

09.28.25 ~ Pentecost 16

“Tithing: Trust & Obey”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Leviticus 27:30-34 ^{ESV}

³⁰ “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. ³¹ If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. ³² And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the Lord. ³³ One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.”

³⁴ These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Leader: These Are Words from God.

People: Thanks be to God!

Philippians 4:14-20 ^{NLT}

¹⁴ Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

¹⁵ As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I first brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. ¹⁶ Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. ¹⁷ I don't say this because I want a gift from you. Rather, I want you to receive a reward for your kindness.

¹⁸ At the moment I have all I need—and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

²⁰ Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.

Leader: These Are More of Paul's Words on Stewardship.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Charitable Lord, we seek you this morning even as we worship. We seek your comfort and your challenge so that we may be more balanced in our blessed faith. Nudge us to share our faith and stories with those who do not know you personally. Motivate us to give to those in need. Inspire us to create new relationships with those seeking you or a church family. Discipline us to tithe and share our resources with various ministries and the needs of this church. Be with us as we prepare and plan our 2026 Budget. Mostly, accept our gratitude for all we have and all you provide. Let us hear your teaching, discernment, and inspiration through Scripture, music, prayer, and this message. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

What does tithing mean, anyway? For many of us who grew up in the church, it is a familiar term of giving 1/10 or 10 percent of our earnings back to the church or to a mission project. We spoke of the penny jar last week, but do any of you remember receiving a cardboard piggy bank shaped like a globe for collecting your church missions money each year? I couldn't locate a photo, but I have a distinct memory of receiving one each year, unfolding and assembling it, then placing it in my room so that every day I'd pray for the missionaries and try to put some coins in it. I was a GA (Girls' Auxiliary in the 1960's, and by 1970, had become Girls in Action and then Acteens), and part of our curriculum was to learn what the Southern Baptist Missionaries (funded by the International Mission Board) were doing around the world to spread the Gospel. As we read and heard about their lives and stories, we prayed for them regularly and donated funds to help with their work. For me, even today, that became a habit and a voluntary action, so I still support Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Baptist General Association of Virginia local and global missions through our church's budgeted giving, where my tithe goes. And it feels good to specifically also support the Food Mission, Benevolence funds, and Church World Service Annandale CROP Hunger Walk with whatever I can give, even if it's just eliminating a cup of fancy coffee. I hope you have similar testimonies. Preaching this stewardship focus has helped me remember how I learned the principles of charity and giving back to the church.

First, my parents had little but did donate weekly, and I recall my mom and grandparents sitting with me in church putting in an offering each week as it was passed around. Second, I often waited for my

grandfather as he counted the church offering and went to the bank with a deposit when it was his month to “count money.” I think he must have also taught me about it by answering my many questions.

Our first passage comes from a challenging book to read, Leviticus. It is the third book of the Torah, or the third book of Moses, and its very name pertains to the Levites, Jewish males connected to the Tribe of Levi and Aaron. They were considered the priestly class of those who were called to be priests or assisted the priests to uphold the ancient holy rituals and laws. The book of Leviticus is a historical account of instructions to Moses related to the Sinai covenant with Israel, even in terms of building the temple, physical rules of cleanliness, devotion, food preparation, etc. Like Exodus, regulations were established to redeem humankind’s sinful tendencies and assure that God’s holy presence would remain with Israel’s people. We know that Jesus fulfilled that requirement, so we no longer follow the 613 Levitical laws.

