

Prosperity,
God's gift,
fruit of love,
joyful practice



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PROSPERITY, GOD'S GIFT, FRUIT OF LOVE, JOYFUL PRACTICE



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Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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I dedicate this book to the holy and beloved children of God, who wish to experience His prosperity here on earth, in the broadest sense of the word, breaking the barriers of prejudices and attachments, sowing, teaching to sow and reaping the pure, sweet and blessed fruit of surrender to Lord's will for their lives.

I thank God for His infinite wisdom that teaches us how to live in a holy, faithful and full way in the midst of a world corrupted by sin, guarding us, protecting us and encouraging us to generate His fruit of peace and justice among a people separated for His honor and praise.

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Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [] or parenthesis (), in *italics*, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand).
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Introduction

When we talk about money and prosperity, we notice many feelings in people: repulsion, pleasure, greed and desire for power, fear, insecurity, disgust, feelings of impurity and several others that, actually, are an expression of the lack of knowledge of its spiritual meaning for their lives.

If we talk about the prosperity only of the human point of view, we may come across unanswered questions or situations of injustice and powerlessness that even bring anger to our hearts. However, if we understand its significance to God we will be putting ourselves in another level, where we will no longer be slaves of circumstances, but kings and warriors in a land that once made us retreat.

In truth, the aim of this book is not to give fanciful solutions to the financial shortage or an infallible recipe for making money, much less economic suggestions for solving the problems of the world. On the contrary, it brings the biblical teaching on this matter, simplifying our attitudes concerning it and taking us to praise God for His wisdom, simplicity and love for us, aiming to bless us and supply us in everything.

The big secret regarding to prosperity of a spiritual standpoint is the love of God and His work and the joy of using this natural resource, money, to help our neighbors to discover the truth and be free from every yoke. The Word of God says that we should not give reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Apparently it's impossible the financial sowing in His work before we experience for ourselves the benefit due to be faithful to the divine laws. However, when we begin to have positive practical experiences in this area, we understand the value of a life to God and how much our investment in His kingdom is important, not only by the use of our own material resources such as clothing and food that are often donated to the needy, but as a teaching resource to open the understanding of those who walked in error before. More than anything, financial sowing brings inner growth as it teaches us to surrender more to the Lord and His will and think about ourselves in a less selfish way.

In dealing spiritually with the financial area, we are not only dealing with the difficulties inherent to the material life; we are also making war against the spiritual forces; therefore, making use of the authority given to us by God Himself for our benefit.

May the Holy Spirit accompany you in this reading and work within you, removing the chains that can be holding you in this area.

Be free and prosperous in the name of Jesus.

General History

1

In Eden, man had no concern with money because he didn't know deprivation. "The currency in circulation" was obedience to God, which put him on a level of well-being and relationship with Him and gave him spiritual intelligence and solution to all his curiosities and needs. However, by disregarding the 'financial rule' (*obedience to the Father*), the human being began to experience shortage in its entirety. Expelled from the garden, he knew what it was to earn his living from the sweat of his face, besides having now to look for an extra enablement to meet his needs depending on his fellow men. It was created trade and exchange, for to have food of the crop he had to exchange it for an animal of his flock, for example. Man began to explore the planet's natural resources and discovered that metals could facilitate his survival. Mining brought a new quality of life, but also a new responsibility. We can say that God in His infinite goodness allowed His children to discover many things because He still loved them despite their sin, and wanted to see them prosperous and free.

In the Old Testament, Palestine was the only natural bridge between Europe and Asia to the north and Africa to the south. Although it was poor land, it was enriched by trade and exchange that crossed the region. In *Ezek. 27: 12-25* the bible presents a sample of worldwide trade that crossed its territory. The text speaks of the trading partners of Tyre which passed through Palestine: Tarshish, Indo-European peoples, Syria, Dedan (south of Edom), Arabia, Africa and Assyria. Tyre traded its goods with Israel for wheat, candies, honey, olive oil and balm. The main commodities traded by Israel were agricultural products and metals. Israel supplied Phoenicia (where Tyre is) with cereals, olive oil and wine. Egypt was supplied with olive oil and wine. After the conquests of David in Syria, the iron began to be marketed, and Israel learned to forge weapons and agricultural tools. At the time of Solomon the copper smelting started. From Arabia and Africa came the incense, spices and gold, passed through Palestine to Egypt and the Mediterranean.

The money shaped as a coin arrived in Palestine more or less in the end times of the Old Testament.

In the beginning, gold and silver were weighed in the form of ingots, bars and rings, which facilitated their transportation. The coin first appeared in Asia Minor in the late 8th century BC. In Persia it was introduced by Darius I (522-486 BC), with the name of daric (because of his name), and that a gold coin with the approximate weight of 8.4 gr. The gold used in the coins was of high quality with a purity of 95.83%. The daric was used until the invasion of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in 330 BC. The old gold coins (the daric) were melted down to mint new Greek coins. In the New Testament the main activities in trade and exchange were in the hands of the Romans.

Some events such as the age of bronze and iron are of interest to be described. Events before 2000 BC (*Gen. 1-11*), that is, before Abraham until about 1200 BC include the *Bronze Age*. From about 1200 BC (period of the judges) until the reign of Solomon (970-930 BC) and the subsequent fall of Judah (586 BC) comprise the *Iron Age I and II*, extending to the year 330 BC (*Iron Age III*).

Wool, barley, wheat, dates, metal, wood, salt, wine, honey and livestock served as articles of exchange. So, wealth was measured by the number of cattle that was owned

and of precious metals (*Job 1: 3; Gen. 13: 2*). Besides Abraham, other patriarchs as Jacob had also large numbers of livestock and precious metals, so they were considered rich.

1) Metals as article of exchange:

Silver (Hebrew, *Keseph*) was the metal more available in Palestine, as well as in Assyria and Babylon and was the most frequently used. Our version of the bible translates *Keseph* usually as **money** (*Gen. 17: 13*). Solomon bought chariots of combat for six hundred shekels of silver (around 15,43 pounds) and horses for a hundred and fifty shekels of silver (*1 Kin. 10: 29 cf. Lev. 5: 15*, the shekel of the sanctuary was equivalent to 11.5 grams or 2/5 ounce, so the horses were worth a 3,802 pounds or 1,725 kilograms of silver). Silver was also used to buy properties, whether a field, as acquired by Jeremiah (*Jer. 32: 9*) in Anathoth for seventeen shekels of silver (6,90 ounces), whether the cave at Machpelah bought by Abraham for four hundred silver shekels of silver (*Gen. 23: 15-16* – 163 ounces), whether the village and the hills of Samaria, bought by Omri for two talents (150 pounds, approximately) of silver (*1 Kin. 16: 24*), or the threshing floor of Araunah acquired by David (*2 Sam. 24: 24b*) for fifty shekels of silver (20.28 ounces) for each tribe of Israel (six hundred shekels of gold, *1 Chr. 21: 25*, 244 ounces).

Silver also formed the basis of the dowries (*Ex. 22: 17*) or was used for the purchase of a bride (*Hos. 3: 2*). It is often found alloyed with gold.

Gold: gold, which was obtained with more rarity, often appears after silver, and is mentioned along with it in large quantities in the payment of taxes. That's what happened to Hezekiah, who paid to Sennacherib three hundred talents (one talent equates to approximately thirty-four kilograms or 75 pounds) of silver (he paid about 22.500 pounds) and thirty talents of gold (*2 Kin. 18: 14*, about 2.250 pounds) for the invader to withdraw from Israel. Hiram paid to Solomon one hundred and twenty talents of gold (about 2.260 pounds) for the towns which were transferred to him (*1 Kin. 9: 10-14*) and also reveals that the gold was also used in important transactions in the States borders.

The so-called “*Fertile Crescent*” in the OT was composed by Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and the Nile Delta with mountain ranges, which provided ores of gold, silver, copper, tin, lead and iron. In some places turquoise and other semiprecious stones appear. The order in which the main metals entered into use was: **gold** (*Gen. 2: 11*), **silver**, **copper** (also known as bronze or brass. Brass is a yellow alloy of copper and zinc; and bronze is a yellowish-brown alloy of copper with up to one-third tin) and **iron**.

2) Forms of coins:

For the metal to be transported with ease it was transformed into jewelry, objects of daily use or characteristic shapes as thin bars or wedges, ingots, pots, powder or small fragments, and could be melted and used immediately for many purposes. To travel, the small pieces of metal were put in a purse or bag of leather or cloth.



Daric in the times of Darius I and Xerxes I and the Dharic 4th century BC

The drachma (Greek: drachmé δραχμή, pl. δραχμές drachmés or δραχμαί drachmaí; derived from the verb δράττω, dratto, 'hold') was a silver coin used by many Greek city-states during several periods in the history of Greece: Archaic period (750-490 BC); Classical period (490-323 BC), the Hellenistic period (323-31 BC – from the death of Alexander the Great until the beginning of the Roman Empire, with Caesar Augustus) up to the Roman period (31 BC-1453 AD) under Greek Imperial Coinage. In the contemporary era, the drachma was reintroduced in 1832 and replaced by the euro in 2001, at the rate of 340.75 drachma to the euro.

In the image below: the Greek silver drachma, weighing 5.57g (Naxos, Sicily, 530 - 510 BC; Rev. ΝΑΞΙΟΝ, of Naxians). The coin shows the head of Dionysos (Bacchus, to the Romans, the god of wine) to left, with long, pointed beard, ivy wreath in his hair and a plain necklace around the neck. On the reverse of the coin one can see a bunch of grapes on stalk with two leaves.



The spread of minted coins in Judah seems to have been slow maybe because of the effigies they brought. At the time of the Maccabees, John Hyrcanus I (135-104 BC) minted small coins in bronze of 1/2, 1/4 and 1/3 of a shekel, showing in front an olive branch with the inscription “*John (Yôhānān), the high priest and the Jewish Council.*” On the back, they imitated the Greek coins with its double cornucopia.



Cornucopia – Greek mythological symbol of abundance, agriculture and trade



The coin of John Hyrcanus I: Judea, Hasmoneans. John Hyrcanus I (Yehohanan) 135–104 BC. Æ Prutah (13 mm, 2.02 gr.). Obverse of the coin: ‘Yehohanan the High Priest and the Council of the Jews’ (in Hebrew) in five lines within wreath. On the reverse, the double cornucopia adorned with ribbons; pomegranate between horns; small A to lower left (Meshorer Group B, 11; Hendin 457. Wikipedia)

In the NT the coins came from three origins: according to the *Roman standard*, according to the *Greek standard* (Antioch and Tyre) and according to the pattern of *local Jewish money* (perhaps minted in Caesarea). Because of so many different coins in circulation, there were many money changers in Jerusalem, especially during religious celebrations, when the Jews came to pay their tax in the temple. Three metals were used: gold, silver and copper (also called bronze or brass, which, in fact, is an alloy of copper and zinc or copper with tin, as seen above).

