

5/16/2014

An Encouragement to Learn Tithing

“Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.” Philippians 4:17

The Apostle Paul, like any good Pastor, has a heart for His people. He is really not interested in their money. He is interested in their spiritual growth. I once heard Jack Hayford say, that the poorest reason for a Pastor to speak to his people about money is that the church is in need. I didn't fully understand it then, but I realize the truth of it now. In the Psalms, God speaks to His people.

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me. I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats? Psalms 50:7-13

If I read this correctly, God is reminding us that He doesn't need anything. At any time in the life of the church or a ministry, He can send provision, beyond what we can imagine. Then why doesn't He? Why does He ask people to give? Why does the Church have to teach people to tithe? Why do missionaries and ministries seemingly need to come to people and ask them to give? The answer to that is two-fold.

First, there is that need for every Christian to grow up. None of us enter into Christ as mature, grown up believers. All of us begin somewhere as spiritual children. We have to grow into spiritual maturity. As we grow and are being transformed by the Spirit, we will learn to tithe and beyond. That however leads us to the second part of the answer. We all have free will! That means that there are times that the work of God will suffer because people can refuse to grow either through lack of trust or just plain disobedience. Let's face it. None of us are obedient all the time and true spiritual growth is about learning to be obedient, to die to our own will and surrender to God's will.

So, we are together in this dilemma. A good Pastor doesn't want people's money, but he or she knows that unless people learn how to give, their spiritual growth will be stunted and puny. Leading people toward spiritual maturity definitely is helping people to learn to trust God, not just in words, but in practical, life changing ways, and money and resources is an important key in this growth.

I am absolutely convinced, that if everyone in any given church tithed, there would be plenty to build appropriate ministry and meet most every need a church has. I believe God designed it that way. Tithing by the way is only an early step toward Christian maturity. It should be considered part of the milk of the Christian life along with honest commitment to a local church, and not the sign of Christian maturity.

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In case you do not understand what is meant by tithe, the word tithe means tenth, and throughout the Old Testament and into the New, the principle of tithing can be demonstrated as a genuine part of the spiritual life, a sacrament of the yielding of our hearts to God lived out by giving the first tenth of all our productivity (in our culture that means mostly money). In other words, the first tenth of what we make belongs to God and is given to your local church to use for the development of its ministry to the community and the world. Those Sunday baskets that are passed in most every church on Sunday are a sacrament (“An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”), a practical yet sacred way of teaching you to step away from a self-centered, self directed life into a God –centered, God-directed life and a necessary step in Christian maturity. The world may think what they want about it, but not those of us who claim to follow Christ. Tithing is an imperative for every disciple of Christ.

While this brief encouragement is not a full teaching on tithing, there is enough here to thoughtfully take before God in prayer and examine your own life and attitudes regarding this important topic. So this is my encouragement to grow with me. Take a step of faith toward God and learn what it is like to actually trust Him with one of our most powerful symbols of self-security and self-control, money. Tithing is a blessing and it opens the door for blessing. After all, it is all His in the first place, and we are simply stewards who will one day give an accounting to Him.