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EDITORIAL

NOTHING IN ALL TIME HAS HAD TO CONTEND, AT ITS very beginning, with such relentless adversity as has the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every form of attack, from the sword of its enemies to the most subtle delusions and inconsistencies of its adherents, has continually assailed it down the long centuries. Its survival is the outstanding phenomenon of human history, as it is the one hope that illumines human destiny.

Had its implanting and spread been left to men's devices alone, the most natural procedure of its earliest devotees would have been to draw up a careful statement of its history, principles, and rules, which should thenceforth be its single accepted authority. But Christianity is life rather than a system of belief. It is adapted to germinate and spread in hearts hungry for inward peace and communion with God, rather than merely in intellects attracted by some new system of ethics. Following its Founder's withdrawal of His visible presence, it at once gained amazingly in influence and believers simply by word of mouth. Then, as distances required written communication, as the earliest disciples began to record its truths for those who should come after them, and as controversies with opposers and misled followers called for the published refutation of error, a

THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF THE TITHE

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I HAVE before me a letter from a gentleman of the highest Christian character, who fills a most honored place in the judiciary of our land. He is frequently invited to make religious addresses and spends more than half of his Sabbaths in that kind of work. His religion is of the old fashioned fervent and orthodox type. The following passage occurs in his letter:

“Something is wrong [with the church]. What is it? I believe it is the money. Some of the methods used are in my judgment cruel towards our fellowman and blasphemous toward God. I have in my possession a piece of propaganda that comes very near offering reserved seats in the Kingdom of God to the highest bidder for cash. I do not see how we can expect a blessing. We are not getting it. Peter said to Simon Magus, ‘Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.’ May it not be more tolerable for Simon Magus than for those who are now teaching the doctrine of Simon Magus? I tremble when I think of what is ahead of us.”

Such sentiments and language from such a source show the need for defining and pressing the proper relationship of the religious use of money to the promotion of piety.

It is antecedently probable that there should exist some intimate and proper and altogether gracious rela-

tion between the right use of money in religion and the best results in our spiritual life. Money lies very close to all the processes of our natural life. It is a medium of exchange. No one can produce for himself all that he needs to live on. There must be division of labor. We must more or less specialize in our vocations. What I produce of one or more things beyond what I need for my own use, I must exchange for the surplus of some other man. Each one needs some of the output of some one else. Money is ever the convenient medium for this interchange. Money is the representative of wealth. Idleness is not a virtue, but a vice. He who is not slothful in business but is fervent in spirit, is truly "serving the Lord." And "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." The God-given result of hard work is increase or accumulation. Money represents that accumulation. It is a power. It may not be "the greatest power known to man," but it is a power, immense, incalculable, which we can no more measure than we can measure the tides of the sea. And it is a legitimate power.

Why should not all this power be made a spiritual force, not merely providing the physical means of transporting and maintaining the missionary and his message, but also becoming a means of grace to him who provides the money for such uses? Can it be that there is in human life so necessary and powerful an agent as money is and one so identified with everything we daily handle, and yet it can have no adaption to the highest uses of human existence? Neutral in moral character, a power for evil when abused, at times a curse to the holder of it, may not money be an even greater power for good? Is it not in accordance with familiar divine methods to rescue the instruments of evil and convert them to

the uses of grace? It is the "love of money," and not money itself, that the apostle calls "a root of all evil." And he does not call it *the* root of all evil, as if it were the only source from which all sin and sorrow come, an accursed thing that blights all it touches. But he calls it "a root of all evil," one of a number of things out of which all manner of evil things may spring.

In some cases wealth is declared to be God's way of expressing His special favor to His servants. Of course then there must be some way of making money subservient to the richest uses of religion, one of many resources of sanctification. Otherwise it is a deadly exception among the things we are compelled to use, and one which should be placarded with the most startling warning signals. If money can be made a spiritual blessing, we need and desire some very explicit rules to guide us. To imagine that the whole subject of our religious offerings is left to the loving and grateful promptings of our redeemed souls is a broad and optimistic theory, but it lacks the warrant of explicit Scripture, and it lacks the support of experience. The Prophet says: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" If God has designated a particular scale upon which we should make our offerings, He has done that which we sorely needed to have done. He has thereby instructed us where we are apt to be helplessly ignorant, and He has stimulated us where our devotion is most apt to be sluggish.

