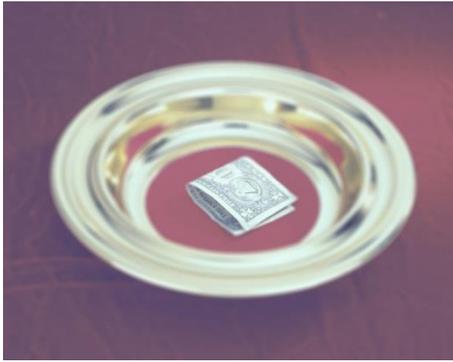


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Tithing: A Christian's Response to Grace

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 served the Church of the Nazarene for 69 years as an educator, pastor, evangelist, writer, and editor of *Holiness Today*. He passed away in December of 2010.

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How Can We Love Our Pastors?



I was privileged to grow up in a Nazarene parsonage and experience the life of a pastor’s kid. There were many good memories and a few bad ones. My dad did not make the largest salary in town, but I never wondered about how the utility bills or rent was paid. I just rested in the faith that my parents had in God, who graciously supplied all their needs.

Now that they are retired, I find myself being much more concerned about their future and their care than ever before.

Philippians chapter 4 is one of the most loved chapters in the Bible. In it, Paul encourages this new church to trust God and not to worry so that they can experience a deep peace. (vs.6-7) Paul stresses to these young Christians to think on things that will make their faith stronger. (vs.8-9) But the part of this chapter that we sometimes fail to stress is Paul's words of thankfulness for the financial gifts that the church at Philippi had given to him.

¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. ¹⁵ As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. ¹⁶ Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. ¹⁷ I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness. ¹⁸ At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:13-19 (NLT)

Back in Acts chapter 16-17 we read that Paul preached the gospel in Philippi. We also see how this church wanted to give him practical proof of their love and appreciation for his ministry. No other church gave Paul financial support the way that this church did. This church and their generosity made Paul very glad, but not because of his own benefit. Paul knew that a generous church was a loving and connected church.

I have become very thankful for the act of love that this Philippian church showed to its pastor, Paul. They gave us an example of how to take care of our pastors, in love and in practical expression. I have been in pastoral ministry in the Church of the Nazarene for over 20 years. My father served the Church of the Nazarene as a pastor for well over 30 years. Support and love for our pastor does not always take on a monetary expression, but the monetary gift reinforces the relationship. Paul was moved by the relationship of love this wonderful church showed to him.

I'm so grateful that the Church of the Nazarene believes so strongly in loving its pastors that we have agreed together to give to a fund that helps our pastors in their retirement years. The Pensions and Benefits Fund is an affirmation that we are a connectional church that understands the importance of loving our family of pastoral leaders. Thanks be to God!

Kevin Koker – Stewardship Ministries Coordinator – Church of the Nazarene

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Quotes:

Oswald Chambers



"I have to get to the point of the absolute and unquestionable relationship that takes everything exactly as it comes from Him. God never guides us at some time in the future, but always here and now. "