

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

June 25 2011: The Adjustment Bureau

There were a few movies that came out this year so far that got good - well, at least interesting - reviews in Christian circles. One of these was *The Adjustment Bureau*. The premise is that key people, in this case Congressman David Norris, have their lives



guided by "case agents" from the Bureau according to the Plan drafted by "the chairman". The Bureau operates by "adjusting" the circumstances that influence people's decisions - and sometimes by using technology that changes their brain structure. You can't believe what the agents say, because words are part of their repertoire, but the Bureau appears to be long-lived aliens committed to guiding the human race to "maturity". When they loose their control to see if humanity can make it on their own, we have fallen into the Dark Ages, the Great Depression, and two world wars. Well, they are either aliens or supernatural entities, because they have the ability to open doors (as long as they are wearing their hats) and step into different parts of the city. They are also able to move things by pointing at them. People have seen the "chairman", "he or she", and we have different names for him/her. Sounds like "god" to me, and David Norris asks one agent if they are angels and gets a vague answer. So except for the scene of the "interjectors" (with their face-concealing riot helmets) using the brain scanners on a bunch of immobilized office workers, there would be no hint that they were *not* supernatural entities.

The Plan can be upset if the adjusters fail to maintain control of their subjects, which can occur if too many loose threads or unexpected behaviour or emotion-driven "inflection points" occur, so they are finite, not omnipotent. The "chairman" will occasionally change the Plan, often to the puzzlement of the agents, so they aren't omniscient. Water seems to block them, so a discussion on a boat is safe, and rain obscures their sensors, but (inconsistently) their magic doors can open

on Liberty Island. They can be evaded, so they aren't omnipresent, even though any man with a suit and hat is an object of suspicion. The film was based on a book by Phillip K. Dick, who apparently was influenced by the classic *Lensmen* series (humanity is guided by super-intelligent aliens) and certainly it smacks of the theory of divine predestination. It is this angle that makes it interesting to evangelicals, in spite of a wholly gratuitous pornographic sex scene.

Do humans have free will, or does God assert some measure of control over our decisions, rather like the "agents" do, by altering our circumstances? In the film, most humans are free to decide and act (the Bureau is finite, after all), and even those who are subject to "adjustment" retain decision power over things like toothpaste brand and beverage. It is these key, influential people that are controlled to some degree. It is likely the same in the real world. It was Noah and Abraham who were used by God in important ways, and doubtless they were prepared for being receptive to God's guidance. It was Pharaoh whose "heart was hardened" by God so that He could reveal His glory and power through Egypt's destruction. It was the kings of Assyria and Babylon who God used as instruments of judgment upon Israel, Judah, and the rest of the world. It is hard to believe that evil men like Hitler, Goebels, Lenin, and Stalin were not directed by God's agents (even hellish ones) to be so successful in their world-changing missions. But not every human is in the place of Nebuchadnezzar or Hitler, in a place of global influence, and therefore God doesn't need to guide each human's life.

At the same time, all humans who are "born again", functional believers who are actively seeking God's will and surrendering to His control, have a *destiny*, a mission in the world unique to each one. God actually *IS* omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and therefore *can* guide our lives according to His Plan. *If we let Him*. And therein is what makes the film particularly interesting to me.

FIRST, it is possible for people to break out of the Plan. In the film, David and Elize achieve this by their powerful emotional connection, unanticipated by the agents. After David learns of the existence of the Bureau and is in contact with the agents, he succeeds in throwing them off the trail and causing another "inflection point". In the real world, we have the power to break out of the Plan. Perhaps a key person like a Reagan or a Netanyahu does not have the power sufficient to short-circuit their destiny, but a believer could, for instance, commit suicide or some other career-limiting sinful act that switches them away from their optimal destiny to some lesser "plan B".

Now, maybe there are people who are "christian" but not actually Christians, that is, not actual born-again believers, who would do this, and the True Believers would be prevented by God from doing things like this. I have seen "adjustments" in my own life, evidence of divine intervention. I don't know if I actually could step outside of God's plan for my life. Not that I want to find out!

