

(Deuteronomy 14:22-29) Re-defining Tithing in Zimbabwean Pentecostal Churches: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract: The emphasis on tithing in modern day Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches is now of a major concern. This study unravels tithing in the selected churches to see how the doctrine is implemented. It follows (Deuteronomy 14: 22-29) which prescribes how tithing should be done. However, Pentecostal churches seem to take a different approach altogether which promotes tithing as a benefit for the pastors and other church leaders. Qualitative research methodology was used to gather the data in the study. Interviews, document analysis and observations were used. Findings reveal that some pastors are mis-appropriating tithes for their own benefit at the expense of other vulnerable members of the church. It thus recommends that a new of handling tithes be implemented that tries to balance off with every stakeholder.

Keywords: Tithing, Prosperity, Giving, Poor and widows, Gospel and goldspel.

1. Introduction

The doctrine of tithing in Christianity is quite strong in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches. Most denominations argue that the church cannot progress without this kind of giving. Whenever preachers get the chance to preach, they definitely talk about tithing with passion, because they know that the money will directly benefit them. It is from these tithes that men of the cloth get their living. So to neglect tithing is as good as forsaking selves. Biblical references such as may be used; (Malachi 3:10) *"Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house..."*

Are congregants not allowed to benefit from their tithes? This can be answered with (Deuteronomy 14: 22-29)

"...then you shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go

up to the place which the LORD you God chooses, and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves; and you shall eat there before the LORD you God and rejoice, you and your household."

Today's tithing is a clear digression from what was commanded Moses by God from the book of Deuteronomy. Believers seem to be surprised by such Biblical references and others show ignorance of the same. Critics have accused the men of the cloth for robbing out the poor people in the church so as to enrich themselves from the proceeds of tithing. A good number of pastors are now living luxuriously at the expense of their congregants.

Tithing is associated with making congregants to prosper because when one gives they will be sowing to reap more from God (Prince, 1995). Prosperity can be defined as the condition of being successful or thriving; especially economic well-being. It also entails adequacy in material possession. There might be no all-inclusive definition of prosperity. However, from a more spiritual point of view, prosperity has all to do righteousness before God (Mediel Hove and Vincent Chenzi, 2017).

The sacrosanct element of the Church has been compromised. Where people previously looked for salvation, they are now interested in attaining wealth through tithing (Chitando, 2013). Something very crucial in the church seem to have been lost. Church leaders are now into wealth-creation syndrome. It is interesting to note that men of the cloth should be supported as in (Deuteronomy 14: 27) which says that

“And you shall not forsake the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance within you”.

However, some commentators voiced their concern that some church leaders are commercialising religion. Some critics charged that the weight on material progress was not consistent with the “proper” teachings of Christianity. More fundamentally, they charged that pastors reaped profits from such a doctrine (Chitando, 2013). The gospel of prosperity has been blown out of proportion in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches. It appears as if some pastors think that they would not have done justice if they do not speak about prosperity. There is a scenario where prophets and pastors are talking more about ‘goldspel’ at the expense of the gospel which is now a major concern (Pashapa, 2011).

The impact of economic meltdown currently in Zimbabwe should be understood to be the basis of such a doctrine that promotes giving for the survival of the pastors. In the wake of increases of poverty, high death

rates, unemployment, hyperinflation and hopelessness, many Zimbabweans would find a message promising wealth, abundant life and hope quite appealing. As 2019 is coming to an end, life in Zimbabwe is becoming a struggle for survival. Thus, such a teaching is palatable in the country.

Mai Chisamba, a popular social commentator at one time argued that the church today has gone commercial. Preachers of the word are concentrating more on money. They are encourage *seeding*. A lot of people have lost their property all in the name of *seeding* (Mwase, 2012). What is disturbing is the idea that within the same church, there is a preacher who is ranked among the richest of the land, owning car sales, more than one housing stands and at the same time there is a widow who is in the same church who can testify of a miracle when she gets a dollar for a meal in the evening. Extremes in such a church may raise eyebrows. Where is the doctrine of equality and sharing that marked the birth of the early church and its expansion. Are we relegating these Christian values in favour of a new world order of selfishness? It is high time that sharing and real love be brought back in the church today.

