

## Is Tithing Still Binding on Christians? In Reply to Art Mokarow

By Eric Snow

Did we really successfully escape the errors of antinomian dispensationalism when we left the Worldwide Church of God a decade ago? Or do Pasadena's arguments of then based on the construct that God radically changes his laws for humanity in different time periods still resonate among us? Ironically, various independent Sabbatarians among us attack tithing using theological arguments that would also abolish the Sabbath, the Holy Days, and the clean/unclean meats distinction if consistently applied. In reality, their attacks on tithing, apparently designed to undermine the financial basis of the "evil" corporate churches' hierarchies with their (fraudulently) "ordained" ministries, would abolish other Old Testament laws they presumably still uphold. Art Mokarow's recent assault against tithing as binding on Christians ("The Journal," 11/30/04) shows that the vampire of "Tkachian" theology wasn't buried permanently a decade ago, but has risen from the dead among the independents concerning tithing, so it deserves another stake driven through its doctrinal heart.

Because of space limitations, a full comparison won't be made here of Pasadena's 1995 reasoning, as proclaimed in the pages of "The Worldwide News," with Mr. Mokarow's theological assumptions. In this tenth year anniversary of "the Great Schism," the curious may want to review briefly Pasadena's reasoning in its own words by downloading and reading the opening pages of my old piece, "Does the New Covenant Do Away with the Letter of the Law?" from the doctrinal essay page of my Web site, [www.lionofjudah1.org](http://www.lionofjudah1.org).

Because tithing wasn't called a law when Abraham tithed on the spoils of war (not just on agricultural products) to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20), it's said Christians shouldn't think this law binds them today. But isn't Mokarow's argument like what could be called the "beer can" (single use) theory of the Sabbath's origination in Genesis 2:2-3? Neither is the Sabbath called a "law" nor are humans commanded to rest here as God did then, right? Correspondingly, the Sabbath wasn't binding on people until the Exodus from Egypt. (See Ex. 16:4, 23-30, which was before they reached Sinai). So does this mean the Sabbath, like tithing and all the rest of the Old Testament law, was abolished by Jesus' crucifixion?

Now Mokarow thinks various conditions tie tithing's existence to the Levitical priesthood's continued functioning. But the tithes given to Melchizedek shows the two laws are independent of each other. The author of Hebrews plainly equates the (clearly involuntary) tithes given to the Levitical priesthood with Abraham's act of tithing in Hebrews 7:4-6: "Now consider how great this man [Melchizedek] was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the

loins of Abraham; but he [Melchizedek] whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises.”

Mokarow absurdly writes, “When you read the context you see it [Hebrews 7] has nothing to do with tithing.” The author of Scripture here uses the administration of tithing to illustrate and support his point that the priesthood of Melchizedek is greater than that of Levi and that the law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:11, 19). He also equates the tithes to Melchizedek and to the Levitical priesthood by reasoning: “Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men [the Levites] receive tithes, but there he [Melchizedek] receives them, of whom it is witnesses that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (Heb. 7:7-10). Had Mokarow included more direct Scripture quotes in his viewpoint, this mistake might have been avoided.

Our old friend, the argument from silence, which antinomians frequently pick up to strike at Sabbath observance, Mokarow wields in his assault on tithing: “There is no other mention to give tithes to the preaching ministry in the New Testament.” Likewise, we have this reasoning: “Aside from Hebrews 7, which discusses the process of perfection and not tithing [?], there are no other scriptures even referring to tithing, except in the Gospels, in the *entire* New Testament.” But, how often does God have to repeat Himself for a law to be binding? *A priori* (ahead of experience), couldn’t we assume a law is in force until specifically abolished? Should we assume continuity or discontinuity about God’s general will for mankind’s conduct? Does the Old Testament have any authority separately from the New Testament’s repeating its commands for them to be binding on Christians? The weight of Matthew 5:17-19; II Tim. 3:14-17; I Cor. 10:6, 11, is plainly against dispensationalist reasoning (i.e., “The Age of Grace” versus “The Age of Law.”)

Mokarow implicit reasons that the Gospels have no authority separate from (basically) the Letters. His dispensationalist premises make the words of Jesus worthless about tithing being binding unless seconded by (say) Paul or some writer after the crucifixion. Hence these words of our Savior are magically rendered null and void (Matt. 23:23): “For you *pay tithe* of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. *These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*” But of course, if all the words of God in the flesh were to be rendered irrelevant for guiding Christian conduct after the crucifixion, why did Jesus say after His resurrection (Matt. 28:19-20): “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*”? Why should God become flesh and die so painfully if His revelations while on earth would (often) be valueless without the Apostle Paul’s explicit approval? If Mokarow, and the other independents wish to make the case against tithing by using antinomian dispensationalism, they should name their premises explicitly and make the case for them, rather than just assuming this standard brand of evangelical Protestant theology is correct. (Because upholders of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition emphasize continuity in God’s will for mankind, such as by believing the Ten Commandments are still in force,

we in the COG movement should carefully avoid portraying all Protestants as antinomians).

