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Is Christian Education a Tithe?

Abstract

"Giving should be done cheerfully, rather than an obligation, and not for the purpose of public recognition."

Posting about the meaning of tithing from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/answering-your-question-is-christian-education-tuition-a-tithe/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

Christianity

Answering Your Question: Is Christian education tuition a tithe?

 [inallthings.org/answering-your-question-is-christian-education-tuition-a-tithe/](https://allthings.org/answering-your-question-is-christian-education-tuition-a-tithe/)

Liz Moss

I need advice concerning paying Christian Education tuition (mainly K-12) and still tithing to the church. We have several children and not a huge income. Can we consider part of our tuition payments as a tithe? Anonymous Reader

There are a wide variety of views on what tithing means in the church. Tithing could mean an obligation or a tax given to support a church or the clergy of the church. To others tithing could be considered giving a certain percentage, like 10%, of your income to the poor or to the needy. But, can giving your money to an organization outside of the church, like the local Christian K-12 school, be considered a tithe, too?

Both the Old and the New Testament mention money and how it should be spent or given away. The Old Testament law required that a tenth of all produce, flocks, and cattle be given to support the [Levites](#). In turn, the Levites were to give a tenth of that for support of the high priest ([Leviticus 27:30-33](#) and [Numbers 18:21-28](#)). An additional tithe, collected every three years, was to be used to meet the needs of the Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows ([Deuteronomy 26:12-13](#)). Additional tithes were taken for festival purposes.

The New Testament does not give any specific rules about tithing and some aspects of the Old Testament law do not apply to Christians. However, Jesus made it clear that we are called to be generous to those in need ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)). Giving should be done cheerfully, rather than an obligation, and not for the purpose of public recognition ([Matthew 6:1-4](#)). The amount to give is not necessarily ten percent. Instead, generous giving is an acknowledgement that everything we have is a gift from God and is to be used for service to God.

To answer this question further, I asked three church leaders serving in three different types of congregations a series of questions. Hopefully this will give clarity to the definition of a tithe and help us answer our reader's question.

What do you consider to be “a tithe”?

Pastor One: [In my church,] we don't talk about “tithing” all that much—we rather use the concept of giving as a discipline and use the idea that the discipline of giving is a means of grace—or a gift God has given us to help us discipline our spiritual lives in the area of finances. We often say “we don't take an offering because God needs our money—God has all the money God needs—giving is for us and it is a privilege to be a part of what God is doing in our world.”

Pastor Two: I consider a tithe in accordance with the [Pentateuch](#)—the first tenth of the fruit of our labor.

Pastor Three: I've read several different definitions of a tithe. One that involved tithing to support the tabernacle, tithing (separately) to support the Levites, and another tithe to support those in need. Because one of these was 10% every third year it added up to a total of 23.3%. When I was a child and my dad started paying me for field work, I got a dollar an hour. One dime was for the church. Tithing has been a

way to remember that everything I have is a gift from God, to trust God with my money and for my necessities. Tithing is a way for me to bless others and a way that I have been blessed. It is a way that I can contribute to the life of the church; a way that I can be involved in the work of God's kingdom around the world.

Do you talk about tithing in your church?

Pastor One: We talk about tithing in terms of the "guide for thankful living." Or, to put it another way, if you're looking for a way to get into the discipline of giving in generosity, giving 10% of your money is a great place to start. Our congregation also talks about disciplines and habits a lot.

Pastor Two: We talk about tithing frequently.

Pastor Three: We don't talk about tithing as an obligatory tithe. We talk about generosity and giving. The best message I've heard on tithing is by [Rob Bell](#) called "Who Doesn't Want in on That". That's the approach I've tried to adopt here as well. I want to approach tithing as an invitation—giving through joy and inspiring generosity rather than demanding obedience. But, honestly, it's infrequent that I focus on tithing on Sunday mornings. It does come up sometimes at leadership meetings. We have good, faithful, generous people on our stewardship team. And God has continued to bless us with increases in giving and generous people which has enabled us to accomplish what God has called us to do.

Do you think those who attend your church or members of your church should give all of their tithe to the church? Or, is it okay if they give to another charitable institution and not to the church?

Pastor One: "Should" isn't really part of the equation since we're New Testament Christians. I think Christians are called to be generous people and most either are or they aren't generous.

One of the #1 comments I get about our church in the area of the country where we are at is how they love that we don't talk about giving very much—especially those who've spent a lot of time in the church world. Many feel financially *used* by the church.

Pastor Two: In most cases, I expect members of our congregation to fully tithe within the bounds of the congregation that is their church home.

Pastor Three: At times, my family has tithed to other areas like sending a family member on a mission trip, supporting other churches, or giving assistance to people in need. I can absolutely understand the desire to use some of what God has entrusted to you to further God's work in all these ways. I also see tremendous value in helping to support the church you belong to. Not giving as "voting with my checkbook," but giving with open hands, open hearts and no strings attached. It can be a discipline in trusting the leadership to use it prayerfully and wisely. It is also the case that through our local churches, we support the work of the kingdom here and around the world. There are so many ministries and good alternatives for where we can be generous. But there is only one church. I personally wrestle with how to answer this one. Maybe my best thought is that there doesn't need to be a hard and fast rule that fits everyone and every situation. Personally, I choose to give 10% to the church and look for opportunities to joyfully give beyond that to other ministries and needs.

Do you think paying for Christian education (mainly K-12) for family members (children) could be considered a tithe?

Pastor One: When we pay for Christian education, we are paying for a service for our children to receive. I do not consider this a tithe, but rather paying a fee for a service.

Pastor Two: I wish.

Pastor Three: It certainly could be *considered* a tithe. The work being done there is God-honoring and aims to further God's kingdom. But, like so many opportunities worthy of our consideration and generosity, Christian education is not the church.

As a side note, though I've had giving ingrained from an early age in who I am, I fully recognize that this topic is easier for me now that my paycheck allows for more margin to give. There are many within our churches for whom it is really asking the "widow's mite." Too often this topic is preached smugly and demanded by leaders who will not be giving nearly as sacrificially as those to whom they are speaking. It is important for us to be sensitive as we teach how to trust God, give joyfully, and be good stewards of what God's entrusted us.

Do you agree with the three pastors' responses? How do you tithe to your local church?