SECOND, we have a choice between fulfilling our destiny to our greatest benefit, and losing it for the sake of something else we want. In the film, David is informed by the agents on multiple occasions that he risks his destiny as a national politician and ultimately President, and Elize's destiny as a world-famous dancer, if he continues to pursue her, and with this full knowledge, he continues to pursue her because of "his feelings". It is the same with us. If we knew what was good for us - and we do, in large measure, because Scripture so informs us - we would submit ourselves to God's control and achieve the destinies for which He designed us. In spite of this knowledge, we often choose to go with our "feelings" of fear, sexual attraction, despair, greed, lust for power, whatever temptation may be facing us to lead to that career-limiting sinful act. Now, we may or may not actually succeed at this, per above, but the choice is there.

Finally, two other minor points of interest: One, in the film, at the end, the "chairman" decides to rewrite the Plan to allow David and Elize to exercise their free will to be together, so there's a happy ending. In the real world, the Plan is not open to revision, and there is no happy ending for those who intentionally escape it. Two, in the film, David is warned to not share his knowledge of the Bureau with anybody on the outside, or risk being "reset" (having his brain erased). In the real world, we are encouraged to share our knowledge and experience of the *real* Chairman, and His plan for our lives, and the benefits of allowing Him and his agents to "adjust" our lives.

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Another movie we saw (or rather, Jerri and I saw, and in the theatre, not the television) was *Soul Surfer*, the story of Bethany Hamilton, the surfer girl whose arm was bitten off by a shark. It was good, particularly from the perspective of just telling a good story and suppressing the temptation to be evangelical and preachy. Yes, there were faithful representations of church (Calvary Chapel got some face time) and life in a Christian home (e.g., prayer over meals) that might make secular types squirm, but over all, I think it was a good effort to get out of the evangelical ghetto and influence popular

culture. The main thing I took away was that Bethany succeeded, not because of her church, nor because of her youth group (except to the extent that the youth group did relief work in Thailand after the tsunami), but because of her family, and encountering people who had lost more than she had.

June 23 2011: Loss of Moral Capital

From instapundit.com[[1](#)], a number of links regarding trends for a middle-class anarchy, of people - like me - who try to live according to the rules, work at jobs, pay taxes, and support the entire United States system, are being victimized by government workers unions, intellectual and government elites, and welfare recipients, illegal immigrants, and other parasites.

- [Like this one](#) [[2](#)]
- [And this one](#) [[3](#)]

Glenn Reynolds correctly identifies the root problem as the loss of American "moral capital". But science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle [puts his finger on the button](#) [[4](#)]; it is the extinction - and suppression - of Christianity and religious morality, the only foundation for Western civilization and the only adequate source for its values, that is responsible for our decay as a civilization.

(I was actually a bit startled to read this. I'm not a big Pournelle fan, so I don't know myself, but science fiction authors tend to be atheists, and there's nothing on the Net that would indicate any religious position that Pournelle has taken. But in this article he is more than charitable toward Christianity and its place as the foundation of Western civilization.)

At any rate, what he says, that "Christianity has become intellectually so unimportant", is spot on. And this has been a choice largely of the evangelical world and the established church.

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1. pajamasmedia.com/instapundit/114067
2. gonzalolira.blogspot.com/2010/10/coming-middle-class-anarchy.html
3. lonelyconservative.com/2011/01/the-squeezing-of-the-middle-class

4. www.jerrypournelle.com/reports/intellectual/intcap3.html#12

May 30 2011: Genesis, Compromise, and Evangelism

Last week was significant for me for three reasons.

- **Thursday**, I went to the [AZOSA \[1\]](#) meeting, for which the subject was evangelism.
- **Saturday** was the day that Harold Camping predicted Jesus was going to return and the world would end.
- **Sunday** was the last day of the [Creation Weekend \[2\]](#) series at Calvary Chapel Tucson.



Of course, at both the AZOSA meeting and the Calvary service, the May 21 "end of the world" prophecy was both a point of amusement and an object lesson in how the things evangelicals do and say, even disreputable evangelicals like Harold Camping (and his not insignificant following), register with the unbelieving culture outside the church.

