

As A Christian, am I required to give a TITHE to church?

As we answer this very common question, let's first take a look at what "tithing" was like in the Old Testament. After that, we can move into the New Testament and draw some principles of giving which will help us understand the way Jesus would encourage us to use our money to honor God.

Giving in the Old Testament

The word tithes [ma'aser] in Hebrew means "a tenth part." Right from the beginning, the principle was to dedicate a tenth of everything God had given back to Him. The tithes is sometimes referred to as a REQUIREMENT, but should rather be thought of as a percentage of income VOLUNTARILY given back to God. While it was commanded by God, it was never forced upon anyone. Just as God commands us to "Love the Lord, thy God"... the commandment is given, but obedience is a voluntary act of the will.

Tithing before the Law

Abraham... The concept of a tithes given to God as a commitment of Lordship is first mentioned in Genesis 14:20, when Abram gave a tithes to Melchizedek, the priest. "*Then Abram gave him a tithes of everything.*" It was given to the priest who represented the gathered people of God.

Jacob... In Genesis 28:18-22, God blessed Jacob with a dream in which He assured Jacob that the Covenant promises given to Abraham would now flow through him. In response to this assurance, Jacob promised God "*of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.*"

Tithing in the Mosaic Law

In the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, the Law was given to Moses by God. The instructions in the Law included clear explanations of how to generously give to God and His people.

First Tithes... The first tithes was a gift of **one tenth** of a family's produce, flocks and herds. It was set aside during the year and then given annually to the Lord to support the Levites in their priestly service. The Levites had no other source of income and had no land ownership in Israel, so the first tithes was for them. The goods were brought to the Levites and kept in storehouses so that they could have provisions to live on. (Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21-24)

Festival Tithes... The festival tithes was a second tithes (*one tenth*) that was used to sponsor the religious feasts and festivals throughout the year. Since many of these festivals were conducted in Jerusalem, it was acceptable for the Israelites to sell their produce, flocks and herds and bring money instead. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they would purchase whatever was necessary to celebrate during the festivals. These were grand religious celebrations, and no expense was spared to bring thanks and praise to God. (Deuteronomy 14:22-27)

Poor Tithes... Every third year, the Israelites were instructed to give a tithes to the poor. It is unclear whether this was a third full tithes or whether the second "Festival Tithes" was to be used on the poor that year. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

So the people of the nation of Israel were expected to give at least 20% (and possibly as much as 30% every third year) of their produce, flocks and herds to the Lord every year. **Overall, the point of a TITHE was to support the ongoing work of the GATHERED PEOPLE OF GOD.**

The prophet Malachi was called by God to remind the people to return to the regular practice of tithing when they had stopped.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'" (Malachi 3:8-10)

Offerings

Propitiatory Offerings... Propitiatory offerings were meant as a means to atone for sins, known and unknown. There were two types in this category:

Sin Offering... Pigeons, turtledoves, fine flour, goats, lambs and bulls were the required elements to be offered depending on economic level. (Exodus 29:14, 36; Leviticus 4)

Guilt Offering... Money and/or rams were used in this offering to bring restitution to those who had been sinned against. (Leviticus 5:14-6:7)

Dedicatory Offerings... Dedicatory offerings were given to the Lord as a way of reminding oneself of the on-going goodness of God. There were three types in this category:

Burnt Offering... Bulls, sheep, goats, birds were all appropriate here. (Leviticus 1:3-17)

Cereal Offering... fine flour, wafers, unleavened bread, cakes, ears of grain were required for this offering. (Leviticus 2:1-16)

Drink Offering... wine was required for this. (Numbers 28:14, 29:6)

Communal Offerings... There were two types in this category:

Peace Offering... Animals of any kind and unleavened cakes seem to be the elements used in this offering. (Leviticus 3; 7:11-26)

Votive Offering... Votive offerings accompanied a vow that someone might make to the Lord. Oxen and sheep seem to be the elements used here. (Leviticus 7:16-17; Numbers 6:21)

So, while we sometimes think Old Testament giving was a simple 1/10 gift of money, it was much more comprehensive than that. Giving for them was a way of life. It included at least two tithes (20%) and multiple special offerings throughout the year. Indeed, all of these things added up to a *lifestyle of giving* to the Lord and to the support of the GATHERED PEOPLE OF GOD.

In the New Testament it appears that churches continued to give a tithe as a regular sign of Lordship. Jesus never abolished the concept of a tithe. He never spoke against it, nor taught that it should end. (In contrast, the New Testament did clearly abolish other Old Testament practices like sacrifices and dietary restrictions.) As in the Old Testament, New Testament giving should never be minimized to a simple 1/10. Rather, the Lord teaches us that our whole life and all that we have belong to Him. 1/10, by principle, is a good place to start, but not a good place to end.

