

SOUTH CAROLINA
BAPTIST CONVENTION

Cooperative Program/Stewardship Development Group
190 Stoneridge Drive • Columbia SC 29210-8254
(803) 765-0030 or (800) 723-7242

Website: www.scbaptist.org

©2003 South Carolina Baptist Convention

Stewardship...
God's Way

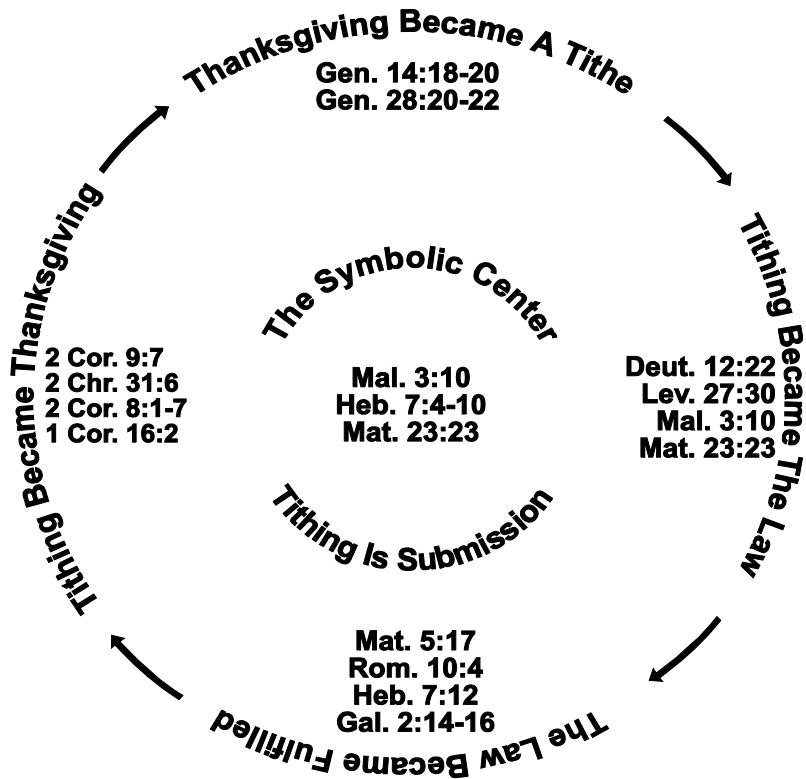
Adult Edition

Have you begun tithing as a part of your life's stewardship? If not, will you seriously consider this closing prayer as a commitment?

***F**ather, I understand from all the Bible says You are a gracious and wonderful God. I cannot begin to thank You adequately for all You have done for me, especially in Jesus Christ. But one way is for me to give proportionately, trusting You. And the tithe is a biblical way for me to do this. Help me to see and do Your will joyfully! Amen.*

Here's a picture of how the tithe has come "full circle" in the Bible.

The Circle of the Tithe



The Christian Tithe

Group Study—Part 4

Background Passages: Deuteronomy 16:16-17,
1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Focal Passage: 1 Corinthians 16:2

Bible Truth: *Tithing is a discipline through which a Christian expresses Christ's ownership of his life and his own thanksgiving to God for His goodness.*

Probably since the first church in Jerusalem, people have debated the subject of tithing. Some people think tithing has absolutely no relevance at all for the church, that it was meant only for the ancient Jews. Others think the opposite, tithing is every bit as required of Christians as it was for Jews.

Most evangelical Christians are somewhere in between these views, saying the tithe is still required by God, but it is between God and the individual Christian, and not anyone else's business. Maybe you already have a definite opinion, or maybe you've never been quite sure.

What we are studying today will help you to be clear on the meaning and the place of the tithe.

We need to begin by realizing the Bible is a marvelously unified and consistent book. The New Testament does not contradict the Old, and the Old Testament is not superior to the New. What the Bible as a whole says about tithing may surprise you!



Our focal passage, **1 Corinthians 16:2**, says:

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

The Point of our Study Today

The Bible's overall teaching about tithing leads us to understand we must give to God proportionately, with discipline, trusting Him to meet our needs as we obey.

Any understanding of what the Bible says about tithing must begin with the principles of stewardship. The Bible certainly teaches everything belongs to God, all we have came from God, and we are accountable to God for how we use it all. It also teaches us God's kingdom is His priority, and He gives us what He does so our needs may be met and so we can give to His kingdom work. Now, two more principles need to be added to what we have learned. The first is the principle we should give in proportion to what we have.