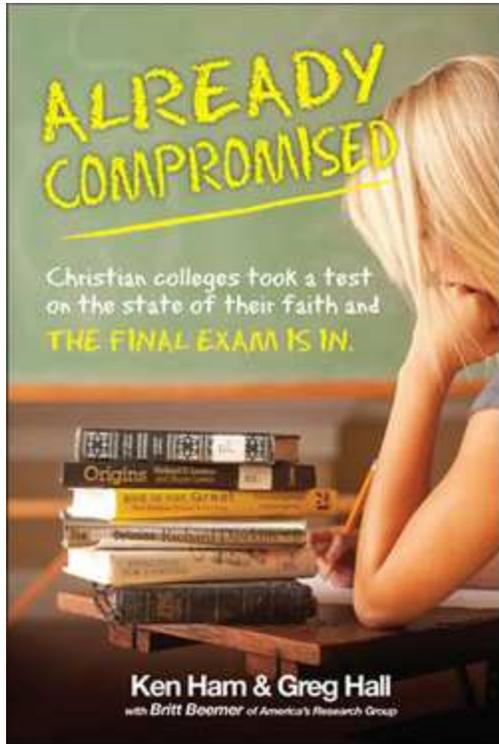
The Creation Weekend was a series of lectures by Dr. Rick Oliver and Ken Ham. Oliver had been to a previous AZOSA meeting, and is a good speaker; his primary claim to fame is having been an evolutionary atheist who came to Christ and turned away from evolutionism. This certainly bears on the evangelism question, and had I known about the Calvary-hosted event earlier than I did (in fact, I had to pick up a flyer at the Thursday AZOSA meeting to learn about it), I would have gone. As it was, Ken Ham was the draw, and I decided to take my family to Calvary to get something more than just another songs (although there was the usual quality entertainment Calvary music service) and sermon Sunday Morning "worship" service.

Now, I am a "fan" of Ken Ham, Answers in Genesis, and the whole young-earth creationism perspective. I follow what Ken Ham says via the free email newsletter (just sign up on the www.answersingenesis.org site), on Facebook, and some of his books, including, notable, *Already Gone*. Thus, I was already "primed" for what he had to say, things like

- The Seven "C"s of Earth History: Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Confusion, Christ, Cross, Consumation
- How the Enemy is attacking the foundation (Genesis) for Christian belief, while evangelicals waste time attacking symptoms of a hostile worldview (like abortion or homosexuality or pornography), or each other, instead of attacking the Enemy's foundation (evolutionism)
- A plug for the Creation Museum near Cincinnati (although he kept saying "northern Kentucky - yes, the CM is in northern Kentucky, not southwestern Ohio, but "near Cincinnati" would mean a whole lot more to folk), and the plans for the Ark Encounter
- A preview of literature for sale at the resource tables outside - most titles having been written by Ken Ham

But that's okay - I understand and appreciate that Answers in Genesis is an *equipping* ministry, that Ken isn't here to make a buck off his books or promote himself by travelling and speaking. AIG is not just a "young-earth creationist" ministry, but a *Christian Worldview* ministry, although they focus more on Genesis as foundational to living and thinking Christianly in all aspects of life more than other Worldview ministries, like Chuck Colson's Breakpoint or Centurions.

I went back on Sunday evening for a few more Ham lectures. In the first, he dealt with the 66-80% of young people who leave the church by the time they attend college. How the research indicates that the disaffection begins as early as middle school or even elementary school - which contradicts the received wisdom that it is the atheist professors in secular universities that are the main contributors. How the surveys indicate that it is the lack of confident answers that what they are being taught in church is actually true, that children raised in Sunday School are actually more at risk than other young church people.



He then introduced the sequel to the *Already Gone* book: [Already Compromised](#) [3]. I already had *Already Gone*, of course; it is a major part of the foundation of my dissatisfaction with the institutional church. I've read the blurbs for *Already Compromised* and know its intent - even professors at "Christian" colleges don't take Genesis 1-11 literally. I grant this is a problem, but it's not one that affects me directly or one that bears much possibility for action by me, where the *Already Gone* problem is directly a church and a youth ministry problem that affects my children and the young people I've dealt with (and still do to an extent), and that I might be able to fight. However, the book may

be more than that - Jerri bought the book off the resource tables after the morning service, so I will read it myself - if it deals with *church pastors* that compromise on the historicity and literalness of Genesis 1-11, then it hits me where I live.