3) Loans:

Loans in Israel didn't have a commercial nature, but charitable, not granted to allow a merchant to establish and expand his business, but to sustain a peasant in times of poverty. In the NT this meaning for loan is different. The debtors (parable of the dishonest steward, *Lk. 16: 1-8*) were tenants (people who rent something from someone) who paid in cash or were merchants who had received goods on credit.

4) Interest, usury:

The word usury had not the same meaning of today, used for exorbitant profit. In the Old Testament this practice was prohibited so that there was not exploitation against brothers, taking advantage of the misfortune of the compatriot (*Ex. 22: 25-27; Lev. 25: 35-37; Deut. 23: 19-20; Deut. 24: 10-13*). However, it was allowed to charge interest of foreigners (*Deut. 23: 20*).

5) Pledge, guarantee:

Used for a temporary loan, in the mortgage of a property or on bail of a financier (*Ex. 22: 26; Deut. 24: 10-13*). In cases where there was no guarantee for the debt, the debtors could be sold as slaves (*Neh. 5: 5*).

The Christian view of money



Paul wrote something interesting about prosperity in *2 Cor. 8: 13-15*, “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’” In the original, is written, “For each reaped what he could eat”, in reference to *Ex. 16: 18*, where it is written, “But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.” An omer was equal to two liters.

God has always been concerned with the supply of His children, so He said in *Lev. 19: 9-10 (Deut. 24: 17-21)* about leaving a bit of the grape harvest, olive and wheat to the stranger, the orphan, the poor and the widow. He said in *Lev. 19: 13 (Deut. 24: 15)* about paying the fair wage to the worker. He spoke in *Lev. 25: 35-38 (Deut. 15: 7-11)* on how to sustain the poor in their needs and not charge interest of them. He spoke in *Ex. 22: 1-15 (Ex 23: 4-5; Deut 19: 14; Deut 22: 1)* on the laws about someone’s property and how it should be respected lest there be theft or injustice etc. In many other passages He made it clear that He is a God of justice and abundance, not a God who approves theft or misery (*Isa. 58: 6-11; Isa. 61: 8*). Therefore, He always compared our life to a land which should be sown in all areas in order to prosper.

For us, Christians, Jesus instructed us to nurture our relationship with God and with the brothers and to keep our material life under the control of His word, for example, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (*Lk. 20: 25 – NIV*). He talked a lot about your financial life in the parable of the dishonest steward (*Lk. 16: 1-13*), in the parable of the talents (*Matt. 25: 14-30*), in the offering of the poor widow (*Lk. 21: 1-4*), in the parable of sower (*Mk. 4: 1-20*), on greed (*Lk. 12: 13-21*), about paying the temple tax (*Matt. 17: 24-27*) and set us an example of ‘economy and management’ by multiplying five loaves and two fish to five thousand people (*Matt. 14: 13-21*). However, we do not do anything under the law, but under total surrender to His Spirit, who transforms our attitudes and behavior through the understanding of His truth, showing us that for love of us, His blood shed on the cross paid our spiritual debts; therefore, we no longer need to be concerned with our ‘spiritual balance’ itself, that is, if we are doing everything right or not to avoid the risk of a greater loss as our eternal salvation. *Our salvation in Him is already won*, but the guard of the resources He places in our hands should be under the dominion of the Holy Spirit so that we learn how to manage our lives according to His design of *fullness* for us and to set the example before men: to be ‘the light of the world and salt of the earth.’ All can be summarized in *love and gratitude to Him*. Hence, God’s grace does not exempt us of paying what we owe to others because it is we that, through our right attitudes with the people, show Jesus to those who do not yet know Him, and that we are able to assume the authority He has given us not only in the material world as in the spiritual: “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things” (*Matt. 25: 21*).

In *Rom. 13: 6-8* is written, “For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

We should sow abundantly in the three most important areas of our lives so we can reap fruit in all of them. Let us explain:

We are body, soul and spirit. Our body requires what the material world has to offer: money, food, material comforts, medicines etc. Our soul is not satisfied with this, because its food is different: love, tenderness, compassion, good words, comfort, friendship, good relationships, peace, family stability, etc. Our spirit also needs other type of food that is the revealed word of God, which makes us aware of whom we truly are and our purpose for being born, beyond what it will show us where we are going back when our carnal body dies. Thus, to avoid shortage in any of them, we need to make an investment in these three areas. Therefore, Jesus paid the price for our salvation by dying on the cross. However, there is something more than our salvation to watch over: our spiritual integrity here on earth in order to exercise the authority delegated to us by Jesus in the heavenly realms. The spiritual area cannot have gaps; otherwise, we will live in bonds of the enemy, who starts to destroy other areas of our lives.

Jesus set us the example, as a man, of what we have to do:

In the material area, we must protect our money from the destruction of the devil by giving tithes and offerings in God’s work; thus, the financial gap that may exist in our lives is closed. And here is where there’s our biggest fight against the works of the flesh, especially avarice or greed, which the bible considers idolatry (*Eph. 5: 5; Col. 3: 5*), because the god of money will want the glory for him. But Jesus says (*Matt. 6: 33*), “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In the end of the previous verse He says, “and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”, namely, the material things; however, He makes a point to say that they will come to our lives if we put His things as a priority.

Also, it is necessary to invest *in the emotional area* and here there is also a great human barrier preventing the flow of God’s love. We need to nourish friendship as who cultivates a plant that likes very much. If we cease to water it, it dries and dies. The bible is very clear on this matter: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow...So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (*Gal. 6: 7; 9-10*). Giving and sharing is a synonym of maturity. If we want friends, we must make friends.

Finally, it is necessary most of all to invest *in the spiritual area* and this does not mean simply to pray once in a while, make a vow or promise at the ‘dark hours’. It means to have an intimate, daily and deep relationship with the Lord as if one expects to have in a marriage, opening the heart without secrecy so that nothing is hidden; above all, to take care of our salvation. Therefore, Jesus bothered the Pharisees so much; He had such intimacy with God to the point of calling Him *Abba* (*ab-bah*’, in *Aramaic* = *Father*) and declare Himself as His Son. When He withdrew to lonely places and prayed, it was to keep up this healthy relationship with the Father.

Each area, being sown with the right seeds, will also yield the right fruit. Thus, we'll know the abundant life that the Lord planned for us. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches how to do this.

Tithes, offerings & firstfruits - OT



Levites

Often we give our tithe as well as our offering without knowing, however, the spiritual meaning of this act or its implications in our daily life. We obey God with the love and joy that the Holy Spirit places in our hearts for His work. Without love and joy no financial offer to Him has value.

Before talking about *the offerings, the firstfruits and the tithes*, let's talk a little about the *Levites*.

Levi was one of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob and whose tribe was separated among all his brothers to serve God as priests, especially the sons of Aaron, a great-grandson of Levi, who served in the sanctuary, in the Holy Place and in the Holy of Holies (here, where the Ark of the Covenant was, the symbol of God with His people, only Aaron and the firstborn of his descendants entered, for they were called high priests). In the Old Testament the duties of the Levites were many, not only to sing, as some think. In *1 Chr. 23; 24; 25; 26*, just before the temple was built by Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant no longer needed to be carried to any part of Israel, the bible tells us the functions of priests and Levites (determined by David): they preserved the vessels of the temple, they moved the furnishings, they baked the bread of the Presence, they kept supplies for sacrifice, they were musicians, administrators (guards of the treasures of the temple), assistants of the priests in rituals, official gatekeepers and judges (*1 Chr. 23: 4*).

Since the dawn of the Law, the Levites received the tithe, the firstfruits and the offerings for the service they rendered in the tabernacle or tent of meeting, because they had no means of income, neither cattle, nor inheritance to maintain them. By doing so, the people were blessed and would not lack food in the house of the Lord:

- *Num. 3: 41*: "But you shall accept the Levites for me—I am the Lord—as substitutes for all the firstborn among the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn among the livestock of the Israelites."

- *Num. 4: 1-3*: "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: Take a census of the Kohathites [*Kohath – son of Levi and grandfather of Aaron and Moses*], separate from the other Levites, by their clans and their ancestral houses, from thirty years old up to fifty years old, all who qualify to do work relating to the tent of meeting."

- *Num. 8: 24-26*: "This applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall begin to do duty in the service of the tent of meeting; and from the age of fifty years they shall retire from the duty of the service and serve no more. They may assist their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties, but they shall perform no service. Thus you shall do with the Levites in assigning their duties."

They, *the Levites gave the tithe of the tithes* of all the gifts they received, and had to be given to the high priest. In *Num. 18: 1-32* are written the rights and duties of priests and here the Lord speaks also about the tithes given to the Levite; 10% of crops and livestock of Israel was the tithe given to the Levites to assist them in their livelihood,

since it was the only tribe that had no possession in Canaan. They, in turn, offered the tithe of the tithes in sacrifice to God:

- *Num. 18: 6; 8; 14; 20-21*: “It is I who now take your brother Levites from among the Israelites; they are now yours as a gift, dedicated to the Lord, to perform the service of the tent of meeting... The Lord spoke to Aaron: I have given you charge of the offerings made to me, all the holy gifts of the Israelites; I have given them to you and your sons as a priestly portion due you in perpetuity... Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours... Then the Lord said to Aaron: You shall have no allotment in their land, nor shall you have any share among them; I am your share and your possession among the Israelites... To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for a possession in return for the service that they perform, the service in the tent of meeting.”

- *Num. 18: 26*: “You shall speak to the Levites, saying: When you receive from the Israelites the tithe that I have given you from them for your portion, you shall set apart an offering from it to the Lord, a tithe of the tithe.”

- *Num. 18: 28*: “Thus you also shall set apart an offering to the Lord from all the tithes that you receive from the Israelites; and from them you shall give the Lord’s offering to the priest Aaron.”

- *Num. 18: 29*: “Out of all the gifts to you, you shall set apart every offering due to the Lord; the best of all of them is the part to be consecrated.”

- *Num. 35: 2-3; 6-7*: “Command the Israelites to give, from the inheritance that they possess, towns for the Levites to live in; you shall also give to the Levites pasture lands surrounding the towns. The towns shall be theirs to live in, and their pasture lands shall be for their cattle, for their livestock, and for all their animals... The towns that you give to the Levites shall include the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit a slayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two towns. The towns that you give to the Levites shall total forty-eight, with their pasture lands.” They received cities to dwell in the midst of the other tribes.

- *Deut. 10: 8-9*: “At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; the Lord is his inheritance, as the Lord your God promised him.”

