

CHRISTIAN GIVING

By H. C. Mullen

Article No. 3

The last article dealt mostly with the thought of having some system for our giving. That there should be a plan or system for something as important in the life of a Christian, seems to me to need no further proof. It is inconceivable that a matter so vital to the welfare of God's cause, and so close to the affections of mankind, should be left to mere chance, or to the whim or caprice of the individual. Suppose the question of Sabbath keeping was left to the fancy or convenience of the individual? How long would we have any day of rest? As it is, it is difficult for large corporations and many individuals to give up work for one day in seven, when the law of the land really demands it, and the Sabbath is an institution ancient and well established by common custom.

If God had left this matter to the individual taste or convenience some would want to keep it on Monday, some would want it on Tuesday, and some on Wednesday, the next week others would find it convenient to have church on Thursday, others on Friday and some would want it late Saturday night and some would have no time to spare for church or a day of rest at all. How should we ever manage our public worship or decide what portion of time we would allot to the Lord? No, the Creator instituted the Sabbath after the creation of the world, and His order has been in effect ever since. Now, listen doubtful ones, there is as much to show that God instituted a system and plan, and defined the proportion for our giving, as there is for Sabbath-keeping. God instituted a plan for taking care of financial matters and that plan cannot be improved upon. That plan was that one tenth of our net income should be set aside for His work and be used for nothing else. Someone has called the requirement of one seventh of our time and one tenth of our income, "Gods' twin laws."

Someone will say, "This was under the law"! Yes, it was God's own financial plan for His church as instituted in the wilderness, and it was a complete success when carried out, but the tenth was a proportion fixed long before the giving of the law. Four hundred and thirty years before the giving of the law, Abraham gave the tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek. Where did he get the idea of this proportion?

Over two hundred years before the giving of the law, Jacob made a vow saying, "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Where did he get the idea of a tenth? There is evidence that the law of the tithe was as old as creation. While the tenth is not mentioned, it is plain to see that Cain and Abel recognized the claims of God upon their temporal increase. These instances seem to have been acts of worship, and that is the true and New Testament idea of giving and no person has yet grasped the matter till giving is a recognition, of our indebtedness to God and His claims upon us. Then our giving is a part of our worship, and great spiritual blessings are derived from it. Many ancient heathen nations gave tithes to their gods; among them being the Phenicians, Carthaginians, Lydians, Greeks and Romans. We have no account of the giving of this law to these ancient people, but it must in some way very early have been revealed to man.

It will be asked, "Is the law of the tithe binding to-day?" "Was it not abolished with the rest of the Mosaic law?" So far as the mere Levitical enactment was concerned, yes, it was abolished. That with the rest of the ceremonial part

of the Mosaic law is repealed. But right here is a point often overlooked. The moral law of the tithe existed centuries before the Mosaic Enactment, and this moral law has never been repealed. The Mosaic law in both the Sabbath and the Tenth only confirmed what already existed. The law said, "Remember the Sabbath day", and the first mention of the tenth in connection with the law says, "All the tithe of the land is the Lord's; it is holy unto the Lord." Lev. 27:30. The tenth was already the Lords, He was at this time only specifying how it should be used, that is, that the people should tithe for the support of the Levites who served the tabernacle, and who had no other source of income, and then the Levites were to give a tenth for the support of the priests. If there were not another thing to be argued in favor of the tenth for the support of the church, it would be all sufficient to claim for it that this was God's own financial plan for the Old Testament church, and a plan that God devised and put in use, cannot be improved on by us in this day. And after all kinds of schemes and methods have been tested in the church the only one single thing that has proved a success has been for the people to bring their tithes into the storehouse—the church—and then make careful distribution as needs require.

Now, the great question to most people will be, "Does the New Testament teach tithing?" There is no place where it is definitely and specifically stated that we should give a tenth, neither can a place be found where we are definitely told to keep a Sabbath day. I cannot even now recall where it says not to rob a bank. The reason for this I do not know, unless the teaching was so well known and ingrained in the minds of the people that it was not necessary. But teaching can easily be found that will fully cover the ground. Do you think in all honesty and fairness that our gifts today under grace with all the light and privileges of the Gospel, with the love of Christ in our hearts, should be any less than those of the Jew who lived under the law? Does anyone honestly think so? Jesus said: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven." And let me call to the attention of those who oppose the idea of the tenth, the very outstanding fact that in every identical thing that Jesus mentioned concerning the demands of the law, He invariably and emphatically showed that the law of love under grace in His Kingdom, went beyond the limit of the law of Moses. Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." The old law said, Thou shalt not commit adultery but Jesus said the lustful look was adultery. Again, Jesus said, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you swear not at all." The law said, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" but Jesus said, "Resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." And so on, through the whole list as given in the Sermon on the Mount. Now, will the fellow that does not believe in giving as much as one tenth, please tell me how it ever happened that this should be the only one particular thing in which the demand was less under the New Testament than under the Old Testament? The church after Pentecost went away beyond the tithe, and at times of special need gave all they had; they had all things common and all shared alike. What need for teaching tithing to a people like that? At this time a special emergency arose. The Christians were ostracised and persecuted and

many because of their new faith had lost their means of livelihood.

But Christian love and fellowship arose to the situation and those who happened to have property sold it, and distribution was made accordingly as the people had need. Now, it is just here where the difference between the law of tithing under the old dispensation and the new is shown up.

There is no such thing now as saying, "I have given my tenth, so it does not matter what the need is, I will do no more!" No Christian because he has given a tenth can now stand by and see his brother have need and shut up his heart of compassion from him. If he did that, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Just here is where the tithe in a mere legal sense breaks down, and the law of Christian love will carry us far beyond, even to the sharing of the last crust with our starving brother. The tenth should be the least or minimum proportion under all normal conditions, then there is free scope left us to give offerings besides this, as we are moved by the Spirit, or as the stress of the circumstances may demand. Many who have adopted tithing as a standard, give as much in offerings besides, as some give as a whole, who do not tithe. Jesus spoke but once in regard to this subject, but His words are clear, and unmistakably He puts His approbation upon it. He said to the Pharisees, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." If there had been anything wrong with the system of tithing Jesus never would have approved of it, but He just simply shows what I have been trying to show above, that justice, mercy, and faith—Christian love, in other words—will do all that, and more too.

Paul gave directions to the Corinthians, saying, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." 1 Cor. 16:2.

The proportion is not mentioned but the Corinthians must have been familiar with the tithe and certainly Paul was, so it is a very natural thing to conclude that they were to lay by a tenth. One thing in favor of this method or proportion is that it is the most simple and natural division so far as the arithmetic of the matter is concerned. It is a great satisfaction to have the proportion of our giving all settled beforehand. Then when some amount of money comes in, it is all decided. What a burden it must be to have to stop every time and try to decide how much we can give to this need or that, or whether we can spare any at all in the face of so many personal needs, but when the matter is all fixed beforehand, then all that has to be done is to set aside the tenth first of all, and use your best judgment as to how or where the tenth shall be used to do the most good for the glory of God. Then, this method of square dealing with the Lord, reacts upon the giver, and becomes a real pillar of assurance when claiming God's blessing upon our own heads.

(To be Continued.)

STILL LET US HEAR

It may be that the night will yet grow darker;

It may be that the storm is not yet spent;

It may be that the times will wax more evil;

Earth braving Heaven and scorning to repent.

Still let us hear the Master daily saying,

"Behold, I come; awake, arise, prepare!"

For but a little and there sounds the summons,

"Ascend, my saints, to meet me in the air!"

—Horatius Bonar.