

TITHING vs. GRACE GIVING

I find that I am motivated to give by some of the same things that motivate Randy Alcorn to give--our author of "The Treasure Principle." I *do* want to lay up treasure in Heaven. I *do* want to turn many to righteousness and shine as the stars forever.

My illustration may be outdated but I do see my life as like a three stage rocket heading towards outer space. **The first stage** is my salvation experience which launched me into the Christian life. After you and I accept Christ and are heaven bound, **the second stage** is the Believer in time--the time during which we may serve the Lord in a way that will never occur again in all eternity; we can woo and win souls to Christ in a fallen world. We can introduce people to the Great Physician on a diseased planet. Some of us are bold and overt in reaching out to people; others of us are low key and subtle, we can all do it using our own style.

There will be exciting ways to serve and glorify God on the New Earth and in the New Jerusalem and the New Heaven, but *never again* in this way. God will *never again* allow sinful, invasive organisms to infect the Universe ever again.

THIS LIFE IS NOT A DRILL

We live in *reality* and we have *real* work to do that *really* makes a difference for all eternity. This is not a game. It's real, and what we do matters.

THE THIRD STAGE IS THE BELIEVER IN ETERNITY

Left to itself the momentum of a spacecraft as it leaves the Earth's atmosphere is the momentum, or speed, it will maintain in space. I have always felt that I wanted to gain momentum in my spiritual life and service for Christ as I was propelled out into eternity.

You may not think it's fair but Jesus definitely states that some Believers will be given more authority than others in the third, unending, stage of the Christian life. So I agree with Alcorn about his emphasis on modifying what we "*lay up on Earth,*" and increasing what we "*lay up*" in Heaven.

Speaking as a person who likes to write it is obvious that Alcorn has a lot of “good licks” in his book--good stories, good examples and good illustrations. If you haven’t read all of the book, or read it *at all*, please put it somewhere where you’ll pick it up now and again and read a few pages.

Of course, with any book about the Bible we are free to agree or disagree

--and I think Alcorn has helped me to crystalize in my mind a way that I disagree with him. Not surprisingly, I disagree with him on the issue that many good Bible Believers, pastors and Christian writers disagree on---

THE TITHING vs. GRACE GIVING CONTROVERSY

This is not an area of doctrine that we break fellowship with other Believers over, but it is very much about doctrine. I have a pretty good collection of books in my personal library on Christian giving, plus old books of sermons from 19th century England and 20th century America which include sermons on giving, and over half of them teach tithing. The rest of them teach “grace giving.”

While I and many other people say the word “tithing” when we simply mean giving, or our regular commitment to the Lord through our local church, word itself is synonymous with giving 10%. Tithing is a popular idea. Even many pastors who rarely preach from the Old Testament have Bibles that will *fall open* to Malachi chapter 3 in the Old Testament because they use the passage so much. Let’s go there:

“7 Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ 8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ “In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the

LORD Almighty. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty." Malachi 3:7b-12

There are some good *principles* here that we can apply such as:

1. Finances are a measurable way we can test God's promises and, not only is it permitted, it is encouraged!
2. We cannot out-give God. If we honor Him in our giving He will honor us.
3. He can bless our finances in at least two ways--increasing our income, or saving us money by preventing problems.

But you might also notice that this promise is made specifically to the nation of Israel--

"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. But you ask, 'How are we to return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me...." "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty." Malachi 3:6-7a, 12

When you consider how much Christian writers and speakers speak on tithing you might suspect that there are similar commands to tithe in the New Testament, or at least one good passage like this one here in the Old Testament. But the truth is that neither Jesus nor the Apostles who penned the Scriptures as they were inspired by the Holy Spirit commanded Christian Believers to tithe. IT IS NOT COMMANDED EVEN ONE TIME! And Alcorn admits this--

"Jesus validated the mandatory tithe, even on small things (Matthew 23:23). But there is no mention of tithing after the Gospels. *It's neither commanded* nor rescinded, and there's heated debate among Christians about whether tithing is still a starting place for giving."

