

Is Tithing Still Relevant for Christians Today?

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Should Christians tithe their income to God through the Church? That’s the question many Christians/Christ-followers find themselves asking as they roam the Internet. There appears to have been a recent rise in the number of people who claim that tithing—giving ten per cent of your income to God—was an Old Testament concept that is no longer applicable in New Testament times. A simple search for the word “tithing” will uncover a multitude of articles and message boards declaring that tithing is passé, that it was good for the Old Testament times but is irrelevant today, and that it is only promoted by money-hungry preachers.



The basis for such a claim is found in the words of Jesus in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In that chapter, Jesus made a point of saying that He did not come to earth in order to do away with the Old Testament Scriptures; instead, He came to fulfill them. So in fulfilling the Scriptures, did He bring the Old Testament law to a close?

In some ways, yes. For example, Christians do not offer animal sacrifices as was done in Old Testament times. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross once and for all fulfilled the Old Testament requirement for sacrifices.

Also, there were cleansing rituals that were applicable in the Old Testament that are no longer enforced today. The book of Leviticus contains a law against touching a dead pig, but we do not teach that it is a sin to play football.

Yet there were some Old Testament laws that are still relevant today, such as the law against committing adultery. Christians still recognize that marital infidelity is a violation of God’s holy standard for living. It is a sinful act.

What's the difference? The answer can be a fairly complex, but one observation is that many of the Old Testament laws were cultural or ceremonial in nature while others were moral or ethical. The moral/ethical laws still apply, while many of the other laws were terminated with the coming of Jesus.

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One simple way to determine if a law still applies is to see if it was renewed in the New Testament. For example, the writings of the New Testament speak against murder, stealing, and vengeance. This reinforces what the Old Testament says about these topics, and shows that the Old Testament law still applies in these areas.

So how about tithing? Is tithing a New Testament concept? Short answer: yes. Longer answer: In Matthew 23:23, Jesus advised that people focus on justice, compassion and faithfulness while not neglecting to tithe.

Granted, this passage occurs before the Crucifixion and Resurrection. So some people may argue that the Old Testament concept of tithing was negated at that time. But would Jesus reinforce a law that would only apply for a matter of months?

Even if that were so, the New Testament clearly endorses generosity. In fact, it encourages extravagant generosity. The widow who put her only two coins in the offering box was praised for giving so sacrificially. There was not even a hint that she should have only given ten percent. Likewise, Paul praised the Macedonians for giving well beyond their capability during a time of financial hardship. If anything, tithing should be viewed as a good starting point and not an end target.

This is consistent with the New Testament pattern of raising the ante for some Old Testament laws. Such as the law against murder. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus set an even higher standard, saying that we should not even speak contemptuously toward others. In regards to adultery, Jesus said to not even gaze lustfully.

Tithing is indeed discussed in the New Testament, despite those who wish to argue otherwise. But even if they are right, the expectation seems to be that we will give generously and even sacrificially toward the work of God in this world, thus expanding His Kingdom.