In fact, Wednesday was the fourth significant event of the week. I went to the Wednesday Night "prayer" service. Wasn't any prayer, just a Bible study by the senior pastor, who, in the course of an object lesson on the Sovereignty of God, mentioned "coal laid down hundreds of thousands of years ago". Of course, I picked up my ears at this. Later that week, I asked him what his position was on Genesis 1-11. Did he believe that God made the heavens and earth in six literal 24-hour days, and that the Noaic Flood was literally global? His answer: I don't know. Some theologians say the word for "day" can mean an indeterminate time interval, and the Flood could have been local but "global" in the sense of destroying all human life (which supposedly hadn't migrated very far in the two-thousand year interval from Adam). Well. That's a downer. This means that he is also unlikely to take seriously the recommendations Ham and Beemer make in *Already Gone* for heading off the exodus of young people from the church and the Christian faith. In fact, it's a pretty good indicator that we will never get beyond Bible Lessons from the pulpit or any organized, concerted discipleship strategy other than Bible Study in Sunday School classes and smallgroups. In fact, since I am signed up to be a smallgroup

leader myself, I can sense that I am going to be alone and unsupported by the church if I intend to do anything more than Bible Study.

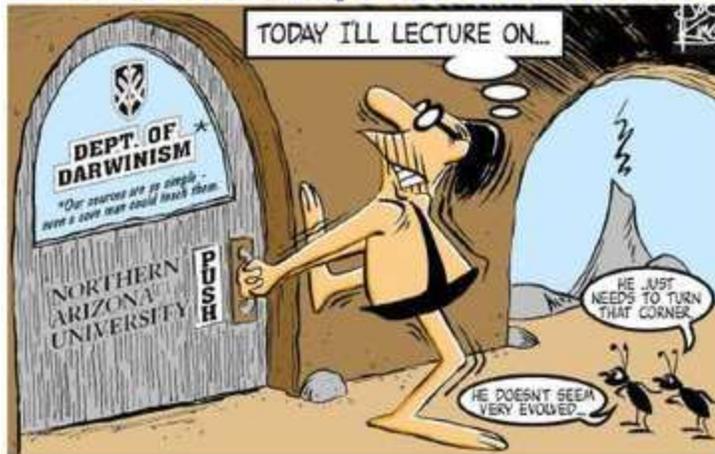
I remember a youth Sunday School class long ago, when two young men visitors were in my class and I was explaining that, per scripture (Matthew 12:30), there are only two choices regarding Christ: to accept or to reject Him as Lord. "Not so", my two visitors objected; "if you remain neutral, then you do not accept or reject". "Ah", I replied, "but by *choosing* to remain neutral, you *choose* to deny His claims of Lordship and in fact reject them". That did not satisfy them. And neither would my attempt to convince this pastor that, by choosing to remain "open" to the question of whether Genesis (and by extension the rest of scripture) can be taken literally or may be taken symbolically or "spiritually", he has in fact already compromised. And this in spite of the new-stated Church Value of "We preach the Word of God without apology and without compromise." Because, after all, it isn't important *how* God created, as long as He *did* create.

Now, in his lecture, Ham made a point that stuck with me: There are several positions on eschatology ("how the world will end") in Christian theology (this actually was where the May 21 Harold Camping false prediction came in again) - Premillennial, Postmillennial, Amillennial, Pre-tribulation, Post-tribulation, etc. But these are all based out of Scripture, and the adherents of any position argues it as an interpretation of Scripture. The question about origins, on the other hand, is whether or not we will interpret Scripture *as informed by non-Scriptural sources*; namely, unbelievers and skeptic naturalists and materialists. In fact, I tried this point out on my pastor, but he remained unmoved and unimpressed. Similarly with the point that if God used evolution to "create" Adam and Eve, then death and suffering preceded Adam, and therefore death is *not* a result of the Fall, and therefore Christ's death on the cross means nothing.

The final Sunday Night lecture Ken Ham produced was about what he calls "Acts 2 versus Acts 17" evangelism. In Acts 2, Peter gives a Pentecost sermon to Jews (who have a Biblical background and understand Creation and Sin), and thousands become Christians. In contrast, in Acts 17, Paul gives an Areopagus sermon to Greeks (who don't have a Biblical background and are inclined to be polytheists, pantheists, or atheists), and only a few become Christians. Why is that?

Amazingly, this was precisely the point of the Thursday evening AZOSA lecture by Dr. Ray Mondragon, scientist and theologian.

Is there Hope for Educated Evolutionists?



What are the best ways to handle questions from intellectuals?

How can Apostle Paul's Creation message work today?

What's most important when sharing your faith?

