

## A Survey of the First Century Churches

The purpose, structure and activities  
A Biblical and a historical perspective  
“The collection”

Of the acts of worship we have studied to date, the act of giving or taking up a collection clearly has the most scriptures directed specifically toward instructions on not only how the church is to collect funds but also the attitude and individuality associated with giving as well as the authorized disbursement of the funds. In an earlier study, we looked at how a number of religious groups today have made the decision to partake of the Lord supper less frequently than is prescribed in the New Testament scriptures. Their reasons range from a matter of convenience to not wanting to trivialize the act by doing it each week. However, when it comes to giving, you would be hard pressed to find any that stray from the instruction given in 1 Cor 16 regarding “laying by in store” on the first day of the week.

I think mainly, there are differences in the manmade guidelines that are handed out today within the various religious groups that run counter to what is taught in the new testament in both the case of taking up the collection as well as how the funds are spent. For example:

“Tithing--**giving 10 percent of one's income to one's church as commanded by Scripture**--is encouraged at Calvary Baptist and elsewhere in the Christian world, notably in black churches”

Deseret Evening News, January 8, 1881, Salt Lake Stake Conference, President, John Taylor: "As there is considerable misunderstanding in regards to the law of tithing, he (John Taylor) felt impressed to make some explanations on the subject. There were revelations requiring the saints consecrate all of their property which they failed to observe, and in answer to the inquiry of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord gave the revelation on tithing, as follows (D&C 119 is quoted).. President Brigham Young had ADOPTED the system of asking one tenth of the property of the new comers IN LIEU of the surplus spoken of in the revelation. **After this the Lord required one tenth of our interest annually. This is not a requirement of man but of God**, and NO MAN HAD THE RIGHT TO CHANGE OR MODIFY THIS COMMANDMENT.”

Catholic principles of tithing: 296. **Four Principles of Tithing:**

- a) Give back to the Lord in gratitude a portion of everything God has given, whether through paychecks, dividends, unexpected windfalls, Social Security payments, or regular allowances.
- b) See the gift as a sacrifice, a donation that seems almost more than affordable, an offering that "makes holy" (the literal meaning of the word "sacrifice") all the efforts and earnings of the past month.
- c) Use whatever means the Local Community may use to identify your tithes as a donation from you, thus both manifesting to others your commitment to regular support of the Community and actively participating in the collection as part of the Community's Conventual Mass worship.
- d) Consider **the biblical norm of tithing** in determining the amount of your sacrificial gift. The biblical norm was **ten (10) percent of gross income**. But in addition, there were many other "required" offerings. Both tithes and offering could equal more than one-third (1/3) of a families' gross income. The specific amounts or percentages recommended for members shall be discussed in the General Directory.

On the other hand, the spending of the money taken up in the collections is certainly an area where there is a wide range of methods and activities that are funded by the various religious organizations. Interestingly, it is in the distribution of these funds that proved to be perhaps the most divisive issue in the Lord's church in the past 50 years. All other issues pale in comparison when one examines the outcome.

We are blessed in that the scriptures are very clear with regards to the collection and the distribution of the funds. We will be studying these two acts over the next couple of weeks.

Please read the following passages:

1 Cor 16:1-2, 2 Cor 8 and 9; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Matthew 10:5-10; Luke 10:7-8

1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 2 Corinthians 8:1-8; 2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15-18  
1 Timothy 5:18; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; Acts 11:29-30; Romans 12:13  
Romans 15:26-27; Ephesians 4:28

1. Where our focus is on the teaching and instruction given in the New Testament, how would you characterize God's desires of his people regarding "giving" in the Old Testament? Numbers 18:24-28, Malachi 3:8-12) What is tithing? What were the funds to be used for?
2. What instruction is given to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians with regards to the actual physical act of taking up a collection?
3. 2 Cor 8 and 9 spend a lot of time talking about the attitude we should have with regard to giving. What characterized the giving of the Macedonian Christians?
4. What does it mean to first give yourself to the Lord?
5. What does Paul mean when he refers to giving as an act of "grace"?
6. Paul says he speaks not "by commandment" in 2 Cor 8: 8. What does this mean in the context of this passage?
7. How is Christ an example for us when it comes to giving?
8. Explain 2 Cor 8: 13-14
9. Does 2 Cor 9:6 preach a doctrine of "prosperity theology" that is teaching that God will *bless* those who tithe and *curse* those who do not.

10. How is tithing different than what is described and practiced in the New Testament with regards to giving?
  
11. What examples do we have in the New Testament of the disbursement of the funds collected from the Christians?
  
12. Based upon what we have studied to date, how would you describe a 1<sup>st</sup> century worship service of Christians?

What some of the early Christians and historians say:

“Every true prophet that wishes to abide among you is worth of his support. Likewise, a true teacher is himself worthy, as the workman, of his support. Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of the wine-press and the threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you will take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give it to the poor.” *Didache (c.80-140)*

“The wealthy among us help the needy...As for the persons who are prosperous and willing, they give what each thinks fit.” *Justin Martyr (c 160)*

“Instead of the Law commanding the giving of tithes, He taught us to share all our possessions with the poor.” *Irenaeus (c. 180)*

“On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation- but only if it is his pleasure and only if he is able. For there is no compulsion, all is voluntary. *Tertullian (c. 197)*

“Let the bishops use as a man of God those tithes and first-fruits that are given according to the command of God. Let him also dispense in a right manner the free-will offering that are brought in for the poor.” *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390)*