

Is tithing forbidden?

With the above treatment of the Old Testament practice of **tithing**, it may sound like I am discouraging the **regular giving of a fixed percentage of one's income** altogether. This is not true at all. My main point is to show that tithing as it is defined in its original context in the Old Covenant Mosaic Law has been fulfilled in Christ and Christians are not obligated to that specific Old Covenant practice. In fact we couldn't do it the way the Law prescribed any way because we do not have a Priesthood, or a Temple in which to appropriate it. However, **tithing as defined by giving ten percent of one's income**, can be a very effective way to give as a New Testament Christian. It certainly is a good gauge for effective giving and a disciplined life of giving will prove to be a certain way that our lives become a constant, **bountiful** and fruitful channel of blessing in the church, and to those in need. Moreover if we do it with a **cheerful heart**, we know that God "*loves a cheerful giver*," and we will of course reap a bountiful reward from the Lord in return.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 - 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and **he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully**. 7 Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; **for God loves a cheerful giver**. NASB

Of course another reason why giving of a fixed percentage of one's income is important is that God commands us to give **regularly** for the **support of our dedicated pastor-teachers** who invest so much of their lives to watch over our souls. Obviously it follows that some kind of regular giving is a foundational part of a well ordered local church.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 - 17 **Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching**. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "**The laborer is worthy of his wages**." NASB

We also see in the New Testament the example of Christians giving for the support of mission's related work which was heartily commended by God. These are some reasons why it is a wise and beneficial practice to give a regular fixed percentage of one's income in support of the local church and to **give generously and to share with those in need**.

Ephesians 4:28 - 28 Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, **in order that he may have something to share with him who has need**. NASB

1 Timothy 6:17-19 - 17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, **but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy**. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, **to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future**, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. NASB

In light of what we have covered, I think it is appropriate to reconsider Tom Schreiner's statement from his book 40 Questions about Christians and the Biblical Law.... "*Even though tithing is not mandated, there is no call in the New Testament to hoard one's possessions or to live selfishly. Believers are commanded to support those who proclaim the Gospel (Matt 10:10, Luke 10:7, 1 Cor 9:6-14, 1 Tim 5:17-18). Those who are blessed with wealth are to enjoy the good things God has given them, but they are also to be generous to those in need (1 Tim 6:17-19). The New Testament clearly teaches that wealth is dangerous because it can seduce us so that we stray from the Lord. God is our treasure, and **hence believers are to give generously and freely**. For most believers in the West, that means giving more than a tithe. Still, the tithe itself is not mandated by Scripture, and Scripture is our rule and authority rather than a tradition that requires believers to tithe.*"

The New Perspective on Paul

There has been a recent firestorm of controversy that has broken out in the evangelical theological world in response to some teaching put forth by several scholars concerning First Century Judaism. These are EP Sanders, Heikki Raisanen, James Dunn and NT Wright (to name a few). The ultimate issues at stake are surrounding the doctrine of **Justification by Faith** and just exactly what Paul was arguing for and against in his defenses of the great doctrine of Justification. Many would classify this as the single **most important doctrine of the Christian Faith** and therefore its biblical and historic defense an ultimate priority.

What is the New Perspective on Paul?

The New Perspective on Paul is a teaching which basically ascribes **First Century Judaism** as much more **grace based religion** that is assumed in Church History, and therefore resets the platform for understanding **how Jesus and Paul interacted with Judaism**. The implications of some of this teaching are very serious indeed and thus the outcry and controversy related to it. To try and summarize what the key issues at stake are, here are a few points put forth by some of the scholars.

