

Tithing: How much should I give to God?

Ricardo Campos, Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA November 15, 2009

I. Introduction

Giving can often be a difficult thing. How much should one give? Should it be 10% or more? What if God blesses you with tremendous wealth, how much should you give then? There's no doubt that the Old Testament mentions tithing, the question is: does it apply to the Church today? And what about the New Testament, does it have anything to say about Giving?

II. Giving in the Old Testament

A. Tithing

1. Abraham and Jacob Tithe (Gen.14:20; 28:22)

In Gen. 14:20 Abraham gives a 10% tithe to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God. In Gen. 28:22 after he has a dream where the Lord reiterates His promises concerning the Promise Land and Israel, Jacob makes a vow to God, which includes a promise to give God 10% of everything God gives him. Yes, these tithes are in Scripture, but does God present them as models for the Church to follow?

2. The First Tithe in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–24)

Lev. 27:30–33 contains the first tithe in the Mosaic Law; it's 10% of all the produce and animals. Note to whom the command is given in Lev. 27:34; it's given to Israel. Num. 18:21–24 reveals the recipients of this first tithe.

3. The Second Tithe in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 14:22–27)

Deut. 14:22–27 has the second tithe in the Law; it's an additional 10% annually of their produce and animals. However, this time the people got to keep the tithe and use it to celebrate before the Lord's Tabernacle (Temple).

4. The Third Tithe in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 14:28–29)

Deut. 14:28–29 lists the third tithe; it was another 10% every third year in addition to the annual 20%. The recipients of this tithe were the less fortunate in society: Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. It was to be collected and distributed within their towns. Note that all tithes are very specific as to their purpose and recipients.

5. Other Passages that Mention Tithes, e.g., Mal. 3:8–10

There are other passages in the Old Testament that mention the word *tithe(s)*. The question is: what does the word mean in its context? If the author doesn't redefine the word, then the audience would understand it as a reference to the tithes in the Mosaic Law. Further, a passage like Mal. 3:8–10 is a reference to corporate Israel (the *you's* in the passage are plural), thus it's a reference to the corporate tithes in the Law and a corporate blessing God will give Israel if they fulfill them.

6. Tithing in the New Testament (Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42; 18:9–12; Heb. 7:4–10)

In Jesus' day the Mosaic Law was in full effect and every Jew was obligated to keep it, including the tithes. Matt. 23:23 mentions tithing, but notice that it's a reference to the Old Testament Law. Lk. 11:42 likewise mentions tithing and it too is a reference to the Law. Lk. 18:12 also mentions tithing, but it's again a Pharisee who is tithing, thus, this too is a reference to the tithes of the Law. Heb. 7:5 clearly indicates that tithes originate in the Law, however the rest of the passage speaks of a tithe that happened 460yrs before the Law, Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek. Does it mean we should tithe today?

Conclusion on Tithing in the Old Testament:

Abraham and Jacob's tithes are statements of fact, i.e., Scripture reveals what these men did: Abraham gave Melchizedek a onetime tithe and Jacob vowed to give God 10% for the rest of his life. Both of these tithes were voluntary and not presented as models for the Church.

The three tithes in the Law were mandated taxes, each with a very specific purpose and recipient. They were part of the Mosaic Law which was given to Israel and not the Church, Lev. 27:34; Deut. 4:8; 5:1–3; Rom. 2:14; 9:4. The other tithing passages in the Old Testament (besides Gen. 14 and 28) also find their origin in the Mosaic Law, as do the passages in the New Testament.

B. Freewill Giving (Ex. 25:1–9; 35:4–36:7)

Ex. 25:1–9 and 35:4–36:7 reveals that freewill giving also existed in the Old Testament in addition to tithing. In fact freewill offerings were part of the sacrificial system, Lev. 7:16; 22:18–23; 23:38.

C. *With the firstfruits of all your increase* (Prov. 3:9)

Pro. 3:9, which is not part of the Law, tells us to honor God with our wealth and the first and best of our earnings. If you do, God *may* bless you for it, 3:10.

Conclusion on Old Testament Giving:

Tithes were mandated taxes for the nation of Israel (not the Church) which were used for very specific purposes. In addition to tithing (which was not an option) the Old Testament provided for freewill offerings, which left it to the individual to decide how much to give. God also told those of the Old Testament (and us today) that we should honor Him with our wealth and the first and best of our earnings.

III. Giving in the New Testament

A. Give 100% not 10%: The Widows Two Mites (Mk. 12:41–44; Lk. 21:1–4)

Mk. 12:41–44 shows that God is not impressed with percentages, unless it becomes a sacrifice to the one giving it.

B. Give as God has Prospered You (1 Cor. 16:2)

1 Cor. 16:2 teaches us the principle that we must give according to how God has blessed us, which contradicts any idea that involves a percentage. How can one give 10% or 23 1/3% and at the same time give according to how God has prospered them? If God blesses you with much, then you should give much. If He's blessed you with a little, then you should give a little.

C. Forethought in Giving (2 Cor. 9:7a [Prov 3:9])

2 Cor. 9:7a reveals that our giving should be pre-planned. We should know beforehand how much we're going to give; it should not be last minute.

D. If You Sow Sparingly, You'll Reap Sparingly (2 Cor. 9:6)

In 2 Cor. 9:6 God declares that those who give little will get little and those who give much will get much. This too doesn't work if 10% or 23 1/3% is what God mandates for the Church today.

Other Principles on Giving in the New Testament:

There are many other principles that God teaches us about giving: You can still give even though you're poor (2 Cor. 8:1–4); it's based on your own freewill (Acts 2:45; 5:4; 2 Cor. 8:3; 9:7); Christ is the ultimate example of giving (2 Cor. 8:9); your attitude is important, giving is not to be a grudging obligation (2 Cor. 9:5, 7); God provides what He asks us to give (2 Cor. 9:10);

IV. Conclusion

When we properly understand the Old Testament teaching on tithing and follow the principles the New Testament reveals about giving, we will know how much to give and the kind of attitude we should have. God leaves room for giving that is sacrificial and giving that is in proportion with how much He has blessed us. This means that our giving can be anywhere from 1% to over 100% of what the Lord has given us.