

New Covenant Theology



Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology

What about Tithing?

- What does the Bible say about tithing?
- Are New Covenant Christians required to give 10% (or more) of their gross income to their church?

*William Barclay's Arguments for NT Tithing

- Last time we began critiquing the arguments in an article by William Barclay on the Gospel Coalition website in which he argues that all Christians in all ages are commanded to give ten percent (a “tithe”) of their gross income to the church.
- Barclay began his article by summarizing his own argument. He argues that the requirement to tithe:
 - Preceded the Mosaic law
 - Was codified in the Mosaic law with ceremonial aspects added
 - Was affirmed by Jesus as binding on his followers.

*<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-commands-christians-to-tithe/>

Barclay Argument #1: Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Barclay began by asserting that, in the two explicit mentions of tithing in the OT prior to the Law of Moses, both Abraham and Jacob had tithed because God had commanded them to do so.
- When we examined the arguments and scriptures given by Barclay to support this assertion, what did we as a class conclude?
- Next, in an attempt to make the case that *all* men were required to tithe to God prior to the Law of Moses, Barclay told us it is “clear” that both Cain and Abel (in Genesis 4) had been commanded by God to tithe and suggested that “*Abel’s offering was accepted [by God] precisely because it was a tithe*”.
- After examining this text and the NT texts that shed further light on Cain and Abel (Heb. 11:4, 1John 3:12) what did we conclude concerning the validity of Barclay’s arguments?

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Barclay then makes another attempt to show that Abraham and Jacob were commanded to pay tithes, by telling us what was in the mind and heart of Moses when he recorded these events:
 - *Why does Moses record these events? Since he later records God's command to tithe, he would not have attempted to show Abraham and Jacob's accommodation to the customs of the nations. Rather, he recorded it to demonstrate their piety.*
- How does Barclay know:
 - What Moses “would not have attempted to show” by those events?
 - That Moses’ purpose in telling about the tithes of Abram and Jacob was to “demonstrate their piety”?
- The text doesn’t **tell** us **why** Moses recorded those things, so how can Barclay know what was in Moses’ mind and heart when he did it?

Barclay Argument #1: Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Barclay then, in an attempt to create **continuity** between tithes given **before** the giving of the Law and tithes given **under** the Law, claims that the writer of Hebrews connects Abraham's tithe to the tithe that the Levites received:
 - *There is an inherent sense of continuity in Hebrews 7 connecting Abraham's tithe to the tithes the Levites received (and gave) under the Mosaic covenant. This is striking in a letter intent on showing aspects of the old covenant that no longer apply to new covenant believers. Yet far from revealing discontinuity, Hebrews leaves the impression that Christians will also tithe to their eternal high priest.*
- In reading this comment by Barclay, what impression do you get about the point being made by the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 7 concerning tithing?
- Lets take a look at the **actual** point being made in Hebrews 7.

Barclay Argument #1: Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- The connection that the writer of Hebrews makes between the Levites and Abraham's tithe in Hebrews 7 is:
 - Melchizedek blessed Abraham when he received a tithe from Abraham.(7:6)
 - *It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.* (7:7)
 - Levi was “in the loins of” Abraham when Abraham tithed to Melchizedek and was blessed by him and therefore Levi was, in effect, **also** blessed by Melchizedek. (7:9-10)
 - Therefore the OT priesthood of Levi is **inferior** to the priesthood of Jesus, who is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. (7:17)
- Is this the impression you get when you read Barclay's summary of Hebrews 7?

Barclay Argument #1: Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Barclay then summarizes the argument he has made in his attempt to prove that the requirement to tithe preceded Mosaic Law:
 - *In these passages, then, the apparent requirement of a tithe comes before the giving of the Mosaic law, and is not tied to it. So while the tithe becomes codified in the old (Mosaic) covenant, it can't be dismissed as part of the old covenant that's been fulfilled in Christ and no longer applies to new covenant believers. These passages show the piety of the patriarchs and establish what God expects from his people.*
- In reading this summary, you can see why Barclay made such a strenuous effort to find a requirement to tithe **prior** to the Law of Moses: he believes that if he can show that tithing was required **before** the Law of Moses, then he will have shown that God expects **all** of his people in **every** age to tithe to him.
- Do you think that Barclay was successful in proving this point?

Barclay Argument #2:

Tithing was codified in the Mosaic law with ceremonial aspects added

- I think we can agree with most of what Barclay says in the initial part of this argument:
 - *“When we come to the law, it becomes clear that the tithe is God’s standard for giving”*. Although, as MacArthur points out (in the article that I passed out to you a few weeks ago), there was also voluntary giving **outside** the tithe (cf. Exodus 25:2; 1 Chronicles 29:9).
 - *Under the Mosaic law, there appear to be three tithes...If this is true, the Israelites were actually required to give 23.3 percent of their income, not 10 percent.*
- But, as Barclay progresses further in his argument concerning the giving of tithes under the Law of Moses, I believe our ability to agree with him must come to an abrupt end...

Barclay Argument #2:

Tithing was codified in the Mosaic law with ceremonial aspects added

- The next thing Barclay does is try to draw a parallel between tithing and Sabbath keeping:
 - *We see this happen with the Sabbath—an eternal moral law rooted in creation—which takes on various ceremonial aspects under the Mosaic law (ceremonies involving showbread, for example). This is what Paul is talking about in Colossians 2:16, when he forbids letting anyone pass judgment in questions of Sabbath. Under the new covenant, the ceremonial aspects fall away while the moral law of the Sabbath remains.*
- Is the Sabbath an “*eternal moral law rooted in creation*”?
- What does he mean when he says that the Sabbath “*takes on various ceremonial aspects under the Mosaic law*”?
- Does the Law of Moses, as given in scripture, ever say anything about the Sabbath “taking on ceremonial aspects”?
- Was not the Sabbath itself a ceremonial practice that foreshadowed the eternal rest that we have in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 4:3-16)?
- Why do you think he frames things in this way? Can you see where he’s going with this? Hint: look at what he does with Colossians 2:16.

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- Colossians 2:16-17 says: *Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.* (NAS)
- He hopes that by framing the Sabbath as “*an eternal moral law*” which “**takes on** various ceremonial aspects” it will allow him to interpret Colossians 2:16-17 as though it were talking about the ceremonial aspects that were **added** to the Sabbath rather than the Sabbath itself.
- Do you think a straightforward reading of Colossians 2:16-17 allows for such an interpretation?

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- Thinking that he has established that the Sabbath is an *“eternal moral law rooted in creation”* that *“takes on various ceremonial aspects under the Mosaic law”*, he then claims that tithing follows the same pattern:
 - *The same is true of the tithe. The basic tithe, supporting the work of ministry, remains, even while ceremonial aspects fall away.*
- Thinking that he has, by merely making that statement, now proven that tithing is an *“eternal moral law rooted in creation”* he precedes to apply an OT passage about tithing to NT Christians:
 - *The basic tithe is to be given to the church, to support its work and mission, as seen in Malachi 3.”*
- Does Malachi 3 say that the tithe is to be *“given to the church”*?
- Lets look take a look and see...

Barclay Argument #2:

Tithing was codified in the Mosaic law with ceremonial aspects added

- Malachi 3:8-10 says: *Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions.⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*
- Where does this passage say anything about giving tithes “*to the church*”?
- Would it even be possible for the recipients of Malachi’s prophesy to give tithes “*to the church*”?
- When did Christ first establish his church (see Matthew 16:16-18; also Ephesians 2:20; 3:4-10; 5:23)?

Questions?