- God's **righteousness** is redefined as "**covenant faithfulness**" instead of alien, real, moral, perfect righteousness which is ours "**in Christ**"
- First Century Judaism and the Judaizers were **NOT self-righteous or legalistic** but rather racially motivated toward divine Jewish favoritism
- The **role of works** is seen as the **basis** of our **Justification** at the **final judgment** rather than the traditional view that it is the imputed righteousness of Christ and works as the fruit thereof
- The traditional **Reformed view of Justification** by Faith is a **backlash** against Roman doctrine in the Reformation and distorts the biblical data
- **Imputation** of righteousness is seen as **non-sense** and not necessary

Effectively the Jews of the first century were not really self-righteous or legalistically motivated to the degree that traditional Church History has portrayed them. Therefore what Paul was really arguing against was a racially motivated "**ethnocentric**" desire for some Jews to be exclusive of Gentiles and therefore forcing them to partake of certain Jewish customs like Circumcision, Sabbath keeping and dietary laws. This is because, according to the New Perspective, God's attitude and therefore ours should not be fundamentally different than it was in Judaism, but that the "**works of the Law**" were simply our response to the grace of God in Christ, including us in His elect people according to His covenant faithfulness. Of course all of the controversy therefore centers around whether or not this is true, and what then is "**Justification**" by faith and how central that is to salvation. In fact, some scholars have begun to redefine Justification as not primarily a message about how one comes to salvation, but rather simply the pronouncement that one has been included in God's covenant and therefore will be vindicated at the final judgment. Paul's discourse with the Galatians then is seen as simply a dialogue about the actual fruit of being included in the covenant as "**faith**" in Jesus and not the "**works of the Law.**" Is Paul arguing with the Judaizers over legalistic self-righteousness, or Jewish-Gentile racism and its practical effects?

If this sounds somewhat **ambiguous** and difficult to grasp, it is because that is what really defines the **New Perspective**. It is at best ambiguous and clarity of its implications is not at all

one of its strongpoints. It has not been well proven or clarified and it surely could be very misleading to many who are not fully educated about the biblical doctrine of salvation, and specifically the doctrines of Justification and Imputation, what they are and why they matter. My own assessment is that this is more of a debate for academia and not really for Christian lay people. I do think the controversy is very necessary and I also believe a well-grounded defense and bulwark has already been established against the New Perspective, which I do believe is inaccurate and also misleading. Unless one is enamored by these issues, I wouldn't spend much time chasing the tail of this dog, for you will never quite catch what you chase. What I believe to be far more important is a clear biblical understanding of the traditional Reformed doctrine of Justification by Faith, which is in fact the most important doctrine of the Christian Faith.

What is Justification by Faith and how does Imputation relate to it?

The doctrine of **Justification by Faith** is so important because it deals with the **fundamental elements of salvation**. Namely that people have been alienated from God because of sin and become liable to death, eternal separation from God. Through the life and death of Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for people to be saved from His wrath, sin to be atoned for through the penal substitution of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to us so that we can be counted or reckoned as righteous in God's sight with God's own righteousness "*in Christ*." This righteousness is foreign, real, moral, and perfect according to God's righteous standard in the Law, and it is received by us with faith, a God-given ability to repent of sin and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ committing one's whole life to Him in faith-worked obedience. In grasping Justification in simple terms, let us have a brief look at the **Westminster Shorter Catechism** on the topic.

Q. What is Justification.

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, (Rom 3:24, Eph 1:7) and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2 Cor 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, (Rom 5:19) and received by faith alone. (Gal 2:16, Phil 3:9)

Now this statement gets right to the heart of what Justification in the biblical sense really is. It is broken down into four parts as follows....

Justification is an act of God's free grace - God's work, given freely (at no cost to the beneficiary, flowing from the gracious character of God)

wherein he pardons all our sins - It is a legal (forensic) term dealing with Law and includes pardon from sin, God is pictured as Judge

and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us - Righteousness is also a legal (forensic) matter which comes by imputation

and received by faith alone - Faith is seen as the means of reception or appropriation

This description of Justification speaks to us clearly about the basic *elements* of Justification.

They tell us of the nature of Justification, of what it is like and how it functions in God's plan of Redemption. With these elements in mind, let us look a little closer and understand how these are described in the Bible.

Justification is an act of God's free grace - The Scripture clearly ascribes justification as being an act of God.

Romans 8:33 - 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? **God is the one who justifies**; NASB

Galatians 3:8 - 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that **God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." NASB