- *Deut. 12: 11-12*: “then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns (since they have no allotment or inheritance with you).”

- *Deut. 12: 19*: “Take care that you do not neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land.”

- *Deut. 14: 27*: “As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.”

- *Deut. 18: 1-8*: “The levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no allotment or inheritance within Israel. They may eat the sacrifices that are the Lord’s portion but they shall have no inheritance among the other members of the community; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them. This shall be the priests’ due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two jowls, and the stomach. The first fruits of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. For the Lord your God has chosen Levi out of all your tribes, to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time. If a Levite leaves any of your

towns, from wherever he has been residing in Israel, and comes to the place that the Lord will choose (and he may come whenever he wishes), then he may minister in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow-Levites who stand to minister there before the Lord. They shall have equal portions to eat, even though they have income from the sale of family possessions.”

- *Josh. 13: 33*: “But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, as he said to them.”

- *Josh. 14: 4b-5*: “... and no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only towns to live in, with their pasture lands for their flocks and herds. The Israelites did as the Lord commanded Moses; they allotted the land.”

- *Josh. 18: 7a*: “The Levites have no portion among you, for the priesthood of the Lord is their heritage.”

The Levites were also exempt from taxes:

- *Ezr. 7: 24*: “We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God”.

Other references about Levites: *Lev. 10: 8-11; Lev. 21: 1-24; Num. 1: 47-54; Num. 3: 6-12; Num. 4: 1-3; Deut. 12: 11-12; 19; Deut. 33: 8-11; Josh. 21: 1-45; 1 Chr. 6: 54-81; Ezr. 7: 24; Ezek. 44: 28-30.*

Tithes

- *Gen. 14: 18-20*: Abram (he was not Abraham yet) was the first to give his tithe to the priest Melchizedek, who is the figure of Jesus, because of the victory that God had given him by rescuing his nephew Lot: “And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!’ And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.” Abram gave the tithe as *gratitude to God* for the blessing he had received. Thus, God was pleased with Abram.

- *Gen. 28: 20-22*: “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you’ God’s house [= *Betel, in Hebrew*].” Here who gives a tithe to the Lord is Jacob, but as a vow, if he was blessed on his journey. Although the tithe should not be a vow, Jacob acknowledged that his grandfather had been blessed by this act and decided to stay under God’s protection. Therefore, tithing ensures blessing, the victory and divine protection (*Gen. 28: 18-22; Gen. 31: 13; Gen. 32: 1-2; Gen. 35: 5-7; 11-15*).

- *Lev. 27: 30-33* mentions that the tithe of the harvest could be redeemed, “All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the Lord’s; they are holy to the Lord. If persons wish to redeem any of their tithes, they must add one-fifth to them. All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd’s staff, shall be holy to the Lord. Let no one inquire whether it is good or bad, or make substitution for it; if one makes substitution for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy and cannot be redeemed.” Considering the tithe a type of vow (because the person is committed with it), the book of Leviticus deals with the tithe

along with other vows. It was usually given in the form of crops or livestock. The animals were sacrificed and could not be redeemed. But the person could buy back the tithes of the harvest by its cash value plus 20%, and the same procedure was possible with other vows and oaths. Maybe it has been created to meet any unexpected shortage.

The Jews brought all their tithes to Jerusalem, in the form of a ritual meal in which the Levite also took part (Deut. 12: 5-7; 11-14; 17-19; Deut 14: 22-27; Deut 18: 1-5; Deut. 26: 1-11 – these verses concern the ‘first tithe’). The ‘first tithe’ was given annually to the Levites for their livelihood and had nothing to do with the ‘second tithe.’

- *Deut. 12: 7:* “And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your households together, rejoicing in all the undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed.”

- *Deut. 12: 12:* “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns (since they have no allotment or inheritance with you).”

- *Deut. 12: 17-18:* “Nor may you eat within your towns the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, the firstlings of your herds and your flocks, any of your votive gifts that you vow, your freewill offerings, or your donations; these you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place that the Lord your God will choose, you together with your son and your daughter, your male and female slaves, and the Levites resident in your towns, rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God in all your undertakings.”

- *Deut. 14: 22-29 focusing on vs. 26-27:* “spend the money for whatever you wish—oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together. As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.” Tithe is 10% of our income and should be given in the hand of the priest. By placing in his hands what we’re taking, we must keep in our hearts that what we are giving is for everything our soul desires, that is, along with the tithe, our request goes up to the Lord’s altar and He will grant it. Don’t understand this as a bargain with God, as blackmail.

- *Deut. 26: 12-15:* “Then you shall say before the Lord your God: ‘I have removed *the sacred portion* from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of your commandments.’” The tithe sanctifies our money. The 10% that we give sanctify the other 90% and make them yield and multiply. God was speaking here of the ‘second tithe.’

- *Deut. 14: 28-29 (the ‘second tithe’ as a form of sustenance for the orphan, the alien and the widow):* “Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.” The ‘second tithe’ is the tithe taken in the third year (*Deut. 14: 28-29; Deut. 26: 12-15*) of the seven year cycle, the Sabbath Year, which was also shared with the Levite, the orphan, the widow and the foreigner within the cities of the Israelites.

The tithe was of grain, wine, and oil, but if the distance to Jerusalem was too great to spoil the produce, the monetary value of the tithe was to be brought to that place and used to buy whatever the owner desired to eat during the feasts that were held three

times a year in the city of David. However, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow were not to be forgotten in their cities (*Deut. 14: 27-29; Deut. 26: 12*).

• *Mal. 3: 6-12 is the basic text on the tithe*: “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ [NIV: How are we to return?] Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings (cf. Neh. 13: 10-12)! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test [NIV: test me in this], says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing [NIV: And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not have room enough for it]. I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the LORD Almighty; KJV; ASV: “The devourer”]. Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts [NIV: Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land, says the LORD Almighty]”.

a) Not to give the tithe is theft. Even though we live under the dispensation of grace of the NT, we are still under the authority of the word of God and it never dies (*Matt. 5: 19; Rev. 14: 12*). The value of 10% He asks of us is a means created by Him to bless us in our finances, and for us to show that He is first in our life, and what we have, we received from Him. It is He who gives us the ability to produce wealth (*Deut. 8: 18*). James wrote in his epistle, “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.” (*Jam. 4: 17*). If you know that God created this law to do good to yourself as a way to bless you in your finances, and that since the dawn of the law blessing and cursing are linked to obedience and disobedience, why put so many obstacles the word of God? Jesus forgives our sins, His blood covers us, but this does not mean that we should continue to sin (*Rom. 6: 1-4; 14*), for to withhold the money that He Himself dedicated to His Work is robbery and robbery generates a consequence on earth, in our natural life, which the bible gives the name of curse, because it creates a gap, a breach, where there is legality for robbery as well. If you do not believe this and still think that just because Jesus delivered us from the curse of the law, bringing eternal life to us by grace and not by works, you are exempt from this commitment to the Lord, try to do both: stay a while without giving your tithe and see what happens; then give the tithe and see what happens. It is only a matter of experience with the Lord and His rules that continue in effect in the spiritual world and in our material life. I’m not telling you to leave the church with the heavy weight of a curse on your shoulders; what I am saying is that it is necessary to understand that our actions bring positive or negative consequences. Understand that this practice is an experience that brings you to the true knowledge of who He is, and why He created laws to protect us from the ravage of the enemy. Jesus said, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (*Lk. 20: 25*). And He was speaking to a people who knew what ‘the things of God’ meant, that is, the tithes and the offerings in the temple, and to pay taxes to Caesar. In the same way, when rebuking the Pharisees, He said (*Matt. 23: 23*), “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others,” and that means that He was

endorsing the most important precepts of the Law: justice, mercy and faith, but without omitting the practice of tithing.

Even abolishing the Levitical Mosaic priesthood, His law remained for the priesthood of the new covenant that He created (*1 Tim. 5: 17-18; 1 Cor. 9: 13-14*). When we love the Lord and His work on earth, all we do is for love, not by obligation subject to punishment or penalty. And that takes away the weight of the word, as it was interpreted in the OT. God's money is different from the money of the world. *Tithing must be understood as an ordinance of God for our good and not as an arbitrary imposition by Him subject to the death penalty. It is not an obligation to be grudgingly fulfilled. It is a protection of God in our lives*, in all areas, not just in finances, against the ravage of great spiritual forces.

The picture described in Malachi about tithes and offerings was a typical case where the Law of Moses regarding the tithe as support for the Levites was not being fulfilled, because the priests had no secular work. But there, both the people did not give the tithe to support the priests, and the priests themselves did not give the tithe of the tithes to God, as stipulated in the Law, because there was in them a nature of theft and prostitution. Therefore, the Lord rebuked them and threatened them.

At the beginning of the Church, the servants of the Lord had no secular work and therefore lived on the offerings of the faithful to support the Early church. Over the centuries, this was corrupted and the money given in the Work of God became disgusting because the greed of religious leaders reached the point of stealing from people to satisfy their own lusts, as it was in the Middle Ages with indulgences. Nowadays, with the capitalist and commercial spirit, everything has been transformed into business and commerce, corrupting the simplicity of the word of God. Although most pastors today have secular work, the word of God has not changed: His faithful servants, who lead His flock in the word of truth and have no work in the world, setting themselves apart for the Work, need to be maintained and also have a commitment to give part of what they receive to administer the ministry they lead. But unfortunately, everything is crooked today because love has cooled from hearts and the human mind no longer has purity of intentions.

Without a spiritual understanding of what tithing means and without a personal experience with God in that area, it is better not to give. Without detachment from material things, love for the word of God is no longer felt, and then the enemy devastates. Collecting a tithe under threat, without spiritual understanding and without surrender, brings oppression.

So, for you, my brother, my sister, who still don't understand this, I just give you *a piece of advice*: redo and deepen your covenant with the Lord, acquire the practice of fasting and seek understanding on this topic directly in Him. Ask the Lord for revelation. I'm sure He will give it to you.

b) Bringing the tithes first into the House of the Lord provides sustenance to the Levite priests, the law established by God for their support (*cf. 1 Tim. 5: 17-18; 1 Cor. 9: 13-14*).

c) Giving the tithe *rebukes the Devourer in all areas of our lives*, not only in finance.