Learn Quick, Easy, Effective answers to Intellectual's Questions!

Bring the family, see Evidence of Recent Creation!

ARIZONA ORIGIN SCIENCE ASSOC, INC (SOUTH) Presents:

Witnessing to 21st Century Intellectuals!

Dr. Ray Mondragon, Engineer/Theologian

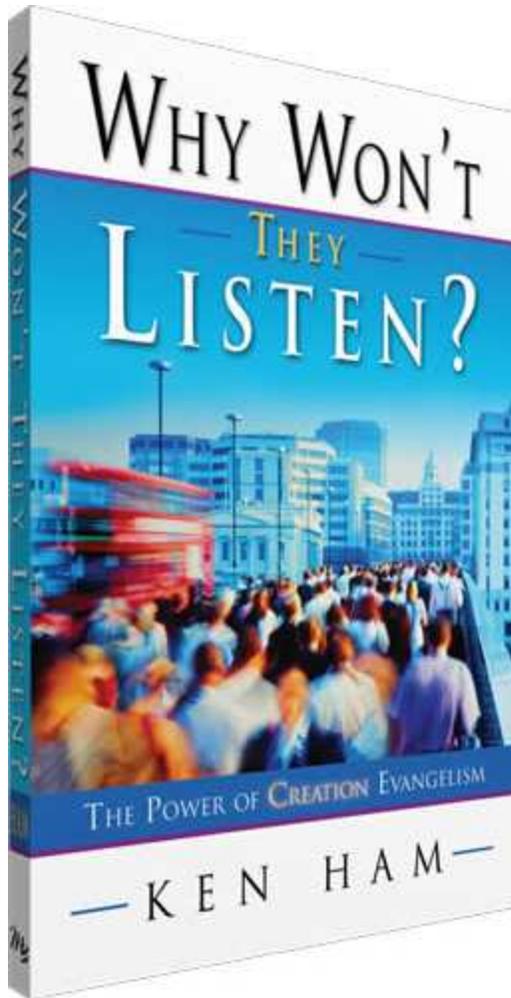
Thursday May 19th 7:00 - 8:30 PM

Fountain of Life Lutheran Church

710 S. Kolb Rd, Tucson, 85710 (W. side of Kolb between 22nd & Broadway)

Now, Mondragon's lecture threw in a lot more archaeology and greek words and scripture than Ham's, and lasted a lot longer, and the crowd at the AZOSA meeting was a lot smaller than at the Calvary Chapel meeting, but the point was the same. (And yet, I don't know why the Northern Arizona logo on the cartoon; I didn't think NAU had a "Department of Darwinism" any more than ASU or UA or New Mexico, where Dr. Mondragon came from.)

Nor was this the first time I had heard this. I have a video from some time ago (in fact, another part of my antiestablishmentarianist background) from Answers in Genesis ([Why Won't They Listen](#) [4]) that makes the point: The Jews of Peter's acquaintance knew the Bible and understood sin and the need for a sacrifice; they *stumbled* (I Corinthians 1:23) over Jesus being the Crucified Messiah. On the other hand, the Greeks that Paul was dealing with had no Bible background, did not understand Original Sin, and to most of them, even when Paul got around to mentioning the Resurrection, it was *foolishness*. In America, and in Western Civilization generally, a hundred years ago, the culture was more "Jewish", more Biblically literate, more influenced by Christian doctrine, so an Acts 2 approach to evangelism might have been more successful. More and more, however, as that Christian-based culture is abandoned or actively suppressed, the culture is becoming more "Greek". The Acts 2 approach isn't going to work, and in fact ISN'T working, even though seminary teachers and church pastors and evangelism ministries continue to push it. AIG's and Dr. Mondragon's position is, until we adopt more of an Acts 17 approach, and account for the audience's *worldview* and take them back to the question of Origins, we are unlikely to see even as much response as Paul did.



There's no question the Acts 2 approach is deeply embedded in the evangelical mindset. Recently, we had a family vacation in Phoenix. At one time waiting for the train, we heard a man shouting a "fire and brimstone repent now" message down the block. At another time (later that day, in fact), on Mill Avenue in Tempe, there was a squad of men in ties and a bullhorn and gospel tracts trying to reach the evening dinner crowd. Of course, they got as much positive reaction as Harold Camping did.

