

WHY SHOULD I TITHE? (Part 1)**GENESIS 14:18-20**

Some years ago, biographer Philip Guedella, began to write about the Duke of Wellington, one of Great Britain's greatest military heroes. He was the general who defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. Guedella was particularly delighted when he was able to get his hands on Wellington's check stubs and cancelled checks. Why was that so important? It's very simple. How you use your money reveals who you are. How you spend your money explains what's truly important to you. We can say we value this, that, or whatever. But how you handle your money reveals your true values and your true priorities. I'd guess that just about everyone here today would say God and the things of God rank up there as being the really important stuff in life to us. But here's my question: Does your checkbook or your bank account support that claim?

I used to believe the less I spoke about money on Sunday mornings the better. I don't believe that now. I've learned you can love Jesus with all your heart and be a good person, but still not really know what the Bible teaches about money or how to manage your money well. We all need to be taught and to learn. I used to believe that the tithe – giving 10% of your income to the Lord – was optional for a follower of Jesus. I liked to think it was simply a part of the Old Testament Mosaic law and it didn't apply to Christians today. That was a very convenient viewpoint at that time in my life because I didn't tithe myself. That's how I excused and spiritualized my disobedience. I'm ashamed to admit it now, but there was a period of time in my early years of being a pastor when I didn't tithe. But God was patient and gracious with me. Now, for several decades I have tithed, and I no longer believe it's OK for a follower of Jesus not to tithe.

One of the great traps any of us can fall into is the belief God's standards just don't apply to us for some reason. My reason – my excuse – is justified! I doubt there's any area of your life and mine where we try to evade obeying God more than in the area of money. And yet it's an integral part of being a disciple of Jesus. It's not specifically mentioned in ROPES – our picture of a disciple here at KRBC. There's no T in ROPES! But there is an O which stands for obedience. Doing what God says to do. Living the way God wants us to live. Jesus made it clear how we use money reveals what or whom we truly worship as god. He put it bluntly when He said, "You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both." (Mt. 6:24 MSG)

This month I'm going to present a message series entitled *The Genius of Generosity*. I got that title from a helpful little book by Chip Ingram that our own Judy Haskins passed on to me. Thanks, Judy! Chip put it well when he wrote, "To be smart, spend carefully. To be wise, save regularly. To be a genius, give generously." Yes, God wants us to spend carefully and save regularly. But God also wants us to experience giving generously to the work of His Kingdom in this world. Why is it genius to give generously? Because it truly opens your live to God's blessing in a variety of ways.

Tithing is an integral part – maybe the beginning point – of learning how to live and give generously. Being a generous giver from God’s perspective and tithing just go hand in hand. How you handle money is a spiritual heart issue between you and God. It’s a mark of discipleship. It reveals if you’re serious about following Jesus well. So, I’d like to try and answer the question, “Why should I tithe?” This Sunday and next I’m going to look with you at ten reasons to tithe or give generously. Today’s reasons come from the Old Testament. Next Sunday’s five reasons come from the New Testament. First,

IT’S ABOUT GRATITUDE.

Let’s look at something that happened in the first book of the Bible – Genesis. Abraham had just rescued his nephew, Lot, from being held hostage by four godless kinds. The Bible says, “And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you.’ Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.” (Gen. 14:18-20 NLT) This is the first time tithing is mentioned in the Bible.

Who was this Melchizedek? He was a king and a priest who lived in the area. He loved God and served as His representative. That’s implied here because he blessed Abraham which was a big deal in OT times. Only the greater person blessed the lesser one. Abraham recognized Melchizedek was a representative of God by giving him a tenth – a tithe – of all he’d recovered by defeating those four kings. By giving a tithe to Melchizedek, Abraham indicated everything he had captured really belonged to the Lord. Otherwise, he would have just kept it all. Now, here’s a principle we all need to grasp. You might agree with the assertion everything you have ultimately belongs to the Lord. But giving the tithe is the literal, physical symbol, or demonstration, that you truly believe that fact. When you tithe, you say, “Lord, everything I have is yours.”

