

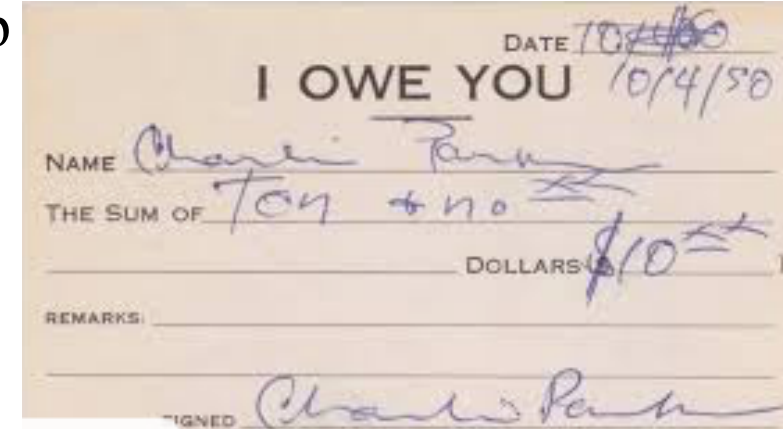
# Gospel of Matthew

## 22:15~22

### *What We Owe*



All of us owe. We bring home a paycheck and a certain portion of the money we bring home is not really ours. It belongs to others that we owe money to. So then it is up to us to separate what is theirs out from what we have and fork it over. If we buy a car and have to buy it on credit, then we have to make monthly payments to pay for the car AND pay for the credit! And when we take a shopping cart full of groceries out of a grocery store, we have to stop at the front first, where the items we have taken are tallied up one by one and then we are given the total amount that we owe the grocery store for those items. Once we dig in our wallet and give the store that amount, we are free to walk out the door with our merchandise. But we owe, and then we pay what we owe. Owing often reveals the nature of a person's character. Not paying what we owe says something about our character, doesn't it? It might mean we are a thief at heart, intending to take someone else's possession, and not intending to pay what we would normally owe them, and breaking our initial agreement to pay them what we agreed for the item. Such a person is of low moral character – selfish to the core, deceptive, and without regard for the loss incurred by the person we are stealing from. Paying what we owe also says something about us. It says that we care about keeping our word, that we are honest and true, and that we care about the other person getting what we owe them. No one likes giving money from our paycheck to someone else. But when we owe them an amount, we are not giving our money away but only giving the other person what belongs to them. \*It reminds me of a little ditty from way back – “*I owe, I owe, so off to work I go. ‘Cause I just spent my last red cent – to work I go*”



So these relentless Pharisees are always trying to trap Jesus. They want to be able to arrest Him and get Him out of circulation. They know He is teaching against them right in public – right in the temple courtyard under their noses! They are looking for a way to trip Him up so that He makes a major mistake! \*They remind me of the “gotcha” media these days. Rather than interview someone and let the viewer decide, they seek to provoke and create a “viral” moment – something that will “trend” on Twitter or Facebook. This is how news is *created* these days. It is not reported but created. It is the reporter’s intention to make themselves become a major part of the story. Well, some guy out to get an name for himself obviously thought He was smart enough to outfox Jesus and provoke Him to say something where He would discredit Himself – maybe Jesus could be provoked enough to say something rash enough to get Him arrested and imprisoned! So the antagonist asks a question regarding Roman taxes. Romans always treated the countries they had subjected as income sources for Rome – cash cows, as they say. The conquest and subjugation of other countries was ALWAYS about money! The invaders always taxed the invaded! The subjugated did not fare well, while the subjugators got richer! Imagine having to pay taxes to two governments. In our case, we actually do! We pay **FEDERAL TAX** that goes to the central government in Washington, AND we pay **STATE TAX** that goes to the state government of whatever state we are in. Imagine if we had another supreme government over this nation that required that we pay taxes to support the supreme governmental also?!



