

STEWARDSHIP 101-6

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Giving to and Supporting His Ministry

Three Scriptural Models for giving Money away:

- **OT System of Tithes and Special Offerings** (One tenth: the “first fruits”)
Exo 28:28-31a; Numbers 18:21-32; Leviticus 27:30-31; Deut 14:22-29; Neh 13:10-12. God’s simple system of giving back to Him from what is already His was the Tithe; the first 10% from the increase of our labors - produce and flocks and herds. It was to be used to support the worship, provide for the Levites (who “tithed from the tithe” to support the priests) and every third year provide for the poor and needy. The wisdom literature of the Bible has much to say about the accumulation of wealth and our attitude towards it. The Tithe was abused by Israel – either neglected (Mal 3:10) or taken as a substitute for a righteous life (Amos 4:4) – the prophets frequently confronting the people. Later a minutiae of burdensome laws were attached to it leading to further abuse in NT times. A Temple Tax was later created to make up for the lacking. Nevertheless the Tithe is the only figure God has given as acceptable. Also significant regarding giving in the OT are the special offerings taken for the Tabernacle (Exo 25) and the Temple – David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 29 is a key passage on giving – emphasizing it all belongs to God already. There are only four references to the Tithe in the NT.
- **A communal sharing of goods and a simple lifestyle** -- NT Synoptics/ Jesus, early church in Jerusalem, Epistle of James
In the teaching of Jesus there was a radical call to a self-denying discipleship that lays up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Jesus’ parables frequently refer to the stewardship of money, wages, etc. Jesus made strong statements regarding the perils of “mammon” – such as his suggestion to the rich young ruler that he sell all. He and his disciples lived simply from a common purse and the generosity of others, and he emphasized a concern for the poor and for sacrificial giving (the widow’s alm). In the early church in Jerusalem, there was a voluntary holding of goods in common. From this model of giving developed the ideals of monastic poverty often taken to extremes in Christian history. James came down hard upon the rich.
- **Working and giving generously in response to God’s grace** – Paul’s epistles
Every one of Paul’s epistles mention money, and there are numerous passages on giving: Romans 12:8, 13; Philippians 4:10-19; and most significantly 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 where he writes concerning an offering for the saints in Jerusalem. He emphasized giving as a response to God’s gift of salvation (1 Cor 8:9; 13-15). There is no mention of a percentage – rather we are to give freely and generously (9:5-8) from a willing heart. Paul taught that giving was to be done regularly (1 Cor 16:1-3); according to, or beyond our means and ability (8:3, 12); that none might be lacking (8:13f); not grudgingly or under compulsion, but cheerfully (9:7) as a measure of our faith. He emphasizes what God gives and also suggests that God will respond with blessing (9:8-11). There is also a strong emphasis on accountability in collection and administering gifts. Paul stresses a productive work ethic, working hard, that we might have more to give. 2 Thess 3:6-15; 1 Tim 6:17-19. So why doesn’t Paul mention the Tithe? It seems that he is concerned for a giving spirit that responds to God’s Gift in Christ accordingly – the tithe is just a “minimum” – the Christian ought to be giving far more, especially for the work of God in advancing the Gospel. It seems he has taken both the concept and principles of the OT and the spirit of the Synoptic teaching on discipleship and combined them in his teaching about generous giving from the heart.

An excellent book on what the Bible teaches about wealth and possessions is **Neither Poverty nor Riches: A biblical theology of possessions** by Craig L. Blomberg. (a review).

See also **On the Pilgrim’s Way: Christian Stewardship and the Tithe** by John k. Brackett.

Some Biblical Models of Supporting Ministry (all of which appear to be Scripturally valid)

- **Supported directly by those ministered or the ministry: “Paid Clergy”**
Matthew 10:9-15; Luke 10:3-9;; 1 Corinthians 9:1-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; 1 Timothy 5:17-18 There is very clear teaching that laboring in the Gospel ministry is “worthy of its wages.” Even when Paul chose to seek his support otherwise, he acknowledged such would have been his “right” as an apostle.
- **Supported from outside the ministry: “Missionaries and Faith Supported Ministries”** Philippians 1:5; 4:10-19; 1 Corinthians 16:6; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Romans 15:23-25; 16:1-2; 3 John 6-8. Paul seems to have been usually supported by his sending church (Antioch) and/or his previous ministries (especially the Philippian church as he progressed on his missionary journeys. He deliberately chose not to take support from those ministered to as a way to not compromise his Gospel ministry. There were many traveling teachers about that were very much interested in gain, especially patronage from wealthy women. So it appears that when support is taken, it should not compromise the integrity of the Gospel. In church history we find many examples of State Supported or denominational supported Ministries – and a history of struggles to keep the Gospel ministry out of political control. Sending (“raised” supporters) are encouraged by the Scriptures (See especially 3 John 6-8)
- **Supported in full or in part by secular work: “Tentmakers” (Bi-vocational)**
Acts 18:3,5; 20:33-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12, especially vs 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-13; 1 Corinthians 4:8-14, especially vs 12; 1 Corinthians 9:15. Paul sometimes chose to work with his own hands when necessary in his ministry. Rabbi’s were expected to have a trade. At times, Paul did it deliberately in order to set an example for others. However, working all day with leather and teaching late into the evenings at Corinthian was wearing – when support from outside arrived via Timothy, Paul was quick to put aside his “tents” and devote himself full time to his ministry.