That one statement Jesus made in Matthew 23:23 was, “Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the Law -- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter (meaning the justice and mercy) without neglecting the former (meaning the tithing).”

Please remember that the commands to tithe were spoken by Jesus to the nation of Israel, which still existed as a national entity when Jesus spoke these words. Also remember that the church would not begin until the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles at Pentecost. To infer a **command** to New Testament Christians from this is at least debatable.

This statement by Jesus is also mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. Also the writer of the book of Hebrews mentions Abraham tithing to the High Priest, Melchizedic. **That’s it, three references to tithing in the New Testament and none of them is a command to tithe.** Yes, Abraham lived before the Law was given, 400 years before Moses, but tithing was included in the Law and we New Testament Christians are not under the Law. Alcorn goes on to say,

“Every example of giving in the New Testament goes far beyond the tithe. However, none falls short of it.”

With this statement Randy Alcorn begins to establish that 10% is the Biblical “floor” for giving, the place where you begin. I see tithing in the Old Testament as a precedent, but not as a command to us in the church age. I also agree that 10% is a good place to start giving, and it helps many people to have such a guideline. I believe we are free to tithe, just as we are free to keep kosher and circumcise our baby boys, but we don’t have to.

**The absence of any command to tithe 10%
in the whole New Testament is striking to me!**

Even Paul’s lengthy passage on giving in 2nd Corinthians 8 and 9 never includes a command to tithe, nor does it even allude to tithing. Since he is telling one church about the generous benevolence of another church to inspire them to be generous themselves this would have been the perfect time to use the Old

Testament term we so freely use today -- "*tithes and offerings.*" We say it to indicate you should give your tithes to your church and then your over and above the tithe gifts to other giving opportunities.

Perhaps we should say, "We ask that you honor *your regular giving commitment* (whatever you have decided that is) to the church, and then make your additional designated gifts to other giving opportunities on top of that. But do it all as you feel led by the Lord."

Alcorn acknowledges the debate between "tithing" and "grace giving" on page 63 (parts 'a' and 'b') of his book, "The Treasure Principle"--

Part 'a'--"Maybe you believe exclusively in "grace giving" and disagree with the church fathers Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, who taught that the tithe was the minimum giving requirement for Christians...

Part 'b'--But it seems fair to ask God, do you really expect less of me --who has Your Holy Spirit within and lives in the wealthiest society in human history--than you demanded of the poorest Israelite?"

Part 'b' of the quote is a convicting and convincing statement and comparison. It is a strong challenge, but part 'a' of the quote is weak. Please read the two parts again.

When Alcorn cites some church fathers to support his teaching it reveals the weakness of his argument. **We usually support doctrinal teachings from Scripture.** In Bible College if someone asserted a position on a teaching and we doubted it, we would say, "Chapter and verse, please?"

We favor the inspired Scriptures and teachings of the Apostles over the early church fathers who lived 100 to 600 years after Christ--and the Apostles *did not* teach tithing in their writings.

WE MUST ASK, WHY IS THERE NO CLEAR-CUT COMMAND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TO TITHE? AND SECONDLY,

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

At this juncture let me remind you that too weeks ago I used the "Who Really Cares?" book to show, statistically, that the Christian and Jewish custom of tithing has a direct "cause and effect" correlation with 'Who Really Gives' in American society. Tithers not only give to their congregations while secular

Americans do not, (because they do not congregate), tithers also give a staggeringly higher percentage of their money to non-religious charities and causes than do secular Americans.

So why are we debating the issue?
I hope to show you.

Alcorn says he “detests legalism” yet, as I read this chapter 5 of his book, I detect legalism in what he says.

FIRST, WHAT IS LEGALISM?

