

BIBLE & THEOLOGY

7 Reasons Christians Are Not Required to Tithe

TGC Asks

MARCH 28, 2017 | THOMAS SCHREINER

Editors' note: This is a two-part TGC Asks series weighing the question, "Are Christians today required to tithe?"

- [The Bible Commands Christians to Tithe](#) (William Barclay)
-

Many think believers in Christ should tithe (defined as giving 10 percent of one's income), and many use the language of "tithes and offerings" in worship services. Others are equally convinced tithing is not required for believers.

Which view is more faithful to God's Word?

This certainly isn't a matter over which believers should break fellowship. Love is far more important than our view on tithing (1 Cor. 13). Still, I would argue tithing isn't required or even encouraged for believers in Jesus Christ. But such a stance needs to be explained.

Tithing in the Old Testament

What does the Old Testament say about tithing? Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils of war to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and Hebrews appeals to this account to support the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over Levi's (Heb. 7:4–10). God met Jacob at Bethel and promised him covenant blessings; the patriarch promised God a tenth of everything granted him (Gen. 28:22).

A tenth of Israel's seed, fruit, and flocks were given to the Lord (Lev. 27:30–32; Deut. 14:22–24; cf. 2 Chron. 31:5–6; Neh. 13:5, 12). The people gave a tenth to the Levites to support them (Num. 18:21–24; cf. Neh. 10:38; 12:44), and the Levites, in turn, were to give a tenth to the chief priest (Num. 18:25–28). Those who didn't tithe were threatened with a curse, while those who did tithe were promised blessing (Mal. 3:8–10).

Though we might assume Old Testament Israel gave a total of 10 percent, it's actually difficult to discern how much was given. We can't linger over details in this short article, but some think the Israelites gave 14 tithes over seven years; others believe they gave 12. Regardless, when we add the required tithes together, the amount certainly exceeded 10 percent. In fact, the number was probably somewhere around 20 percent per year.

Why Tithing Is Not Required Today

There are seven decisive reasons for saying Christians are not required to tithe.

1. Believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant (Rom. 6:14–15;

7:5–6; Gal. 3:15–4:7; 2 Cor. 3:4–18).

The commands stipulated in the Mosaic covenant are no longer in force for believers. Some appeal to the division between the civil, ceremonial, and moral law to support tithing. Yet these divisions, I would observe, are not the basis Paul uses when addressing how the law applies to us today. And even if we use these distinctions, tithing is clearly not part of the moral law. It's true the moral norms of the Old Testament are still in force today, and we discern them from the law of Christ in the New Testament, but tithing is not among these commands.

2. The examples of Abraham and Jacob are not normative patterns.

Some think tithing is required because both Abraham and Jacob gave a tenth, and they both lived before the Mosaic covenant was in place. Such examples hardly prove tithing is for all time, however. Abraham's gift to Melchizedek was a one-time event; there is no evidence he regularly gave God a tenth.

Jacob's giving of a tenth signified his gratefulness to God for promising to be with him and to protect him. His gratefulness and generosity still speak to us today, but a historical description of what Jacob gave doesn't support the idea that all believers must give God a tenth of their income.

3. Tithes were given to the Levites and priests, but there are no Levites and priests in the new covenant.

Levites and priests were tied to the sacrificial system of the old covenant. Now all believers are priests (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), with Jesus as our Melchizedekian high priest (Heb. 7).

4. The tithe is tied to the land Israel received under the old covenant.

Israel was supposed to celebrate a tithe every three years in Jerusalem. But that requirement cannot apply to Christians today. It related to the Jews as a nation—to Jews who lived in the land of promise. With the coming of Christ, the Jewish nation is no longer the locus of God's people, though individual Jews are part of the church through faith in Jesus.

The earthly Jerusalem is no longer central in God's purposes ([Gal. 4:25](#)). Believers are part of the heavenly Jerusalem ([Gal. 4:26](#)) and look forward to the city to come ([Heb. 11:10](#)), to the new heavens and new earth ([Rev. 21:1–22:5](#)). Abraham isn't heir of the land of Israel, but of the whole world ([Rom. 4:13](#)).

5. If tithing is required today, how much should we give?

As noted above, the number was certainly more than 10 percent and closer to 20 percent. Those who advocate tithing should probably settle on 20 percent.

6. When Jesus affirmed the tithe, it was before the dawn of the new covenant.

Some defend tithing by saying Jesus praised tithing, even if he said it was less important than other things ([Matt. 23:23](#); [Luke 11:42](#)). This argument appears strong, but it's not persuasive. Jesus also mentioned offering sacrifices in the temple ([Matt. 5:23–24](#)), but Christians don't think—even if the temple were rebuilt—that we should do that. Our Lord's words are understandable when we think about his location in redemptive history.

Jesus spoke about sacrifices and tithing *before* the cross and resurrection, *before* the dawn of the new covenant. He used tithing and sacrifices as illustrations when addressing his contemporaries. He kept the law since he was “born under the law” ([Gal. 4:4](#)). But we can no more take his words as a commendation for tithing today than we can his words about offering sacrifices.



7. Nowhere is tithing mentioned when commands to give generously are found in the New Testament.

When Christians are instructed to give to the poor, they aren't commanded to give “the poor tithe.” Instead, they are instructed to be generous in helping those in need ([Acts 2:43–47](#); [4:32–37](#); [11:27–30](#); [Gal. 2:10](#); [1 Cor.](#)

[16:1–4](#); [2 Cor. 8:1–9:15](#)). For example, [1 Corinthians 16:1–4](#)—a passage often cited in popular circles in support—doesn’t mention tithing; it relates to a one-time gift for poor saints in Jerusalem.

Give Generously

Even though tithing isn’t required today, it does not follow that believers should hoard their possessions.

We are commanded to support those who preach the gospel ([Matt. 10:10](#); [Luke 10:7](#); [1 Cor. 9:6–14](#); [1 Tim. 5:17–18](#)). And while we should enjoy the good things God gives us, we are also called to be generous to those in need ([1 Tim. 6:17–19](#); [2 Cor. 8–9](#)). Wealth can so easily become an idol, leading us to abandon the Lord.

Since God is to be our treasure, believers are to give generously and freely. For many in the West, this will mean giving more than 10 percent.

Still, Scripture doesn’t command Christians to give a tenth—and Scripture, not tradition, is our rule and authority.

Thomas Schreiner is the James Buchanan Harrison professor of New Testament interp and associate dean for Scripture and interpretation at [The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary](#) in Louisville, Kentucky. You can [follow him on Twitter](#).

NOW TRENDING

1 [*You Didn't Do 'Nothing' Today*](#)

[EMMA SCRIVENER](#)

2 [*Personality Tests Don't Excuse Your Sin*](#)

[CHRISTA THRELFALL](#)

PODCASTS