Tithing does not work automatically in producing spiritual blessing. There are no mechanical processes of sanctification. The Shorter Catechism declares that the outward and ordinary means of grace are "the word, sacraments and prayer." Not one of these means of grace will work without some co-operation on the part

of the man himself. One ever present danger with the Christian is, to regard these means of grace as having a power in themselves to sanctify the worshiper. The Bible continually warns us against this danger. It is not the "much speaking" in prayer that brings the blessing, but personal communion with "the Father which is in secret." The Apostle tells us "the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." If the Lord's Supper is not partaken of in a worthy manner, it not only does not do any good, it is positively injurious, because it incurs the "condemnation" of the Master.

So Christ tells us that we may tithe, never so scrupulously, even down to giving a tenth of mint, anise, and cummin, and yet be left untouched by weightier matters of a spiritual kind. However good a seed may be, it will not grow unless the soil is adapted to it. Just so no religious rite or agency will work of itself if the heart is not right. We must take account of this fact if we are to understand the spiritual side of the tithe. We are so prone to imagine that if we give so much money to religion, especially if we give exactly the proportion mentioned in the Bible, that is all that is necessary. We treat our offering as a substitute for heart service and as a self-acting means of grace. This danger, however, is not peculiar to our worship of God with our money. Any religious service we may render is exposed to the same temptation. It may prove to us an occasion of spiritual pride and self-righteousness. It should not surprise us then if our offerings of money, be it a tithe or some other proportion, should tempt us to self-complacency and to misjudging of others. It is true, as claimed, that he who would try to meet all his religious obligations by the payment of money, or who would

depend on that money for all his spiritual grace, does not differ radically from Simon Magus, who offered to give Peter money if he would confer on him the power to control the workings of the Holy Ghost.

Now there are some people whose vision does not get beyond this danger, and they do not see the safety and blessedness of the right sort of tithing which lie on the other side of the danger. They put a microscope over the danger, close one eye, affix the other eye to the instrument, and become oblivious of all the rest of the subject. To them tithing is synonymous with a financial religion, with bargaining with the Most High, and so on. Let us rather take into view the whole scope of the subject, survey and chart the danger, take all proper precaution to avoid it, and then go confidently on to possess the blessing.

With all possible veneration for the Shorter Catechism, may I not raise the question whether that Catechism has really given us a complete list of the means of grace in the formula, "The word, sacraments and prayer." Should we not add *obedience* as a fourth: The word, sacraments, obedience, and prayer? Christ clearly taught that obedience is a means of grace, when He said: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Willingly doing the will of God results in enlarged, correct, and spiritual knowledge and in a quickened and more active and constant devotion. If, then, tithing may be classed as obedience to God and that obedience is rendered in the right spirit, that is decisive of the question as to whether it has a spiritual side or not.

That tithing is agreeable to the will of God is witnessed by two facts: First, God did once set the seal

of His approval upon the tithe when He incorporated it in the Mosaic law. Second, nowhere in the Bible is He represented as approving of any offering for religious uses if it amounted to less than a tenth. The implications completely cover the ground. Inference could hardly be more conclusive. The tithe is the minimum approved of God. Then tithing, done in the right spirit, should inure to our growth in grace. Nay, the argument is *a fortiori*: If obedience to laws which require honesty and sobriety and chastity and diligence and courtesy and all that class of virtues, entails a spiritual blessing, how much more may we expect such blessing from obedience to a law which requires the habitual and frequent bringing to God Himself of such things and in such measures as will keep us reminded that all we have comes direct from the hand of a gracious Providence. So, then, we conclude that the tithe must bring a spiritual blessing because it is a conscious effort on the part of the tither to do what he believes is pleasing to God.

We may approach the subject from another point of view. There is an obvious logical connection between "proportionate offerings" and spiritual blessing. If I have no fixed principles to regulate my worship of the Lord with my substance, if I am without any system or method in the premises, then my offerings are impulsive. Impulsive offerings are apt to be spasmodic and capricious. They are caused by freshly excited emotions, which usually subside as quickly as they arise. In some cases the impressions may be so strong as to set up a fixed habit in the life of contributing periodically to some one particular cause. But even in that case no breadth of view is acquired, no sense of a universal need of humanity, no sense of the all-comprehend-

ing ownership and sovereignty of God, but merely a sentiment operating within a narrow sphere, related to a single cause or group of causes.