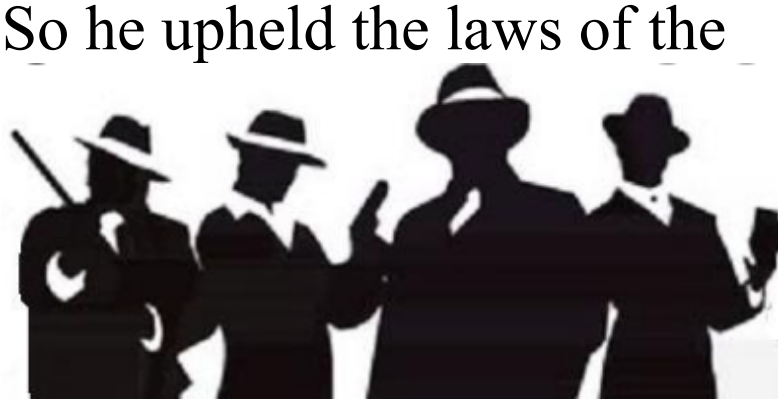
Anyway, as might be expected, the Roman tax was a hated part of Judean life! Everyone spoke against it! It was an insult to their nation and to God! So in asking this question, these men were hoping to get Jesus to say He opposed the tax. Then he could be prosecuted by the Romans for the very serious political crime of inciting insurrection/rebellion! If, on the other hand, Jesus surprised everyone and spoke in favor of buckling under and paying the tax, He would lose His favored status with the people! That was really what these men were after anyway – to discredit Jesus. So it was a win/win for the Pharisees and priests. Any way He answered, Jesus would lose! It was a brilliant strategy! This was one of the better strategies any of them had EVER come up with!



Except for the fact that it was Jesus they were trying to trap! He was definitely the smartest man in the room by an enormous margin! He simply took a coin, and on it, of course, was a picture of Tiberius, the then emperor of Rome - step-son of Octavius/Caesar Augustus. It could have been an older coin and had a picture of Augustus on it. And He asks them whose image is on the coin. “***Caesar’s***” they answer. “***Then give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s***” In this answer Jesus displayed a genius that even His detractors/enemies could not help but stand back and admire, saying to themselves “*How did He do that?!*”



Jesus was not trying to bring about political revolution at this time. So he upheld the laws of the land. One of the laws was to pay taxes to Rome, another was to pay taxes to King Herod, and another was to pay the tithe to God at the temple! A person could not avoid paying the taxes they owed the two secular governments - *under threat of prison or death!* That is the power that the state wields. They will do harm to their own citizens if one of them fails to pay what they owe the in taxes. It is the same philosophy behind the Mafia, or gangs of the big cities. You pay them a hefty fee of “Protection money” and they will “protect” you from the dangers of the city. But what they are actually protecting you from is themselves. Pay them or they will burn your place of business down, or kidnap one of your children until you pay, or brutally beat you to death to make a point to all the other business owners who don’t want to pay. It is a system based on the same philosophy as government. With government today the penalties are not quite as brutal but they are effective. Now it is hefty fines until you pay, and if you don’t pay, it is prison time with felons and murders, and then I think you still have to pay the huge fines after you get out! So, of course, people pay their taxes! People payed them in Jesus’ day just as we do today - and for the same reasons. No one has ever wanted to pay the penalty for NOT doing it! Some Christians recently have assert that we should NOT pay our taxes. They say that our taxes are being used to fund abortions and that if we pay our taxes, we are helping to pay for those abortions. Jesus did not agree with all the governmental policies that taxes in His day supported. Rome was a cesspool of moral corruption! Yet Jesus makes no mention of that when He tells the people at the temple to give Caesar what Caesar says was owed Him! I think Jesus was indicating that the government bears responsibility for its own policies, not the taxpayers. We owe taxes to the government, therefore it is wise for us to pay up, or suffer consequences we cannot afford!