Proportionate Giving

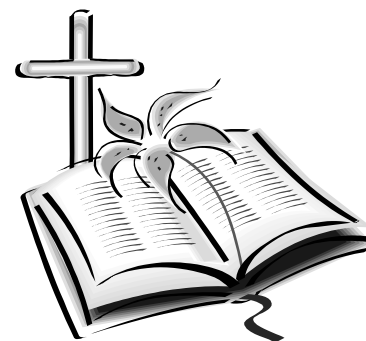
It is often pointed out the New Testament teaches us to give proportionately and cheerfully. That's true. The term "proportionate" means our gift represents some fraction of our income. When Paul wrote the words of 1 Corinthians 16:2, he didn't give any particular proportion. He could have

It certainly meant Jesus must have tithed. Jesus revered the written word of God and said not a jot or tittle (Hebrew for "dotting your i's and crossing your t's") of it would pass away until *all had been fulfilled* (Matthew 5:18).

The fulfillment of the law also meant Jesus brought to pass the reality of all the Old Testament symbols of Him: the sacrifices in the temple, the meaning of the Sabbath (rest), ceremonial cleansing — and, tithing. Interestingly, tithing is not only a symbol, but a very practical discipline that has always made it possible for God's people to do ministry and missions, helps the poor, and supports those who preach and teach the Bible to every generation. Jesus didn't fulfill *any* law just so people could stop doing the good things God wants His people to do. He fulfilled it so it could be written on our hearts, and we could obey from a spirit of love and thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving

This is what tithing is now, for Christians. It is thanksgiving once again. It isn't a law we must obey slavishly. It is a discipline truly submitted Christians will learn and follow. Because it shows we have come to realize how much God has given us and done for us — especially in Christ. In fact, if anything, the tithe is only a *beginning point* for us. We ought to see how much more we can give than a simple tenth.



born yet, tithed to Melchizedek, the type of Christ, because Hebrews says Levi “was still in the body of his ancestor.”

What this means is the tithe shows submission and thanks to God, and especially to Jesus Christ, who has given His all in order to be our Great High Priest, our eternal Savior.

Law

Eventually, God made tithing a law. He set up the standard of the tithe for all His covenant people, who before Christ were the Jews. Leviticus 27:30 is the first verse to mention tithing as the law, and many other verses in Numbers and Deuteronomy outline how tithes were to be brought and paid. Finally, on the last pages of the Old Testament, Malachi says the Jews *robbed God* by not tithing, and if they returned to tithing, it would be a fitting symbol of their repentance and submission. There we see it again: tithing is submission to God.

Fulfillment

When Jesus came, He fulfilled the law. This means two things: first, Jesus obeyed every law God had given. What did this mean for something like tithing?

Did Jesus Tithe?

- His Bible was the Old Testament which clearly taught tithing (Matthew 5:17-19).
- If He had not tithed His enemies would have certainly used it against Him (John 8:46).
- If He had not tithed Himself, He would hardly have commended it for others (Matthew 23:23).

been thinking a tenth — but for all we know, he was thinking a fourth, or half! We’ve probably all heard stories about people who were blessed with great success in business and gave three fourths or even more of their income to the Lord. Most churches wish there were *more* such stories!

The instruction of 1 Corinthians is specific enough to make us responsible — “**in keeping with his income**” — and general enough to keep things personal — “**his income.**” Relating our giving to our income means we think and pray about what is either an appropriate dollar amount, or an appropriate percentage — “proportion” — of our dollars.

The decision must be personal, which means we cannot simply do what someone else does, as his or her income may be different, and their assessment of God’s goodness may be different.

This means it doesn’t matter what a person gives, or we can’t recognize inadequate giving when we see it (or do it!). We would all agree a Christian who makes a million dollars a year and gives only \$50 to the Lord isn’t giving “**in keeping with his income.**”

What *is* appropriate as a proportion, then? This lesson will end up proposing a biblical solution, but for the moment we must realize that God wants us to do some solid thinking and praying about the greatness of His blessing. He wants you to respond to His blessing of your life, and not to cheat His kingdom work, but to say “thank you” with a responsible gift.

