

HOW DO CHRISTIANS CONCEIVE OF FINANCIAL GENEROSITY?

People often have questions surrounding the topic of giving which is excellent! The gospel of Jesus touches every part of our lives which means that it invites us to ask questions surrounding our finances which represent a big part. Our relationship with God will undoubtedly cause us to consider how to use everything he has given us.

- Should I give to the church?
- What if I'm in debt?
- If so, how much? What's this about a "tithe?"
- Do I calculate a tithe from my gross or net income?
- If I cannot give joyfully, should I give at all?

Like most specific questions we have nowadays, we cannot find specific answers to them in the Bible. But don't fret! Similar to other topics, these questions begin to answer themselves when we seek to understand a greater biblical vision of generosity.

TITHING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Towards the very beginning of the Bible we encounter a unique concept: tithing (Genesis 14). The word "tithe" is derived from the word "tenth," and we will see this "tenth" giving tradition continue in Israel's patriarchy (Gen. 28) before God commands it of every Israelite family at Mt. Sinai when he gave them the law (Lev. 27:30-32; Num. 18:21-28; Deut. 12:5-19, 14:22-29, 26:1-19).

Why did God institute this? In short, because 1 of the 12 tribes, the Levites, had the special responsibility of being scattered among the other 11 tribes in order to lead them in the worship of God. So God called all the people of Israel to give a tenth of their income so that the Levites and their families could have the necessary income they needed to live in the land with them.

Sounds like a big commitment right? It is, and tithing was so important to God that he attached a promise

to it. In Malachi chapter 3 we see that God calls his people to test him with the tithe saying "Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be enough room to store it!"

And in the same passage, on the other hand, God let his people know that a failure to give a tenth was rebellion and thievery against God himself.

But is this blessing (and rebuke) still active today? Does God still expect his followers to give 10%?

TITHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Beyond a passing mention of tithing in one of Jesus' parables (Luke 18:12) and a description of Abraham's gift to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:3-10), tithing is only mentioned in two parallel passages of the Gospels (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). In fact, the New Testament never commands the tithe.

What are we to make of this virtual silence on the subject in the New Testament?

Well, as with all topics in the Old testament, we must consider them through an examination of Jesus Christ, always being careful not woodenly apply the prescriptions of the Old Covenant as if we're not living under the New Covenant! The life, death, and resurrection of Christ fundamentally transformed how believers are to relate to the Old Testament commands and descriptions.

But how so? The key to understanding the Law is as such: Jesus clarified and intensified the law by exposing the motivations and intentions of our hearts.

Let's take a few OT commandments that don't deal with money as examples. These are from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where he examined several parts of the OT law:



“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ **But I say to you** that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...”

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ **But I say to you** that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Now, imagine Jesus saying, “You have heard it said, ‘give your tithe of 10%, **but I say to you...**’” *How do you think he would finish his sentence?* Considering this question provides the spiritual depth we need to explain the radical, sacrificial generosity that we see throughout the New Testament and today in the hearts of God’s people.

SO, HOW DO WE GIVE THEN?

We begin with what the person of Jesus Christ proclaims: *God sacrificially gives*. No truth is more readily apparent in Scripture than God’s sacrificial generosity to humanity culminating in Jesus Christ.

So it’s no surprise that in 2 Corinthians 8:9, the Apostle Paul ties a Christians understanding of wealth to Jesus:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Paul doesn’t guilt the Corinthian church into giving, he doesn’t tell them how well off they have it compared to other people or that they owe him because he brought them the gospel. Instead he points them back to what happened with Jesus Christ: Our rich God became poor so that we might experience life! Leaning into this truth & reality empowers a healthy attitude toward our material possessions, growing us into people who joyfully generous.

We could also say it like this: *Understanding the eternal riches we have already received from God in*

Christ motivates us to invest our temporary & decaying riches in his purposes and kingdom.

This means that as those being transformed into the image of Christ, God doesn’t hope that we merely give, rather he hopes for selfless and sacrificial giving that overflows from a heart that’s grasped His generosity that we find in the gospel. So how should we conceive of our own giving?

BIBLICAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Give Thankfully // Grace is the basis for gratitude. As those who have received grace in all areas of life, we willfully and gratefully extend gifts to others. Why? Because we have come to see that even though our paycheck might come from a company, all our welfare comes from God!

Give Generously // In Paul’s greater giving argument of 2 Corinthians 8-9 he tells us the Macedonian Christians gave generously, “beyond their means.” This was clearly radical and significant giving, not just throwing some cash in the offering basket as it passed by.

Give Cheerfully // Gospel giving is cheerful because it trusts that every deposit into the kingdom is an investment that earns *eternal interest* and compounding interest over eternity is obviously a great return!

Give Sacrificially // A heart freed by Jesus gives generously even when it “hurts” a bit. Recall Jesus’ assessment of the widow’s mite (Mark 12). Where we’re tempted to value a gift based on amount, God sees the sacrifice attached to each gift. Even a small amount can be an enormous gift in the kingdom!

Give Regularly // Though we can give as needs arise, the act of giving is often linked with prayer and fasting in the New Testament (Matt. 6:1-18), practices that ideally contain some element of discipline and regularity. We see this reiterated in 1 Cor. 16:2 where Paul commends a disciplined and orderly form of giving in addition to whatever



spontaneous gifts people might feel compelled to give.

Give Secretly // The flesh craves the praise of man, and thus we need to beware the tendency to give in an effort to purchase the acclaim, attention, and affections of others (Matt. 6:2-4). Christians give so that the kingdom of God increases and brings him glory, not to increase others' opinions of us or seek our own glory.

TO WHOM SHOULD CHRISTIANS GIVE?

Now that we know why and how to give, the question then becomes, to whom do we give? We see that God called the early Church to give to:

1. Our Local Church Family (1 Cor. 16:2)
2. Our Global Church Family (2 Cor. 8-9)
3. Our Biological Family (1 Tim. 5:8)
4. Our Neighbors (Luke 10:25-37)
5. Our Enemies (Rom. 12:20)

Though the hard and fast law of the tithe (as it is understood in its Old Testament context) is no longer absolutely mandatory for believers, we strongly contend that giving a consistent, significant, set percentage amount to your local church is the most spiritually healthy and helpful giving principle for God's people today. God commands Christians to support those who labor for the sake of the kingdom especially in the teaching and preaching of the Word which uniquely happens in the context of the local church (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:3-12).

In addition, by giving to the local church you are choosing to trust that the senior leaders of the local church have privileged insight as to the needs of both those within the church family and those outside the family in the larger community which the church must serve. We see the early church selling their possessions and laying the proceeds at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:32-37), trusting them to discern how to best steward those financial gifts with the help of other leaders within the church, called deacons. In light of this biblical precedent, we

contend that Christians today should continue to prioritize the local church in their giving.

BUT...HOW MUCH AM I TO GIVE THEN?

As we grasp more and more God's generosity through Jesus Christ, we discover giving goes much deeper than a responsibility, it becomes a serious opportunity. In view of this reality, we do not view 10% as the top end of what to give, but the floor. Disciples informed by the gospel continue to think through how they can give more and more throughout their lives.

What if I am unable to give 10% right now?

We find that an inability to give is usually indicative of a general lack of budgeting in one's life. And so we first encourage people to pursue resources on how to budget on a month to month basis. Why? Because Jesus isn't only concerned with how we spend 10% of our income, he has thoughts on how we spend all of it! Budgeting is a process where his followers invite him into the financial aspects of their lives which spill over everywhere.

That being said, there are seasons in our economic lives where giving becomes especially difficult where we have financial responsibilities to our families, friends, communities, and in some cases, creditors. Good planning is necessary to make it through these seasons with the hope of returning to God's call of sacrificially giving to the local church.

We believe a good goal for everyone over time is to increase one's commitment up to and above 10% so that we respond faithfully to God's grace and Word, make significant kingdom investments now that will yield eternal returns, and model Christ's love and generosity in a mind-boggling way to our society.