

First Things – part five, about the tithe

12/04/2016 Andy Figueroa

*But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the feasts, as it is ordained for all Israel by an everlasting decree. Taking the **first fruits** and the tithes of my produce and the **first shearings**, I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar. Of all my produce I would give a tenth to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem;* Tobit 1:6-7a RSV (about 8th century BC)

Tobit leads an exemplary life, a model of faithfulness observing all that has been commanded, in spite of the apostasy that was rampant among the Hebrew tribes living in exile in Nineveh. If Tobit had been a Christian, he would be a hero of the faith.

Many Christian teachers dance carefully around the subject of tithing and giving, a topic that deserves more than passing notice. Although it is true that Christians are not bound by Old Covenant laws such as feasts, fasts, sacrifices, ceremonies and rites, “no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.” (BCP, Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, article VII) The greatest moral law is love: love God and love your neighbor. (Matthew 22:37-40 and BCP, Order for Holy Communion)

We give to the church because we love God and we want to support His ministry in this place and in the world. Under the Old Covenant, “the church” was the temple, the Levites, the synagogues, and God commanded the Levitical tithe for their support. Under the New Covenant, the Christian church is the body of Christ and represented by outposts like Holy Trinity. It is a moral imperative to support the church, and in the tithe God has revealed one consistent standard for giving that pleases Him.

But a tithe, which God gave to His chosen people as a standard for giving, should be seen by Christians as mere training wheels for New Covenant giving. Most children learning to ride a bike start with training wheels, but as they gain experience the training wheels come off and real riding begins. The early church fathers did not teach keeping the Old Covenant tithe. Irenaeus wrote, “The Jews were constrained to a regular payment of tithes; Christians, who have liberty, assign all their possessions to the Lord, bestowing freely not the lesser portions of their property, since they have the hope of greater things.” (*Against Heresies, Chapter XVIII*)

The matter of the tithe is a two-edged sword. It's very helpful to have the tithe in its Old Covenant context as a standard for giving, but Christian giving is not so straight forward as just paying your tithe. For some people, giving a mere tithe to the church might be unsatisfying and unfaithful. In other cases, compelling the gift of a tithe might be tantamount to stealing the widow's mite. (Luke 21)

In his book, *Answers to Questions*, F. F. Bruce wrote, *Each Christian must come to a conscientious decision on this subject before God, and not be content to submit to the dogmatic statements of others; and it will be surprising if grace does not impel him to give a larger proportion than ever the law demanded.*

Finally, now that you are thinking about it, if you have not yet participated in the in-gathering of 2017 *Estimated Tithes and Offerings*, please complete your card and place it in the gray box near the baptismal font or drop it into the offering.

You will find a copy of this article and all past articles at: <http://2chronicles36.org/>