

Should New Testament Christians Tithe?

By Pastor Rod Nichols

According to Barna Research, less than 10% of born-again Christians tithe, which explains why so many churches and pastors are struggling. In response to the tithing issue, I'm often asked: "Wasn't tithing part of the law?" and "should New Testament Christians tithe?" I have spent a number of years researching the tithe and will present some of what I've learned in this article.

First, let's answer the question about whether the tithe was part of the law. The answer is "yes", however it also pre-dated the law. The Bible first mentions the tithe in Genesis 14:20, when Abram tithed (10%) of his increase (spoils of battle) to the high priest Melchizedek. Clearly Abram was moved by the Holy Spirit to give this holy man a tithe of what God had given him. This event pre-dates the law given to Moses and shows that Abram was motivated by the Spirit to give the tithe. As followers of Jesus Christ, I believe we should be motivated to do the same.

Now, I would like to point out something about the tithe that was associated with the law. It was instituted for three reasons:

1. To maintain the temple.
2. To pay the priests.
3. To help the poor.

When you bring your tithe into the church, it is used for the same three reasons. We use it to maintain and improve this building. It's used to pay the pastors and staff. Finally, it's used to help the poor. We also use it to reach the lost and lead them to Jesus, which is the most important reason to tithe.

Obviously, the answer to the second question (asked in the first paragraph) is that New Testament Christians should tithe. This is supported in scripture by both Jesus and Paul. Jesus refers to the tithe in Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. 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." (emphasis mine) Jesus was saying that we should tithe, but not for recognition or at the expense of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Although the Apostle Paul does not use the word tithe, he too addresses it in First Corinthians 16:2, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." He says that we are to set aside a sum of money in keeping with our income. This sure sounds like a tithe to me. As Paul said, if all Christians would tithe faithfully, there would be no need to take collections in church. By-the-way, the Corinthian church included both Jews and Gentiles, so we aren't back to that whole "under the Law" issue.

In my humble opinion, if both Jesus and Paul supported the tithe, that's good enough for me. However, I think it's good to understand why we tithe, so let's look at that next. Malachi 3:8-12 gives us the best explanation, but before we jump into that, I need to set some ground rules. First,

according to Psalm 24:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:26, everything belongs to the Lord. That means that 100% of the money you receive belongs to God. Second, God has established a partnership with us and all He asks for is the first 10%. We get to keep and use the other 90%. Okay, now let's study Malachi 3:8-12 to better understand why we tithe.

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 tithe 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. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

I love this scripture because it is God speaking to the Israelites and to us; giving exact instructions. In verse eight, it is clear that if we are not tithing, we are robbing God. How can that be, you ask? If 100% of your money belongs to God and He claims the first 10%, then that part belongs to Him, right? If you use it for your own purposes and don't give it to God, wouldn't that be stealing? The correct answer is "YES" and none of us want to be stealing from God.

Verse nine gives the penalty for not tithing - a curse. Keep in mind that this is pre-Jesus, who took all the curses to the cross, so in their case they would have been subject to an actual curse. I don't believe this applies to us now, but I do believe that when we don't tithe, we miss out on the benefits mentioned in Malachi 3:8-12, which includes protecting the rest of our money from the devourer (satan/the devil)

According to John 10:10, the thief (again satan/the devil) comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, so we don't want that rat anywhere near our money. Satan will accomplish his mission by misleading our thinking into making poor financial decisions causing debt and worse. Also, because God's blessing isn't there, things will wear out quicker (clothes and sandals of the Israelites in the desert didn't wear out because of God's blessing).

Verse ten is the one I really like, because it tells us that if we bring the whole tithe (10% of our gross income and any increase) into the storehouse (the church), then we will be blessed. In fact, this is the only place I have found in the Bible where God says "test me." Right after that He tells us that if we do test Him and tithe, He will open up the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we don't have room enough for it all. One day when I was meditating over this verse, the Lord told me that He used those same floodgates to pour water onto the earth in Noah's day. That was a lot of water and this is a lot of blessing. Plus, He says that we won't have room enough for it. I don't know what your situation is, but I checked with my bank and there is plenty of room in my account, so pour it on, Lord!

Verse eleven shows us the opposite of the curse (if we don't tithe), as it tells us that if we tithe, God will prevent Satan from having access to the other 90% and so it will go further. My wife and I experienced this. There was a time when we were deeply in debt and there was always

more month than there was money and so we thought we couldn't afford to tithe. Perhaps you feel the same way. However, once we began to understand this teaching, we decided to write the first check (10% of our gross income – before taxes, health insurance, 401k, etc.) to God and then trust Him for the rest. Prior to tithing, there was never enough money. After tithing (with no change in our income or expenses) there has always been enough and now it's to the point where there is always money left over. I don't know how it works and quit trying to figure it out years ago (God's ways are higher than our ways).

Finally, verse twelve tells us that if we tithe, nations will call us blessed. Prior to tithing, no one ever called us blessed and although I haven't had nations calling us blessed, many people have.

Let's recap. If we don't tithe, we are robbing God and don't get the blessings and protection. If we do tithe, we receive more blessing than we have room for and the other 90% of our money is protected from the enemy. Seems like a no-brainer to me, but God gives every person free will, so the choice is yours whether you tithe or not. New Testament Christians are NOT required to tithe.

Now that we understand the benefits of tithing, let's examine the motive. First, tithing is not giving. The first 10% of your money belongs to God. You can't ask to borrow some money from a friend and then give it back to them as a gift. We tithe out of obedience. I'm sure that you recognize that God doesn't need your money, but if He is truly going to be Lord of your life, then you must be obedient and tithe. Tithing is a heart issue – does God or money have your heart

Giving or the offering is always beyond the tithe and given out of love. God so loved us that He gave His only Son. Obviously, we can never give enough money to repay God for what He gave us. Fortunately, God doesn't look at the amount, He looks at the heart.

On occasion, I have people ask if they could work up to the 10% (or if they could tithe 5%). Tithe means 10%, so anything less is not a tithe, and you miss out on the benefits listed in Malachi 3:8-12. Now, if you are still convinced you can't tithe, become a giver and continue to increase your giving. It shouldn't be tithe or nothing.

I'm also asked if the tithe can go to a television ministry and the answer is typically "no," however if a person is not currently attending a church and is being fed (spiritual food) from a ministry, then the tithe can be sent there. I always encourage them to find a church to plug in to and at that time switch the tithe over to the church.

Okay, so we tithe out of obedience and if we do, we will be blessed and protected by God. It's a great deal. Trust God! It works and I don't know why any Christian wouldn't want to test God by tithing.