

One of the aspects of Christian stewardship is the giving of a tithe, or 10% of one's income, as a response to the provision God has granted us here on earth. The command for a tithe comes from the Old Testament in two places directly. First, God gives the following instruction to Moses for the tabernacle, ***Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD (LEV. 27:30).*** This tithe was given to the priests in service to the tabernacle to be able to supply it with everything needed for the right worship of God. In fact, this is one of the last instructions given in Leviticus to ensure the lasting support of the worship life of the congregation of Israel. And so the Lord instructs for 10% to be given back to him, for it is from him that all things come anyway. It is an act of faith, trusting in God to provide all we need to support this body and life, which is something we pray for every day in the Lord's prayer: *Give us this day our daily bread.* Knowing that God does provide, we then can give faithfully, not worrying about our lack but in confidence trusting in our God to supply us with all things needful.

Second, Malachi the prophet says in chapter 3, ***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 (vs. 10).*** This is a remarkable passage wherein the Lord is challenging us to out-give him...something that is impossible to do! What is also remarkable is that God, in truth, does not ask for much from us...only 10%. That's a dime out of every dollar; a dollar out of every \$10; \$10 out of every \$100, and so forth. If we were to plan on this, and if we are honest with ourselves, we know that this is a doable thing and that there is enough for us to "live on" if we give 10% away to God. And even though this is such a small amount, look at what God promises to do in response: to open the windows of heaven and pour down blessings to the point that there is no longer any need! Talk about a return on investment! But this is precisely the way God works for us. He takes what we give to him, not hoarding it for himself, but he turns it right back around and gives it back in abundance in blessings too numerous to count.

In a very practical example, consider this. Your offering goes in the plate as a thank-offering to God. In return, the Church makes use of these funds to do a number of things including providing for a pastor and his family, ensuring there is a space for the congregation to meet in, providing the elements needed for the Divine Service, offering opportunities for continued growth in the faith, and supporting those in need in our community. On top of that, the Church takes 10% of what you give and turns around and gives it to other organizations whose work is to bring the Gospel of Jesus to a lost and hurting world. Thus, out of your offerings, you have a shepherd to preach the word to you and administer the sacraments, a building in which to gather weekly for worship, opportunities to study the Bible, and works of mercy and mission being accomplished in our community and around the world. All of that flows out of the faithful giving of our members which certainly seems like the abundance of blessings that Malachi prophesied about.

OK...I think I get it, you might be saying...but, is this something I have to do? After all, you've given a couple of Old Testament examples...aren't we New Testament people who live in the freedom of the Gospel? That is a good question, and a valid point. We do indeed live under the freedom from the law that Christ has won for us. However, that does not mean that we are free to live any way we please. There are still good things for us to follow as faithful, Godly people. For example, the command to keep the Sabbath day holy, is that something we have to do? That is an Old Testament thing too. And yet, while the letter of the law has been fulfilled (we don't have to observe a Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday), the spirit of the law is still in place, for our good. Thus, being in Church weekly to receive God's gifts is still something we do, not out of obligation to the law, but under the blessing of the Gospel. So too it is with the tithe. The letter of the law has passed with Christ, but the spirit of that law remains, and it does not seem as though what God saw as good and salutary in the olden days would somehow go out of style in the new. In other words, God would not have us do less in our life of faith...the 10% tithe is still a good thing, and is something we have the privilege to be able to do in response to what God has given to us. We do not make God poor when we do not offer a tithe in faith, but we do make ourselves poor in spirit, and may even be leading ourselves into the temptation of allowing the allure of money and wealth to get in the way of our relationship with God.

Thus, God commends this tithe to us, not as an obligation to fulfill, but as a Gospel-response to all that our Lord has done for us in Christ. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, *But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.* Paul is referring to the generosity of the saints in Corinth to the people in need in Macedonia. We are invited to excel in this kind of giving, even as we have been blessed with faith and love and the like. It is all part of our Christian life, and thus it is something that we should think about and take seriously, just as we do any of the other instructions from God, for they are intended for our blessing.

Giving away 10% of our income can be a scary proposition, especially if you've never done it before. But rest assured, no one who has ever done it has found themselves lacking because of it, otherwise, the word of God would be false. God says we will be blessed in this, and that means he will continue to supply us with all we need. Consider these 5 things then in regards to tithing and giving as part of our stewardship of God's gifts. First, any giving should be done **willingly**. Again, it is not out of obligation, but is a faithful and joyful response to what God has done for us. Second, our giving should come **first**, not last. We should not handle everything else in life, and then if there is stuff left over, we give to God. It goes the other way around, and it may mean sacrificing things we like to make this work. God has given us everything and he asks for the first of our bounty in thanksgiving. Third, our giving should be **regular**. A majority of us have rather regular income, and in response, our giving should be regular – weekly or monthly and not dependent upon whether we have upheld the 3rd commandment or not. Fourth, our giving should be **proportionate**. Again, God has asked for a tithe as a benchmark, and so we are called to take that percentage and return thanks to God for what he has provided. And fifth, we are to be **generous**, seeing the tithe as the floor of our giving, not the ceiling, and as we are able, to find other areas of the church where we might be able to support her work.

So, as we continue to look at the topic of stewardship, consider your own giving to the Church and whether a tithe is something you are doing or not. If you are, then think about other ways you can help out. And if you are not, then think about what is preventing you, and how you might seek to align yourself with God's teaching in this regard. While it seems odd, giving to the Church is a blessing, for the Lord always provides, and through his graciousness, grants us far more than we could possibly accumulate for ourselves. He has rained down blessings from an open heaven, and promises us to have these now and forever!

May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our first-fruits give. (LSB 781, st. 2)

~ Pastor Noack