10 Principles Of Giving In The New Testament

In the pages of the New Testament, Christians that had spent time with Jesus and the apostles passed down to us their example of godly giving. Listed below are 10 principles that guide us in our endeavor to understand the heart-felt financial commitments that early Christians made to one another and to the building up of the kingdom of God.

1. God owns everything... and we are His “money-managers.” God has given us all good things, including money. He owns it all. Our role is to manage it as best we can in building up His kingdom. As in the Parable of the Talents, we are God’s servants, managing His resources in hope that one day He will say back to us...

“...Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.” (Matthew 25:21)

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” (1 Corinthians 10:26)

“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” (2 Corinthians 9:10)

2. Giving is God’s best antidote to materialism. Those who have the most are not automatically the happiest. Happiness is gained far sooner by *who* you have (God) rather than by *what* you have (stuff).

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

3. *The concept of a regular tithe was not overturned by Jesus.* In fact, Jesus affirmed the importance of the tithe when he was talking to a Pharisee about his lack of love...

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” (Matthew 23:23)

4. *New Testament Christians give to the church proportionately from God’s provision.* Tithing in the Old Testament was the “training wheels”, so to speak, on proportionate giving. As God blesses and provides for us, we are to give back a proportion of what’s His anyway! “How much is required?” is not the right question. The better question is, “How much can I give?” A faithful Christian should dedicate a regular percentage of his income to the monthly support of the church.

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...” (1 Corinthians 16:2)

“The Elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and, ‘The worker deserves his wages.’” (1 Timothy 5:18)

5. *The emotionally secure Christian gives anonymously.* Our temptation in giving is to do it to gain a better reputation among our friends. But Biblical giving is a decision before God alone. Churches rightfully keep track of gifts for tax purposes, but no public recognition is given.

“So when you give to the needy do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

6. *A godly leader gives voluntarily.* The mark of maturity in any realm of human behavior is to do it without being asked. Leadership, by definition, is doing something first without handholding from others.

“For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.” (2 Corinthians 8:3-4)

7. *The knowledgeable person gives expectantly.* To not expect God to bless is ignorance. Whether God blesses now on the earth, or later in heaven, He will indeed bless. We are smart to expect it when we are generous.

“Remember this, whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

8. *The Spirit-filled believer can give with joy and thanksgiving.* When our hearts are guided by God through His Spirit, we are naturally joyful and thankful to give back to Him what He deserves.

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

9. *The prudent man is able to give sacrificially.* To live in such a way that our lives are not burdened by financial debt and excess, frees us up to take godly steps of faith in our giving.

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.” (2 Corinthians 8:2)

“But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.”

(Mark 12:41-44)

10. God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving. The prosperous man has learned that prosperity is always in the hand of God.

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you used, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

Therefore, knowing the above principles of generous giving, every Christian should decide in his own heart a percentage of his income to give to the church on a regular and consistent basis. This amount given to the Lord’s work we call a TITHE in order to distinguish it from other types of gifts given. We may at other times give an extra benevolent offering, a special offering, or an offering to organizations outside the local church. These are wonderful gifts, as well, but separate from a regular, committed TITHE to the church, His GATHERED PEOPLE OF GOD. In my pastoral teaching, I encourage every Christian who has committed his life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord to start strong **by choosing to give back to God at least 10% of everything God has given to him.**

Tithing in the Early Church

Didache Writings... The Didache writings were a post-Biblical collection of writings presumably authored by the 12 Apostles in the late first century AD. In this early church history we also find an emphasis on the giving of first-fruits. “Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets... But if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor. If you make a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. So also when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.”

St. Irenaeus... This early church father wrote that Christ Himself “gave directions to His disciples to offer the first-fruits of His own created things not as if He stood in need of them, but that they might be themselves neither unfruitful nor ungrateful.”

St. John Chrysostom... This early church father contended that the tithe was more binding on the Christians than on the Jews as a matter of loving witness. He wrote “...if it was a danger to neglect the tithe then, imagine how serious it must be now!”

AN EASY LESSON IN TITHE COMMITMENT: 10-10-80

I teach my children the basic financial principle of **10-10-80**. Of the income God blesses you with, immediately give back to Him and His work the first 10%. Then discipline yourself to save 10%. Finally, teach yourself how to live on the remaining 80%. You will be amazed how easy it is! And how God will bless you with His many blessings, both spiritual and material. From an early age, if children learn the thrill and joy of giving and saving, then prudent spending becomes a way of life.

As adults, then, we can start with the same financial principle and work upwards. We can discipline ourselves to give more and save more and spend even less. **Remember, God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving.**

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