Some “Plans” for increasing your Giving

- **Getting Started: Progressive Percentage Giving along with a plan for reducing Debt, Saving and living within your means** The very process of Tithing leads to sound financial practices – budgeting and dealing with debt, and watching spending carefully. Ideally: the first 10% should be the Tithe; 10%-20% for Savings, 70%-80% “essentials: including taxes, etc.”. If you can’t begin at 10%, then start lower, with a goal to increase.

Two good Christian Writers on how to deal with debt, budget and save and give are (the late) Larry Burkett (<http://www.cfcministry.org/>) and Ron Blue (<http://www.ronblue.com/home.html>) who have numerous books on the subject: *Wealth to Last* by Larry Burkett and Ron Blue ; *The Family Financial Workbook: A Practical Guide to Budgeting* and *Debt Free Living* by Larry Burkett and *Master Your Money* and *Generous Living* by Ron Blue are among many other useful titles.

- **The Graduated Tithe** where, the more money one makes, the higher percentage one ought to give away. With time, as our “non-essential” income increases then we deliberately continue to live at the same level and proportionally increase our “tithing percentage” on the increasing income rather than increasing spending on our lifestyle, accumulating goods, etc. It also involves an application of the Christian “work ethic” to your life. For more on the concept of the Graduated Tithe see Todd Temples articles on Giving It Away. (See the website for links)
- **Faith Promise Giving.** Giving God an opportunity to give through us, by looking to Him to provide beyond our known sources of income (2 Corinthians 8:3 *“For they gave according to their means, . . . and beyond their means, of their own free will”*) either through increased or unusual sources of income; by decreasing our expenses, or moving us to sacrifice. It is a faith exercise – a promise prayerfully made with God, that as He provides you will give, then trusting God to provide; and unlike a church pledge, a matter only between the Lord and the giver. (See website for links)

For more on *Faith Promise Giving* see Howard Culbert’s Faith Promise Page, his *Faith Promise FAQ* and J. Oswald Smith’s *Faith Promise Bulletin Insert*. Faith Promise Giving programs are used by many denominations and churches including Presbyterians, Christian Reformed, Methodists, Nazarenes, etc as well as many missions and other Christian Works. The blessed law of sowing and reaping develops it in a study on giving, and many can testify as to how God has provided in unexpected ways.

“Biblical Models for Giving”

From *On the Pilgrim's way: Christian Stewardship and the Tithe* by John K. Brackett, pp. 79-81; 86-87, 101

We can see that for Christians there are several theological Models for giving money away. These models are based upon the Scripture as composed of the Hebrew Scripture and the writings of the New Testament in one Christian group of writings called the canon. These models of giving can now be summarized.

The Hebrew Model of the Tithe

First, there is the Hebrew model of the tithe in which one tenth of one's income is offered to God as a response to the covenant. In this model, the Christian is expected to learn a living by making money as a productive member of an economic community. Money is to be used wisely, and in itself money is not understood to be either good or evil. In this model, the giver must set aside one for each year as an offering to God.

This money can be paid to the sacred sanctuary, the clergy, or to the relief of the poor and needy. The Hebrew tradition clearly permits all of these groups to receive part or all of the tithe. Gifts of money for the construction of the sacred places of God are considered offerings in addition to the tithe. These additional voluntary gifts are made based upon need and on spontaneous openhandedness. They are not regular offerings made each year to the sanctuary.

The Synoptic Gospel Model

The second model for giving is found in the New Testament synoptic tradition and the first part of Acts. There, it is made clear that the possession of money and the message of the salvation in the context of gospel discipleship are incompatible. Those who take time to make money for themselves and participate in the worldly economy are able only to attain salvation through the ultimate mercy of God. It is made clear, however, that even God's mercy has little to offer those who are unjust and rich. On the other hand, those who voluntarily offer all the money they have to the community are viewed as faithful, with a secure place in the coming kingdom of God. In Christianity after the New Testament, this model of giving found its true place in the various monastic orders who voluntarily took vows of poverty. Of course, there are many today who still follow this radical model of Christian life.