Mokarow also believes the spirit of the law abolishes its letter: “It is Scripturally obvious one cannot tithe to the New Testament ministry because the law became a spiritual matter, not a matter of the letter of the law.” Does this mean, say, that literal adultery would be permissible, but a man shouldn’t lust after a woman in his heart (Matt. 5:27-28)? Obviously, the spirit of the law almost always includes the letter of the law also, as the Sermon on the Mount shows (in Matt. 5), since the letter fell short in its requirements. Ironically, the text Mr. Mokarow cites ( II Cor. 3:3, 6) in order to abolish the letter of the law reveals that the letter “kills,” not “did kill,” so the letter of the law is still in force! (Compare also Gen. 26:5 with Rom. 4:15, 5:13; 7:9).

Now, could Christians “rest in Jesus” spiritually, thus allowing them to not literally need to avoid working during a particular physical time period? Hasn’t Mr. Mokarow already said publicly that Christians need not physically delevaen their homes? But to do this physical ritual teaches us about God and his ways spiritually, so it’s hardly useless. The spirit of the law normally requires obedience to the letter also.

Mokarow also spends much space attacking the teaching that the ministry has authority over money issues within the church. In actuality, although the apostles delegated their authority over physical matters, delegation obviously doesn’t destroy the authority of the one delegating. After telling laymembers to choose out the deacons, the apostles ordained them (Acts 6:2-6), but they still would have had the power to overrule any possibly bad decisions by laymembers or deacons. Consider this: Where did Ananias put his money after selling his land? At the apostles’ feet! (Acts 5:2) Where had the local church placed its funds after selling their property? At the apostles’ feet! (Acts 4:34-35, 37) Likewise, Paul cites the Old Testament in principle (such as the Levitical priesthood) when making the case for his right to be paid (I Cor. 9:7-14), although he chose not to exercise it (v. 15; cf. II Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13-14).

Paul wrote about money matters (II Cor. 9:5-15; 8:1-21), thus showing the preaching ministry may write, preach about, and even ask for money as part of doing God’s evangelistic work. The general claim that “ministers should not handle or be in charge of money because it is corrupting” contradicts the assertion that only deacons should handle money. Why aren’t the deacons similarly corrupted then? If the spirit of the law is so important, why should the text about a laborer being worthy of his hire be so narrowly interpreted as a reference to food and drink? It so obviously includes all compensation, whether for ministers or anyone else.

Congregationalists routinely make without proof raw assertions like “each local congregation was autonomous in the primitive church.” Plainly top-down control on doctrinal matters existed throughout the church as a whole. All local churches had to obey the Jerusalem Council’s decisions about circumcision not being a requirement for gentiles (Acts 16:4): “And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.” And

did the local church in Corinth have the authority to defy the Apostle Paul when he ordered them to disfellowship someone (I Cor. 5:1-5, 11, 13)? Obviously not. The text that prohibits the ordination of women also shows the ministry does have authority (I Tim. 2:12): “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” If the ministry doesn’t have control over money matters related to the church, it ultimately clearly has no spiritual authority at all when laymembers control the finances, which contradicts such texts as Hebrews 13:17; I Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; 2:15. The worldly insight that “He who pays the piper calls the tune” is spiritually unavoidable as well. Ultimately money decisions in a church are spiritual decisions, such as deciding how much to spend on evangelization relative to hiring full-time paid pastors. Thus the ministry should not have to submit to financial boards controlled by unordained laymembers. Plainly, not all “elders” are “older men” who reach a certain chronological age (compare the likely otherwise contradictory directions in I Tim. 5:1-2, 20). Neither spiritual maturity nor length of service after baptism need corresponds closely to chronological age. If Jesus began His physical ministry at age 30 (Luke 3:23; cf. Num. 4:46-47), does that show an “elder” need not be even middle aged? Would a senior citizen who objects to listening to someone speak from the pulpit less than half his or her age have listened to Jesus or Timothy (I Tim. 4:12) then? Would a new convert (if a man) baptized at age 70 become (presto!) an automatic “elder”? Those interested in the general Biblical case for an ordained ministry with authority should consider downloading this essay from my Web site, “Is the Ordained Ministry a New Testament Doctrine?: Norman S. Edwards’ Church Government Doctrines Revisited.”

Much more could be said against Mr. Mokarow’s positions on the law of tithing and on the authority of the ministry. But it’s plain that his theological premises about the law, as revealed by his arguments against tithing, hardly differ from Joe Tkach Jr.’s. All COG Sabbatarians who accept his theological premises on tithing should realize they ultimately doom Sabbath observance as a continuing requirement of God for Christians as well. The Sabbath and tithing rise and fall together.