

CORONARY CHRISTIANITY - WHY AND HOW WE GIVE TO THE LORD - Part Four

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FIVE ETERNAL BENEFITS OF PRACTICING THE TITHE AND BEYOND

Recently, **Christianity Today** ran an article about young adults and financial giving. In it, author James Williams of the Church of God World Service said some things that ought to be of concern to all of us in the church today:

“Christian people 45 years old and younger have grown up mesmerized by the agenda of materialism. There’s tremendous pressure on families to spend, spend, spend.”

Then he adds: **“The generation that used to believe in and practice tithing is in three places: retirement homes, nursing homes, or the cemetery.”**

In other words, on the whole, baby busters and gen x’ers haven’t embraced tithing. In precise harmony with the world around them, in spite of what they **say** they believe about seeking God’s kingdom first with all their heart, they see **themselves** as the primary object of their spending and investing.

I want to try to show you this morning that these generations are making a huge mistake. I want to give you **five reasons** from the Scriptures why God has ordained the **tithe** and **beyond the tithe** as His plan for advancing His kingdom and reaching the lost and dying of this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ:

1) **RETURNING THE TITHE TO THE LORD’S WORK HONORS THE PRINCIPLE THAT, AS CREATOR, GOD OWNS EVERYTHING WE HAVE, INCLUDING ALL OUR INCOME**

I’ve actually heard people object to the practice of tithing on the basis that **everything** we own belongs to God. In other words, why should we press the issue of the tithe when everything we have belongs to God already, not just the tenth. Doesn’t this make the practice of tithing redundant and legalistic?

It is certainly true that everything we have belongs to the Lord:

Psalm 24:1 - “The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.”

This is as simple and straight forward as you can make it. If the whole **earth** is the Lord’s, plus **everything** that is in it, then there’s nothing else left. There is nothing left over that **doesn’t** belong to the Lord.

But this is not an argument **against** tithing. It’s an argument **for** tithing. This is why the Scriptures call the failure to tithe **robbing** God. Surely, if **everything** belongs to the Lord, we should consider it an honor and privilege to return to Him a tenth of it. In fact, this is exactly what the Scriptures teach. My honoring God with the tithe is my way of showing that I **understand** everything I have is His.

We can see how this works even in human relationships. There is something wrong with the husband who responds to his wife’s complaint that he never spends any time with her by saying, **“What do you mean, I don’t give you my time? All my time is yours! I work all day long for you and the children. You’re the ones I do all this for!”**

Those words have a hollow ring to them if he refuses to give her any time that is **specifically** hers. Giving her some evenings, taking her out each week for a date, sitting with her and talking with her and listening just to her - these are ways of **showing** that you **understand** your time is hers. The **special** times you set aside, **dedicated** just to her, are the ways you **prove** that she comes first in your heart, that all your time really does, in fact, belong to her.

Tithing shows how deeply I **believe** everything I have belongs to God. God knows us wisely and deeply. He knows that **general** commitments are often **non-existent** commitments. **Tithing** shows with our **wealth** what the **Lord’s Day** shows with our **time**. My acknowledgment that all my time belongs to God, while I find it a chore even to come to His House consistently one day in seven, will have a hollow ring to it. And my acknowledgment that all my wealth belongs to God, while I can’t even bring myself to put a tenth of it at His disposal is just empty religious blither.

Giving God a tenth of our wealth doesn't **deny** that all our wealth is His. It **proves we believe it**. When I tithe I prove that I understand that **all** my wealth is His. It proves I know that the way I spend every cent says something about my view of God. What I do with every cent shows what God means to me in this world. Tithing is the constant offering of the **first fruits** of my whole life. By my tithe I am saying, "**God, this tenth is Yours in a special way because I know everything is Yours in a general way.**"

2) TITHING OUR TOTAL INCOME TO THE LORD'S WORK IS AN ANTIDOTE TO COVETOUSNESS

Wanting material things too much is incredibly dangerous for your soul:

Luke 12:15 - "And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'"

Colossians 3:5 - "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

And, just to brand the importance of heeding these warnings about covetousness - to keep us from hearing them the way people listen to the flight attendant talk about the emergency exits on the airplane as it takes off - Paul says something shocking about the danger of the peril of the covetous heart:

Ephesians 5:5 - "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

That's right. You can't get into heaven with a covetous heart. Paul is saying my desire for material things **can't** be left unchecked. It **must** be curbed and limited or I will **perish**. And so God, in His grace, has made provision for my need. Tithing is one of God's great antidotes to covetousness. It is God's primary means of freeing the soul from the stain of the love of wealth. Here's why: **Every time I tithe I must deal with the desire of what I might have bought for myself with that money.**

And that's also why, as we saw last week, tithing is only treated as a **first step** in this treatment. This was the theme of last week's study. **Sacrifice** is the measurement for giving in the New Testament - not just tithing. That's why tithing isn't mentioned very much in the New Testament as the standard for giving. And that's the way it's supposed to be. Tithing is just the first step. But it's a great first step because tithing confronts covetousness like nothing else in this world. **To give is not to buy.** Tithing forces the choice.

It's easy to prove this is the truth. Study one hundred Christians who don't tithe and you will soon see their reason. It's usually **not** that they've studied the issue and have concluded tithing is an Old Testament practice rather than a New Testament one. Their reason isn't usually one of hermeneutics. They will tell you they **can't afford** to tithe. That is, if they tithe there will be other financial commitments they won't be able to meet. Their **lifestyle** will be affected.

Because the church **wants** people to tithe a whole new approach has been dreamed up to deal with the non-tither's objection. A prosperity gospel has been birthed that **allows people to enter into the experience of tithing without making the choice to sacrifice personal lifestyle**. We've begun to tell people they can have it both ways. We tell people that God will actually **use** their tithe to make more wealth. If they will tithe, they won't have to sacrifice. God will see to it.

But the real tragedy here is that this new system negates and skips over the **greatest** blessing of tithing. Tithing **should** cause personal sacrifice. If the level of my giving, starting with the tithe, **doesn't** cause me to do without in other areas of purchasing power it misses God's greatest work in my heart.

This understanding lies at the very core of Scriptural giving. Every week that crisis of **not** buying something for myself so I can give more to the Lord is absolutely **essential** to maintain. We must all fight covetousness every day we live and breathe. Covetousness is a **poison** to spiritual life. Tithing is God's **antidote** to that poison.

Tithing forces this question to the surface of my heart: Do I value the cause and honor of God most, or am I more in love with 10% more money for myself? God tests our heart every week with the tithe. He's out to kill covetousness with a vengeance. Killing covetousness frees the soul from the kingdom-numbing deceitfulness of riches. You make the joyful discovery that there are **two** ways to contentment. The first is to get enough things so

you want nothing you can't afford. The second is to **scale down your wants**. You learn, as you spend your life for the kingdom, that **not wanting something is as satisfying as possessing it**.

3) WHEN CHRISTIANS LEARN TO LIVE BY THE TITHE AND BEYOND IT ACTUALLY PUTS A GOVERNOR ON EVER-INCREASING PERSONAL SPENDING

This is very closely related to the last point, but it presses it even deeper. It seems to be one of the most infallible rules of modern human life that **spending expands to fill the income**. And if you make more, and spend more, you will observe something else: **Spending begets more spending**. That's because everything I buy has to be maintained, stored and repaired. This is all part of what Jesus called the **"deceitfulness of riches."** They beget more **care**, not more **well-being**.

There is another certain rule: **If I make less, I will spend less**. I spend absolutely no time whatsoever thinking about luxury cruises around the world or ninety thousand dollar sport cars. But it's not because I'm holy. I simply know those things are out of the question for me. And I know something else about my own heart: If I made five hundred thousand dollars a year it's very possible I **would** think a great deal about those things. I would buy those things like I buy the things I buy now without even thinking about it, simply because I would have the money to do so.

All of this reveals a huge and corrupt problem deeply rooted in our nature. If it really is true - true that expenses and investments expand to fill income - **how will we ever restrain ourselves from simply living to accumulate more and more stuff, and more and more expensive stuff, and appearing to the world around us like we share exactly the same drives and goals and values they are governed by?**

It seems to me there is only one solution to this problem. As our income grows we must move **beyond the tithe**. We must resolve to maintain, not a certain **dollar** level in our **giving**, but a certain **sacrifice** level in our **living**. As my income increases I must **put the brakes** on my level of personal indulgence. As we increase in wealth we must all **curb the natural, fallen impulse toward ever-increasing luxury**.