But then Jesus includes another topic in the mix! “**Render** (KJV - give over) **unto... God, what is God's**”. Wait,.. WHAT! Where did that come from! All his listeners in the temple courtyard were people that believed in the tithe. That was a key part of why they were there in Jerusalem at this time. They had each brought with them their annual tithe to give over to God at the temple! The tithe was an important part of the Mosaic Law which stipulated that each individual within Judaism was responsible to bring 10% of their annual income to the temple and leave it there. That 10% portion of their income was considered literally what was owed to God! It went to the support of the temple and its priests and its benevolences! \*Now, before you draw a sharp intake of breath over this amount, consider that the Muslims have always had to pay an annual fee of 2.5% **of all they possess**, or a basic 20% of their harvest, or even 1/5 of the total worth of their animal flocks and herds. That is twice as much (and more) as Jews and Christians are required to give. It is called “**zakat**” and this practice is called “the 3<sup>rd</sup> pillar of Islam”. That is the requirement of a false god, and I must say that without equivocation! So when the true God, Creator of the universe and of the earth says that 10 % of our income belongs to Him – Him who gives us life and breath, and Him who has paid for our salvation at the cost of His Son's life,.. well, in view of 20 % and much more, 10 % is not that much, is it! Why can the cults and false religions require of their devotees more than the God of the Universe requires of His? It is a mystery to me! They are all required by penalty of law or under threat of hell, or both! But Christians are not under the law. It is inconceivable to me that Christians so consistently use this as an excuse to ignore the obligation to tithe. I have had to argue many times with Christians regarding this. I have argued that for the Christian, the tithe is an obligation of love, not of law. An obligation of love makes the tithe a beautiful act of worship! Yet, it is estimated that on average, about 3 % of Christians actually give the whole tithe! Such a pathetic figure makes me weep for my brothers and sisters. To know the wonder of the truth and to neglect it in such a way is unthinkable!



Yet it is estimated by people – pollsters, people that keep track of statistics, that only a staggering 3 % of all Christians tithe. Of evangelical Christians, generally less than 12-15 % of us tithe, but the average percentage of income that **evangelical Christians** give, is, on average, about 4 percent of our income to our respective church's general budget, to missions work, and/or charities. That means that less than 15 out of 100 of give the 10 % tithe! That leaves a whopping 85 % of us that do not tithe and many of that number do give anywhere near the tithe!!



Before going on with this, let me take time to clarify, and make sure we are all on the same page, at least as far as terminology.

**The tithe** – 10 % of your income. Like it used to go to the temple, the tithe is best utilized when it goes to your church. If you trust your church leaders, it is best to just drop it off and let it go. It is the Lord's money, not ours.

**Offerings** – anything over 10 % - this is employed when, for instance, you want to support a missionary individually or give them a one-time gift. When Karen and I decide to personally support a missionary, it is a big decision because it always comes from over and above our tithe-giving. Our 10 % tithe is ALWAYS designated to the church, but if we want to give extra to someone or some project we believe in, well then, we have to figure out where it is going to come from out of our budget! It will take an extra bit of sacrifice on our part because it is coming out of *our* money. In our minds, the tithe just always belongs to God. It is not ours and never was! We treat it that way. It is never something we have to decide to give or not give on Sunday. That decision was already made 40-plus years ago, and we have never wavered, not even during the hard times! It is designated money therefore not on our financial radar. I do believe that this is the way it should be for everyone! I really do not believe this is a matter of personal conviction, but a matter of whether we truly believe or not! Every professing believer in Jesus that is consciously not willing to tithe, has an issue with God! It is a belligerent stand to take, and it is a stand against Him. Of course, it is a secret issue because no one knows if you tithe or not, but it is always going to be an issue between you and God. And if a person is stubbornly unwilling in this area, you have to ask, *where else* is that person unwilling to obey God?