When He speaks of the locusts (*Jl 1: 4; Jl 2: 25; Am. 7: 1-3; 1 Kin. 8: 37*) that devoured the crops He means that it was as a form of punishment from the Lord upon a disobedient people. The vines also suffered from drought, frosts or pests. Although in the OT these natural catastrophes acted as a way for God to correct them, today we cannot ignore the symbolism of all this, especially in the case of tithes. When the Lord speaks of the 'locusts' or 'pests' or 'the devourer' (KJV and ASV), it is not just locusts

that He speaks. They are symbol of the ‘Devourer’ (in other translations, ‘Destroyer’). It is about the action of demons on people’s financial lives, where they find an open gap to destroy that area, for the fact that Jesus came and abolished the rituals of the Old Covenant does not mean that the word of God was abolished (*Mt 5: 17-20*), nor that His laws were modified. God has always wanted to participate in the lives of his people in full, and the financial area is one of them. Tithe remains valid, even more today, when Rulers and Authorities (or Principalities and Powers, demons of high hierarchy) are eager to steal the truth of God and the peace of His children, giving the world the honor by prosperity. This way, the tithe protects our heritage.

d) God rewards those who are faithful to Him, showing the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not serve Him. God spares them from the curses and confirms His fatherhood over them (*Mal. 3: 17-18*: “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him”).

e) The Lord says to put Him to the test [NIV: ‘test me in this’], giving Him the tithes. For some, it may sound like a challenge from God so that the man believes in Him, especially in an area that is so palpable. However, the verb (‘to test’) may have the meaning of to search, to examine, to experience, to taste, as if savoring a meal that one never ate, to see if it’s good or not, whether we like it or not; it can also have the meaning of to gain experience, knowledge and skill in any area. With this, the Lord tells us that by giving Him our tithe, we can achieve a higher level of knowledge of Him, leading us to gain experience in this area of our lives, the same way as we experience Him in others. Giving Him our tithe, we begin to be aware of what He can do for who is faithful to Him.

The meaning of all this for us today

Today, the harvest symbolizes your job, your profession, from which you obtain the fruits of your labor for your survival.

For us Christians today, the Levite priest, figuratively, is anyone who holds a leadership role as a priest, for example, the pastor of the church and those who assist him in instructing the people, and who were set apart for this office and often do not have secular work. They were set apart by God only for the ministry. The Bible says that the Levite priest, that is, the pastor, receives the tithe of the people and gives his tithe to God, that is, the tithe of the tithes he receives, which is used in the work of the House of God.

Therefore, the tithe must be given in the hands of whom the Lord chose as priest, where you feed, spiritually speaking. People who are experiencing financial difficulties and are not congregating, therefore, do not have a House of God where to give their tithes may be putting what belongs to the Lord in a land other than the kingdom of God, for example, giving the tithe to a beggar on the street or handing it over to some other secular institution. But what we give there is charity, a financial donation, not the tithe that by divine law belongs to the Lord to bless us. Jesus always told us to sow into good soil; therefore, by sowing in the kingdom of God with our tithes and our offerings, we will be sowing in a land that is holy and will bear fruit. When giving our money to the world, which is not holy ground, there will be theft, because it is barren land. Money is not being sanctified, consecrated.

- So, if you are a member or worker and attend a church, that is where you should give your tithe.

- But if you have already been called by God and received from Him a ministry to lead and initiate and are already fulfilling it, without ties to another church, then invest in the land that God Himself gave you because it is from there that you will reap the fruits of what you are planting. Pray, consecrate your tithe to Him and use it for the Work that He has placed before you. There is no point in sowing in one land and wanting to reap in another.

In *2 Chr. 31: 5-6; 12; Neh. 10: 37-38; Neh. 12: 44; Neh. 13: 5; 12* we can see the people bringing the tithe to the Lord, thus obeying His law.

Finally, I want to put a clarification on something that has raised doubts in some hearts: if we must give a tithe of *a loan*. If we do not have money to pay our bill, for example, and we borrow it from someone, *we have no obligation to tithe*, but the person who received this profit. What we have to do is to pay the other person from whom we did the loan. Another question about tithes: The value of the tithe to be given is *taken from the gross value of the salary, not the net value*.

Firstfruits

Difference between tithe, offering and firstfruits

Tithe is 10% of our salary given into the hands of God's representative on earth for His work, because everything belongs to God and not to us.

- *Deut. 8: 18*: "But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today."

- *Job 41: 11*: "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me."

- *Rom. 11: 35*: "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?"

- *Ecc. 5: 19*: "Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God."

If He has given us work, money, health, strength (power) and life, these belong to Him and are not ours. And if He is the owner, He can dispose of them as He pleases. But God does not need our money, but our hearts, and these 10% are a means of blessing us, so that we are not robbed in any area of our lives. You can read the rest in the text.

An offering is a voluntary amount that the Lord places in our hearts to bless His work. It is given spontaneously when we feel moved to help God's work in some way, and this depends on the spiritual position in which He has placed you and also according to your possessions and gifts. While tithing preserves your assets, offerings multiply them (*2 Cor. 9: 10-11*).

Firstfruits were the first products of a harvest (*Ex. 23: 16; 19a; Deut. 26: 1-4*) when the Israelites entered the Promised Land, a way of expressing their trust in God's provision and their gratitude for the blessings they had received, and this guaranteed God's blessing on their harvest. It was a way of honoring God, recognizing Him as the provider and Lord of all. Today, firstfruits can be understood as a way of dedicating to

God the first and best of everything one has, whether it be money, material goods, time, talents or resources.

It is important to notice that before the act of Abram of giving his tithe to Melchizedek there was only the *offering of firstfruits*, as Abel did (*Gen. 4: 2-7*). Abel gave God his firstfruits; that's his offering was accepted and Cain's was not (among other reasons). The firstfruits were not 10% of the crop or livestock, but it was what first bore fruit or was begotten, as an offering of gratitude to the Lord. The Lord was pleased with Abel and blessed him. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they should offer to God the firstfruits of all the fruits of the earth, which would probably be ripe by the beginning of the year, right after the harvest (the Pentecost or Feast of Weeks or Feast of the firstfruits, 50 days after Passover, which took place on the 14th day of Nisan). In offering the first harvest to the Lord, the people expressed their confidence in divine provision and their gratitude for the blessings. In other words, the firstfruits ensured God's blessing on their harvest. The priest received the basket with the firstfruits of the cereal and presented it to the Lord (*Deut. 26: 4*) in a ceremonial way (as an elevation offering, or wave offering, besides presenting the burnt offering and the grain offering) to show that the person who offered was fulfilling the commandments of the law of God. Then, a communal meal was held where the person and the Levites participated (*Deut. 26: 11*). The firstfruits and the first tithe were for the maintenance of the Levites and their families. The 2nd tithe was also given to orphans and widows, in addition to the Levites. The firstfruits of any blessing that we receive are a way of thanking the Lord for having given it and to have His protection over what is generated from there. *Tithe is 10%; therefore it's different from the firstfruits.*

Still about *firstfruits* it is written:

- *Ex. 23: 16; 19a*: "You shall observe the festival of harvest (Pentecost or Feast of Weeks), of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering (Feast of Tabernacles) at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor... The choicest of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God." In the Law of Moses, the people were instructed to bring to the Lord the offering of firstfruits, that is, what first yielded fruit of the harvest, *to ensure God's blessing* for the whole harvest and as *a gesture of gratitude* for having blessed the Earth.

- *Ex. 34: 22; 26a*: "You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year... The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God." Again, He speaks of the firstfruits in the three appointed feasts for the Jewish people: the Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread), Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), which marks the end of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Tabernacles (feast of the harvest at end of the year), which finishes the entire harvest. The Feast of the firstfruits (*Lev. 23: 9-14*) was celebrated on the 16th of Aviv or Nisan, the first month, which corresponds to March-April of our calendar and one should present a bundle from the first crop of barley as an elevation offering (or wave offering), besides presenting the burnt offering and the grain offering. See also *Lev. 23: 10; Deut. 26: 1-11*.

- *Deut. 26: 1-4*: "When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us'. When the

priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God.”

- *2 Chr. 31: 5*: “As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.”

Today we can consider the firstfruits as a *gesture of gratitude to God* for having blessed us in our work, and for Him to continue to bless what He himself has given us, that is, to have His protection over what is generated from that, especially when we receive something that we did not expect or that we have been waiting for a long time and that is very important for us to be able to start over. It is a way of honoring God, recognizing Him as the provider and the Lord of everything. We can give as an offering of firstfruits to the Lord a percentage or the entirety of our first salary, for example, from our first job; also when the Lord blesses us with a job after we have spent some time without financial support; when God places in our hands a financial restitution for something that we had already considered as lost; when we receive an extra bonus for our work or even when the Holy Spirit moves us to do so, in any other situation that for us is a miracle or symbolizes a God’s blessing upon us, so that “that door” that He opened does not close again, but remains under His protection.

However, the firstfruits may not refer to money, but to everything that bears fruit first, that which is most important, such as, for example, the firstborn who were consecrated to the Lord. Jacob said in *Gen. 49: 3*: “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigor, excelling in rank and excelling in power.” It was the best that a person could give birth to, as happened with Hannah, who was barren and consecrated Samuel to God to honor Him for this miracle. Or what happened to someone who, even at an advanced age or being barren, was blessed with being a father, such as Zechariah and Elizabeth (parents of John the Baptist), Abraham and Sarah, Manoah and his wife (parents of Samson). John the Baptist and Samson received this order of separation from God Himself, but Hannah did it voluntarily. In other words, it is the best we have to give to God, even our good morning in the morning or the time we set aside to pray with Him. He has priority and will always come first in our lives, participating in everything. The firstfruits can be understood as a way of dedicating to God the first and best of everything we have, whether it be material goods, time, talents or resources.

In the New Testament, Jesus is called “firstfruits” by Paul in *1 Cor. 15: 20* (“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.”), indicating that He is the first of those resurrected, the first of all those saved and the first to begin a new era.

Offerings

Offering symbolizes seed. Through tithe we protect our heritage; through offering we multiply it.

- *Ex. 34: 20b (Ex. 23: 15; Ex. 22: 29; Deut. 16: 16)*: “No one shall appear before me empty-handed.” When we enter the House of God, we must be aware that we are there not only to receive from Him, but to give Him something: our love, our gratitude, our praise, our willingness to serve Him and our financial offerings.

- *Lev. 3: 14-16; Lev. 4: 8-9; Lev. 7: 3-5; Lev. 9: 10*: The fat, the kidneys and the lobe of the liver were not burned along with the rest of the animal, but on the altar. Fat

symbolizes the tastiest part of the meat, what rises like a sweet aroma to God. For Jews, the kidneys were the center of the emotions and consciousness and this means that *our offering should be what is most pleasant to the Lord* and all our soul must be involved in this process, i.e., our emotions must also be placed on His altar, mainly the joy of being offering. So, our offering rises as sweet incense to Him.

- *Lev. 22: 17-33*: The offering must be *flawless (without blemish)*. Verse 19 says, “to be acceptable in your behalf it shall be a male without blemish, of the cattle or the sheep or the goats.” Defective animals were not accepted; therefore, our offering before the Lord should be with the best we have, with the firstfruits, not with what’s left; *the offering should be given willingly and with reverence; liberally and with integrity of heart.*

- *Deut. 16: 16 b-17*: “They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you”. Each person offers to God as he is able, according to his capacity.

