

Tithing: A Christian's Response to Grace

by William E. McCumber

Giving a tenth of all one makes or has to God is an ancient practice. Its origins are lost in the unrecorded past.

The first tither mentioned in the Bible is Abraham. With his armed servants Abraham had defeated a pagan army led by four kings. He then released their captives, including his nephew Lot. Returning with the spoils of war from that victory, Abraham encountered Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God. This king-priest blessed Abraham and blessed the God who had given him victory. In response, Abraham “gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:18-20).

The next tither we read about is Jacob, grandson of Abraham. Jacob was fleeing through desert country when the Lord appeared to him in a dream, promising to be with him, to watch over him, and to bring him back home safely. In gratitude for the promised blessings Jacob vowed, “Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth” (Genesis 28:10-22).

Jacob's offspring became the nation of Israel, a nation formed by God. when He delivered them from slavery in Egypt, made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, and brought them into the Promised Land of Canaan.

The people of Israel were to be governed by laws given by God through Moses. The “law of Moses”—as it came to be called—included tithing the produce of the land, the flocks and herds, or the money when crops and animals had been converted to cash.

The law declared that “a tithe of everything... belongs to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30). It didn't become His when it was given, it was already His. Not to tithe, therefore, was to rob God and to incur His righteous anger. Restoring the ancient practice, in contrast, would bring prosperity to the nation (Malachi 3:8-12).

DOES TITHING APPLY ONLY TO THOSE UNDER THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Some have argued that Christians need not tithe because they are under grace, not under law. This is nonsense. In the first place, no Christian should do less for God than did an ancient Jew. In the second place, Jesus endorsed the practice of tithing, though He did not specifically command it (Matthew 23:23). In the third place, tithing responds to an older law than the law of Moses. It responds to the law of gratitude. The tithe is not a means of bribing God to secure a blessing. Rather, the tithe is a way of acknowledging God as the Giver of every blessing received and promised. When Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, it was not to obtain a blessing. He was already blessed and was properly thankful.

Jesus is our King-Priest, “a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20). That certainly makes Him a tithe-receiving Priest. He has blessed His people with the greatest of blessings--their salvation. This blessing was purchased at the greatest of costs--His death. Our gratitude for that should make us joyful tithers to Him

Israel’s tithes supported the Temple and priesthood. Our tithes support the church and its ministry. Tithing makes it possible for preachers to occupy their pulpits and pursue their rounds of varied services. Tithing makes it possible for missionaries to make disciples among all the nations of earth. Tithing underwrites the mission of the church to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, and evangelize the lost. Tithing provides the buildings, equipment, and supplies needed by the church for its global task. Tithing was not invented by some church finance committee. Tithing is God’s financial plan, and it cannot be improved upon. It is His basic plan, and devoted Christians gladly add freewill offerings to their tithes. Those who do so are the happiest of the Lord’s followers.

Tithing is human response to God’s grace.

Tithing initiates nothing. It places no claim upon God. It is not a bargaining chip. Biblically understood and practiced, tithing is human response to divine grace.

We give to God because He has already given to us. We bless God because He has already blessed us. He is no poorer if we fail to tithe, but we are impoverished. He is no richer if we do tithe, but we are enriched. Tithing is rewarded, for God rewards all obedience to His Word. But we do not give in order to get; we give because we have received.

Every Christian should tithe and give over and above the tithe. And every Christian should do so joyfully, not grudgingly. “God loves a cheerful giver,” and He rewards a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Dr. William E. McCumber resides in Gainesville, Georgia. He has served the Church of the Nazarene as an educator, pastor, evangelist, and writer.

Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version* (NIV). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.