Giving the tithe was Abraham’s way of saying thank you to God for helping him rescue Lot. It was an act of gratitude. Abraham lived 400 years before Moses and the giving of the Law where the tithe was first established as the standard for giving among God’s people. But here we see that even before the Law was ever given, God’s man – Abraham – gave the tithe. It was an expression of his profound gratitude to God. Like Abraham, we don’t live by the Mosaic Law either, but tithing can and should still be an expression of profound gratitude to God for us, too. Are you truly grateful to God for all He’s done for you? One way to demonstrate gratitude is to tithe faithfully.

Let’s suppose one of you husbands brings home a dozen red roses and a beautiful card to your wife on her birthday. As you give them to her, you say, “Happy birthday, honey!” And she says, “Oh, my, they’re so beautiful. Thank you so much! You shouldn’t have spent all that money.” And you say, “Oh, yes, I had to do it. It’s your birthday. I’m required to do something. It’s my duty to give you an expensive gift I can’t really afford even if I don’t want to.” Wife, how would you feel? Maybe like slowly sticking each rose

stem right up your husband's nose thorns and all! But, instead, what if your husband said, "Oh, sweetheart, there's nothing I'd rather do with my money than spend it on you because I love you so very much!" Same money. Same gift. But one gift was just a duty. The other gift was an act of love. God is a Person who loves you and has given so much to you. Your tithe is an expression of sincere gratitude to Him for all His blessings – not some kind of forced duty or obligation.

IT'S ABOUT WORSHIP.

The Bible says, "One-tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy." (Lev. 27:30 NLT) Now, the OT book of Leviticus is basically an instruction manual for the people of Israel on how to worship the Lord. The tithe was and still is a central part of what it means to worship the Lord. When you drop your tithe into the box out there in the lobby or you tell your bank to send us an online gift, it's just as much an act of worship as singing a praise song or offering up a prayer. Here's another place where the Bible connects tithing and worship. "Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose.... No one should appear before the Lord empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you." (Dt. 16:16-17 NIV) The proportion was at least the tithe.

I'm challenged when it says there, "No one should appear before the Lord empty-handed." Don't we come before God empty-handed whenever we worship Him? Of course, because we can only ever come into His presence because of His love and grace. We don't deserve anything from God. We can't earn or bribe Him for His favor. Nevertheless, it's still inappropriate to approach God without a gift. In the New Testament, we're encouraged to bring what's called "a sacrifice of praise." We sing, we pray, we listen to God's Word so we can obey it. Likewise, the faithful giving of your tithe is an act of worship. It's actually a part of that sacrifice of praise. Don't appear before the Lord empty-handed. Something to think about, yes?

Did you notice the Lord considers your tithe to be something holy? It's special, unique, even sacred. Giving your tithe is of great importance to Him. It's holy to Him. He sees it as a profound act of worship. It reveals to Him that you acknowledge He is God and that you're His child. It's proof you know all things belong to Him ultimately. Kids, when you tithe your allowance to the Lord, it's holy. Teenagers, when you tithe your earnings from a part time job, it's holy. Maybe you earn a small salary or you're living on a fixed income. Your tithe is just as holy – just as significant and special to God – as a wealthier Christian who's able to tithe much larger amounts. Tithing is about worship.

IT'S ABOUT ALLEGIANCE.

Turn with me to Dt. 14:22-29 and follow along as I read it. The book of Deuteronomy is a document that's similar to a formal contract or agreement. It was a contract between God and the people of Israel. God promised to bless His people both spiritually and materially if they'd worship, obey, and love Him exclusively. However, if they decided to

worship, obey, and love other gods, the contract would be broken. So, the tithe was an expression of this contractual relationship with God. God promised to bless the land and cause it be fruitful. By giving back to God a tithe of what the land produced, the people of Israel acknowledged the land belonged to God ultimately and they were simply managers or stewards of what really belonged to God.

