



Christ Church Grosse Pointe



October 15, 2007

Proportionate Giving & the Tithe: Biblical & Modern – Is the expectation a reality?

When we talk about our traditions of Christian giving, one word often used is “tithe.” This word, meaning “tenth,” is found in scripture and Christian historical documents and refers to that offering which is given back to God or the church for the support of ministry. Throughout the Hebraic and Christian traditions, the expected percentage of one’s produce (“currency” in agricultural societies) to be offered to the church was ten percent. Actually, early documents called upon as much as 25% to be offered for the support of clergy and the church.

Much has been written about employing the Biblical tithe in modern times. Not unlike other ancient Biblical principles of faith, the meaning of the tithe is difficult to translate from thousands of years ago and apply to our 21st century understanding. The questions which arise today are: Ten percent of what? Net income or Gross? Does all ten percent go to the church or are my other charitable contributions included in that total?

In wrestling with a modern understanding of the tithe as a standard of giving, we face a world with different realities. Rising health care costs and long-term care costs of a population which is living into their 80’s and 90’s present financial pressures which did not exist centuries ago. Of course neither did the exceptional health care opportunities either. Families face the challenges of the demands of raising children in a consumer oriented society. College tuition must be financed, not to mention those who make the choice of private elementary and high school education. Two careers are often needed to support the financial engine that drives today’s average family. We all face taxes and rising, consumer costs. Clearly, the financial pressures of today cannot be compared to the pre-modern era where agricultural cultures were the norm.

So, how do Christians understand the tithe today? And, can we approach the subject honestly without finding various reasons to dismiss the idea entirely? And more importantly, how can we begin to move towards a level of giving referred to as a tithe?

I have been asked to tell you what the tithe means to me. I understand the tithe as **that which I give to God as an honest reflection of my thankfulness for what God has already given me.** That’s it. It is really that simple for me. What proportion of my resources (beginning with my money and then continuing with the giving of my time and talent) is a large enough offering? How much is enough, that I can truly say, “God please accept this as my thanks to you?” Now truth be told, if I could give everything I have back to God, that would still not reflect the reality of what God has given me. But, in the same fashion that Gabriel wrestled with God, I am

confident the Holy Spirit will lead me to the right amount for my gift. It may be 10% gross. It may be 10% net. Maybe its 17%. Or it could be 5%. What matters is that the proportion I give is significant enough to me, that I can sleep well at night with the knowledge I am offering God my best and true offering of thanks. Many people speak of this sort of approach as *proportionate giving*. This sort of understanding asks us to look seriously at the proportion of our resources given to God's work and is it in a proper balance with the rest of our use of those resources.

1.3% is the average pledge of our Christ Church parishioners, based on the per capita income of our community. I hope we are more thankful than that that average implies. How will God know our gratitude if we don't do all we can to spread God's Kingdom and the glorious love of Jesus Christ? How do we affirm our faith and uphold the Christian Church? Easy... we give offerings of thanks with faith and as the Apostle Paul taught us, with cheerful hearts and in balanced proportionate values. In addition I am often asked what institutions should be included in this proportionate giving. Again, my answer is simple. Our first check is written to Christ Church. We also support other organizations which promote God's kingdom. All of this giving I consider a part of our tithe and our proportionate giving.

Let's assume you have spent time praying and talking to others about your life as a follower of Christ, and you are one who recognizes that all you have is a gift from God, what proportion of your available resources is a true reflection of your thankfulness to God?

Is it 10%? Is it 5%? Is it 25%? Your answer is your tithe. Your expectation then becomes your reality.

I hope this helps us in our conversation about thinking Christ Church First.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad +". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Bradford G. Whitaker

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