



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

Office of the Metropolitan, Synod Secretariat, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India.

SHEPHERD'S LETTER

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✠Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Barekmor!

It is once again a joy to write to you and share what God has put in my heart for you as your spiritual father. In the past few weeks, I have had the privilege to travel to some of your parishes and see some of you in person. Truly, you are a letter from Christ—not a letter written with pen and ink, but by the spirit of the living God (adapted from 2 Corinthians 3:2–3).

In this letter, I would like to remind all of you about God's command to us about giving—specifically about tithing, what it means and the blessings that will follow as we obey God in tithing.

Someone once said, "Show me a man's wallet or money purse and I will tell you the state of his spiritual life!" Unlike what we often think, our spiritual life and money or the finances we have, have an inseparable connection.

Abraham and Moses both left the comfort and riches of their household and Egypt to follow God's call (Genesis 12 and Exodus 2–3). Lot made the wrong choice in his life, following money instead of God, and destroyed his life and his family (Genesis 19). Gehazi brought a curse upon himself by lying and taking that which didn't belong to him (2 Kings 5:20–27). Salvation was pronounced on Zacchaeus when he promised to be truthful in money matters (St Luke 19:8). The rich man went to hell as he did not use his money to glorify God, and instead spent it on himself (St Luke 12:16–21). Like these, there are plenty of examples in the Bible which show how our spiritual life and money are related. In fact, a significant portion of Jesus' teachings were on money, its right usage and its dangers. The truth is, when our relationship with God is real, our financial dealings will also be based on God's Word.

So, what does God's Word tell us about our wealth?

1. God is the true master and owner of all what we possess. We do not own anything, rather we are just stewards (Job 41:11, Psalm 24:1, Haggai 2:8, 1 Corinthians 4:1–2).
2. And out of all what we have, God commands us to give Him our tithe and offerings.

The divine command of tithe is created by God Almighty Himself. One-tenth of all our income (from all the different sources we may have) is the tithe that belongs to God, and it is for building His kingdom. This spiritual plan is ordered by the Almighty.

It was a rule in the Old Testament that each person should give tithe (Leviticus 27:30, Proverbs 3:9). No one was exempt from that. In the New Testament, Jesus taught us about giving a tenth of everything (St Matthew 23:23). In fact, God expects a higher level of spirituality from the believers of the New Testament than those of the Old Testament (St Matthew 5:21–22). This is true in the case of tithe too.

What does tithing practically look like? If your salary for a month is 10,000 rupees, then out of that, 1,000 rupees is not yours; it belongs to God. If you get ten sacks of wheat or 500 coconuts in a month from your fields, one sack of wheat (or the money you get for it) and fifty coconuts is not yours—that belongs to God.

Now, where are we supposed to give our tithes to? When and to whom should we give it? On the basis of God's Word, we are instructed to give tithe to our local parish. In the Old Testament, God ordered us to bring tithe to the house of God (Malachi 3:10). And, we have to give it "on the first day of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Tithe should be given in the same box where we put offerings on every Sunday. Write your name in the cover, seal it, and put it in the box.

It is also important to know what tithe is not. The money which you give to the priest of your parish or missionary should not be considered as tithe. Helping the poor or the beggars should not be considered as tithe either. Instead, give your whole tithe to the church, your local parish.

God promises to bless the person who is faithful in giving tithe and meet all his needs (Malachi 3:10–11). The 90 percent money of a person who gives tithe faithfully is

more useful than 100 percent of the money of a person who does not give it. To those who give tithe, God will take care and protect them from the enemy—in their work, businesses and in their job.

When we keep tithe, which is God's right, with us, God considers that as robbery (Malachi 3:7–8). In other words, not giving tithe is equal to robbing a bank and keeping the money. God says that the one who does not give tithe is considered to be “cursed” (Malachi 3:9).

I remember that in a house I visited once, none of the coconut trees bore fruit. I talked to the son and asked him “what happened to the trees?” The son replied, “What to do? Our father is not giving the tenth of what he gets from these trees, so now God is taking the tenth.” You may think it is funny, but this is the truth about giving.

Maybe you have not tithed till now. Don't worry; right now is a good time to start! Maybe your financial situation is such that you find it difficult to give tithe. But in faith, do what God asks you to do. You will see God's hand of blessing on you and your family.

Dear brothers and sisters, let me encourage all of you with the words of St. Paul, “But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Let us put our trust in God, who promised to cleanse our previous sins and ignorance and bless us. Let us decide to give tithe which is legitimate to God.

May the almighty God's grace and peace abound in your life, more and more. Amen.✠

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