But at the time, as I sat there in Calvary Chapel, surrounded by the

crowd that was, perhaps, 80-90% Calvary members, I wondered how much these people were likely to change as a result of Ken Ham's lectures. In fact, at the end, the Calvary associate pastor got up as part of the dismissal process, and asked everyone to bow their heads and for anyone who wished to receive Christ as Lord to raise their hand. An Acts 2 tactic, right on the tail of a challenge to our standard evangelical tactics! So deeply engrained...

And even more, in speaking to my current senior pastor, hearing his qualified response regarding Genesis 1, I know that an Acts 17 approach, of going back to a literal Genesis, is out of the question. If a church has compromised on Genesis, there will be no Acts 17 model of evangelism, and the church remains irrelevant - no matter how much prayer and how much "filling of the Spirit" there may be. It seems to be an "irreducible complexity" phenomenon: Just like a living cell cannot function without all the parts being there working together, a church cannot succeed without the doctrine (literal Genesis), accountability and community (discipleship) and power (prayer, Spirit) all being there together. It could happen. But I haven't seen it yet - or I'd be there!

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1. www.azosa.org
 2. www.calvarytucson.com/Information.asp?TopicID=240
 3. www.answersingenesis.org/PublicStore/product/Already-Compromised-Book,6823,224.aspx
 4. www.answersingenesis.org/PublicStore/product/Why-Wont-They-Listen,4519,224.aspx
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May 8 2011: "Tithing" and the Institutional Church

As part of being a member at First Southern Baptist Church - on a limited, provisional basis - I have felt obliged to show good faith in meeting low-commitment expectations. Like attending "worship" services. And putting a token amount in the plate on Sundays following paydays. And going to the orientation classes.



These classes are relics of FSBC's attempt to be a "Purpose-Driven Church". There are other relics, like framed posters of the Five Purposes here and there around the building, with no context or explanation. Even Central Baptist's inclusion in their Sunday Morning bulletin was better than this, but neither are effective, and both indicate a church that neither understands nor is really committed to being a "Purpose-Driven Church". Which is fine, but the pretence grates. Anyways, in following the PDC outline, FSBC originally had the four classes in the PDC "Baseball Diamond" series:

- Class 101: Discovering Membership (*Fellowship, Worship*)
- Class 201: Discovering Maturity (*Discipleship*)
- Class 301: Discovering Ministry (*Ministry*)
- Class 401: Discovering Mission (*Evangelism*)

These days, there's just the 101 and 201 classes, and it sounds like even that will soon be modified.

The 101 class taught by the pastor was okay, it was knocked out pretty easily, and I found it to be mostly Southern Baptist traditional concepts. Including (to my sorrow) the answer to a question asked by another class attender, namely

Q: If I've fallen into sin and drifted away, am I still really saved?

A: If you've ever asked Jesus into your heart, then you are really saved.

Now, statements he has made from the pulpit since indicate that he recognizes real regeneration to be more than that, and there are many *in the church* who *call themselves Christians* who really aren't, so I'm

guessing this answer in the class was more a Southern Baptist preacher reflex than his own position. But that was the 101 class.

The 201 class taught by the associate pastor was really quite good - what is involved in becoming a disciple, including personal Bible study and prayer and scripture memorization and meditation. In fact, I thought it would be good as a guide for a one-on-one course between a new disciple and a mentor. In general, the only general shortcoming I saw was a reliance solely on the Bible. I don't think a new believer can become a functional disciple in this age if all he ever uses is the Bible.

But there is another specific shortcoming, perhaps even an error in the class. The class materials correctly identified *giving* as a necessary component of discipleship - we are to serve God with our **time**, our **talents**, and our **treasure**. But then it went on to the usual Baptist trope of *giving* = "*tithes and offerings*". That is, ten percent of your income should go to your local church, and everything beyond that, given to whatever ministry you will, is a voluntary offering.

The material presents "tithing is an obligation" with the support of the usual levitical Old Testament passages and Malachi 3:8-10. It even goes so far as to say that when Jesus was condemning the Pharisees for tithing herbs and spices but not justice and mercy, because He didn't explicitly say that the tithe was no longer in effect, then He is in effect commanding contemporary (Gentile!) Christians to tithe.

I think this teaching misses the mark on a number of levels.