- *Deut. 27: 5-7* (After the Israelites have crossed the River Jordan): “And you shall build an altar there to the Lord your God, an altar of stones on which you have not used an iron tool. You must build the altar of the Lord your God of unwrought stones. Then offer up burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God, make sacrifices of well-being, and eat them there, rejoicing before the Lord your God.” ‘Building an altar where an instrument of iron’ meant not to rely on any pagan nation to help them in the worship of God, since the pagan altars were forged with this metal; this was not known to Israel. *Our offering should be given with joy and simplicity, without depending on the values of the world to participate in our worship (its fame, its ostentation, its demanding parameters).*



• *2 Sam. 6: 12-15*: “was told King David, ‘The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.’ So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.” David brings the Ark to Jerusalem with praises. *The offering with joy brings God’s presence (the Ark) to our lives.*

• *1 Chr. 21: 23-24*: “Then Ornan said to David, ‘Take it; and let my lord the king do what seems good to him; see, I present the oxen for burnt offerings, and the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for a grain offering. I give it all’. But King David said to Ornan, ‘No; I will buy them for the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing.’” Ornan offered everything, but David refused and said he would not offer a burnt offering to the Lord that did not cost him anything. This means *not to accept help of the enemy to our worship, because then he will charge his share in the blessings we receive.*

• *1 Chr. 29: 1-9*: “King David said to the whole assembly, ‘My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced, and the work is great; for the temple will not be for mortals but for the Lord God. So I have provided for the house of my God, *so far as I was able [NIV: with all my resources]*, the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, and the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, and wood for the things of wood, besides great quantities of onyx and stones for setting, antimony, colored stones, all sorts of precious stones, and marble in abundance. Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided for the holy house, I have a treasure of my own of gold and silver, and *because of my devotion to the house of my God* I give it to the house of my God: three thousand talents of gold [*about 110 tons*], of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents [*about 260 tons*] of refined silver, for overlaying the walls of the house, and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will *offer willingly*, consecrating themselves today to the Lord?’ Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their *freewill offerings*, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king’s work. They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents [*about 190 tons*] and ten thousand darics [*about 185 pounds or 84 kilograms*] of gold, ten thousand talents of silver [*about 375 tons*], eighteen thousand talents of bronze [*about 675 tons*], and one hundred thousand talents of iron [*about 3,750 tons*]. Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced because *these had given willingly*, for with single mind they had offered freely to the Lord; King David also rejoiced greatly.” David set the example of how we should give the offerings: *to give willingly and with liberality, for the love of the Lord.*

• *Ecc. 11: 1-6*: “Send out your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back. Divide your means seven ways, or even eight, for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth. When clouds are full, they empty rain on the earth; whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie. Whoever observes the wind will not sow; and whoever regards the clouds will not reap. Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.” *The offering is a seed*, like

bread that is cast to the waters to be found later. Besides being sowed, it should be shared. The Lord tells us that if we just look at the wind, like a farmer who is only looking at the sky waiting for favorable weather, we'll never sow anything, and who only looks at the clouds will never reap. The wind is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, as well as our requests. Clouds mean rain, blessing, promise and the glory of God. This means that if we stay just praying and waiting for the action of the Spirit until we have His signs or if we just are looking at His promise without acting in a practical manner, we will sow nothing nor reap. The NT summarizes this thought, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (*Jam. 2: 17*).

- *Ezek. 44: 28-30*: "This shall be their inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no holding in Israel; I am their holding. They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. The first of all the first fruits of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests; you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, in order that a blessing may rest on your house." *The offering with the best fruit brings God's blessing upon our house.*

- *Hag. 1: 6-11*: "You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord. You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labors." *Without concerning about the House of God there is no blessing or prosperity.*

- *Mal. 1: 6-14*: "A son honors his father and servants, their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, 'How have we despised your name?' By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, 'How have we polluted it?' By thinking that the Lord's Table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. And now implore the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. The fault is yours. Will he show favor to any of you? Says the Lord of hosts. Oh, that someone among you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the Lord's Table is polluted, and the food for it may be despised. 'What a weariness this is', you say, and you sniff at me, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? Says the Lord. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in the flock and vows to give it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations." *God does not accept 'damaged offering', that is, is to*

bring our offerings unwillingly, with contempt or some other feeling in the heart than humility, reverence and love.

Tithes and offerings - NT

4

While tithe corresponds to the value of 10% of our income, the offering is a voluntary value that the Lord places in our hearts to bless His work. The view of NT is basically based on two premises: love and sowing. The offering multiplies our heritage, since the tithe protects it.

Paul expressed the right of maintenance of a servant of the Lord for doing the work that was commanded him (*1 Tim. 5: 17; 18b; 1 Cor. 9: 14; 18b*). The evangelists use the phrases: “for the worker deserves his wages” (*Lk. 10: 7*) and “for laborers deserve their food” (*Matt. 10: 10*), where the word ‘food’ is used as in *Lk. 11: 3* and *Matt. 6: 11* in the Lord’s Prayer (“Give us today our daily bread”), that is, all we really need for our earthly existence. Gospel ministers are entitled to their maintenance and, consequently, a dignified life, especially when they are dedicated to the work of God full time.

Paul uses the word ‘offering’ in relation to his sustenance only once in *Rom. 15: 16*: “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” This teaches us that our offering given with love in the work of God is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, consequently our money is sanctified.

Other words are used by Paul in his epistles to refer to the maintenance of the workers of the Early Church, for example, ‘service’ (NIV; in KJV, ministering or administration). He used the word ‘service’ three times (*2 Cor. 8: 4; 2 Cor. 9: 1; 2 Cor. 9: 12*; in Greek: diakonia, Strong #g1248) to refer to the financial assistance given by the Greeks of Macedonia, Achaia, Galatia and Philippi to the children of God of the Church in Jerusalem and the poor brethren of Judea. The Greek word has the meaning of ‘attendance, aid, service, ministering, ministration, office, relief’. And he used the word ‘contribution’ or ‘collection’ in *Rom 15: 26* (contribution); *1 Cor. 16: 1* (collection); *1 Cor. 16: 2* (collection; KJV: gatherings), where in Greek the words are: koinonia (*Rom. 15: 26*, Strong #g2842) and logia (*1 Cor. 16: 1; 2* – Strong #g3048); the two words have practically the same meaning: communion, distribution, collection, gathering, fellowship.

So our offering in the God’s work is a form of service, that is, when we offer, we are serving the Lord through His servants who carry out their ministry, and contributing to their growth. It is also a way of being in communion with God and with His children, our brothers in Christ.

In *Phil. 4: 17-19*, the apostle Paul thanked the Philippians for their financial aid in their time of tribulation and said that this offering (*Phil. 4: 17* – ‘gift’; in Greek ‘doma’, Strong #g1390, which means: gift, present) not only served to supply him, but was to God like a fragrant offering, an acceptable and pleasing sacrifice; the Lord would also supply them in their needs. This teaches us that our offering in the work of God increases our credit in heaven, for what we give with love for the sustenance of the Lord’s servant reverts to our own benefit; we are saving our money in safe place, our treasure in heaven.

- *2 Cor. 8: 1-15*: “We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of

generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints – and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something—now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’” [*Exodus 16: 18 – the original text in Hebrew is written, ‘for each reaped what he could eat.’*].

In short: the believers in Macedonia were *happy to offer* and insisted to do it because their heart was prosperous and abundant. A thriving heart does not need to be necessarily rich, but is giver and sower, and will surely reap the fruit, for it received the anointing of multiplication. Even if they were experiencing financial trials, by the grace of God they overcame themselves and gave willingly because they discovered that participating in this ministry was good. By the will of God, they first gave themselves to Him and then to the brothers, that is, for their love of Him they decided to give the saints because they found out Jesus in each of their brothers. Paul wanted the Corinthians imitated this example of the believers in Macedonia, both in the faith and in the true knowledge of God’s word, as well as in the prosperity of their heart. He reminds us that Jesus, being rich in everything, became poor for our sake; He stripped Himself of His glory and majesty so that we might become rich in everything, even in material life.

Another important word we see in the NT to symbolize offering is seed.

- *2 Cor. 9: 6-7; 10:* “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver... He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.” Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. The bible also says to contribute according to what the heart is willing to give, not by obligation. The Lord Himself puts the seeds in our hands so we can sow and He can multiply them. *We must not give reluctantly or under compulsion, but with joy, because it moves the heart of God. Joy is a fertilizer for the seed.*

- *2 Cor. 9: 12-14:* “for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they

long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.” The financial assistance given to the converted Jews by the Gentiles of Achaia and Macedonia had a great spiritual impact, for the name of the Lord was glorified by those who received it because of the obedience of the Greeks to the gospel of Christ and the liberality with which they contributed; they received the affectionate prayer of the Jerusalem church. *The generous and free offering of our hands brings the blessing of the Lord, the friendship of the brothers and makes us to be recognized as His children.*

• *Gal. 6: 7-10*: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” *What a man sows, that he will also reap, and this also applies to financial life, for it is a spiritual law.*

Jesus taught the parable of the growing seed:

• *Mk. 4: 26-32*: “He also said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come’. He also said, With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” The offering is a seed planted in the kingdom of God (both financial offering and the Word of God); the growth occurs by divine power, not by human effort. *When we offer liberally, we can be sure that there will be growth and multiplication of the seed we plant.*

Here we have a metaphorical text about seeds:

• *Lk. 6: 37-38*: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back”. Learning: *1) To receive we must give first. 2) Rash judgment is forbidden: the same measure is used to us. 3)* Before this text, Jesus was talking about the sentimental and affective life, about revenge and love of neighbor. Here, too, He does not only speak of the sentimental area, but the three most important areas of our lives, for the prosperity covers not only the wealth, as the global donation of ourselves and the multiplication of blessings in all of them. It is interesting that the word above (*Lk. 6: 37-38*) teaches us the *true sowing* in material, emotional and spiritual area. So: who has the authority to judge is God; it’s no use to condemn anyone that God judged innocent, so in this area (spiritual), instead of judging, *the seed is to pray*. In the emotional area, *the seeds are: emotional support, the word of encouragement and forgiveness*. Withholding forgiveness kills the seed. In the financial area, the Lord advises us *to give the best we have, because who will do the calculations is He Himself and His weights will be fair. For Jesus there is only one weight and one measure: love.*

Other verses of the NT are useful for us to understand the spiritual value of our offering:

• *Matt. 5: 23-24*: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your

gift”. *We must be reconciled before bringing the offering. Enmity makes it to be refused by the Lord.*

- *Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4*: “He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” *It doesn't matter the value of the offering, but to offer our best to the Lord, even everything we have; to surrender to Him completely.* She gave all that she had, which was of more value to Jesus than the offerings of the rich. She heard the voice of God in her heart, before any carnal and incredulous voice.