The Pauline Model

The third and final model for giving in the New Testament is found in the genuine letters of the apostle Paul. For Paul, giving is linked to love for God, to blessing, and to salvation. Giving should not be compulsive or limited by some arbitrary standard like the tithe. Thus for Paul

Christian giving is linked to personal spiritual growth. It is also considered an open and clear statement of one's faith, displaying a willingness to imitate Jesus and pour oneself out for God's work in the world.

In the Pauline model, like that of the Hebrew Scriptures, the accumulation of money and one's participation in the world's economy is not condemned. Like the Hebrew Model, Paul emphasizes the proper use of resources in relation to one's faith. Faithful use of them serves to deepen one's commitment to God's grace in relationship with Christ Jesus as savior and redeemer. Ultimately, then, in this Pauline model, the tithe is not sacrificial enough. For Paul, generous giving begins when the Christian pours out his or her money as an act of love and faith in response to God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. To give very little, or to give only the minimum of a tithe would be counter to all the principles of Christ's saving grace. In this model, the tithe was more than likely viewed as a kind of minimum standard which Jews followed to satisfy the Law. Paul suggests that only sacrificial giving in the name of Jesus Christ lives up to the highest meaning of sacrifice defined by the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Why Tithe?

Again, we return to the question of why a Christian person should seriously consider giving one tenth of their income away. The answer appears to be: *Christians who tithe do so in order to fulfil the minimum biblical standard of giving.* While Paul states that giving ought to be according to one's love for God and not by compulsion, it is nevertheless clear that Paul states this view in the context of the Jewish practice of the tithe on the one hand, and some apparent knowledge of the apostolic model of complete surrender of one's money to the Christian community on the other. (1 Corinthians 9:1-18). Certainly Paul would never have accepted the notion that not giving at all to the Church, or giving less than the Jews give to the Temple, would have been an acceptable practice. In fact, the tithe is a minimum standard to which Paul appeals as a foundation for significant, Christian, sacrificial giving in his community. The limit in the other extreme contrasted with Paul is viewpoint of the Synoptics, which is complete surrender of all assets to the Christian community. But this action of complete surrender of wealth is compulsory. For Paul, Christian giving is integrally linked to spirituality in the salvation process, and it is an extension of faithfulness. Thus, as one's faith and spirituality grows, so grows also one's love for God and for giving.

Practical Tithing

Without doubt, for the average American working person interested in promoting their faith and supporting their Church, the Pauline model offers the most spiritual and helpful guidance for Christian growth and practice. This practice is simply to give beyond the standard of the tithe in order to attain a sacrificial outpouring of one self in faithful dependence upon God.

Tithing begins with a crucial decision

It is evident that the tithe is a symbol of a person's spiritual and financial commitment. In a practical sense, this commitment is decided every day in the way each of us spends our money. Do we first give to others, to God's work and to the work of the church, and then take care of our budgetary needs; or do we spend first on our selves, and then give what ever is left over to God's work?

The issue is also whether it is possible to tithe and budget in such a way that a person reduces the stress of debt and economic peril hanging over their heads, or whether they continue to live in a kind of self-induced slavery to money. The message of Jesus Christ is that God wants us to be free from the power of economic depression and pressure, and to live happy lives of management through which we strive to be the best people we can be. This, however, can only happen when one is willing to take a risk and tithe sacrificially to God's work.

Tithe to whom?

To answer this question is also possible theologically speaking. For Paul, giving is best directed to the needs of the Church. However, it must also be remembered that for Paul the Church includes the needy saints in Palestine nearby as well as the mission work in far away places. In many ways, Paul is faithful to his Jewish training on this issue, for he tends to support the guidelines of the Hebrew Scriptures. One thing is clear, the church is the recipient of three models of giving which in many ways conflict with each other in both theology and practice. It is no wonder that the issue of tithing and fund raising have long be at odds with each other. For the Scripture permits so many way to raise money for the work of God in the world.

To whom is this budgeted tithe to be given?

We have seen that the Hebrew Scriptures offer a variety of options including the sanctuary, the clergy, the poor and the needy. We have also seen that for Paul the Christian's Offering is made to meet the needs of the Church both locally and throughout the world at large. Hence, I would offer the following guidelines for the practice of tithing and sacrificial giving.