I read a beautiful example of this from the life of John Wesley. Let me quote it to you:

"John Wesley was one of the great evangelists of the 18th Century, born in 1703. In 1731 he began to limit his expenses so that he would have more money to give to the poor. In the first year his income was 30 pounds and he found he could live on 28 and so gave away two. In the second year his income doubled but he held his expenses even, and so he had 32 pounds to give away (a comfortable year's income). In the third year his income jumped to 90 pounds and gave away 62 pounds. In his long life Wesley's income advanced to as high as 1,400 pounds in a year. But he rarely let his expenses rise above 30 pounds. He said that he seldom had more than 100 pounds in his possession at a time."

"This so baffled the English Tax Commissioners that they investigated him in 1776 insisting that for a man of his income he must have silver dishes that he was not paying excise tax on. He wrote them, "I have two silver spoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present, and I shall not buy any more while so many round me want bread."

"When he died in 1791 at the age of 87 the only money mentioned in his will was the coins to be found in his pockets and dresser. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his life had been given away."

4) LIVING BY THE TITHE AND BEYOND WILL PROVE AND STRENGTHEN YOUR FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD

Hebrews 13:5 - "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

If you read those words quickly you will think they are all about **money**. They aren't. They are about **faith**. More specifically, they are about how to **grow** in faith. Surely this is something all Christians aspire to because without faith it is impossible to **please** God. God loves to see faith developed in our hearts.

So the question naturally arises, **"How can I grow in faith?"** Certainly if faith came simply by our **asking** for it we would all be giants in faith. But faith doesn't come just because we **ask** for it. Faith comes as you and I **grow** into

it. It's a gradual process, not an instantaneous bestowment.

The writer of Hebrews says there is an absolute correlation between the increase of faith in the promises and character of God and the letting go of material things we **think** we need for our contentment and security, but really don't. In other words, the strength and growth of your faith in God is proportionate to the way you release funds to the work of the kingdom that you would normally think you must have for your own pleasure and security.

This is another purpose of living by the tithe and beyond. Every time you doubt that you can live on 90% of your income, let this glorious promise of God strengthen your faith - **Philippians 4:19** - "**And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**"

5) **THE FIFTH REASON FOR LIVING BY THE TITHE AND BEYOND IS IT MULTIPLIES GOOD DEEDS BRINGING GOD GREATER GLORY**

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. [7] Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. [8] And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

At the end of **verse 8** Paul says that when we sow **generously** and **cheerfully** the result isn't just that we **feel** good about ourselves (though there **is** great joy and fulfillment in giving). The result Paul focuses his attention on is the fact that there will be an "**abundance for every good deed.**"

Notice, the goal is **good deeds**. Excess money is for good deeds. Financial gain is for good deeds. Increased income is for good deeds. It's very easy to get this all turned around in our minds. We can easily think (if we listen to the advertisers) that increased **income** is for increased **spending**. We can actually come to think that when God puts additional wealth into our hands (remember point number one - all wealth belongs to the Lord) that He is putting it there for **our own pleasure**.

Paul says this is a huge mistake. This misses the mind and heart of God. The person who lives this way simply doesn't **know** God. The wealth God puts into my hands is put there so the world will see that my God is truly glorious. The good deeds my wealth can accomplish are the deeds that will make my light shine. If I simply dedicate myself to laying up treasure on earth people who see how I live will have no reason whatsoever to think God is glorious. **They will never think of heaven by the way I use my wealth.**

Do people think of eternity by the way you spend your money? Paul says they should. Increased wealth is for deeds for the kingdom. What is there about the way you use your wealth that makes no sense to an atheist? What is there about my spending that proves God is the most important thing in my heart - that I've serving Him more fulfilling than material purchases?

This is God's call to our church family today. His call has never changed. As God's children on our way to heaven we are simply not allowed to lay up treasure on earth. Increased wealth is for increased investment in God's kingdom. Remember, there is absolutely nothing wrong with **making** a lot of money. It's **not** a sin to want to **make** a lot of money. It **is** a sin to want to **keep** a lot of money. God bring you increase for His kingdom. This is where the reality of faith is proven and nourished. And this is where the potential to gladden the heart of Father God with the good deeds - the **missionary** deeds - that flow from living by the tithe and beyond will point our world to Jesus Christ.

This **concludes** this series of teaching on giving. But it only **begins** the process of freeing and transforming our desires and attitudes. Let this Word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly all year long.