

SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-07-29—TITHING—A MATTER OF THE HEART

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Many of God's people have tithed for years and even decades. It is such a common practice that sometimes we do it without much thought. But it is, perhaps, not always that way especially in the beginning. All believers go through tests and trials to prove our commitment to God. Many times the first trials a new convert faces involve keeping the weekly Sabbaths, Passover, and the holydays. However, sooner or later many are faced with challenges in keeping God's commandment to tithe.

Someone who did not grow up in the Church may find the prospect of tithing a daunting one because of a tight budget, job uncertainty or loss, unexpected expenses, young children, health problems, etc. When I started tithing, things were very tight but manageable. However, during my third tithe year, my financial situation quickly became serious and I recall when it all came to a head. Back then, tithes were based upon gross income, too, instead of the net as it should be. I had just written a tithe check but the financial numbers were dismal. I went outside and was pacing back and forth—I was really worried but did not want my family to know. Looking up into the night sky, I told God how bad things were. I was at the point of tears and fearful that the worst would happen. I did not know what to do. As the sole provider for my family, I did not see how I could afford to keep tithing. I went back inside but nothing had changed. How nice it would have been to find an envelope in the mailbox with money or, at the very least, hear God tell me everything would be alright. As reluctant as I was, I put the check in an envelope and went to bed.

You are probably anticipating a story that ends with a stunning miracle against the backdrop of a heavenly choir singing in the heavens. Nope. Nothing changed. At least that was what I thought. Throughout that year I continued to send in my first and third tithes and save my second tithe for the Feast of Tabernacles. At the end of that third tithe year when I looked back at my finances, I just shook my head because I could not for the life of me figure out how it had worked out. Numbers do not lie but how in the world had there been just enough for the mortgage, bills, food, clothing, cars, gasoline, etc. as well as my tithes? How exactly it had worked out is still a mystery.

Besides the fact that God somehow worked everything out, the big lesson came the following year when God's blessings just poured in. A promotion, raise, and bonus at work were a big part of them but there were many other things: no major home repairs, visits to the doctor or hospital, etc. And God has continued to bless me tremendously ever since. Tithing helped me to truly begin trusting in HIM:

MALACHI 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the treasure house, so that there may be food in My house. And prove Me now with this," says the LORD of hosts, "to see if I will not surely open the windows of heaven for you, and pour out a blessing for you, until there is not enough room to receive it."

In the beginning, I gave tithes out of reluctant obedience. After all, they are a commandment of God¹. But the whole experience taught me that there is much more to tithing than money. While I proved through much angst God is faithful, I also realized that He had tested my resolve to obey Him. God will always fulfill His promises but they can be conditional upon us having to occasionally PROVE our obedience.

Tithing goes beyond the promises of God's blessings, too, because they are a way in which we can have a part in fulfilling Jesus Christ's commission to the Church—to preach the Gospel to the world and feed His sheep. At times, I wish I could thank those whose tithes allowed me to begin reading the truth of God.

Third tithe is very special because it allows us to be directly involved with others. It is, perhaps, the tithe that brings the most joy because it is an opportunity to personally give to others in their times of need. Notice the emphasis is on those “within our gates;” that is, those we can personally help:

DEUTERONOMY 26:12 When you have made an end of tithing all the tithes of your increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (that they may eat inside your gates and be filled),

This is one of the few laws of God where we are **commanded** to tell God that we have been faithful to take care of those in need and **remind** Him of His promise to bless us:

DEUTERONOMY 26:13-15 Then you shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have brought away the holy things out of my house, and also have given them to the Levite, and to the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me. I have not broken Your commandments, neither have I forgotten *them*. 14 I have not eaten of it in my mourning, neither have I put *any* of it away for unclean *use*, nor have I given of it for the dead. I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. 15 **Look down from Your holy dwelling, from Heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land** which You have given us as You swore to our fathers, a land that flows with milk and honey.’

