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CHRISTIAN
Cithing
- A PRIVILEGE -

By ROBERT E. SPEER

Christian Tithing a Privilege

BY

ROBERT E. SPEER

Secretary, The Board of Foreign Missions, 1891 to 1937

THE tithe is a working scheme of proportionate giving by which we can make the principle of stewardship actual and living. I should like to suggest just a few of the practical moral considerations on which it rests.

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First of all, the Gospel ought to lead and enable men to do more than the pagans and Jews of Old Testament times. The Jew in the old dispensation was expected to bring his tithe in addition to his taxes and his various offerings. The generosity of many pagans equals the old Jewish standards. We do not need to enter into the motives that led them to give. The clear fact is that many of the non-Christian people, like the Jews, have given much more than tithes. Now our Lord said unequivocally that principles are to be judged by their results; that modes and motives of action cannot claim the allegiance of man because of any beauty in themselves. By their fruits they are to be tested. Unless the motives of the Gospel are able to lead men to give more generously than the Old Testament Jews and pagans gave, the motives of the Gospel must be inferior to those of Judaism and paganism.

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Secondly, the ancient Jew and the pagan faced no less difficulties in the way of practicing a principle like this than we face. We face no greater difficulties than they faced. As a matter of fact, they faced even greater difficulties than we face. The Jew was a poor man and lived in a poor land. He had no such currency passing through his hands as passes through ours. He gave of his orchards and

fields or he set aside one tenth of his soil that its produce might be regarded as, not his own, but God's. If Jews then and the pagans now have overridden their difficulties and, in spite of poverty and limitation will do this, it is not asking or expecting too much that Christian men should do so. The charges that are laid upon us to be borne are trivial compared with the charges laid upon the Jews in the olden day.

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Thirdly, we need some practical abiding principle like this to make sure that the principle of stewardship is a reality in our lives and that we do not find ourselves self-deceived. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man who does not deal with God in the matter of obligation as he does with his fellows to find that he has not been giving God his due. I would ask any man who has adopted the minimum principle of the tithe if he did not discover that in the old days he was outrageously robbing God. Just exactly as we need the Sabbath to make sure of the recognition of all time as sacred to the Lord of life, just so do we need the recognition of our tithe obligation to God in the matter of our wealth.

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In the fourth place, God does not need tithes for himself. The principle of tithe-giving is needed by man. God made it clear, not as something valid for that time only, but as something for all time. Man's moral constitution has not altered. Our moral nature is the same across the lands and across the centuries, and the old principle was not a principle that belonged to a particular epoch; it was a principle that lay deep in human nature. That is why John Ruskin speaks as he does in the "Seven Lamps of Architecture":

"And let us not now lose sight of this broad and unabrogated principle—I might say incapable of being abrogated so long as men shall receive earthly gifts from God. Of all

that they have his tithe must be rendered to him, or in so far and insomuch he is forgotten; of the skill and of the treasure, of the strength and of the mind, of the time and of the toil, offering must be made reverently; and if there be any difference between the Levitical and the Christian offering, it is that the latter may be just so much the wider in its range as it is typical in its meaning, as it is thankful instead of sacrificial."

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Fifthly, money is the most perilous thing with which we have to cope, next to the baser, sensual nature. It is one of the most dangerous forces with which we have to deal. We all know how perilous it is, how constantly through the New Testament warnings are given regarding it. So it was throughout all our Lord's teaching. He realized that some of the sources of deepest peril to man in one sense lay in money. In order to escape that peril, we need the protecting grasp of some great and secure principle. Who does not know how serious this need is? We can think of friends who have had wealth pile up for them, and we have seen their spiritual atrophy, unless they clung to some simple principle of action like this to hold them secure.

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In the sixth place, our Lord himself recognized and approved the validity of the principle of the tithe. He said to the scribes and the Pharisees, "Ye tithe . . . but these ye ought to have done." So many times now do we say that the Old Testament laws are abrogated in Christ. The types and shadows were indeed fulfilled and terminated in Christ, but the moral law was not terminated in him. None of these moral ideals did Christ abrogate. He reënforced and sanctioned every one of them, and poured upon each one of them the burden of a greater obligation. He explicitly indorsed the tithe: "Ye tithe . . . but these ye ought to have done."

Seventhly, the only sure way of securing to the uses of God in the extension of his Kingdom what is needed is to set aside carefully for him the first tenth. It is only so that the causes of Christ in the world will get what they require. They never will get it by any haphazard method or by any method through allowing every man to whittle out his own principle; it will be only when the whole Church generously yields itself to some corporate principle that bears a definite relation to all its life. The general adoption of the principle of the tithe throughout the Church would pour into all the treasuries of the agencies of the Church and the great philanthropies and movements of charity and good will all that they need for the work that must be done, and we shall not be likely to accomplish it in any but this simple, fundamental, ethical way.



