

Why Should I Tithe?

The Austin Stone Community Church believes that giving a tithe (10% of income) is a biblical principle established by God in the scriptures in order to protect the hearts of God's people who are so prone to loving money more than God. We believe that tithing to the local church is the starting point of giving that frees the heart from the slavery of materialism and hoarding and into cheerful generosity, mercy and justice.

Tithing honors the Creator as Owner of All¹

When we release a tenth of our income and give it over to the ministry and mission of Christ through the local church, we honor the Creator rights of God who owns everything, including all our income. One objection to thinking of a tenth of our income as especially belonging to God is that ALL our money belongs to God. Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

That is absolutely true. What you do with every cent says something about your view of God and what He means to you. It also speaks to what your values are in this age and what you think your few years on earth should be spent for.

But God is wise and knows us deeply. He knows that there is something wrong with the husband who answers his wife's complaint that he doesn't give her any time 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." That has a very hollow ring to it if he doesn't give her any "especially time." Giving her some evenings together and some dates does not deny that all his time is for her, it proves it. This is why God declares one day in seven especially God's. They are all his, and making one special proves it.

And this is the way it is with our money and God. Giving God a tenth of our income does not deny that all our money is God's; it proves that we believe it. Tithing is like a constant offering of the first fruits of the whole thing. The tenth is yours, O, Lord, in a special way, because all of it is yours in an ordinary way.

I believe the tithe should be the first check we write after the income deposit is made in the bank. And when you write it, you put a seal over what's left: GOD'S. The tithe reminds us of that, and proves that we really believe it.

¹ Sermon: "Toward the Tithe and Beyond: How God funds his work," September 10, 1995, John Piper

Why Should I Go Beyond the Tithes?²

It is a biblical truth beyond all dispute: all your money is God's (Psalm 24:1) and has been loaned to you as a steward to use in ways that maximize the glorification of God's mercy in the world (Matthew 25:14–30). Tithing is a way to express to God that we, indeed, recognize that.

Tithing is biblical. We can talk about verse after verse about how God commands a tithe from His people: Genesis 14:20, Leviticus 27:30, Numbers 18:8-32, Deuteronomy 14:22-29, Deuteronomy 26:1-15, 2 Chronicles 31:5, Nehemiah 10:32-39, Malachi 3:6-12, Matthew 10:9-10 & Luke 11:42, just to mention a few. But it is irrational to think that giving ten percent of that money to the church settles the issue of good stewardship. In a world of such immense need, and in a country of such immense luxury, under the commission of such a powerful Lord, the issue of stewardship is not: "Shall I tithe?" but rather, "How much of God's trust fund dare I use to surround myself with comforts?"

But some may even argue that though tithing is absolutely biblical in the Old Testament, the New Testament hardly mentions it at all. But I'd like to show you that the New Testament doesn't "hardly mention" tithing, not because God is telling us we don't need to tithe anymore, but because God is trying to take us beyond the tithe.

To commend tithing as the ideal simply does not capture the New Testament view of discipleship. "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none. And he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). That's 50%, not 10%. Zacchaeus stood and said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor" (Luke 19:8). Again, 50%. Jesus said to the rich young man, "If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me" (Matthew 19:21). That's 100%. "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Again, 100%. "A man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head'" (Luke 9:57f.). "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44f.). "There was not a needy person among them for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:34f.). "In a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. For they gave according to their means . . . and beyond their means"

The best way that I know how to capture the spirit of the New Testament generosity is simply to say: the issue is not, "How much must I give?" but, "How much dare I keep?" Not: "Shall I tithe?" But: "How much of the money that I hold in trust for Christ can I take for my private use?" The financial issue in the church today is not tithing, but exorbitance of life-style. The question is not if you can afford to tithe, but can you justify the life-style that consumes 90% of your income? Behind that is the question: "Do I love to use God's money to spread justice and mercy and spiritual hope in the world, or do I prefer to embezzle his money to purchase more and more personal comfort?" The question of whether the work

² "I Seek Not What Is Yours but You: A Sermon on Tithing". January 31, 1982 by John Piper

of Christ here at The Austin Stone will be adequately supported year after year is really the question of where your treasure is. And where your treasure is, there is your heart.

An Example to Follow³

And so what does it look like to give and keep based upon having our treasure in God? Take John Wesley as an example. He 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. He had 32 pounds to give away (a comfortable year's income). In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds, and he 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. He wrote, "I cannot help leaving my books behind me whenever God calls me hence; but in every other respect, my own hands will be my executors."

Further Resources:

Money Matters sermon series by Matt Carter:

http://www.austinstone.org/resources/sermon_search/6a38cfb5cbaaa40e26ebcacfb912315a/

Sermons and Resources by Tim Keller on Stewardship:

<http://www.redeemer.com/serve/stewardship/resources.html>

³ Mission Frontiers, Sept./Oct. 1994, nos. 9–10, pp. 23–24

Sermon by John Piper: Magnifying God with Money:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/magnifying-god-with-money>

Is Tithing Biblical? D.A. Carson:

<http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/november15/9td094.html>

The Practice of Tithing as the Minimum Standard of Christian Giving by Randy Alcorn:

<http://www.epm.org/articles/tithing.html>