- *Lk. 12: 22-34; Matt. 6: 25-34* (Do not worry): “He said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well’. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” *Putting the kingdom of God in the first place makes that He may add us other things.* When we have faith in God, we live one day at a time with the innocence of the creatures of nature, because we know that tomorrow He will provide. The Father knows that we need material things.

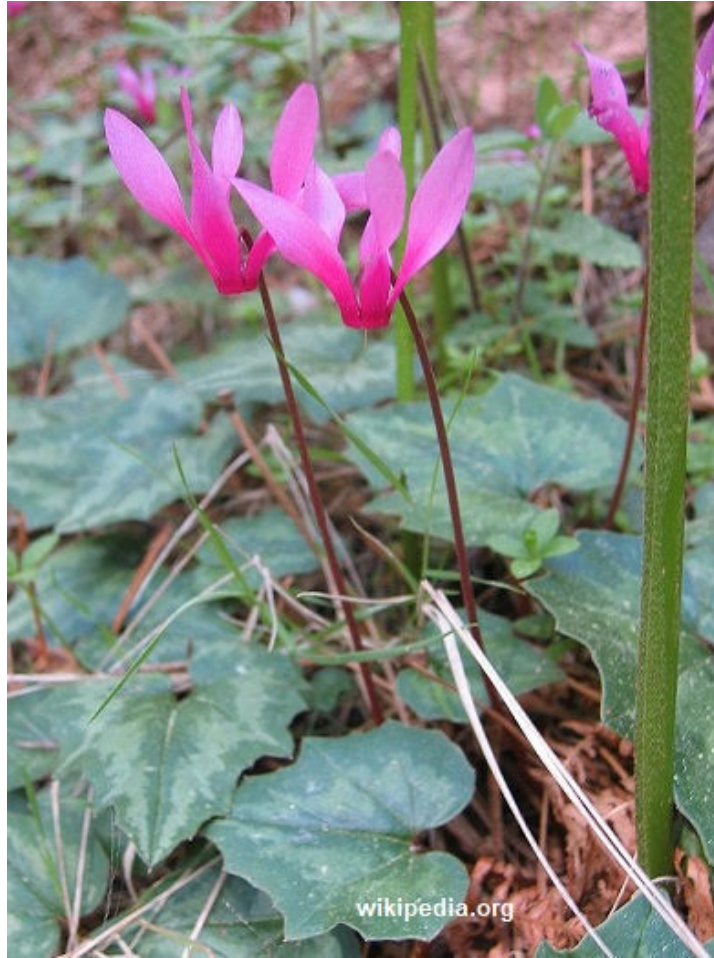
I would like to make a comment here:

I have always been drawn to the verse in *Lk. 12: 27*: “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

The lilies Jesus are referring are probably wild anemones (*Anemone coronaria*), red and purple in color, abundant in the fields of Galilee, or else, the *Cyclamen repandum*. Red and purple are the colors of kings’ robes. Solomon, in all his glory, dressed in his royal robes, did not have the splendid appearance of those humble little flowers, who neither toil nor spin, but have a natural beauty that rivals a king in all his glory. If God lavishes so much beauty on flowers that bloom today and are burned tomorrow, won’t He care about the needs of His children? We prove that we have little faith when we worry, grieve and strive in a ceaseless struggle to obtain more and more material goods. We waste our lives doing what God would have done for us if we had given more of our time and talents to Him.



Anemone coronaria



Cyclamen repandum

• *Matt. 6: 24*: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”. In other translations the word *wealth* is replaced by *money* or *mammon*, its meaning in Greek, what was understood as *the ‘god of wealth.’* Therefore, money must be under the control of the Spirit in our lives, so that *it is our servant, not our master*. Let us explain: in Hebrew, the word for *money* is *Keseeph* (= *silver*). In Greek it is *mammon*. Wealth or money, however, because it is something that has received so much honor and priority by men, it was put in place of a god; therefore, it seems to have an identity, even competing with the true God for the possession of a soul, that is, money acquired life. This is why Jesus said we could not serve God and mammon (wealth). He did not put in this verse any other god that men tend to worship: pleasure, power, fame and knowledge; He did not talk about diseases, nor on other works of the flesh besides greed, nor about other spiritual entities. We can think, then, that the god who most competes with the real God is money. With him all the other gods are ‘bought’, except Jesus. In addition, the scales usually have two plates. Money weighs toward the material side, preventing the spiritual side from being manifested in a person. He becomes blind to the truths of Jesus, taking the risk of losing his salvation (*Lk. 12: 13-21*). God and Mammon are mutually exclusive, they are completely opposite to each other.

Here, I also want to put a note about *tithes in the New Testament*. Jesus came to abolish the Mosaic rituals of the Old Covenant (*Heb. 8: 13*), making the propitiation for

our sins once for all (*Heb. 7: 27; Heb 9: 12; 26*); thus bringing the full understanding that the Old Covenant was a 'shadow' (*Col. 2: 17; Heb. 8: 5; Heb. 10: 1*) of His ministry and the New Covenant that the Father made with men. Christ took His place as high priest and as the tabernacle of God among men (*Ezek. 37: 27; Heb. 8: 1-3; 6*), at the same time He gave Himself as an offering for the final atonement of sins (*Eph. 5: 2; Heb. 10: 10; 14*). This way, He transformed the old priesthood by bringing in the new, where the function of the ancient Levites and priests began to be occupied by His apostles and disciples, to whom He appointed shepherds of His flock. So they remained with God's right to the Levites to be supported by the tithes and offerings of His people (*Num. 18: 8; 14; 23-24; Deut. 18: 1-8*), for they were wholly separated to the ministry of the word (Paul, Peter and the other apostles of the Lord – *Acts 6: 4*).

Therefore, Paul talks about his maintenance as minister of Christ in some verses: *1 Cor. 9: 1-14; 18; 1 Tim. 5: 17; 18b; 1 The. 2: 7; Rom. 15: 27; Phil. 4: 15-19*.

In short, the tithe is given in the hands of the priest appointed by God (as the pastor of the church, for example) for his maintenance (as he was divinely ordained), especially if he has no secular employment and has separated himself exclusively to the work of God; and he, in turn, gives to the Lord the tithes of tithes for the work that is necessary in the ministry, like the Levites did in the OT (*Num. 18: 24-31*).

The practice of charity

The practice of charity (giving alms) is something different from the offering that is given in the hand of a representative of God on earth.

One of Jesus' teachings was the practice of financial aid (charity) for the less privileged, for He Himself said that when we do good to one of His little ones, we do it to Him.

- *Jam. 2: 14-17*: faith without works is dead. James spoke of the practice of charity toward the poorest believers; therefore, they should put their faith in Jesus into action, giving without expecting anything in return, in the certainty that the reward came from the Lord.

- *Gal. 6: 9-10*: to do good to everyone, but especially those of the family of faith, for we will reap the fruit of what we have given with love.

- *1 Jn. 3: 17-18*: not to close the heart to the brother in his need but to supply him according to our possessions, so that God's love may remain in us. This attitude also means to put our faith into action and know that our offering makes us like God and perfects His love in us.

Many followers of Jesus exercised this practice of aid to the less privileged: Dorcas, the disciple (*Acts 9:36*), and the centurion Cornelius (*Acts 10: 2; 4; 31*), and the bible says that Cornelius' alms went up to God as a memorial offering, that is, the will and practice of serving those who are God's people (*Acts 10: 2*), are counted as a memorial before the Lord for the benefit of those who offer. By his godly attitude, Cornelius received the great gift of salvation (eternal life) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a force to fulfill God's call to him. The Greek word for alms (*Matt. 6: 2; 3; 4; Lk. 11:41*) is eleemosune (Strong #g1654), which means compassion for the poor, beneficence, alms, benefit.

Paul adopted the practice of financial aid to the church in Jerusalem by teaching his co-workers and disciples to do the same. This was regarded by him as a sign of unity between the Jew converts and the Gentile part of Christ's church: *Rom. 15: 25-27; 1 Cor. 16: 1-4; 2 Cor. 9: 1-15; Gal. 2: 10*.

Repeating what I wrote about tithing, the tithe must be given in the hands of whom the Lord chose as priest, where you feed, spiritually speaking. People who are experiencing financial difficulties and are not congregating, therefore, do not have a House of God where to give their tithes may be putting what belongs to the Lord in a land other than the kingdom of God, for example, giving the tithe to a beggar on the street or handing it over to some other secular institution. But what we give there is charity, a financial donation, not the tithe that by divine law belongs to the Lord to bless us. Jesus always told us to sow into good soil; therefore, by sowing in the kingdom of God with our tithes and our offerings, we will be sowing in a land that is holy and will bear fruit. When giving our money to the world, which is not holy ground, there will be theft, because it is barren land. Money is not being sanctified, consecrated.

Some causes of financial problems



This chapter does not propose to cover all the spiritual causes of financial problems, for many remain unknown to us, depending on the learning that God has for each of His children.

The **first** cause is still *not to obey the commandment of the tithe*. In *Malachi 3: 8-9* is written: “Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you!” In this text, God makes it clear that withholding the tithe is theft, therefore, a sin that generates a curse because of this disobedience. Even though we live under the dispensation of grace, we are still under the authority of the word of God and it never dies. The value of 10% He asks of us is a means created by Him to bless us in our finances, and for us to show that He is first in our life, and what we have, we received from Him. It is He who gives us the ability to produce wealth (*Deut. 8: 18*). It is an act of love, not a charge, subject to punishment. When I say “curse” here, I am not referring specifically to a cursed word from God over your life, especially if you are a child of God, but to the consequence that the sin of disobedience, rebellion, works of the flesh or personal mistakes may have generated, that is, a snowball effect, one mistake producing another instead of correcting the behavior. In biblical words: “Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me.” (*Ps. 42: 7*).

The **second** cause involved in this process is *the lack of offering*, because without offering there is no seed planted, so there is nothing to be harvested:

- *Gal. 6: 7*: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.”

- *2 Cor. 9: 6*: “The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

This reaffirms the idea that the offering is a seed that will only grow and multiply if it is sown. Without seed there is no harvest.

The **third** cause is *works of idolatry and witchcraft*. Some texts in the bible speak of them and its corresponding punishment (mainly in the OT), which is death, namely, the separation from God and His grace for sin itself. What we must remember is that for God, *greed* or *avarice* is considered a *sin of idolatry* and *disobedience* or *rebellion* is compared to *witchcraft*, besides the real acts of sorcery, witchcraft and idolatry that lead the person to be stuck to the ties created by the enemy:

- *Lev. 20: 27*: “A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them.” [NIV: A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads].