However, much of Jesus’ teachings came from the Hebrew Scriptures; “love your neighbor as yourself” first appears in Leviticus 19:18! For our purposes, let us remember these commandments of the Lord were for the people of that specific time, the Israelites, so our interpretation must be according to Jesus’ teachings and how they relate to today’s culture. Having said that, I found the commentaries were helpful. Deuteronomy 8:11-20 also helps the Israelites remember the Lord’s provision. During their 40 years escaping Egypt, they lived in a rocky, desert wilderness, and were hungry, thirsty, angry, and disobedient; the required offerings of land, animals, and first fruits of their crops are to remind them of God’s sufficient provision: water from

the rock at Massah (Exodus 17:7), quail meat from the sky (Exodus 16), and manna on the ground every morning (also Exodus 16). Tithes of grain, wine, olive oil, herds and flocks were to be eaten by the donor in the presence of God at the Sanctuary (not just dropped off); this was an act of worship to acknowledge God's sovereignty over all. It is ok and important to respect money or needed possessions; Biblical warnings are about greed and the love of money driving humans into sin. As I said last week, we must eliminate our mindsets of scarcity and embrace Christ's sufficiency, abundance, love, peace, hope, joy, and surplus. We had over 110 families and neighbors served yesterday at the Food Giveaway, plus more bread for local food shelters, yet we still had some provisions leftover. God filled our empty shelves, and we had more volunteers to help! It was a good day for both givers and receivers.

The Philippians, from our second passage, were very generous so don't hear Paul's letter as a critique. They had sent Paul gifts two times already while he was in Thessalonica. He was not begging for more but wanted to thank them in this letter and explain his gratitude and his Roman prison conditions. They had heard of his imprisonment (under house arrest most sources say) and assumed he needed assistance. As the true evangelist that he was, he focused instead on their beliefs, obedience, and trust in God as he shared his testimony. He assured them that God would meet their needs through Jesus Christ. He did want them to receive credit or acknowledgment for helping him and praying for him because these mutual needs were important too. The supportive nature and collective strength they shared with him were only refueled by their trust and obedience to Christ.

Because of the Philippians' kindness to this minister of God who shared his life transformed by Jesus, God would accept their gesture as a holy and generous blessing to God himself. Their physical and spiritual gifts and prayers would be acceptable to God as proof of their trust and obedience. The apostle Paul reminds them that they will receive reciprocal blessings out of God's love and gratitude, not as a payment for their sacrifice. And so it is with Jesus. We give out of our hearts not just our pockets, checkbooks, or Zelle accounts or Apple Pay! We give out of love for Jesus and his teachings. Yes, that is obedience, but we must also give from our trust in God as well. Sometimes, we give sacrificially because we may not have enough to give, and God will honor those free will (not coerced or guilted-into-giving) sacrifices.

So, after three weeks of study, are you still ready to bolt for the door when the word stewardship is uttered? Or do you have a deeper understanding of how money fuels the Gospel message to build God's kingdom? Through the church, through food missions, through language ministries, through sandwich teams or hunger walks, through teaching others, by being a physical presence in the community, by opening our doors to those in need of prayer or resources, we obey and give. True, we have finite resources at this moment, but God has proven over and over that he has infinite resources to replenish our own. Our church had a bleak future in 2017, but look at us now, 8 years later, we have hope and sufficiency and even a little surplus! God has provided for our needs through your obedience and generosity. God has provided people to use our space for donations that pay for utilities and maintenance. Jesus has been with us every step of our spiritual and financial growth. Will you in

this next season pray for him to provide new congregants to join us on this kingdom path? I'll be announcing a prayer emphasis soon, but you can start now, in gratitude for our financial position, and in petition for new believers to come to Christ within these walls again. Remember, your offerings are "ACTS" of worship: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. By your trust in God for his provision, you are obedient and will be rewarded. Paul wrote: "¹⁹ And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen." Will you both give and receive so that you may share in Christ's riches of faith, generosity, and salvation? I hope so! Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we continue to pray for your stewardship direction. Help us to boldly share what you have provided us with generosity and responsible discernment. As we reflect on our own trust and obedience, help us dive into your Word, praying for open hearts and minds to give and receive. We dedicate the ideas shared here today and say thank you for your people. Be with us after the service in our Council meeting as we steward the church's business. It is in your name, we pray, Amen.