- Part of one's tithe can be given in regular weekly offerings to one's local congregation or place of worship.
- Part of one's tithe can be given to reputable organizations in or outside the Church which directly aid the poor and the needy.
- Part of one's tithe can be offered for the discretionary use of the clergy.
- Part of one's tithe can be offered to the greater work of the Church to help carry the message of Christian salvation. This includes offerings toward missionary work throughout the world.

Remembering that the tithe is a minimum biblical standard of giving for all Christians, all of these are proper and biblically sound recipients of financial support. The amount or percentage of money to be given to each must be calculated by thought and prayerful determination of how much and what percentage of the tithe each of these recipients ought to receive. Thus each organization should receive the amount or percentage the giver wants to offer. However there are ways to evaluate an organization and its management of money. It is important to remember that a tithing persons support for an organizations ought constantly to come under review.

Evaluating recipients: three questions:

- What is their mission and purpose for using offerings?
- How much of their money is actually spent on the mission? How much on overhead – is it reasonable?
- Are they open to examination of budget and spending?

You Can't out give God! (Mal 3:10)

The theory that underlies tithing is stewardship, and its specific principles are three-fold.

- 1) As David so aptly confessed to Yahweh "All things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee. 1 Chron 29:14) Everything that exists comes from God, belongs to God and will some day revert to God. Cf 1 Cor 4:7)
- 2) The relationship of men to worldly property is that of temporary stewards, whose privilege is that of managing and rendering back to God what is already His own. 1 Chron 29:14. Even when we yield up all we have to God, it is but expected service (Rom 6:12; 12:1) and leaves us still unprofitable servants (Lk 17:10)
- 3) In reference to our giving, however, God in His grace invokes only the principle of the first fruits: He accepts that, a mere token offering (Ex 23:19; Duet 18:4) a figure he specifies, a fraction of the whole he is entitled, which he is yet please to treat as acceptable to Him. The Tithe (Lev 27:10) is the only figure which God has ever revealed to men as genuinely acceptable. J Barton Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, pp 434

Biblical Principles for Stewardship and Fundraising

Christian leaders, including development staff, who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and choose prayerfully to pursue eternal kingdom values (Mt. 6:19-21), will seek to identify the sacred kingdom resources of God's economy within these parameters:

1. God, the creator (Gen. 1) and sustainer of all things (Col. 1:17) and the One "who works within us to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20), is a God of infinite abundance (Ps. 50:10-11) and grace (2 Cor. 9:8)
2. Acknowledging the primacy of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16) as our chief treasure (Mt. 13:44), Christians are called to lives of stewardship, as managers of all that God has entrusted to them (1 Cor. 4:1-2).
3. A Christian's attitude toward possessions on earth is important to God (Mt. 6:24), and there is a vital link between how believers utilize earthly possessions (as investments in God's kingdom) and the eternal rewards that believers receive (Phil. 4:17).
4. God entrusts possessions to Christians and holds them accountable for their use, as a tool to grow God's eternal kingdom, as a test of the believer's faithfulness to God, and as a trademark that their lives reflect Christ's values (Lk. 16:1-9).
5. From God's abounding grace, Christians' giving reflects their gratitude for what God has provided and involves growing in an intimate faith relationship with Christ as Lord of their lives (Mk. 2:21-22).
6. Because giving is a worshipful, obedient act of returning to God from what has been provided (1 Chron. 29:10-14), Christian fundraisers should hold a conviction that, in partnership with the church, they have an important role in the spiritual maturation of believers (James 3:1).
7. The primary role of Christian fundraisers is to advance and facilitate a believer's faith in and worship of God through a Christ-centered understanding of stewardship that is solidly grounded on Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16).
8. Recognizing it is the work of the Holy Spirit that prompts Christians to give (In. 15:4-5) (often through fundraising techniques) (2 Cor. 9:5-7, Neh. 1:4-11), fundraisers and/ or organizations must never manipulate or violate their sacred trust with ministry partners.
9. An eternal, God-centered worldview promotes cooperation, rather than competition, among organizations, and places the giver's relationship to God above the ministry's agenda (2 Cor. 4:16-18).
10. In our materialistic, self-centered culture, Christian leaders should acknowledge that there is a great deal of unclear thinking about possessions, even among believers, and that an eternal kingdom perspective will often seem like foolish nonsense (1 Cor. 2:14) to those who rely on earthly kingdom worldview techniques (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

When these principles are implemented, that rely on God changing hearts more than on human methods, the resulting joy-filled generosity of believers will fully fund God's work here on earth (Ex. 36:6-7).

From the Christian Stewardship Association:

<http://www.stewardship.org/index.cfm/method/content.582C8956-861F-41AC-9F192C446DC64D41>