Whenever the gospel of prosperity is being preached, it should be done in such a way that others will not be offended. Rather, they should be encouraged. In as much as it is known that the devil is able to creep into the church, believers should be careful not to be entangled into such practices. Many preachers encourage their congregants to be rich and talk about riches. However, they do not provide the way out to be rich. This has left a hollow to be filled in as far as the right procedure to prosperity is concerned. Many have been left to figure it out on their own, ending up committing crimes.

It can be said that the idea of ‘thieving’ behind the pulpit was started way back in 1883 with the missionaries who came to Africa. The letter from King Leopold II of

Belgium to colonial missionaries stated that when preaching to the Africans you should dilute the word so that you take all their belongings. You need to focus on references such as;

“Happier are the poor because they will inherit the kingdom of heaven”

And

“It is very difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God”.

King Leopold also stressed on “forcing the Africans to pay signs of recognition – goats, chicken or eggs, every time you visit them” (Vera and Okoro, 2005). The proceeds from the offerings were supposed to be used for the construction of business centres. It seems, this mentality has never left the Christian fraternity even in the present day. In Zimbabwe, the history of Christianity can be traced back in the 15th century when the first missionary Goncalo da Silveira came (Sibanda et al., 2005).

2. Methodology

This study was framed within a qualitative paradigm. The methodology was chosen because it offers participants giving them time to freely express themselves. It is an interpretive methodology, thus, the researcher was able to articulate the feelings of participants. In this paper, discussions, interviews, observations and document analysis were made use of in data gathering. Interviews were mostly preferred because they have follow up questions which can help in coming up with more information. The researcher gave participants time to freely express themselves in all the questions raised during the course of the study. This eventually gave data that was rich and diverse, reflecting the true reality of the participants’ experiences (Kikwala Study Group, 1994). Participants have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is

typically the case with quantitative research methodologies. Through observations, the researchers kept a penetrating eye into events that unfolded in the way tithing is practised in Pentecostal churches as the researcher is an active member of the church.

2.1 Sampling

The population for the study was Norton residential area where the researcher is a resident. The number of Pentecostal churches in the residential area exceeds 30. It was not possible to make a meaningful study out of all the churches. Actually, that would take life time doing the study. Thus, the researcher decided to narrow the study to only five churches so that a proper analysis of data would be more meaningful and not cumbersome. It is from these five churches that the researcher will generalise the findings. Twenty participants were used for the study. From the five churches that were selected, four individuals were randomly selected for the study. For the selection of churches, convenience sampling was done as the researcher wanted to make use churches close by to reduce the transport costs.

3. Findings

3.1 It is our duty to pay tithes

The teaching on paying tithes was very popular in all the churches which were visited for the study. All the respondents who were captured for study concurred that they do pay their tithes religiously to their respective churches. They actually posited that they give tithes willing and with a joyful heart. This is fully reinforced by Paul who says in (2 Corinthians 9:7)

“Each one must do as he has made up mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”

Some references which were quoted included (Acts 20:35)

“...it is more blessed to give than to receive”.

These findings show that the pastors and /or church leaders have done justice in teaching their congregants about the paying of tithes. However, has the teaching been done without putting into consideration (Deuteronomy 14) which emphasise the givers to feasts their tithes as well.

3.2 The old path

It was gathered that from the twenty respondents for the study that some had a negative view concerning congregants enjoying their tithes in the church. Regardless of the fact that I had shown them the Bible from (Deuteronomy 14: 26) which makes it mandatory for believers to consume their tithes, some respondents maintained that it was the duty of the pastor to enjoy the benefits of tithes alone. This was a clear sign of indoctrination which was observed by the researcher. One of the respondents from the interviews said that;

“Your topic is very interesting...but I will not be moved from my faith. I will continue to give my tithes to my pastor until donkeys grow horn. We have been paying tithes and offerings in the church. My pastor has the right to consume everything because he does not go to work. I do it for him. Moreover, we need to move in the old path”.

This response was in direct link to (Jeremiah 6:16). It was very clear from the findings that people had been indoctrinated to believe that the tithes are specifically for the pastor to enjoy. This is something worrying because it positions the pastor at an advantage in terms of upward mobility faster than the rest of the congregants. Since prosperity is the talk of the day in most churches in Zimbabwe,

those who are struggling to make it in life following a huge change in the economic challenges in Zimbabwe will have no one to blame but themselves. It can be suggested that the need to feast from ones tithe is quite crucial as it cements the bond between the pastor and the congregants.