But suppose I adopt a sliding scale of offerings, moving up and down with the rise and fall of my success in business, a fixed ratio between my income and my offerings. If I do that, then the amount I offer is in itself a reminder of the amount God has entrusted to me. If the amount is large it excites thanksgiving and adoration. If the amount is small it suggests self-examination, lest there may be something wrong in my life to which the Lord would direct my attention and from which He would have me delivered. Can it be that a practice which lies so close to thanksgiving on the one side and self-examination on the other could prove otherwise than a powerful incentive to holy living?

Suppose further, that I not only adopt a ratio of offerings to income, but that I make that ratio one that appeals to me as Scriptural—not a ratio selected by myself in my fallible judgment and in my imperfect devotion, but one which I recognize as of divine appointment, the minimum of which God has expressed approval—how much more powerful the reaction becomes!

But, however convincing such kinds of reasoning may be and however useful in clarifying and strengthening our faith, that which puts the conviction upon an immovable foundation is the express declaration of Scripture. The Bible teaches that tithing in a right spirit is a means of grace. When Paul was a prisoner in Rome his friends at Philippi sent presents to him for the relief of his discomforts and privations. He acknowledged their kindness with profuse thanks and expressions of delight and then added that the thing which rejoiced him most of all was the spiritual blessing

they themselves were going to get out of it. "Not because I desire a gift," said he, "but I desire fruit that may abound to your account" (Phil. 4:17). He was not discussing tithes but an act of Christian charity. Nevertheless the principle is the same. The unselfish use of our substance in a worthy cause that is near to the Master, done for the Master's sake, will bring the blessing of the Master's approval and benediction.

If it be so with our offering for Christian charity, much more is it so with offerings direct to God Himself, such as the tithe is. In Deuteronomy, Moses says: "Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth * * * *that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.* * * * *that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thy hand which thou doest*" (Deut. 14:22, 23, 29). Growth in grace and knowledge and in favor with Jehovah is here explicitly declared to be the effect of tithing. God said to Israel through Malachi: "Bring ye all the tithes into the store house, * * * and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10).

What sort of "blessing" is it that God is here promising to the tither; is it material or spiritual blessing? Some of those who are opposed to the tithe as a modern institution are shocked at the suggestion that God could offer a reward of material prosperity to those who tithe. They claim that that would be appealing to a mercenary motive. But unquestionably material blessing is promised there, without, however, excluding the spiritual blessing. Is it possible to conceive of a material prosperity that is a real blessing, if the favor

and grace of God do not go with it? If it be not sanctified to our spiritual welfare it is no blessing at all. The blessing of God is one that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow therewith. If the good things of this life have no entail of permanent happiness they are of no advantage. Dives with all his riches was not blessed of God. When a man is really blessed of God his material and spiritual possessions are so interwoven with each other that we cannot separate them and say, This is matter, and this is spirit. And so, a large part of the tithers' blessing was spiritual riches—an inundation, the windows of Heaven open and no room to receive the flood. One more passage. God told Israel that, at the time of the presentation of the tithes, He would "avouch" them to be His peculiar people, to keep His commandments, adding, "*That thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God*" (Deut. 26:18, 19). I conclude, therefore, that wherever the tithe law is in force and is properly observed God has attached to it a promise of sanctifying grace.

But what is the actual result of tithing, as it may be seen and judged of in the practical experience of those who pay tithes? Has the practice of tithing been found really to inure to piety and growth in grace? As has been repeatedly implied in the foregoing, all depends on the motive of the tither and the spirit in which the tithing is done. If a man pays tithes from a mercenary motive and because he thinks it will increase his income; if he does it in a self-righteous spirit that he may have glory of men; if he does it in a legalistic spirit, "grudgingly and of necessity," because he thinks he must and because he is afraid of the blight that follows disobedience; if he does it out of curiosity as a novice would play with chemicals; if he does it in a superstitious spirit

as one would pry into the occult; if he does it carelessly or perfunctorily as one who would do it quickly and be done with it, he cannot expect much if any wholesome effect in his spiritual life and character.

