

Tithing — basic questions often heard

I. Tithing and the OT.

A. What was the tithe?

The tithe was a God given commandment that reflected the reality that everything was from and rightfully belonged to the Lord. Each Israelite was to give the first tenth (first fruits) of their harvest and livestock each year back to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-34).

B. Was the tithe simply a compulsory religious tax or was there something more significant behind it?

The tithe was commanded by God but the fulfillment of the command was a matter of the heart, i.e. there were no "tithe collectors" working for the temple.

As noted above the tithe was an act of obedient trust that celebrated the assurance that God would provide all the believers needs.

In giving the tithe the Israelites also acknowledged that the land belonged to the Lord and that they were simply stewards of God's gift. They were the tenants and he was the owner. (See parable of Jesus that touches on this theme: Mt. 21:33-46 where Jesus uses this relationship in a much broader and more profound arena.) To fail to tithe was in essence stealing from God. (see Mal. 3:8)

The tithe was also a part of the Israelites life of worship. The giving of the tithe was an act of thanksgiving which showed gratitude toward God for his caring provision and generosity (Gen. 28:20-22).

C. What was the tithe used for?

Over time as Israel settled in the land the tithe was the primary way the people supported the ministering priests. The Levites were not given land of their own (i.e. a means of support) because they were to dedicate themselves wholly (i.e. "full time without distraction") to ministering to the Lord and the people. Thus the primary practical purpose of the tithe beyond the heart of gratitude and worship to God was to care for the material needs of the ministering priests. (Numbers 18:21)

At times Israel reneged on their tithe giving, forcing the priests out of the temple and into the fields. This was seen as a grave failing and was corrected under the great spiritual renewals led by King Hezekiah (2Chron. 31:5), Nehemiah (Neh. 13:12) and Malachi (Mal.3:8-10).

D. Was the tithe all that the Israelite ever gave?

No, you will find that there were special offerings and special rules regarding the needs and care of the poor.

II. New Testament Giving

A. Is the tithe specifically required in the NT?

B.

As important as the tithe is to the OT one would assume that it would be specifically required in the NT. Jesus (Mt. 23:23) does address the issue of tithing among the religious leaders of his day, but it comes as something of a surprise to discover that the command is never specifically restated nor removed in the rest of the NT.

This is not to imply that the principals of the tithe or the concern for financial stewardship is absent from the NT. For these issues are in fact repetitively addressed.

The Apostle Paul instructs the believer, affirming the OT pattern, to give in order to sustain those called to "vocational" ministry in Christ (1Cor. 9:7-14) and in order to care for the poor. (1Cor. 16:1-3).

Paul urges and commands generosity (2Cor. 9:6 and 8:1-5), but note that there is never any amount or percentage given to guide the giver.

All of Paul's words concerning giving stress that the Christian gives not in response to some outward law but in response to the law of love written on the hearts of the believers. Giving is a voluntary act of worship and gratitude to the Lord and a practical means of supporting the ministers and ministry of the gospel in the world. (see Ro.15:25-28; 1 Cor.9:8-18; 2Cor. 8-9; etc.).

Paul anticipates that the person of the Spirit will not give under compulsion (2Cor. 9:7) but freely, happily, systematically, and generously. (2Cor.9:6-8; 1Cor. 16:2)

Paul need not talk about a tithe because he assumes that the law of love and generosity will teach us a higher expression than the law that was given through Moses.

What is central to the NT is that we as believers would "excel in this grace of giving." (2Cor.8:7)

B. Why does a Christian Give?

1. He gives because he recognizes that he is Christ's servant and therefore neither he nor his possessions are really his own to do with as he pleases. (Ro. 6:16; 1Cor.6:20 and 7:22; 1Pt.2:16).

2. As a steward of God's creation he is charged by Christ with the privilege and responsibility of managing his Master's goods (1Pt. 4:10) knowing he will give an account for all his actions (Mt. 25:14-30; Ro. 14:12).

3. He gives because he has the model of Christ's generosity (2Cor.8:9) and is full of gratitude.

4. He gives because he has received from Christ's ministers and cares about the ministry of the Word, the life of the community, and the pastor's well being. (1Cor. 9:9-12). The believer understands that it is Christ's will that those whose calling and work is to vocational ministry should receive their living from this work from those they serve (1Cor.9:14). An exception to this can be seen in Paul's missionary journeys where churches helped him reach out to new areas or where the poverty of the people (Thessalonica) inspired Paul to work at tent making so that he would not be a burden to the new converts.

5. He gives the amount he has made up his mind to give and does so with joy (2Cor. 9:7) as the Lord has prospered him. (1Cor. 16:2) The NT principle is not equal gifts but instead Paul speaks of giving in equal sincerity of love and sacrifice. (2Cor. 8:8-15).

C. Should the Christian Tithe?

Yes!!! But not as a legalistic act lacking in spiritual motivation and joy. Nor is it a means of gaining God's acceptance or is interpreted as meaning that "now I've done my duty and God can't ask me for anything else".

The tithe is the old law. The new law is the law of sowing generously with deep contentment. As Origen, the early church father noted, tithes are something to be far exceeded by Christians in their giving. (In Num. hom 11)

For the young the tithe is a very helpful and appropriate place to begin a life of the grace of giving. But each of us should seek to deepen our contentment in this world and grow in the heart and grace of giving.

III. What About Me and Chi Alpha?

A. Should the campus ministry receive all my giving?

Ultimately, you must decide. Some have decided to give a portion of their tithe since they are not at college for the entire year. Others give 10% of income to the campus ministry and give love offerings beyond their tithe to other places and concerns.

There is no law except the law of loving generosity and joyful sacrifice. What would the Spirit have you do to share in meeting the needs of the fellowship

B. Should I do all my giving during the summer (if I only have a summer job) or should I spread it out over the year?

The ministry's needs are relatively consistent throughout the year so giving some during the summer is very much appreciated. Beyond that it is really a matter between you and your Lord.

C. Where do the student's offerings go?

The student's offerings go into the general budget to meet ministry and personnel expenses. The student budget presently accounts for about 15% of the entire ministries needs.

The other 85% is raised by the Chi Alpha staff from supporting churches, alumni, and individual supporters.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE CHI ALPHA BUDGET OR THE
MINISTRIES FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY YOU MAY CALL THE OFFICE. WE ARE MORE
THAN HAPPY TO GIVE ALL THE INFORMATION YOU MIGHT DESIRE.