**LEGALISM IS WHEN CHRISTIANS LEGISLATE
FOR OTHER CHRISTIANS WHAT THEY OUGHT TO DO.**

IT IS OKAY FOR A CHRISTIAN TO HAVE A CONVICTION ABOUT WHAT HE OR SHE THINKS HE OR SHE SHOULD DO (MORE THAN LIKELY NOT MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE), BUT WHEN THAT PERSON IMPOSES HIS OR HER PERSONAL CONVICTION ON OTHER CHRISTIANS AS A RULE OR A LAW, THAT IS LEGALISM!

Often there are “regional taboos” that become what Christians should or shouldn’t do, such as “Christians *shouldn’t* dance, drink wine, smoke or go to movies or watch TV.” Also, some Christians have rules for what other Christians *should do*, such as “You should go to Sunday school, Church and Wednesday night Prayer meeting, cut your hair, shave or dress a certain way.”

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged." Matthew 7:1

It is especially shown to be legalism when one Christian judges another Christian for a violation of that rule or law. Does our good and faithful and mostly “right on” Christian brother, Randy Alcorn, do this?

Quoting, “Paul encouraged voluntary giving, yet also described such giving as *“obedience”* (2nd Corinthians 9:13). God has expectations of us, even when our offerings are voluntary. To give less than He expects of us is to rob God.”

Is Alcorn accusing a Believer who gives less than 10% of being a "robber" in spite of the salient fact that the New Testament nowhere commands Christians to give 10% as God, in Malachi 3, commanded the Jews to tithe and accused the Jewish nation of robbing Him? To me it looks like he does—

"Some say, 'We'll take this gradually. We're starting with 5 %.' But that's like saying, 'I used to rob six convenience stores a year. This year, by God's grace, I'm going to rob only three.'" The point is not to rob God less--it's not to rob God at all."

Alcorn calls them robbers of God. Now, if this view is correct we can judge and reproach Believers for not tithing with the same conviction that we can judge and reproach Believers for not being forgiving, not being loving, not being kind, not reading their Bibles which are all things we are commanded to do. Of course, most of us wouldn't be that judgmental or censoring, but some pastors and some Believers think "guilt motivation" works "because..." as one legalistic brother told me, "guilt motivation worked on me! (meaning himself)." Those kinds of Believers and pastors are not above brow-beating Christians into becoming tithers. But they don't have to come on that strong. All they have to do is make people feel emotionally pressured in the Name of God to do *their* will. This steals the initiative from the person, and it deprives them of the joy of deciding for him or herself.

**THIS IS MANIPULATION. THIS IS EMOTIONAL COERCION. THIS IS LEGALISM
AND IT SURELY IS CONTRARY TO THE SPIRIT OF GRACE!**

How many people don't go to church because they feel pressured to give rather than being taught to give as part of their discipling? How much did the state backed religious taxation of its citizens in European countries, whether the individual citizen was a Christian or not, contribute to the demise of Christianity in Europe? When the people resisted the "state church tithe" legal action was taken and assets were seized.

Is this the spirit of Jesus?

I don't know how much the abuses of imposing tithing as a law led to post-Christian Europe, but consider this--the church age is called "**The Age of Grace.**"

It is the time of God's patience, not the time of God's impatience. It is a unique period of time during which God is Dealing with man in a particular way -- **and that particular way is not Law (the commandments), but Grace!**

First, let me show you where in the Old Testament or the Old Covenant Scriptures, where the New Testament or the New Covenant, is predicted:

31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jeremiah 31:31-33

Notice it says, "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts." What does that mean? It means - Don't write it down as a part of your church by-laws. Don't create Christian legislation regarding it. This New Covenant, different from the Mosaic Covenant given after the Exodus, is also for the Jews--and if you read on down to Jeremiah 31:37 you will see that it describes the 1,000 year Kingdom. For example, *"No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.*" This describes kingdom conditions.

But when the King, the Messiah Jesus, came and offered the Kingdom and fulfilled 333 details of Old Testament prophecy--details as specific as, *"His hands and feet will be ripped as though by a lion's paw"* - the Jewish leaders and, ultimately, the Jewish nation, rejected Him.