I like how the Living Bible paraphrase renders the last part of v. 23. “The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives.” (Dt. 14:23 LB). When you tithe your income, you’re learning to always put God first in your life. Allegiance. Loyalty. The tithe is one evidence both to God and yourself that God has the proper and right place in your life. You remind yourself God owns everything ultimately. The home you return to after today’s service is God’s home. The car you drove today is God’s car. The clothes you’re wearing are God’s clothes. The food in your refrigerator is God’s food. It’s His refrigerator, too! The checking accounts, the savings and investment portfolios, and the retirement savings in your name belong to God ultimately. All of them and everything in them.

The last part of Dt. 14:29 (NLT) teaches that the faithful practice of tithing invites blessing. “Then the Lord your God will bless you in all your work.” There’s been a lot of theological garbage fed to God’s people that tithing somehow obligates God to make you rich. You’ve heard about the prosperity gospel. It’s a lie taught by false prophets. No one can obligate God to do anything. But it would be a mistake to say there’s no relationship between tithing and financial blessing. The Bible clearly says tithing and financial blessing go together. Now, God doesn’t promise anyone fantastic wealth just because you tithe. But if you obey God in how you handle money – including giving the tithe – you will discover God will indeed bless you financially over the long haul of life. That doesn’t mean your car will never need a repair or your oven will never die. It simply means God will meet your needs and then some. When you choose to obey the Lord in any area of life, you invite His blessing. Likewise, if you choose to disobey the Lord, you forfeit the blessing He wants to give you. “The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives.” (Dt. 14:23 LB). Tithing is about allegiance.

IT’S ABOUT SACRIFICE.

Turn with me to another passage in your Bible: 2 Samuel 24:21-25. (p. 323-324). King David had ordered a census to be taken of his army, the army of Israel. His decision had offended the Lord because it demonstrated a lack of trust in the Lord. The Lord punished his sin by sending a deadly plague upon the people of Israel. David cried out to the Lord to be merciful, and the Lord instructed him to offer a sacrifice at the home of a man name Araunah. Granted, tithing isn’t mentioned here, but there’s an important lesson on giving found there, nevertheless. David insisted on paying for the oxen and wood he used in his sacrifice because he refused to offer something to God in worship that cost him nothing personally. Again, v. 24 says, “I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing.”

You don't give God what you think you can afford and expect Him to find it appropriate. You don't give God what's left over at the end of the month and think He should be well satisfied with your generosity. The Bible says you should give Him the first and the best. And what you give ought to entail financial sacrifice – that which actually costs you and me something. Chances are - for most of us - giving the tithe faithfully will mean being unable to buy every little thing our hearts desire. In other words, sacrifice.

Does your giving reflect sacrifice? I don't know the dollar amount of what anybody gives to this church, and I never will. Fine by me! But let's say you give \$100 a month. That might sound like a lot! But from a tithing perspective, that means you make only \$12,000 a year. I doubt your income is that low. You might think \$100 a month is "sacrificial" regardless of your income, but the fact is God finds it neither acceptable nor appropriate. Why not? Because in His estimation it wasn't sacrificial. Only when you get to the level of a tithe or beyond the tithe can you say that your giving has become sacrificial in any biblical and meaningful way. Sacrifice always costs you something.

You can offend people talking about money. True enough. But the fact is that sometimes we need to be offended. Let's say you go to the doctor tomorrow because you're not feeling well. He examines you thoroughly. He's poking around and he touches a place on your side, and you say, "Ouch, doc, watch it! That really hurt!" He'll likely raise his eyebrows, look you in the eyes and say, "I'm sorry, but it's not supposed to hurt there." Nothing I've said this morning will bother anyone who is already tithing. You already know the joy of obeying the Lord in this area of your life. But if it hurts to hear me talk about tithing – you find yourself wincing, cringing, getting a little defensive – may I say to you, "My friend, it's not supposed to hurt there." May God help us if we offer to the very One who made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross – dying for our sins in our place - that which costs us nothing when it comes to following Jesus. Instead, may He help us develop a heart like David's. "I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing." (2 Sam. 24:24 NLT) Tithing is about sacrifice.

IT'S ABOUT OBEDIENCE.