But if the tithes are paid in a spirit of worship; if there be a thankful acknowledgment of God's gracious agency in providing the income he is tithing; if there be any adoring sense of God's sovereign ownership of the one-tenth and the nine-tenths and the worshiper and all he calls his own; if he have any degree of zeal for the glory of God and the extension of Christ's Kingdom and the saving of souls to which these tithes are devoted; if they be presented with meekness and penitence, with gratitude and renewal of consecration; if these things enter into the tithing, even in some small and germinal measure, and in proportion as they do enter in, the tither is accepted of God, and communes with God, and God pours into his life some expression of His loving favor, some purifying virtue of His touch, some sanctifying power of His grace.

Without attempting an exhaustive enumeration of all the spiritual effects of tithing, I give a suggestive list. It emphasizes divine ownership of all things. It sanctifies the nine-tenths that remain. It puts a check on selfish spending, by injecting a great, wholesome, sanctifying ideal into the riot of extravagance. It concentrates the attention of the family upon a noble standard. It deepens the man's own sense of the divine. It fills his heart with a peculiar joy. It gives him an irrepressible message for the world. It dignifies church finances by removing the whole subject from the realm of caprice to one of divine worship.

From the circle of my acquaintance, I can name a

number whose whole spiritual life has been transformed since they began to tithe, and who themselves attribute the blessing in large measure to tithing. The family altar is established in the home, the children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and grow up as olive branches around the table, social pleasures are pruned of unwholesome features, business life is re-organized upon the principles of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule, the whole family cherishes a loving devotion to all that makes for the Kingdom of Christ, and soul winning becomes a passion.

At the beginning of this article I quoted from a lawyer. I cannot better complete and conclude it than by giving, in his own language, the impressive experience of another lawyer. I may say, incidentally, that when he began tithing his income was \$215.18, and at the end of twenty years his income had grown to \$75,862.84. He writes:

“It was merely an impression received from a sermon in 1899 that laid the foundation of a system of tithing which I then began, and have since maintained with scrupulous care. The results that have followed have confirmed my faith in the reality of Christian experience which has been so often and so vividly manifested to me; and I have often longed to express in word what the spirit alone can know. This expression will be entirely without meaning to the man who has never felt the results of a real Christian experience; but to him who has it it will be clear. That he who has it not may seek its truth and kindred joy through tithing, I observe that grace comes through faith, and faith is strengthened by service, and tithing is service. * * * The practice of tithing

illuminates the soul, establishes peace and fixes a steadfast, immovable purpose in the life of a Christian; for once begun, I cannot imagine how one could afterwards abandon the tithing system. My income was so insignificant (at the first) that my natural lust for the Lord's tenth was not greatly strained by the separation. While I never afterwards thought of discontinuing the system then begun, as time passed and income increased with growing practice, I was often sorely tempted to excuse myself from tithing larger fees. When my father gave me \$5,000.00 in 1901 (the first real money of any consequence I had ever had) I stood out firmly against the pangs of conscience and kept it all for myself. My surrender was not complete. I have found the following entry in my journal under date of November 20, 1915, 'In considering the returns or dividends received from my B— T— Company stock as part of my inheritance which has been charged against me as an advancement, I have never yet placed any part of them to my special account to be used for church and charity. The other day I told this to Mother and added that ever since such dividends had begun to come in things had been going wrong, and that out of the very next dividend I intended to take a tenth of all received to date and put it to my special account for church and charity. Strange as it may seem, since I came to that determination things at home have changed and been to my entire satisfaction with perhaps the most trifling exceptions.' The causes of my previous troubles and sufferings remained with me for a time, and they are sometimes with me still, but they do not affect my peace of mind. God's grace has been all sufficient to sustain me, and I have no words to express the exquisite joy and peace and happiness that have come to me. God has verily extended His divine

finger from the throne of mercy and touched me, thereby infusing into my soul a flood of grace and comfort that cannot be told. How will others believe, if they have not realized a similar Christian experience? Nathanael did not believe Philip, who said that he had found the Messiah. Philip could not picture his experience in human speech. Neither can I. But just as Philip invited Nathanael, so I invite others to 'Come and see.'