First, the Old Testament *law* of the Tithe was to *Israel*, the theocratic nation and ethnic identity that God was preparing to represent Him to the world and bring in the Messiah. The Tithe was to support the Levitical Priesthood, maintain the Tabernacle (and later the Temple), and provide a rudimentary "social security" system. Thus, the Tithe is part of the *Civil* or *Ceremonial* function of the Law, not the *Moral*

Second, it is *clear* in the New Testament that the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws *do not apply* to followers of Jesus, especially Gentile ones. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:6-29) ended with a letter from the Apostles of Jesus Christ that no greater burden would be upon the Gentile believers than to abstain from

- eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols,
- eating blood (sorry, eastern Europeans!), and
- sexual immorality.

We note that "tithing" is not on the list. We further have the entire book of Galatians to teach us that believers (especially Gentiles) are free of the Old Testament laws (at least, the civil and ceremonial ones).

So to hang "tithing" as an obligation on Christians is the sort of legalism that Jesus and His Apostles condemned and the early church rejected.

Third, the usual passages in the New Testament regarding "giving", in I Corinthians 16 and II Corinthians 8, were aimed at a special offering taken up from the Gentile churches to aid Jewish Christians suffering from famine in Judea - *NOT* as instructions to raise operating funds for the local church and to pay the salaries of professional ministers. To *that* purpose, the closest we get is the "don't muzzle the ox" passages of I Corinthians 9 (especially verse 14, "the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel") and I Timothy 5:18.

So sorry, Southern Baptist (and, indeed, generally, Evangelical) traditionalists - it's just not there. You can't defend hanging the "Tithe" on us.

Now, having concluded that the 201 Discipleship class misses the boat regarding the Tithe, are we as Disciples then *NOT* supposed to *give* (1) a *tithe* (2) to the *church were we are members* (3)?

1. Giving of our *time*, our *talents*, and certainly our *treasure* is indeed a necessary component of discipleship
2. Ten percent is a pretty good starting point for giving money, even if it should not be proposed as an *obligation*. Viewed as a "challenge" or "training wheels", it's a good idea.
3. Per I Corinthians 9 and I Timothy 5, a case could be made for providing at least part of the living of pastors. But what about full time salaries with benefits and pension/annuity? What about youth pastors and music ministers and educational directors? What about interns and janitors and musicians and yard workers? What about building maintenance and utilities, to say nothing of building upgrades or capital funds programs to relocate to a fancy new building farther out in the suburbs? What about youth programs, or AWANA programs, or senior adult programs, or after-school daycare programs, or a church school, or a church-owned camp on the mountain?



Seems a bit of a stretch to me. In the case of other, parachurch ministries that you could give money to, you have the confidence that they are using the funds you give them for the purpose you intend. The best ministries participate in the [Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability \[1\]](#) that are independently monitored for compliance. Churches don't do that. The best you can hope for is an honest accounting in the quarterly business meeting, and even then, rumours often circulate of the pastor and the church accountant "bending" the rules.

But even if the church were entirely honest about using the funds the way the members direct, what if you don't agree with what the majority of members want? What if you think the membership is demanding "nice to have" stuff to serve themselves and their "felt needs", rather than actually honoring Christ and advancing His Kingdom? Or, almost as bad, a load of "traditional" stuff, or "we got this out of a book or copied it from another church" stuff that is *intended* to advance the Kingdom, but there's little evidence that it does and even more than a little evidence that it is actually counterproductive?

Two choices:

- Leave the church. I've already done that a few times, not for money reasons (yet), but for the related "blind traditionalism" case. Or
- Vote with your wallet. Families and businesses and states and nations that are flush with cash tend to make bad, selfish, non-productive money decisions that set hard-to-deal-with precedents. When faced with cash shortfalls, families and (some) businesses and (hopefully) states and nations have to make hard decisions about what the real priorities are.

So for people who are in an institutional church on a provisional basis, waiting to see if either the church "gets it" or a start-up closer to the ideal church appears nearby, the "vote with your wallet" strategy works the best.

Besides all this, if we as disciples are to be held accountable for our stewardship of the (financial) resources we have been given, we must *invest* in a *portfolio* of the best Kingdom-advancing ministries and

activities going on in our neighborhood and around the world.

The local church may not be worth the majority share of this investment.

It may not even be worth 10 percent of your income.

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1. www.ecfa.org