Eighthly, I think every man will find, as all who have passed through the experience can testify, that the acceptance of a principle like this marks a distinct era of spiritual enlargement in his life. It carries him forward and leads him out into a wider expanse. The whole thought of God's love and presence and human duty becomes more vivid. I am not speaking out of the air. I am speaking out of the experience of many who look back to such a time as marking the beginning of a new era in their lives.



In the ninth place, tithe-giving may bring the great religious expansion and awakening for which we long: "Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." I suppose we have many times stumbled at Horace Bushnell's word on this subject and wondered whether for once one of the greatest

spiritual voices of his time did not miss the true note when he said: "One more revival—only one more—is needed, the revival of Christian stewardship, the consecration of the money power to God. When that revival comes, the Kingdom of God will come in a day." But may this not be true? Mr. Gladstone even went so far as to say, "I believe that the diffusion of the principle and practice of systematic beneficence will prove the moral specific of our age."



In the tenth place, I believe in this principle because, regardless of anything that will flow from it, it is fundamentally right. It does not matter what effect it may have on our lives, whether it pinches or cramps. We believe in it because we think it is right. I liked a letter that appeared in *The Sunday School Times* some years ago. A number of letters had been published telling of the prosperity which had followed the adoption of tithe-giving. One correspondent wrote that he had an utterly contrary experience from the rest. He told a long story of the struggle that he had undergone, growing harder and harder ever since he had adopted the principle of the tithe. Shortly after there was a letter from Canada which said that what this last man wrote of his experience in giving because it was right, in spite of the hardship and disasters he had suffered, had touched the writer as no experience of prosperity had done, and he also had begun what clearly seemed to him now the thing to do because and only because it was right.

I do not mean to say that the privilege of giving a tithe is all that there is to proportionate giving, or that it exhausts the principle of stewardship. There will be men whose duty and privilege it will be to give two tenths or nine tenths. I am only setting forth some of the reasons for believing that the practice of the tithe is the best method for securing for the principle of stewardship an initial grip of reality upon life.

Let me lay the emphasis lastly on the rich privilege of being justified in giving at least a tenth of our income. I have a right to take all the money that comes to me and, before I do anything whatever with any of it, to set aside a tenth for the Lord. What a joy it brings into life that we may simply act as bankers for God, to spend for his work! Mr. Gladstone wrote of this to a son who was then in residence at Oxford University, in which he suggested eight rules, the observance of which would be conducive to the highest interests of his son's life, literary and moral and spiritual. Among the suggestions was the following:

"In regard to money—there is a great advantage in its methodical use. Especially is it wise to dedicate a certain portion of our means to purposes of charity and religion, and this is more easily begun in youth than in afterlife. The greatest advantage of making a little fund of this kind is that when we are asked to give, competition is not between self on the one hand and any charity on the other, but between the different purposes of religion and charity with one another, among which we ought to make the most careful choice. It is desirable that the tenth of our means be dedicated to God, and it tends to bring a blessing on the rest. No one can tell the richness of the blessings that come to those who thus honor the Lord with their substance."



I can still remember the very hour that all this first pressed on me in 1892 in the old First Church at Auburn. Horace Pitkin then still a theological student, who later died as one of the martyrs in the Boxer tempest in China, read a paper on proportionate giving and the principle of the tithe. I never had seen this truth until that morning, and it burst on me as clear as sunlight that this is the right, the privilege, and the duty of Christians. And if only the Christian Church would come to it, my friends, what could we not do?

Principles of Giving in Christian Stewardship

The Christian

Recognizes that God is the Creator and Giver of all things, and that all people are dependent upon him for their material possessions.

Rejoices in his partnership with God in acquiring, saving, spending, and giving.

Believes that stewardship calls for regular, proportionate, and sacrificial giving.



Page 10 of this leaflet is a reproduction of an enrollment form for use in connection with a Christian tithing campaign. There are three sections to the card which is available in quantities—one to be kept by the individual, one for the church files, and the other to be sent to the Board of Christian Education. 75 cents a hundred at all Presbyterian Book Stores.

The Presbyterian FELLOWSHIP of GIVING

I purpose to adopt the practice of proportionate giving in accepting my responsibilities as a Christian steward:

- ☐ 1. By setting aside.....per cent of my income for the support of the church, for the advancement of the Kingdom of God at home and overseas, and for the furtherance of worthy causes.
- ☐ 2. By dedicating a tithe (a tenth) of my income as an expression of the principle of proportionate giving, historically accepted by the Christian Church.
- ☐ 3. By adopting the practice of the tithe for a period of.....months.

Name.....

Address.....

Mark the square that indicates your decision.

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