Few of us are directly involved in preaching the gospel to the world even though first tithe supports that work. What many do not recognize is that third tithes are an even greater work within the Body of Christ—they are a direct blessing. Third tithes are the means we came to know some of the most wonderful and loving brethren. We also would not have known to pray for them if God had not revealed their needs to us. Giving to others is a great blessing. But the astounding part of godly giving is that those who receive something from us give even more back to us. There are certain scriptures that

¹ Lev. 27:30-31.

just have a wonderful poetry about them, and one of them is a quote of Jesus Christ on giving and receiving:

LUKE 6:38 Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete out, it shall be measured again to you.”

Even though I am writing about tithing, giving and receiving are about so much more than money. My experience with tithing happened before I understood it was a matter of the heart. In the beginning, it was a financial concern. Now it is much more than that. Another scripture that talks about giving and receiving being from the heart is in Paul’s words:

2 CORINTHIANS 9:5 Therefore, I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go ahead of us to you, and to complete the preparations of **this your bounty** beforehand, since **you had already proclaimed a willingness; so that it might be received as a blessing,** and not as it were of covetousness.

The Corinthians wanted to give to the needy brethren in Judea. God’s blessings upon them produced a “bounty” that they determined should be given to others who were in need. While it does not say whether this was an offering or a particular tithe, the Corinthians had a **desire** to give. Read on:

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-10 But this I say: **the one who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and the one who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.** **7 Each one as he purposes in his heart, so let him give,** but not grudgingly or by compulsion; for **God loves a cheerful giver.** **8** For God is able to make all grace abound toward you so that in every way you may always have sufficiency in all things, and may abound unto every good work, **9** According as it is written: “He has scattered abroad, and he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever.” **10** Now may He Who supplies seed to the sower, and bread to eat, **supply your seed and multiply your sowing; and may He increase the fruits of your righteousness,**

Giving as we have abundance to those in need affects the hearts of both the giver and recipient—and God blesses both. Amazingly, it also results in **thanksgiving to GOD:**

2 CORINTHIANS 9:11-12 So that **you may in every way be enriched unto all bountifulness, which causes thanksgiving to God** through us. **12** For the administration of this service is not only filling to overflowing the deficiencies of the saints, **but is also abounding by the giving of many thanks to God.** **13** **Through the performance of this service, they are glorifying God** for your professed subjection to the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of the distribution toward them and toward all the saints;

Both those who give and those who receive are motivated to glorify and give thanks to God! Have you ever thought about that? Everything done out of agape love working in us glorifies HIM. Both the giver and recipient abound in thanksgiving to God. Those who

give are thankful for the means to do so and those who receive are thankful for being taken care of in their times of need. Although I did not understand this in the beginning, tithing is one way God works to create agape love in us:

MARK 12:33 “And **to love Him [God]** with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, **and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**”

Love toward God and love toward mankind is a **result** of tithing! This kind of love was the motive behind the poor widow giving her two coins:

LUKE 21:1-4 When He looked up, He saw the rich men tossing their offerings into the treasury. 2 Then He also saw a certain poor widow drop in two small coins. 3 And He said, “Of a truth, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; 4 For all these have from their abundance cast into the offerings to God; but **she, out of her poverty, did put in all the livelihood that she had.**”

While no one should tithe if it puts them into poverty, this poor widow gave all out of love for God, His work, and the needs of others. Obviously, she was not coerced because even the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees would not profit from such meager resources. (Note—these two coins were equivalent to one of the least valuable Roman coins, rather like two half-pennies.) By giving **in her time of need**, she glorified God more than all of the others because of the abundance of love in her heart. This is the true lesson we are to learn and the one that God will continue teaching us until the day we go to our graves—ALL His ways are love². Giving and receiving are acts of love that glorify Him. This kind of love is reflected in Jesus Christ whose love for the potential children of God is so deep that He gave the greatest sacrifice anyone can—His own **life**! It was unconditionally from His heart. THIS is our standard for giving tithes and offerings:

EPHESIANS 5:1-2 Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 And walk in love, even as Christ also loved us, and **gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

Whether we are blessed with abundance or tried by poverty, God uses our circumstances to work in us His greatest gift—agape love. Sometimes it is a hard lesson and other times it is a joyous one but God’s work in us is for the same purpose: to make us like He is.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

<https://sabbathreflections.org>

² Psa. 145:17.