

CHURCH & MONEY: NAVIGATING THE WATERS OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY

"...The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives."

Deuteronomy. 14:23, TLB

Pastors often hesitate to deal with this issue because it appears self-serving. Besides, who hasn't been angered, grieved, or embarrassed by a manipulative and unbiblical approach to fund raising by Christian ministries or churches? The subject, however, must be addressed without apology. Giving is undeniably biblical, and the church needs to be consistently educated and motivated concerning this vital topic.

Is It Spiritual To Talk About Money?

The Gospels contain more warnings concerning the misuse of money than any other singular subject. One in every four verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke deals with money. One in every six verses in the New Testament make some reference to money. Almost one-half of the parables of Jesus make reference to money and its misuse. The only one of the 12 apostles to fall (Judas) fell over money.

Growing In Giving

Biblical giving is a financial investment given to an appropriate ministry, motivated by grace and for the glory of God to the advancement of His Kingdom. Giving begins with the tithe.

Is Tithing Biblical?

The most specific and direct passage in the Bible concerning tithing is Malachi 3:7-12. Tithing is a humble acknowledgement that God's purpose supersedes our own. Tithing is a consistent way to worship and honor God, a reminder that we are dependent on and personally accountable to Him. Tithing is not complicated - it doesn't even require a calculator. It is simply investing 10% of our income in the local church where we are committed. Tithing isn't tipping God. Tithing is an expression of gratitude, submission, and commitment to God. A failure to tithe has consequences. We resist God from providing for us. Even worse, our financial neglect hinders His purpose. When we do tithe, we honor Him and His purpose is advanced. As the church grows and makes an increasing impact we can know the fulfillment of participating and making our invaluable contribution!

Some people would argue that because tithing is an Old Testament practice we are freed from its constraints because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. While it is certainly true that we are free from the bondage of the Old Testament Law, we would do well to recognize that tithing predates the Law by some 400 years! (See Genesis 14:18-20.) Many Bible scholars believe that King Melchizedek, whom Abraham paid tithes to, was really Christ Himself in a pre-incarnate appearance. While Moses was a man of the Law and lived under the Law that included the paying of tithes, Abraham was a man of faith and did not live under the Law - just like us.

In the New Testament tithing is mentioned ten times. In Hebrews 7:1-10 the word "tithe" or "tenth" is used seven of the ten times. I believe that the writer of Hebrews is trying to strongly suggest that the Jewish Christians voluntarily tithe without coming again under the bondage of the Old Testament Law. Finally, in two New Testament passages, Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus Himself affirms the validity of tithing.

Randy Alcorn gives an outstanding challenge in his book, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Tyndale

House Publishers, 1989): "To me giving less than the tithe is simply not an option. Someday I'm going to stand before God and give an account of my life (Romans 14:12). In that day I do not want to have to explain why, having been indwelt with His Holy Spirit and having lived in the most affluent nation in human history, I failed to give at the very minimal level."

The Place of Offerings

An excellent definition for *offering* is to present a gift to God as an act of worship. Offerings are necessary for special projects such as facilities and certain specialized ministries. The tithe, however, is where we commence, not conclude.

Three Levels of Giving

As we grow in faith and our understanding of God's call to commitment in a local church, we usually pass through three distinct levels of giving:

1. The lowest level asks, "**What can I afford?**" (What I can give without giving anything up.)
2. The middle level asks, "**What can I sacrifice?**" (What I can give only if I give something up.)
3. The highest level of giving asks, "**What can I trust God to do through me?**" (What I can give only if I give something up and trust God to be my source.)

The Great Physician

Do you remember the last time you went to the doctor for a physical? The bulk of the physical was the doctor poking, and prodding, and pressing in various places, all the while asking, "Does this hurt? How about this?" If we cry out in pain one of two things has happened. Either the doctor has pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity; or more likely, there's something wrong, and the doctor will say, "We'd better do some more tests because it's not supposed to hurt there!" So it is when we examine what the Bible has to say about financial responsibility, some people cry out in pain and discomfort. When that happens one of two things has happened - either the pastor has pushed too hard, or perhaps there's something wrong, and if that's the case it's time to call in the Great Physician because it's not supposed to hurt there! It might be that we need to be healed in some of our attitudes and perceptions.