- *1 Sam. 15: 23*: “For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.” Here God was talking about Saul, who had been rejected as king because he had disobeyed the Lord. Today this law is still valid. Even if a person has committed these acts before he converted to Christ and has been forgiven by God, he can still be connected somehow to the consequences that they generated,

particularly if he involved other people with this (he keeps connected to them spiritually and emotionally). So he must break these bonds effectively not only asking for forgiveness to God and releasing forgiveness to the lives involved, but crying out for divine wisdom to help him to change his 'sickly' behavior.

- *Eph. 5: 5-6*: "Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient." Paul says here that those who practice such things will not enter the kingdom of Christ or the kingdom of God. Paul reinforces the idea of being alert to everything that can fool us with false wisdom, trying to teach another doctrine or to keep us tied to rational human wisdom and not being associated with them because they will be subject to the wrath of God.

- *Col. 3: 5-6*: "Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and *greed (which is idolatry)*. On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient."

- *Lev. 19: 31*: "Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."

- *Deut. 18: 9-14*: "When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God. Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so." This means that now the Lord brought us into His kingdom, we must not seek the strategies of the world like do those who are in it, mainly to make money. Our dependence must be on God that blesses our work, not in the dirty strategies that the enemy uses to make us win our money based on his patterns and, often, without wanting to work to earn it (gambling, lotteries and other methods using divination and clairvoyance, as well as the attitudes of greed and covetousness that pervade many commercial transactions, aiming only the own profit for selfish ends). In *Ps. 1: 1* the Lord says, "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers." Wickedness or impiety is the disregard to the Word and the things of God.

- *Ex. 22: 18*: "You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live."

The *fourth* cause is *to touch God's anointed*. David was the greatest king of Israel and was an example in this regard, because he knew that to plot something against whom God Himself had chosen, despite being in sin and wrong paths as Saul was, it was to touch in God Himself and to do justice that does not belong to man. That's why he didn't kill Saul, though he had before him two opportunities to do so. The bible says that *we are the apple of the eye of God and who touches us, touches the very God (Zech. 2: 8b)*. When the bible uses the term 'anointed of God' it is referring to the *kings* or *prophets*. Today, for us, being anointed of God means everyone who has the seal of the Lamb's blood on him and walks in His ways, especially if he has any position of authority delegated by God Himself and in whom He pours out a greater portion of His Spirit. We can touch an 'anointed of God' in various ways but the main among them is the gossip generated by envy and that brings with it a false accusation to pervert the image of His servants. This does not mean that the leader cannot be reprimanded or

exhorted; however, God Himself raises another anointed to do so, as was the case of Samuel with Saul and of Nathan with David. What He does not approve is the carnal slander of those who only delights in criticism and gossip. Like it or not, these cursed words will bring obstacles in the path of those who are the target of them, however, they will make the paths of those who utter them even more difficult.

The fifth cause is *not to respect the Sabbath*:

- *Lev. 19: 30*: “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.”

- *Deut. 5: 12; 15*: “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you... Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

- *Neh. 13: 17*: “Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?”

- *Isa. 56: 2-5*: “Happy is the mortal who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and refrains from doing any evil. Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will surely separate me from his people’; and do not let the eunuch say, ‘I am just a dry tree’. For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.”

- *Isa. 58: 13-14*: “If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

- *Jer. 17: 21-22*: “Thus says the Lord: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors.”

- *2 Chr. 36: 21*: “to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.” The people should honor God by allowing their land to rest every seven years. This period without planting was considered a Sabbath of rest (*Lev. 25: 2-4; Ex. 23: 10-11*). As, however, they failed to do that over the centuries, God condemned them and removed all Sabbaths of rest at once. The land would be asleep during the Babylonian captivity: seventy years (*Lev. 26: 34-35; Lev. 26: 43; Jer. 25: 11; Jer. 29: 10; Dan. 9: 2*).

God’s rest on the *Sabbath* (*Ex. 23: 12-13; Lev. 23: 3*) means to enjoy the spiritual blessings, as written in *Heb. 3: 11*: “As in my anger I swore, ‘They will not enter my rest’ (in reference to people’s disobedience to God in the desert, tempting Him for forty years).” For us Christians, this means that if we respect the *Shabbat, our Sabbath of rest*, resting in the Lord of the things we cannot solve with our own strength and from the work of our hands to make money and financial support, He will start acting in our favor and we shall receive our blessings directly from Him. Respecting the Sabbath also brings prosperity, because we show that we believe in God to supply us and to resolve what we cannot with our own strength. Doing this, we are truly consecrating ourselves to Him. “*Our Sabbath*” of rest can be any day of the week that we dedicate to God, not necessarily Saturday. The Lord gave us a day of rest and we should respect it, because

this way His prosperity will involve us in full. Let's imagine that your job requires a work on Saturday or Sunday (for example: you're an intensive care doctor or a surgeon, a commercial aircraft pilot, a fireman or have any occupation that deals with emergencies); you would like to have this day off (Saturday or Sunday) to be with your family, your friends or with your brothers in the church; however, it's impossible. What to do? If you really fear the Lord and understand the meaning of Sabbath, choose one day in the week that matches with your day off and make it a day of blessing and separation to God, thinking on His things, that is, in spiritual things instead of earthly ones that only bother you, and rest in Him. While you rest, He works for you. Therefore, the Day of Rest is not a day of financial loss, spiritual prison, trial or strife between brothers, but day of blessing and consecration to Him.

The *sixth* cause is *to curse the Jews*:

In *Gen. 12: 3a*, it is written, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." That's what God said to Abraham when He called him to leave his land and go to a land that he did not know. This blessing is upon us, Christians, by having inherited it through Jesus (*Gal. 3: 14*, "in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"), but it still prevails over the Jews; therefore, when we bless them, we will be fulfilling the word of God.

The *seventh* cause is *to be in "unequally yoke" with unbelievers*:

The bible teaches us in *2 Cor. 6: 14-18* not to maintain close relationships with unbelievers, not to incur in the risk of moving away from the Word, and therefore from God's blessing: "Do not be mismatched [*NIV: yoked together*] with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Some Corinthians thought attractive certain false doctrines and wanted to combine them with the gospel. But there is no means of putting something true together with what is false. There can be no middle ground: either we follow Christ or just simply do not follow Him. Of course that living in the world, we are subject to relationships with non-believers, as in our job, in our housing or in marriage or with partners in a company. But what God tells us here is that we must keep our integrity, not yielding to harmful influences and not contaminating ourselves with them. It is we who must set an example of integrity and righteousness of God through our actions. However, whenever possible, we should ask the Lord to free us of these yokes, for this can affect all areas of our lives, not only finances. We must avoid to the maximum the close relationship with someone who is not the Lord's. We must treat them with love, but keep the relationship on a more superficial level so that our soul and spirit are preserved and we do not become complicit with sin.

The *eighth* cause is *the lack of forgiveness and to forget that we must do to others what we want them to do to us*.

In *Matt. 7: 12* Jesus says, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law (*prosperity*) and the prophets." In *Matt. 6: 14-15* He says, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses [*NIV: sins*]."

In some versions the word *offense* (trespasses, sins) is replaced by *debts*. The emotional wounds must be healed in us through the forgiveness to those who oppose our way, so also God will forgive us. Our debt was paid by Jesus on the cross of Calvary, for our sins hurt God and this bad attitude left us a debt in the spiritual world that only the blood of the Son of God could pay for us to be rescued. He forgave our offense. Likewise, when we bear a grudge or hurt of someone and we do not release forgiveness for that person, whether because of an emotional or financial debt, we end up getting stuck to him and to this situation. When we forgive, we are also free.

The *ninth* cause is *the conscious and unconscious thefts*:

When God called Moses to Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments, one of them was: "You shall not steal" (*Ex. 20: 15*). As for tithes and offerings, we've seen that, if retained, they will be a robbery of God and will bring curse on us (*Mal. 3: 8-9*). However, other thefts bring us problems:

- To retain something that is our neighbor's (for example, to keep with us what we borrowed but did not give back).
- To take of the other what is his (visible theft).
- To live beyond his means because the person lives at the expense of the work of another. There is a word in *Jer. 22: 13* that says: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages."
 - Waste of time and negligence at work, which is to steal the boss.
 - Envy, which through actions or words, comes to steal the inner wealth of another person (as joy, hope, innocence, the strength or the spiritual blessings).
 - To betray the trust in a relationship; bad humor and frustration discharged without cause on someone to steal the joy
 - To nurture a dream in someone's life and then not fulfill the promise.
 - Negative words that bring doubt and destroy projects; emotional blackmail that makes the other to leave his needs to pay attention to the blackmailer.
 - Try to legalize something that in itself is illegal ('piracy' in any area, forging licenses that do not exist).
 - To deny help or information to someone or give false information, which makes the other 'to stumble' and to take longer to reach his purposes, when one has the capacity and conditions for this (*Prov. 3: 27*).
 - To collect more for a service when it is not worthy of it ("Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him [*John the Baptist*], 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you'" – *Lk. 3: 12-13*).
 - To use of cunning, deceit or worldly trickery based on wisdom and experience of the flesh in any business, whatever the profession, which only brings own benefit for selfish ends. One loses the confidence of men and God, making increasing gaps for the destruction of the devil.
 - Undue taxes, which are diverted for unlawful purposes.

These and other subtle forms of theft cause harm for both parts: who is stolen and who steals.

In summary: If you know that something is good for a person and you denied this to him, you are stealing and will be stolen from you later. The word of the Lord does not change:

- "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow." (*Gal. 6: 7*).

- “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” (*Matt. 7: 12*).
- “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” (*Prov. 3: 27*).

The *tenth* cause is *hereditary curses and the curses that come from the mouth*:

In *Ex. 20: 5b* it is written, “for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me.”

Also in *Deut. 30: 15-20* the Lord says, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you *life and death, blessings and curses*. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

In *Prov. 18: 20-21* we read, “From the fruit of the mouth one’s stomach is satisfied; the yield of the lips brings satisfaction. Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

In *Job 15: 6* the Word says, “Your own mouth condemns you, and not I; your own lips testify against you.”

