 3:8-12. With respect to the tithe, Rushdoony believes in the divine right of the Individual with respect to the institutional church: no earthly judicial appeal beyond the individual conscience.

All four approaches are a denial of God's warning through Malachi. All four seek to evade men's responsibility to bring one-tenth of his increase to the single storehouse, the house of God.

### Conclusion

The leadership of Christians in society depends on their **covenantal** faithfulness. The leadership of individual Christians within the institutional church also depends on their **covenantal** faithfulness. If God still brings predictable corporate sanctions - both **positive** and **negative** - in history in terms of His law, as Old Testament affirms repeatedly, then in order for men to prosper, they must obey God's Bible-revealed laws. The failure of Christians to exercise **dominion** in any era of **history** is **closely** associated with their unwillingness to preach God's **law** and obey it. To put it concretely, it is associated with their unwillingness to bring all of their tithes to God's single storehouse: the local church.

It is unlikely that individual Christians will be able to exercise leadership outside of the institutional churches if the Christians are economically second-class citizens, struggling to keep up economically with covenant-breakers. It is time for pastors to start preaching the biblically mandatory nature of the tithe if they want the Church to lead in society. Unfortunately, not many pastors really want this. So, they continue to nag members for "donations." But unlike the state's appeal for larger "contributions," churches threaten no **negative** sanctions against members who refuse to donate. Preaching without institutional sanctions is mostly nagging. The Bible does not set forth a theology of leadership through nagging.

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