

What does Christ Community affirm about... Finances and Giving?

Overview and Introduction

In light of who Jesus is and the realities of his rule, Christ Community affirms that our giving is a beautiful act of love, surrender, and participation in his Kingdom. Given the breadth of the Scripture's teaching, we believe that giving at least a tenth of one's income within the local church is usually the best representation of Spirit-led obedience with our financial resources. We affirm this to clarify our Biblical convictions, and not with a desire to bring division among churches that may believe differently. Financial support of the local church is the body of Christ caring for its people and providing for active mission.

We affirm that the Bible teaches generosity, trusting surrender, and wise stewardship with all of our resources. Jesus is King; HE is complete owner. God gives us all we have so that we might be a blessing to others as we experience His goodness. Toward this end, God's concern for our *motivations* in this area runs throughout the Bible.

This brief survey of Old and New Testament passages on finances and giving will help us understand the Biblical basis for these conclusions.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament reveals a righteous law and a way of wisdom regarding finances and giving that complement one another. The way of wisdom, as described in the Proverbs and modeled by the Patriarchs, centers one's heart on God first, before any blessing of wealth (Proverbs 15:16-17) and describes how the wise honor God with their wealth (Proverbs 3:9-10). Abram and Jacob model this way by giving to the Lord in faith and worship. In Genesis 14, Abram gave "a tenth of everything" to Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God after God had blessed Abram with victory in battle. Similarly, Jacob vowed to "give a full tenth" to the Lord after an experience of the Lord's presence (Gen 28:22).

Years later, the Old Testament Law showed a comprehensive system of sacrifices, offerings, and tithes that God required of his people. They were a demonstration of faith, an expression of worship, and a participation in the work of God at the Temple (2 Chronicles 31:2-21). The Law also makes room for offerings of generosity that people gave of their own free-will for the poor or for building projects.

These tithes, sacrifices, and offerings came directly from a family's wealth, economic resources the Lord had provided (even if they were not in monetary form). Similarly, Jubilee years for the people of Israel taught that all resources and people belonged wholly to the Lord, and that generosity toward those in need is God's will (Deuteronomy 15:1-11)

God has always desired people to give with sincerity, joy, and in faith – even within the Law's boundaries. He speaks with equal contempt about sacrifices given with a ritual duty-

bound mindset (cf. Is 1:10-15) as He does against those who give their second-best leftovers (Malachi 1:6-14), or who have neglected to give fully (Malachi 3:6-12).

The New Testament

The New Testament teaches plenty about a God-honoring use of money and resources, with both warnings and encouragements.

Warnings

- Jesus condemns selfishness, and calls hoarding wealth foolish and short-sighted (Luke 12:13-21, Luke 16:19-31).
- Our earthly treasures can hinder our ability to enter the Kingdom when we desire them above the Lord (Matthew 6:19-24, 19:16-30; Luke 16:14-15).
- Love for money and hope in wealth are empty pursuits (1 Timothy 6:17-18, Hebrews 13:5), and will fail us.

We're called to prize Jesus above money and stuff. Though we may be unaware, our use of resources reveals our outlook on life and shows the extent to which we have made money an idol instead of yielding to God's complete ownership. So, if we're not supposed to *trust* wealth, *hoard* wealth, or *use* wealth for personal promotion – how ARE we called to steward money and resources?

Instruction and Encouragement

- Jesus **assumes charitable giving** will occur (Matthew 6:1-4)
- Jesus **affirms sacrifice** and **generosity**, as with the widow's old covenant Temple offering (Luke 21:1-4).
- God our Father has a willing ability to **provide** for our needs as we trust in Him (Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:19).
- Jesus teaches **trustworthy and responsible stewardship** of wealth (Luke 16:8-15)
- Paul teaches the appropriateness of **financial support for ministers of the gospel** (1 Corinthians 9:3-14, Galatians 6:6).
- God values the **willingness, generosity, and joy** in the one who gives (2 Corinthians 8:12, 9:6-7)
- God provides for us *in order that* we might give to others (Genesis 12:1-3, 2 Corinthians 9:8-11)

Examples

- The earliest gathered church in Jerusalem shared their possessions to care for physical needs in their midst (Acts 2:45, 4:32-35). In this example, we see a **compassionate stewardship of resources**; possessions did not belong to the individual family, but were available for meeting the needs of others. Implied is a clear belief that all they owned truly **belonged to God**.
- Paul calls the church in Corinth, and others, to take up a collection for the poor in Jerusalem, "a sum of money in keeping with his income" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Acts 24:17). These are **planned gifts**, saved and intentional.

- At times, Paul depends on the **gifts from the churches to support his gospel work**, gratefully trusting God whether he receives much or little (Phil 4:10-12)

Narrowed Focus: Tithing

The New Testament does not explicitly teach one to tithe a tenth of all income. Thus, contemporary confusion about tithing arises from a combination of two factors, namely, the role of the OT Law for a new covenant believer and the lack of clarity as to what aspect of the law tithing falls under.

Aspects of the law related to the ceremonial worship and Israel's national identity are completely fulfilled in Christ and no longer apply to believers, having governed over a previous age (Hebrews 9:1-10:18). This fulfillment does not equal abolishment, though (Matthew 5:17). The Law – in all its aspects - reveals the heart of God for holiness and righteousness (Psalm 19:7-11, Psalm 119, Romans 7:12). The new covenant difference is that our righteousness comes through Him by faith and not through law-keeping (Romans 3:21-25) since Christ has completed the law's requirements (Romans 10:4).

Therefore, we can affirm that the Old Testament Law for tithing reveals God's heart for giving, but does not create a new law for believers. It demonstrates the righteousness that Israel was supposed to model in reflection of their eternal King. In relationship with Christ and under the freedom of the cross, our giving is good without earning us merit. The tithes that supported aspects of the ceremonial or sacrificial system are fulfilled in Christ and do not apply directly to the church.

Paul teaches, however, “by faith we uphold the Law” (Romans 3:31). We do so by being united with Christ (Galatians 2:20), and walking in the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4). Tithing according to law is death; tithing by faith in Christ fulfills the law.

So where does this leave us? How do we tithe in faith? We do so in the same way we “keep” any other aspect of law – by setting our minds on the Spirit and living accordingly (Romans 8:5-6). The Spirit of God will glorify Christ in how we steward our resources and lead us to obedience. As wisdom from the Bible, the tithe (10%) principle may be helpful as a tutorial, and create a starting point for generosity.

Conclusions

The whole of Scripture teaches that a disciple, walking by the Spirit, will grow in financial generosity and wise stewardship of resources, just as in other acts of faithfulness and Kingdom orientation.

Giving in the local church, while not an Old Testament tithe, is taught and modeled in the New Testament as a Spirit-led act of obedience, one that exceeds the “law of 10%” in depth and breadth. When we give within our church family, we care for those in our immediate body, providing for the pastoral work, care for the needy, and partner in the outward mission of the Kingdom.

The following heart questions may prove helpful in self-assessment:

- Am I holding onto resources in idolatry?
- Am I grateful with what I have, and do I give out of gratitude?
- Am I sacrificing for others?
- Do I treat possessions as mine or as the Lord's?