Some people are blessed with a lot, and some with a little. There is enormous variety of human talent, success, and possessions. Good stewardship means responding in proportion to what you are and have. My all for Jesus is my all, and your all for Jesus is your all, and they’re the same in that they’re all, but different in quality and quantity. Similarly, a worthy proportion of my income will probably differ from yours, but if both of us are being obedient and responsive, that’s what counts.

Do you think God knows you? Do you think He knows what you are capable of doing for Him and His kingdom? Are you confident you are doing all you should and can?

The Principle of Proportionate Response

God has gifted us uniquely, according to His gracious purposes, and expects us to respond in proportion to our abilities and opportunities.

- What percentage of your income is an appropriate gift to God?
- How personally do you measure God's goodness to you?
- When would you think you had given too much to God?
- When would you know you had given too little?

Deuteronomy 16:17 says: "Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you."

The New Testament specifically states God knows our abilities differ. Romans 12:6 says, "**We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.**" Grace is another word for God's goodness, or His gifts. How you respond in giving will differ according to how God has blessed you.

There are two great barriers to obedience in stewardship. One is selfishness, and the other is distrust. Selfishness says, "It's mine, and I'm not going to give it up." Distrust says, "I'm afraid if I give, I'll lose." The principle of proportionate response helps us to overcome selfishness. Another principle helps us overcome distrust.

When we understand we are expected to give proportionately, and we are expected to trust God to provide for us when we do, then we are ready to learn a discipline that has been a Godly response to the Lord's goodness ever since the patriarchs of our faith.

Tithe Giving

Many people think when the church studies stewardship, it's just another word for tithing. This series of studies has proven stewardship is much more than tithing, or even giving money in general. In fact, the word "tithe" has hardly been mentioned until this lesson. It is because we need to learn the principles of stewardship and learn the goodness of God so the discipline of tithing will not seem strange or too hard to do.

Now we're going to answer the question of what place tithing has for Christians today.

Thanksgiving

Tithing began as an expression of thanksgiving to God. **Genesis 14:17-20** says Abram gave a tithe to Melchizedek. This was an important act. Psalm 110:4 identifies Melchizedek as the symbol of the everlasting priesthood of which the Messiah will be the only true and eternal one. The book of Hebrews says Jesus is that priest, and Melchizedek was a symbol or type of Christ.

This means what happened between Abram and Melchizedek was symbolic. When Abram tithed to Melchizedek, he was showing his worship and submission to God, and symbolically, to Christ. In fact, even the Levites, who hadn't been

Or think of Mark 10:28-30, where Jesus promised Peter that no one who gave up houses, lands, parents, spouse or children, would fail to receive "a hundredfold now in this time...and in the world to come, eternal life." God will more than make up.

Many people are scared of committing themselves to biblical giving, because they believe they will lose too much. But it's a matter of perspective, isn't it?

A soldier came back to his hometown after being gravely wounded in battle. He showed up with only one arm hanging from his broad shoulders. Someone dared ask him, "How did you lose your arm?" The answer was swift and bold: "I didn't lose it. I gave it."

If you go into the battle for the kingdom of God, having committed your all to Christ, then anything you part with along the way, whether voluntarily or not, is something you gave to the cause. This is exactly what God promises to respond to by providing for your needs.

What we often stumble over is the issue of what is a "need" and what isn't. For instance, consider the following things. Identify which is a need and which is a want:

Own a house	New car
Life insurance	Health insurance
Boat	Television
New stereo	Computer
A raise	Jewelry
Spring wardrobe	Health club membership
Patience	Courage
Faith	Purity
Compassion	Knowledge of future
Sereniy	Peace with past

It's possible some of these things are necessities for some people, but not for others. We tend to define our needs as much greater than they really are. God promises to supply our needs.

Trustful Giving

We may trust God to provide sufficiently for us when we obey Him in stewardship, because He has repeatedly proven and promised that He can and will.

This is the principle of trust. The Bible teaches God has not left us to fend for ourselves on meager resources after giving Him a worthy gift. He promises to provide for us when we obey Him in giving.

Let's look at three places where this principle of trust is taught or implied. First, our focal passage implies it. When the Bible says we should give "in keeping with" our income, it implies what we give God will leave enough to adequately supply our needs.

Then consider an Old Testament passage like Deuteronomy 8:14-16:

"The Lord your God... brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you."

The experience of Israel in the wilderness teaches us when we obey and follow God in all things, including giving to His kingdom work, we can be confident He will see we have what we need.