

Giving in Scripture

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1 Introduction

In the light of recent financial issues in the church, I thought it would be beneficial to cast a new vision on Christian giving and finances in general. This document gathers some ideas from Scriptures on giving, starting with the Old Testament, then the New Testament and concludes with some general thoughts.

2 Old Testament

The full, old-testament tithe was about 25%. First, the general tithe, Leviticus 27:30-32:

“Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord. If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman’s staff, shall be holy to the Lord.” (ESV)

This tithe was due every year. Then there was a special tithe for festivals. Deuteronomy 12:10-12:

“But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord.” (ESV)

This was also an annual offering. Lastly, there is a tithe to support orphans and widows that is collected every three years. Deuteronomy 14:28-29:

“At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.” (ESV)

As we can see, there were actually three “tithes” that the nation of Israel was commanded to give.

- To support the religious and governmental leaders (Levites) – 10% each year.
- To support the national religious feasts and festivals held annually in Jerusalem – 10% each year.
- To support those who were unable to provide for themselves (widows, orphans, immigrants, etc) – 10% every 3rd

This averages out to about 23.33% in tithes each year.

3 New Testament

The New Testament covenant is a fulfilment of the Mosaic covenant (Matthew 5:17). The need for Levites as religious leaders is no more as all believers have direct access to the Lord through the saving work of Jesus. The idea of tithing is foreign to the New Testament. The concept is barely mentioned let alone prescribed.

The Greek word for *tithe*, δεκατω (Strong 1183, “to pay tithes”), appears six times in the New Testament (Hebrews 7:5, 7:6, 7:9; Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42, 18:12). It only refers to historic events or is used in derogatory sense.

What you see instead is an emphasis on generosity, Hebrews 13:16

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (ESV)

Jesus is our great example, 2 Corinthians 8:9:

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

Jesus loved us so much that he set aside his majesty, became poor and ultimately gave up his life so that we can have life. We had nothing and Jesus gave us everything. Jesus didn’t think of himself and selflessly sacrificed himself for us.

Paul actually calls believers to be generous, 2 Corinthians 9:11:

“You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” (ESV)

4 How much should I give?

The apostle Paul actually provides an answer to this question, 2 Corinthians 8:12-14:

“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.” (ESV)

A wealthy individual may not even feel a 30% offering but a single mother may barely manage 3%; yet both offerings are acceptable to God. (Mark 12:41-44)

5 Purpose of giving

- Meet the needs of the saints (Acts 2:44-45, 1 John 3:17, Galatians 6:9-10)
- Meet the needs of Christian workers (1 Timothy 5:17-18, 1 Corinthians 9:6-14, Philippians 4:15-18)
- Meet the needs of the poor (Luke 12:33-34, Ephesians 4:28, James 1:27)

6 General thoughts on giving

- The money you give to the church doesn't go to the church. It goes to the Lord.
- The money you give goes to support the Lord's work both locally and globally.
- The money you give is a joyful sacrifice. You give up something you could use to help make your life easier but you are filled with joy because of the love you have for the Lord and his work.
- The act of giving is a step of faith. You trust the Lord to sustain you.
- Giving is blind. Only the Lord knows what he requires.

- The church leadership has a responsibility to be above reproach in the matters of finances. The leadership should make transparent to the body what happens with collected finances.
- If you feel you have to give, don't. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. Your salvation doesn't depend on your giving. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

7 Quotes

Rick Warren:

God doesn't evaluate my giving by how much I give. He considers how much I still have after giving.