



Dear Phil

TITHING

Dear Phil:

Does God require New Testament believers to tithe? Isn't the New Testament principle that everything belongs to God and we should want to give more than

Old Testament believers gave? In other words, is a tithe all God requires from us in our giving? Or should we be giving more than the tithe?

—Jim

Dear Jim:

First things first, and the first thing that has to be addressed in response to your question is the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Despite the vexed nature of this question, I am convinced that the principle that best states this relationship is this: *Everything God required of His people in the Old Testament applies to us today either directly or in principle unless He has stated or implied that it does not.* You've probably heard the exact opposite: "Nothing in the Old Testament applies to us today unless it is repeated in the New Testament." I believe this idea is unbiblical for two main reasons.

First, neither Jesus nor any other New Testament writer even hints that He viewed the Old Testament in this way. In

fact, the New Testament writers freely quote the Old Testament and Mosaic Law as being directly applicable to us (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 6:1-3). Perhaps the most abused text on this subject is the Jerusalem Council decision in Acts 15. Most people fail to observe the reason the apostles limited their injunction to only four commands, three of which had to do with food. The apostles did not say that the only things from the Law that the Gentiles have to keep is that they don't eat food offered to idols, abstain from sexual immorality, and don't eat anything strangled or eat blood. They mention these four items only because "Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). In other words, the Council did not need to spell out all that God required of the Gentiles. The Gentiles had plenty of access to the synagogue and could learn what God required of them from the Old Testament, (p19)➡

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A BIBLICAL RESPONSE continued

➡(p14) especially from the Mosaic Law. The Jerusalem Council gave the four specific commands they did for two reasons: (1) to highlight the issues most likely to cause problems between Jews and Gentiles—eating blood, things strangled, or food offered to idols, and (2) to warn against the Gentiles' most frequent temptation: sexual immorality.

Second, since God does not change in His character, what pleased Him in the past will still please Him in the present. What displeased Him then will displease Him now. Therefore, anything that God desired and required His people to do in the past applies to us today either directly or in principle, unless He has told us differently.

When it comes to tithing, Scripture implies that, long before Moses, God had revealed that it was appropriate to tithe—that is, give a tenth of one's increase to God. Abraham reflects this in his tithing to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), as does Jacob in his manipulative vow in Genesis 28:20-22. When God gave the gracious gift of His law to Israel at Mt. Sinai, He included this already revealed principle of tithing there as well.

The first reason God requires His people to tithe is to remind us that everything we have actually belongs to Him. We easily forget that we are only managers and stewards; He is the owner. He owns everything because He created it all (Gen. 1:1; Psa. 24:1). Everything we have comes from Him (1 Cor. 4:7). In fact, He even owns us (Isa. 43:1; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek for this very reason. He recognized that it was God who had delivered his enemies into his hands, and it was God who had enriched Him (Gen. 14:20; cf. Gen. 24:35). God reminded

Israel of His total ownership of everything at Mt. Sinai—"all the earth is Mine" (Exod. 19:5), and again prior to entering the Promised Land—"The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me" (Lev. 25:23).

The second reason we should tithe is gratitude. Since all that we have comes from God (Jam. 1:17), we should gladly and joyfully express our gratitude for His goodness through giving to His work a tenth of our increase. This principle of gratitude and gladness in giving runs through the entirety of God's word. In Deuteronomy God commands His people repeatedly to bring their tithes with joy for all the blessings they have received: "bring...your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings...and you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you" (Deut. 12:6-7, 11-12; 14:22-26). Paul reflects this OT principle when he writes, "The Lord loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

In my next column I'll finish my answer to your question, dealing with what we can learn about the OT practice of giving tithes and offerings and how it applies to us today.

Sincerely,

Philip Brown ■

Dr. A. Philip Brown II is a member of the ministerial faculty of God's Bible School and College. He may be contacted by e-mail at pbrown@gbs.edu.

NEWS FROM THE HILLTOP continued

➡(p13) video tracks for Green's current concert tours.... **Pictured is Dr. Mark Bird of the GBS Division of**



Ministerial Education and GBS alumnus Rev. Edsel Trouten with Dr. Richard S. Taylor at the Wesleyan Theological Society meeting March 4, Seattle, Washington. At that time Dr. Taylor received the WTS "lifetime achieve-

ment award".... For the second consecutive year, **music groups from God's Bible School and College were invited to the annual banquet of the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati.** The event was held March 10 at the Westin Hotel in downtown Cincinnati. Kezia Morley played the harp for the President's Reception. Jessica Smith played the piano during the meal. Assurance Quartet opened the banquet with several vocal selections. This was another opportunity to acquaint members of the Cincinnati community with the ministry of GBS.... Chaired by Dan Glick, **GBSC's Division of Intercultural Studies and World Missions has 48 students enrolled for the spring semester 2005.** This marked increase in divisional enrollment accents

the mission program's continuing expansion. Pictured is Chairman Glick with GBSC students in his division. Approximately ten students are absent from the photo. ■

