

Shayla: Can one's tithe go to the poor or must it go to the church?

Meforshim:

First, let's have a quick history lesson. The first Scriptural example of tithing is when Abraham offered the tithe of the spoils of war to Melchizedek.¹ Jacob later bargained with God and said that if the Lord would be with him, he would give back to the Lord a tenth of all his property.²

Derashot:

1. Tithing preceded the Mosaic law so to say that the giving of tithes is associated with Halakha and is thus maleh³ is foolish.
2. Tithing preceded coinage so it does not even have to take the form of money. The vast majority of the tithes (10% off the top of one's gross) and offerings (whatever one chooses to give above and beyond that) came in the form of food, vegetables, birds, or cattle. In modern parlance, perhaps you don't have a lot of money but you do raise a lot of strawberries so you bring a tenth of your strawberry harvest to the church to offer to God. Perhaps the church will sell them and use it to keep the lights on and the pastoral staff fed. Perhaps the church will vote to simply give it to the food pantry. Either way, you have given God your tithe.

Later, Jesus⁴ formalized tithing in Halakha⁵ and we can see what customs grew out of trying to creatively interpret those laws.⁶ One of the specific issues that arise from time to time today is the question of whether or not the pastoral staff should be paid or if they should, like Paul, be "tent-makers", i.e. bi-vocational. Of direct import to this question is the instruction Hashem gave that one-tenth of the tithe be used specifically to pay the priests, teachers, and judges.⁷ Back in the day (well before the arrival of banks) the tithe was actually stored on-site at the Temple.⁸

Derashot:

1. Tithing is a formalized system of caring for the poor but is also to be used specifically to finance religious work. It is to be used to build buildings, pay for the maintenance of those buildings, and finance the programs that are run in those buildings.
2. Those who dedicate themselves to full-time ministry should be paid for their work.⁹ Should they decide (as Paul did) to forgo that right in order to facilitate the ministry that is their right but it is not up to those who are receiving the teaching to make that decision.

When the people went astray they quit tithing. When they experienced revival they began again.¹⁰ God, who does not change, specifically argued against those who refused to bring their tithes into His storehouse, i.e. the tabernacle, Temple, and later the Church.¹¹

¹ Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:2-6)

² Genesis 28:22

³ In Adonism maleh refers to those laws and regulations that have been fulfilled and are no longer required though not necessarily forbidden.

⁴ For further discussion of this concept consider studying the doctrine of theophanies.

⁵ Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 12:6-7, 17, 19; 14:22-29; 26:12-15

⁶ Nehemiah 10:37-38; Amos 4:4; Hebrews 7:5-9

⁷ Numbers 18:26; Nehemiah 10:38

⁸ Nehemiah 10:38-39; 12:44; 13:5, 12; 2 Chronicles 31:11-12; Malachi 3:10

⁹ 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:14

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 31:5-10; Nehemiah 13:10-12; Malachi 3:8

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Approximately 1400 years after He instituted the Mosaic Law which included the tithing system, Jesus showed up again and said,

- [Matthew 5:17-19 HCSB](#) "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (18) For I assure you: Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all things are accomplished. (19) Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches people to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches *these commandments* will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Elsewhere I have discussed the issue of what activities are considered maleh, as well as the rules that direct us on the matter. Suffice it to say here, tithing cannot be shown to be maleh. Tithing remained customary even well after the advent of the Messiah.¹²

Derashot:

1. Due to the fact that tithing both preceded and followed the Mosaic Law, it should be considered as still being in effect.
2. Due to the fact that we have clear instruction TO tithe and no clear instruction NOT to tithe, the intelligent conclusion would be to tithe.
3. The fact that Jesus instituted the tithe and confirmed it 1400 years later, and Paul recommended it to the first century church, should lend further credence that it is not likely that God has changed His mind on the matter.

Now, having laid that groundwork, let's turn to the question at hand. May an individual's tithe go straight to the poor or must it go through the church? I believe that 1 Corinthians speaks directly to the issue.

- [1 Corinthians 16:1-2 HCSB](#) Now about the collection for the saints: you should do the same as I instructed the Galatian churches. (2) On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save to the extent that he prospers, so that no collections will need to be made when I come.

In this case, the money was not being collected for the furtherance of the Gospel through the local church. It was being designated to the poor saints who were starving and being persecuted in Jerusalem.¹³ Yet, it was still brought into God's "storehouse" and managed through God's ministers.

Let's compare that to the admonition in Malachi,

- [Malachi 3:5-10 HCSB](#) "I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the widow and the fatherless, and cheat the wage earner; and against those who deny *justice* to the foreigner. They do not fear Me," says the LORD of Hosts. (6) "Because I, Yahweh, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed. (7) "Since the days of your fathers, you have turned from My statutes; you have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Hosts. But you ask: "How can we return?" (8) "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!" You ask: "How do we rob You?" "By *not making the payments* of 10 percent and the contributions. (9) You are suffering under a curse, yet you--the whole nation--are *still* robbing Me. (10) Bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.

¹² Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12

¹³ Acts 11:28-30

Note the context was the issue of justice, particularly in providing for the poor (something Adonai is passionate about¹⁴). Note too that God's prime argument was the fact that He does not change and that He had already instituted a way to care for the poor – namely by bringing the tithe to His storehouse. Finally, it is of critical importance that we remember that when we fail to do this, Adonai considers it theft!

Your money is your responsibility. You don't own it for everything belongs to God. However, as His steward you get to choose to give your offerings at any percentage you like and in any form that you like. That was part of the apostle's pronouncement against Ananias and Sapphira.¹⁵

The tithe, on the other hand, is another matter completely. I believe that it is a necessary part of the process of "humbling ourselves before the Lord"¹⁶ and acknowledging His sovereignty over our lives. I think it is a disciplined way to systematically provide for God's work and fulfill the Great Commission.

My advice is, if you want to give to the poor and it is going to come out of your tithe, to give it to the church and see if they would designate the funds appropriately. On the other hand, if you have already given your tithe and the alms are above and beyond the tithe, then give it at the time and place, and in the manner that the Spirit directs.

¹⁴ Psalm 146:5-9; Micah 6:8

¹⁵ Acts 5:4

¹⁶ Numbers 12:3; 1 Samuel 15:22-23 (cp Matthew 6:24-25; Luke 16:13); Proverbs 3:5-8 (cp Proverbs 5:11-14; 11:2); 12:15 (cp Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 2:3); 16:19 (cp Proverbs 29:23); Micah 6:7-8; Matthew 23:12 (cp James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-7); Luke 18:2-5 (cp Proverbs 13:13); Romans 12:3; 1 John 1:9