3.3. Conduit for riches for church leaders

The issue of acquiring riches by the pastors in the guise of receiving tithes and offerings has received mixed feelings from the respondents. Those who supported pastors in their move to gain wealth were 8, whereas 12 concurred that tithes were a source of an income to move from the jaws of poverty to prosperity. The table 1 will suffice to present the arguments.

Table 1. Tithes as source of riches

Tithes as source wealth	Yes	No
Number of respondents	8	12

Is it really the case that congregants should enrich their pastors? Do church leaders have to live a life above others? Some respondents showed it was not a crime for pastors to getting rich from the proceeds of tithe because;

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out grain.” (1 Corinthians 9: 9)

There is definitely nothing wrong with pastors living a good and respectable life. However, there should be some checks and balance in the way tithes are used.

The church should not be taken as a money making venture. This is because people who go to church will be looking for life challenge solutions. Thus, preachers should not manipulate the needs of the congregants to strip them out of their hard earned

possessions. One instance of such practice is of a youthful prophet sold his shirt for USD\$10 000.00 on his birthday bash (Nehanda Radio, 2012). This can be defined as daylight robbery in the under the pretext of receiving blessings from God.

3.4 Uses of tithes

There are quite a number of uses of tithes. These include; pastors' upkeep, caring for widows and orphans. In as much as tithes are not only for pastors at the church, some congregants had no idea why they were paying their tithes to the church. The majority just thought that the objective of paying tithes, was for the general up keep of the pastors and their families. The question one may ask is this; to what extend should the pastors be catered for? Should this be done at the expense of poor widows in the church? This is a challenge because vulnerable members are failing to make ends meet in the church when the pastors are enjoying life without taking into consideration the widows and orphans in the church. The table 2 shows the use of tithes in the church:

Table 2. Uses of tithes

Uses of tithe	Number
Pastors' upkeep	13
Orphans and widows	7
Total	20

It can be ascertained that most respondents argued that tithes were meant to improve the welfare of the men of the cloth and only a few individuals believed that tithes were meant for the vulnerable in the church.

3.5 An eye-opener

It is something that was totally new to 50% of the respondents that they had never come across (Deuteronomy 14). To them, it

was very new. One respondent from a well renowned church argued that;

"My brother, I have been reading the Bible for quote a long time... But I never come across this one. You have brought me a new dimension altogether. Thank you very much for the insight. I will have to go and see church elders and discuss this issue with them so that we can make a plan to work accordingly."

In as much as others were saying that this is a new reference altogether, they seemed reluctant to 'fight' the powers that be in the church and start enjoying the benefits of their tithes and offering in the church. Some said;

"We have been paying tithes for quite a long time. It is not for us to partake of the stuff that we give to the church. It is for the poorer and widows to enjoy. We cannot stoop such low to scramble for the food with the pastor together with widows and orphans. The reason why we are well off is that we give to the Lord. He has blessed us and now we are very rich."

Such a response augurs well with the idea that when one is a Christian they should be very rich. Examples were drawn from the life of Abraham who had great riches during his time as a result of the tithe he gave to Melchizedek the king of Salem. The idea of tithing was there even before the law (Guti, 1995). So tithing cannot be forsaken as a doctrine. It has to be maintained because it makes believers rich.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The doctrine of tithing is one which has attracted more attention particularly in Zimbabwe. It has been found out that most churches are seriously encouraging their congregants to give to tithes to the church as a way to be blessed by God. Although, the issue of prosperity through tithing is now more like

an anthem in most Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, the challenge that remains is that pastors seem to use the resources for their personal gains.

It is thus recommended that tithing should be taught clearly putting into consideration some scriptures such as (Deuteronomy 14:22-29). These references make a point that all Israelites should go to the sanctuary and feasts from their tithes. It can be inferred that believers in the current Zimbabwean should as well embrace such teaching because it is enshrined in the Bible. There should be mechanisms in the church which must be put in place to see to it that the vulnerable members of the church are cushioned from the harsh economic environment prevailing in Zimbabwe. This could be through centralising the money and channel it towards the development of the church, rather than to have the pastor to decide on his own.

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