**Donations** – anything under 10 % - my nephew, a pastor in Washington State, calls it “*giving God a Sunday tip*”. We think it is normal to give on Sunday like we give to the Salvation Army red kettle - nothing planned about it. Loose change, a bill or two



This is not primarily about the church and its needs. I never worry about money – never have. Not having money in the budget makes taking care of the church’s needs more difficult, but it generally gets done. For me the money issue is not about the church. I don’t talk about tithing and plead for money for the budget because I am alarmed or feel the wellbeing of the church is threatened. For me, and my pastor’s heart, it is about *the individual* and where the individual people are at in their relationship with God! Tithing is an accurate indicator of where people are at on that score. I have to say that I worry that the individuals who are not willing to tithe don’t really believe! Everyone says they believe, but tithing is secret. People tend to think they can get away with *anything* when things are done in secret! The anonymous social media is a good case in point! People say despicable things when there is anonymity/ when they can do wrong things in secret.



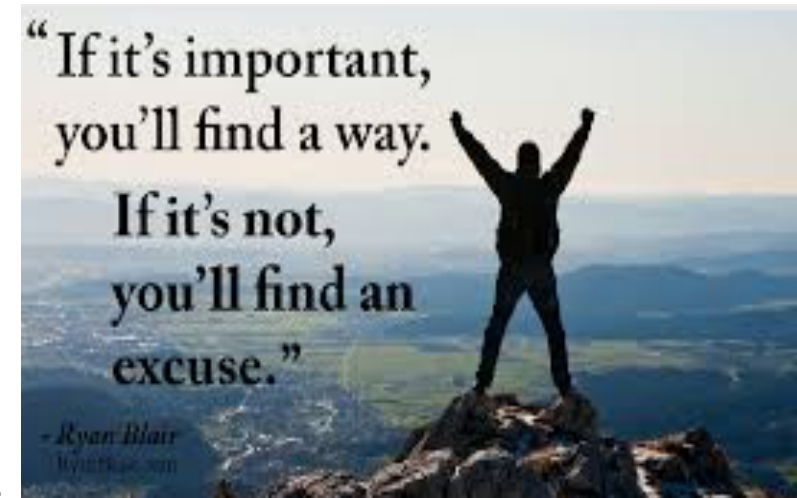
On a scale of 1% -10%, how close to 10% are your giving patterns? According to the statistics, most of us would be hovering around less than 1% to about 3 or 4 %. That actually tells me where you are at in your relationship with God! But I do not know what people at this church give as individuals, so I can’t make that assessment for you, but I can see that our church’s overall giving is typical for churches everywhere – which, even during a good year for us, is way, way below where it would be if everyone tithed! That is easy to deduce! But *you* still can and must assess yourselves! You are the one who must face God one day with how seriously you supported His earthly Kingdom – with whether you stole from God or always gave what you owed Him! It will all be out in the open on that day – no secrets then!

Listen, when the prophet Malachi confronted the people over this (3:7b-18), he had a direct message from God. *“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me (God)! “How are we robbing you”* is the response from the people. *“In tithes and offerings... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...”*



Find a way. “*But we can’t!*” Yes,.. you can! God would not ask of you something you cannot do! It is simply a decision about your lifestyle and about what you believe in most. I will reiterate what I’ve said before. We all do what we want most! Our decisions always reflect what we really want, and nothing reflects that truism more than how we designate our money!

I read this week that Jesus talked about how we use money more than any other single topic. I didn’t actually personally verify that, but just from a general knowledge of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel accounts, I’d say it’s probably true – or at least close! His follower’s use of money was obviously important to Jesus! He personally didn’t have much of it. He knew He had no need of it where He would soon be going. But how His disciples would handle their money after He was gone from this earth,.. well, that concerned Him, and it appears, for good reason! It’s an issue, and always has been! Anything that concerned Him should be of concern to us – if He is our Lord, Master, Leader, and Teacher – it ***has to*** concern us! Confess it before God for what it is. Unbelief! Unbelief is not a little sin! So, then, figure out! Make the needed course correction, and may God bless you when you do. ***“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouses. Test me in this and see,” says the Lord Almighty, “if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it.” - Malachi 3:10***



BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN,  
WHERE MOTHS AND VERMIN DO NOT DESTROY,  
AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL.  
FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS,  
THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO.

MATTHEW 6:20-21