When this trend of His rejection became clear Jesus started talking to His disciples about something new--His Church. And He discussed it in the future tense-- *"I will build My Church."*

THE CHURCH WAS SOMETHING.....COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

We all know the rest of the story, but Jesus left it to Paul to totally flesh out the *"mystery"* of the Church. Please look at Ephesians 2:14-18:

“14 For He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

Let's notice the spirit of this Church Age

It is characterized by a marvelous peace between Jewish and Gentile Believers, a true and sweet brotherhood. We have experienced that right here in Clayton Community Church.

The Church begins with, and is built upon the Apostles and Jesus who, together, are the *foundation* of the Church. It is *not* a continuation of Old Testament Judaism even though Jerusalem is called “*the mother of us all.*” *Old Testament Judaism and Christianity may be like “seed and flower” or “tree and fruit,” but each is distinct from the other.*

Ephesians 3:1-6 says,

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

A “**MYSTERY**” IN THE BIBLE IS
SOMETHING REVEALED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Why wasn't it revealed before? Because the nation of Israel could have accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and God's Kingdom on Earth could have begun 2,000 years ago. Simply stated, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit had a back-up plan if the Jewish nation were to reject Jesus. But the back-up plan does not, ultimately, keep God from having His Jewish-led Kingdom on Earth. It will still come, only it has been delayed because of the negative volition of the Jewish people 2,000 years ago, (and which continues to delay it to this day).

The Jewish people were put on a "side-track" in the history that God had planned for them, scattered as "the wandering Jew" and yet resolutely retaining their Jewish identity. Soon we will be raptured out and they will come to Christ and be placed back on the main track. Praise the Lord!

THE AGE OF GRACE

Look back at Ephesians 3:2 and see what the Holy Spirit, through Paul, calls this "back-up" age we are in-- "*The administration of God's grace that was given to me.*"

The word "administration" has been translated as "stewardship" or "dispensation". It has also been called an "age."

The church age we live in is characterized by grace!
It is an administration of grace!

I hope you can see now why I am making such a strong stand in favor of "grace giving." Here are just a few of the 169 uses of the word "grace" in the New Testament:

"I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing"--Galatians 2:21

"You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" 2nd Timothy 2:1

This is Paul's exhortation to a young pastor. What it is *not* saying is, "You then, my son, be ***laid back*** in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." It is *not* saying, "***be lackadaisical or loosey goosey*** in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

"This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, Who has destroyed death."--2nd Timothy 1:9,10

*“But He gives **more grace**. That is why the Scripture says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”--James 4:6*

*“But **grow in grace** and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”--2nd Peter 3:18*

GRACE IS FREEDOM

--freedom from the Law. The Law was perfect, but it was weak through the flesh. It was a burden, especially as the Scribes and Pharisees added rules of their own. Paul took a strong stand against legalists who surfaced in the early church. Galatians 2:5,6 says,

*“...some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. **We did not give in to them for a moment**, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.”*

In other places Paul called the gospel the *“gospel of grace.”*

Tithing is a dicey subject. We pastors are delighted that most of you tithe. Carolyn and I regard 10% as a floor for our giving and we do give our “tithes and offerings,” but that is our choice. It is not a set rule. Like it is for many Christians, it is our custom. We pastors here at Clayton Community Church do say about special projects, “Make sure your gift for this project is over and above your regular commitment to the church’s general budget” (and sometimes we say “over and above your tithe” as a figure of speech)--but, ultimately, what you decide to do, or not do, is between you and your Savior!

I will not minister condemnation to a fellow Believer who doesn’t tithe. It is really not any of my business what you do. My business is to teach the Bible and trust God, not you, for the viability and future growth of this church. **So, the pressure is off at Clayton Community Church!**

My motto is “Trust God and love people.”
“Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.”

Note: Our next sermon in this Treasure Principal series will be entitled, “The Tithe Is Neither a Floor Nor a Ceiling.”

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your

confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” 2
Corinthians 9:12-15