There's no clearer passage on tithing as an act of obedience than Malachi 3:8-10. Notice how God considers withholding the tithe from Him as a form of theft. But if the tithe belongs to Him, that's what it is, right? When you fail to tithe for whatever reason, excuse, rationalization, or extenuating circumstance you offer up, you're still cheating God out of what belongs to Him. You're robbing Him. God says you're stealing. You're a thief. I didn't call you a thief, if you don't tithe. God did.

Someone might say, "Rick, you've got a vested interest in preaching about tithing. Our giving pays your salary." Indeed, it does, and I am most grateful. But, my friend, if for whatever reason you don't believe KRBC is worthy of your tithe, go and join another church and give your tithe there. It's far more important to your spiritual welfare that you tithe somewhere than it is for this church to receive your tithe. Someone else might say, "Rick I'd love to tithe, but I'm up to my ears in debt right now. How can I ever get into a

position to tithe if I'm giving money to the church that could be used to eliminate my debt?" I want to be compassionate here, but let me invite you to ask yourself some questions. "How can I ask for God's help me in my financial life – for example, getting out of debt – if I'm disregarding God's clear teaching when it comes to giving the tithe?" Scripture reveals blessing follows obedience. Another question. "Has the fact you don't tithe helped you get out of debt yet?" Probably not. When you disobey God – even for what you might think is a noble, good, and justifiable reason – you still disobey God. And Scripture reveals when we disobey God, we forfeit His blessing. The fact is many people never get out of debt until they admit God knows best and they obey Him by giving the tithe. That may sound impossible, but I'm convinced if you tithe God will help you get out of debt more quickly than if you don't tithe. How is that possible? When we obey God, we invite His blessing in our lives. Therefore, when we obey God by tithing, we put God on our side financially, so to speak. We invite His blessing on our finances.

The universe God created is governed by both physical and spiritual laws. This spiritual law is just as real as the physical law of gravity. When you obey God, you invite His blessing. When you disobey God, you forfeit His blessing. I'm not talking about God loving you. God loves everyone! But God doesn't bless everyone. Not in the biblical sense of blessing. God blesses people who obey Him. If you're not tithing, you're forfeiting both spiritual and financial blessing. If you are tithing, you're being blessed in ways that only Heaven will reveal to you fully someday. That's the genius of generosity! Hear again God's Word on the matter. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,' says the LORD, 'I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" (Mal 3:10 NLT) Did you know that's the only place God ever says to try Him or put Him to the test? And it has to do with tithing. With being generous. Tithing is about obedience. And when you obey the Lord, He will bless you.

[Objects: 10 apples and a large cross] While standing in front of a large cross and a table of ten apples, speak about the generosity of God and how he has given us so much (pointing to the ten apples). Emphasize that God owns all ten of the apples, but allows us to use 9 as we choose. Spend some time talking about the different ways we can enjoy using the 9 red apples: i.e., pay rent/mortgage, buy food, buy clothes, buy latest smart phone, buy an airline ticket to visit a friend. Explain that tithing means a tenth, and it's called the firstfruits of our income. A tithe is what God asks of us. Illustrate the tenth by holding up one of the 10 apples. Offer a few thoughts on the uncanny way financial demands pop up. With each example, take a bite out of the "tithe" apple. Examples: "Oh! I just remembered we need new tires for the car!" (Take a bite out of the "tithe" apple each time.) Example: "And let's face it—it's been a while since our family has had a good vacation." Example: "School's about to start. There's going to be a lot of extra expenses!" Example: "I really need to add yet another streaming channel subscription to the ones I already have." Continue in this vein until all that's left is the core of the yellow apple. Say, "God, this was my tithe, but a lot of stuff came up. This is all I have left." Toss the apple core at the foot of the cross. Point to the cross and the Communion table and say, "And now we get to celebrate the

unbelievable, infinite generosity of God when He sent His Son, Jesus, to take our place and die for our sins. Are we being generous in helping Him build His Kingdom?”

Father, You ask us to be generous because You are generous. You’ve demonstrated it fully at the cross – something we’re about to remember and thank You for as we partake of Communion. Help us to remember that to be smart with our money, we should spend carefully. To be wise, we should save regularly. But to be a genius with our money, we must give generously. And generosity begins with faithfully and joyfully giving our tithe to You.