In all these verses, we see that both for errors of our ancestors (*hereditary curses*) as for our mistakes by attitudes that do not agree with those of God, or by words of curse thrown by others or by ourselves (*curses of sentence*), we end up suffering the consequences, including in the financial area. Often, even as believers, the wrong knowledge that we had before makes us repeat limiting words upon ourselves: ‘I cannot’, ‘I am unable’, ‘I won’t be able to do this’, ‘I will always be poor’, ‘I’ll never have anything’ or words truly cursed (‘pests’, ‘plagues’). This restricts the abundance of God upon our lives and upon others’, if we cast those words of curse on them. The interesting thing is that God does not deny hereditary, genetic transmission, but gives us the free will to break these curses through our actions, that is, by practicing what is right. Other biblical texts that are also relevant in this sense are in *Ezek. 18: 19-20*; *Num. 14: 18*; *Deut. 24: 16*; *Ex. 20: 5-6*; *2 Chr. 25: 4*; *Jer. 31: 30*, who talk about the responsibility be personal, i.e., on the free will of God for His children and that can be summarized in few words, “Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for their own crimes may persons be put to death” [NIV – “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin”]. God spoke on the Ten Commandments that He would visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who disobeyed Him. So we can say that God punishes us for sins that we actually committed. Nowhere in the bible, a justified believer paid forever for the sins of his parents. Every one shall die for his own sin. This does not mean, however, that nothing passes along the family tree. The patterns of sinful behavior are transmitted to family members. However, children are accountable to God for their lives, not by the parents’. *Whenever children are contrary to the sinful*

pattern set by parents, they can receive God's blessings. The gospel of Christ provides the power to break the chains of sin on families.

Jesus has already broken all the curses by His blood shed on the cross, and has left us His spiritual blessings available to us in the heavenly realms (Eph 1: 3), but it is up to us to bring these blessings into our material life through the faith that makes us exercise His word and gives us authority over the evil one, taking from our hands what is ours. Therefore, the true break of curses takes place in our daily lives, changing the patterns of behavior that make room for the desolation of the enemy.

The **eleventh** cause is *the mismanagement of money*, for instance, consumerism. *Misery, consumerism* and *anxiety* are works of the flesh that undermine financial life. They overwhelm us. Therefore, we must give not only our money to the Lord, but our whole life in its fullness, trusting in His dominion and asking Him for wisdom and the gift of administration (gifts of leadership), for many Christians are business owners and are in the head of financial business, requiring a divine enablement to manage their work. Even housewives need to know how to manage what comes to their hands. When He takes 'the helm of our boat', He Himself tells us what to do with what we own.

One of the emotions that touch our soul, mainly concerning financial problems, is fear. I once heard a comment about fear, in a preaching. If we think that is an acronym, we'll have: F= false; E= expectation; A= appearance; R= reality. Therefore, fear is a false expectation with the appearance of reality. Thus, coming from the soul or the devil, anyway it is a lie. The love of God casts out all fear. His love keeps us and protects from fear. So, don't give in to fear. "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love" (*1 Jn. 4: 8; 18*).

In this item, we also should remember a work of the flesh called *envy*, which may be responsible for economic loss in our lives, because if we envy the other, it means that we do not have the courage to fight for what is ours and we desire that which belongs to other people comes 'for free' to our hands. This is a lie, because it is written in the bible that the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. Whether because of financial stability or by other causes (for instance, spiritual gifts), envy is never a good feeling in the heart of a child of God, for it opens gaps for many other destructions. The bible says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (*Prov. 14: 30*). The heart of a thriving person, besides being giver, sower, multiplier and releaser of resources and gifts, can rejoice at the victory of the brothers and that attitude is also reflected in his own life (supplement your reading with the books: "Work", "Laziness" and "Unnecessary Savings"):

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/work.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/laziness.pdf>

<https://www.searaagape.com.br/unnecessarysavings.pdf>

Since we're talking about envy, why not talk about one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which is joy? (*Gal. 5: 22*). Without love for the things of God and without the joy of sowing in His Work, what's the use working so hard and making an effort in your profession, and withholding the money that belongs to God? Joy is like leaven that makes our offering prosper and nourish other lives; it is an essential fertilizer for our seed.

- *2 Cor. 9: 7*: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

There is a strong word in *Deut. 28: 45-47*, which talks about the curses resulting from disobedience and we can notice that in *v. 47*, the Lord says that evil overtook them

because they did not serve the Lord joyfully and with gladness of heart, despite the abundance they received. The word says: “All these curses shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God, by observing the commandments and the decrees that he commanded you. They shall be among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything.”

I think that when people are not really aware of what Jesus did on the cross for all humanity, they fail to value what they received and do everything out of obligation, out of religiosity, but not out of love or gratitude for what they received from Him. If they knew, they would do everything to make Him happy, instead of saddening Him with unbelief and rebellion.

Valuable teachings



Some useful lessons about giving, sowing, offering, poverty and wealth can be found in the book of Proverbs and in some other biblical verses not previously mentioned. If you understood *the true meaning of prosperity*, meditate on them:

- *Prov. 1: 19*: “Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.”

- *Prov. 3: 9-10*: “Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

- *Prov. 3: 27*: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”

- *Prov. 3: 28*: “Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it’ – when you have it with you.”

- *Prov. 5: 8; 10*: “Keep your way far from her [*adulteress*], and do not go near the door of her house... and strangers will take their fill of your wealth, and your labors will go to the house of an alien.”

- *Prov. 6: 6-11*: “Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest. How long will you lay there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.”

- *Prov. 8: 18-21 (wisdom)*: “Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.”

- *Prov. 10: 3*: “The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.”

- *Prov. 10: 4*: “A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”

- *Prov. 10: 22*: “The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.”

- *Prov. 11: 1*: “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight.”

- *Prov. 11: 24*: “Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.”

- *Prov. 11: 25*: “A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.”

- *Prov. 11: 26*: “The people curse those who hold back grain, but a blessing is on the head of those who sell it.”

- *Prov. 11: 28*: “Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.”

- *Prov. 12: 9*: “Better to be despised and have a servant, than to be self-important and lack food.”

- *Prov. 12: 11*: “Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense”.
- *Prov. 12: 14*: “From the fruit of the mouth one is filled with good things, and manual labor has its reward.”
- *Prov. 13: 4*: “The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing, while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied.”
- *Prov. 13: 7*: “Some pretend to be rich, yet have nothing; others pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth.”
- *Prov. 13: 8*: “Wealth is a ransom for a person’s life, but the poor get no threats.”
- *Prov. 13: 11*: “Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it.”
- *Prov. 13: 22*: “The good leave an inheritance to their children's children, but the sinner’s wealth is laid up for the righteous.”
- *Prov. 13: 23*: “The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.”
- *Prov. 13: 25*: “The righteous have enough to satisfy their appetite, but the belly of the wicked is empty.”
- *Prov. 14: 4*: “Where there are no oxen, there is no grain; abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.”
- *Prov. 14: 21*: “Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor.”
- *Prov. 14: 23*: “In all toil there is profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”
- *Prov. 14: 31*: “Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.”
- *Prov. 15: 8*: “The sacrifice [*the offering*] of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”
- *Prov. 15: 16*: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.”
- *Prov. 15: 17*: “Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.”
- *Prov. 16: 8*: “Better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice.”
- *Prov. 16: 19*: “It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.”
- *Prov. 17: 1*: “Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.”
- *Prov. 17: 16*: “Why should fools have a price in hand to buy wisdom, when they have no mind to learn?”
- *Prov. 19: 15*: “Laziness brings on deep sleep; an idle person will suffer hunger.”
- *Prov. 19: 17*: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.”
- *Prov. 20: 4*: “The lazy person does not plow in season; harvest comes, and there is nothing to be found.”
- *Prov. 20: 13*: “Do not love sleep [*unconsciousness, ignorance*], or else you will come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.”
- *Prov. 21: 5*: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want.”
- *Prov. 21: 13*: “If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard.”

- *Prov. 21: 25*: “The craving of the lazy person is fatal, for lazy hands refuse to labor.”
- *Prov. 21: 26*: “All day long the wicked covet, but the righteous give and do not hold back.”
- *Prov. 21: 27*: “The sacrifice (*the offering*) of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when brought with evil intent.”
- *Prov. 22: 1*: “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.”
- *Prov. 22: 9*: “Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.”
- *Prov. 22: 22-23*: “Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; for the Lord pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.”
- *Prov. 22: 26-27*: “Do not be one of those who give pledges, who become surety for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?”
- *Prov. 23: 4-5*: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist. When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”
- *Prov. 25: 21-22*: “If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the Lord will reward you.”
- *Prov. 28: 6*: “Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich.”
- *Prov. 28: 19*: “Anyone who tills the land will have plenty of bread, but one who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.”
- *Prov. 28: 20*: “The faithful will abound with blessings, but one who is in a hurry to be rich will not go unpunished.”
- *Prov. 28: 22*: “The miser is in a hurry to get rich and does not know that loss is sure to come.”
- *Prov. 28: 24*: “Anyone who robs father or mother and says, ‘That is no crime’, is partner to a thug.”
- *Prov. 28: 25*: “The greedy person stirs up strife, but whoever trusts in the Lord will be enriched.”
- *Prov. 28: 27*: “Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but one who turns a blind eye will get many a curse.”
- *Prov. 29: 4*: “By justice a king gives stability to the land, but one who makes heavy exactions ruins it.” *cf. Prov. 29: 14*: “If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever.” *cf. Prov. 8: 15-16*: “By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.”
- *Prov. 29: 7*: “The righteous know the rights of the poor; the wicked have no such understanding”.
- *Prov. 30: 7-9*: “Two things I ask of you; do not deny them to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; *feed me with the food that I need*, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.”
- *Prov. 31: 10-31*: “A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and *he will have no lack of gain*. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and *works* with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from far away. She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for

her servant-girls. She *considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands* she plants a vineyard. She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. She *perceives that her merchandise is profitable*. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. *She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy*. She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes. Strength and dignity are her clothing, and *she laughs at the time to come*. She opens her mouth *with wisdom*, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and *does not eat the bread of idleness*. Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: 'Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.' Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. *Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.*" [NIV: "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate"].

- *Deut. 15: 1-11*: "Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. *There will, however, be no one in need among you*, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. *If there is among you anyone in need*, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near', and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. *Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth*, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land'" cf. *Prov. 22: 2*: "The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all" and *Mark 14: 7*: "For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me [*Jesus*]."

- *Phil. 4: 19*: "And my God will *fully satisfy every need* of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

- *1 Tim. 6: 7-10*: "for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For *the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."

- *1 Tim. 6: 17-21*: "As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to *set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*, but rather on God who

richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you.”

- *Heb. 13: 5*: “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and *be content with what you have*; for he has said, I will never leave you or forsake you.”

- *Jam. 1: 12-15*: “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. *But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it*; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.”

- *Jam. 4: 1-5*: “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly*, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, ‘God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?’”

A promise from God

7

For you who understood the Word of God and wish with all your heart, to correct your ways, the Lord has a real promise for your life:

“Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth. The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies and foreigners shall not drink the wine for which you have labored; but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the Lord, and those who gather it shall drink it in my holy courts” (Isa. 62: 6-9).

