

April 27, 2008

“Having The Tithe Of Your Life”

A Jew, a Catholic, and a protestant were talking one day and got on the subject of giving.

The Jew said, "I take my pay for the week and throw it into the air. When it hits the floor whatever comes up "heads" I keep, whatever comes up "tails" is given to God."

The Catholic said, "Well, I do it a little differently than you. I draw a circle on the floor, then I throw my pay for the week into the air. Whatever falls outside the circle is mine and whatever falls inside the circle goes to God."

The protestant cleared his throat and said, "Well we do it differently. My wife and I take our pay for the week and throw it all up in the air. What God wants, He keeps. Whatever hits the floor is mine!"

It was Martin Luther who said, "There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook."

Did you know that money is such an important topic in the Bible that it is the main subject of nearly half of the parables Jesus told. In addition, one in every seven verses in the New Testament deals with this topic. The Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 verses on faith, and more than 2,000 verses on money.

In fact, 15 percent of everything Jesus ever taught was on the topic of money and possessions—more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.

Why such an emphasis on money and possessions? Because there is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money.

We cringe when the church talks about money. Maybe it is because such teaching is sometimes abused and used for personal gain. But we need to get a proper biblical perspective on this important subject.

Today I want to speak to you specifically on the subject of tithing. Many are confused about this topic. Hopefully, we can clear a few things up.

The financial support for the work of our local church and for our denomination is raised primarily from those who give consistently to the church (basically our Sunday morning offering). The Church of the Nazarene is a tithing church. A tithe is 10% (or a tenth) of your earnings. We believe in tithing for three reasons:

1. Duty

It is our duty to tithe. Some say tithing is an Old Testament principle not a New Testament principle. This is incorrect. As a matter of fact Jesus Himself told us not to

neglect the tithe. Let's take a look at Matt 23:23-24 (NLT) "How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law-- justice, mercy, and faith. *You should tithe, yes*, but you should not leave undone the more important things. 24 Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!"

At the time of Christ these religious teachers and Pharisees were so ritualistic about tithing that they would count the small herbs in the garden at their own home and make sure they gave a tenth of the herbs so they could say they gave a tithe of all they had. Not that there is anything wrong with that. Imagine if every time you plucked ten mint leaves from your garden for your iced tea you made sure you gave one leaf so that others without mint could have some for their iced tea. Many of you do that. You grow tomatoes and probably give more than a tenth away.

But, here was the problem with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They were not giving from their heart. And the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart (more about that later). Even worse, they thought because they were tithing they were good, while in reality they had selfish hearts. They were so concerned with obeying the letter of the law, but neglected the injustice around them. They gave a tenth of their mint, but neglected to show mercy. They made a big deal about small details of the law, yet were unfaithful in having a deeper relationship with God. They sweated the small stuff and neglected the more important matters. Jesus calls them blind guides and gives a picture of them straining the water in their cup to make sure they did not swallow a gnat, because gnats were considered unclean, yet they filled their house with camel meat!

Jesus said we should not ignore the important things of justice, mercy, and faith, but Jesus did not do away with tithing. He said, and I quote, "*You should tithe, yes...*"

The ministry of Jesus Christ brought an end to adherence to many of the ceremonial rituals that were fundamental to the Jewish faith. Tithing became a casualty of that, though it was not meant to be. Since the first-century, Christians have believed in generous giving, and willingly, and cheerfully gave away more than 10%. They believed that everything they had was God's, including their money, and as good stewards 10% was the least they could do. It was their duty to tithe, yet they did not see it as a duty, they desired to give. Tithing was an expression of their trust in God, for after all, if you can't trust God with your finances what can you trust Him with?

Tithing is our duty because Jesus said, "*You should tithe, yes...*" That alone should be all the reason you need to begin tithing if you are not tithing already...but let's look at other reasons to tithe.

2. Blessing

God wants to bless you, and promises to bless you if you tithe. In Mal 3:10 (NLT) God says through Malachi: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of

heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!"

Mal 3:10 (THE MESSAGE) "Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams."

(from: THE MESSAGE The Bible in Contemporary Language © 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved.)

"Bring the full tithe" - some people call what they give a tithe, but it is not a full tithe or a full tenth. They want God's full blessing, as God promises here, but don't give the full tithe.

A pastor received a call from a special agent of the I.R.S. who said, is this the pastor?

"Yes, it is," said the pastor.

"Well, I'm calling to inquire about someone in your Congregation, a Dr. Jones, do you recognize the name?"

"Yes," says the pastor, "Dr. Jones is a member here at the church, how can I be of service?"

"Well, I have the Doctor's tax return here, and he claimed to have made a sizeable tax-deductible donation to your church last year. Is that true?"

The pastor said, "well, I'd have to verify it with the treasurer. How much did the doctor say he contributed?"

"\$25,000" says the I.R.S. agent, "can you tell me if that is true?"

There's a long pause, "I'll tell you what," says the pastor, "call back tomorrow and I'm sure it will be!"

Now, I want to be careful here. I am not suggesting what you may have heard some charlatans say on TV, "send me \$10 and I guarantee God will give you \$100 in return" or "send me all your money and God will make you rich." Or Want to prosper? First you must send me 'seed money' as a sign of faith." These people are quacks or worse - swindlers, con-men. Some of God's blessings are better than money - seeing your child come to faith in Christ, being part of a mission project that is fruitful, being part of a growing church or ministry.

Yet, God has also blessed financially when we have been faithful to Him. Perhaps you have had one of those "mailbox miracles" of unexpected income that came just when you needed it. We had that happen here at the church last week. Diana knew last week was going to be a little tight financially especially with the kids home from school. There were needs at the house that had to be taken care of as well. She wasn't sure what she was going to do, and then someone left an envelope for her, with the money to meet her needs last week.

Here is a thank you she emailed to me to include in my "GM!" newsletter:

Good morning Pastor Jerry,

The kids and I were blessed by the kindness and generosity of a person or persons unknown to us from our "Forever Family." There are no words to express my feelings at this moment. This is a very heartfelt thank you to God and those that He chose to help us. You have no idea how this has blessed me, especially this week. I am extremely grateful and humble. May God bless them always!
Love Diana

I am not saying we should tithe so that God will bless us, I am saying when we tithe God promises to bless us. We are told not to test God, except in this one area. God says give your tithe and, "If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!"

3. Love

Love is the deepest and best motive for tithing.

Gen 14:18-20 NLT

18 Then Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought him bread and wine. 19 Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
20 And blessed be God Most High,
who has helped you conquer your enemies."

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

Abraham was the first person to tithe. At that time there was no command to tithe. Abraham had been blessed by God with a victory in battle over his enemies, and he desired to give a tenth of all his earnings for the work of God. Abraham's tithing came from a heart of love.

(in Matt. 23) Jesus told us not to neglect tithing, but to do it with the right motive. Neglecting to tithe is wrong, it is our duty to tithe. However, to tithe grudgingly is also wrong, God blesses a cheerful giver. Also, to tithe as ritual and not from heart of love is also wrong. Tithing is a natural response to a loving God. It doesn't feel like a duty, but something we desire to do. When we love God we want to obey Him.

Tithing is a tremendous opportunity to grow as a Christian in your commitment to Christ, in the blessings He has for you, and in your obedience as a true believer. From a pure heart the tithe is praise to a loving God Whom we wish to obey because He blesses our lives.