

Why Pastors Shouldn't Teach Tithing

by Lon Hetrick

Were you taught *the tithing system*?

I was. I believed it, practiced it, and even preached it myself. But no more.

The tithing system is what I call the modern teaching that if you tithe, God will bless you; if you don't, He won't. You know the Pastor is going to preach *the system* if the sermon text is this passage from the the Prophet Malachi:

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, “How have we robbed you?” In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” — Malachi 3:8-11

The system goes like this:

1. Tithing is commanded by God.
2. Therefore, Christians should give 10% of their income to their “storehouse” (i.e. the church you attend).
3. God promises to bless people who tithe.
4. Failing to tithe is disobedient to God, robs Him of His due, and shows that you don't trust Him to provide for your needs with the remaining 90% of your income.
5. God withholds His blessing from non-tithers, and they forfeit the peace of mind and security which tithers alone enjoy.

The system could be heard from thousands of church pulpits on any given Sunday, making it a dominant view of Christian giving. [Here's an example sermon](#) from well-known Southern Baptist pastor, Dr. Charles Stanley. This quote from the sermon illustrates *the tithing system* in a nutshell:

“God gives us a plan for our finances [in which, tithing is the key component]...I've practiced it for 64 years. And it works... I've met many people who have not practiced the plan... who have all kinds of troubles.”

Now, as far as I know, Dr. Stanley is an honest man, and a generous giver. He is not a false teacher where the gospel is concerned, and has never been involved in any scandal. But does the Bible really teach that Christians must give 10% of their income to their local church or risk “all kinds of troubles?”

Here's four reasons I think Pastors should not teach tithing.

1. *The tithing system* doesn't have an answer for why the Apostles never taught Gentile Christians to tithe.

You will search the New Testament in vain looking for any teaching on tithing, though there are plenty of passages about giving, generosity, and care for the needy. Even when the Apostles debated whether Gentile believers must keep the Law of Moses (of which tithing was a part) to be considered full-fledged members of the church, the answer was *no*. (see [Acts 15](#), especially verses 28-29).

In one of our most popular posts, I offer a full explanation for how God intended tithing to work in the life of Israel, and [why Jesus and the Apostles never taught tithing](#).

2. *The tithing system* distorts God’s purpose for giving and encourages works-oriented self-righteousness.

Notice the motivation Dr. Stanley cites: “it works” and you’ll avoid “all kinds of troubles.” That’s a very tit-for-tat, put-the-quarter-in-the-machine, works-oriented theology: Put in a tithe; pull out a blessing.

It is true that it is more blessed to give than receive. It is also true that God blesses those who are generous to those in need. But to tithe primarily to earn God’s blessing is an attempt to manipulate God. And theologically speaking, it is akin to modern prosperity teaching: Put in a tithe; pull out a **big** blessing. Nor is it far from medieval Catholic indulgences: put in a coin; pull out forgiveness of a few sins.

God is not our gum ball machine.

3. *The tithing system* can mislead people into thinking that God’s blessings are received as a result of what they do.

The New Testament is very clear that every blessing a Christian receives from God is received on account of Christ, in Him, through Him, for His sake, and for His glory. (see [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)).

You can never earn one ounce of God’s favor, and yet His favor is abundantly provided to you for the sake of Christ. We read that Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

Does he pray, “Oh Father, accept them because they are faithful and obedient tithers?” No! He points to the scars in His hands, feet and side and says, “Father, accept them for the sake of these wounds.”

4. *The tithing system* misses the *real* reasons Christians should give.

If you make giving about receiving blessings, then you’ve reduced it to a way to manipulate God into *owing you*. If you make giving about personal stewardship, then you’ve reduced it to a technique for financial management. If you make giving about supporting your local church (mortgage, utilities, salaries, events, etc), then you’ve reduced it to club dues. If you make giving about obedience to God’s tithing command to Israel, then you’ve missed the real reasons Christians should give.

Instead, Pastors should teach this:

Give as much as you can — and you alone decide what that is — *to support the mission to preach Christ to the ends of the earth, and to care for those in need.*

These are the only biblical motives for giving.

If you’ve grasped the magnitude of what God has done for you in Christ, if you’ve seen that in receiving God’s grace He has made you an ambassador of it, this will be enough to inspire you to give generously, joyfully, and increasingly without regard to the tithe.

You’ll give less than a tithe without feeling guilty, or a lot more than a tithe without thinking it’s enough. You’ll support ministries that pursue the mission and meet people’s needs. And you’ll simply give because you want to feed someone, clothe someone, rescue someone, and ensure that they hear how God has loved them.

Thank you Lon, I wish every preacher would be honest like you!