

ONE FOR EVERY TEN

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 1/13/19, Matt Heerema

2 Corinthians 9:7-8 (ESV)

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Thesis summary:

The OT tithe laws of the Mosaic covenant are fulfilled in the new covenant, and are now obsolete in the life of NT believers (see Hebrews 8). However, they are not irrelevant, as they provide guidance for believers by setting the backdrop for the conversation on giving in terms of scope and manner of giving.

Under the New Covenant, every believer should consider carefully and prayerfully, in their heart, how they should respond to God's generosity to them in the Gospel through financial giving. The purpose of giving is in order to joyfully provide for: 1) the needs of those who minister the gospel to them, 2) the saints in the church with which they fellowship, and 3) the mission of the church in the Great Commission.

INTRO

Growing up, I was always one of those who could never stop asking the question "why?" I've always had a hard time taking things at face value. And while this might be a personality strength with a massive downside, I have trouble simply trusting people's assertions, without being given proper explanation. This was true with my parents' commands to me as a child, teachers instruction to me in school, and mentors and elders to myself in the church.

It's gotten me (rightly and wrongly) in trouble over the years, but I think has also served me well. And I hope today that it will serve you well as we unpack a topic that we don't really look into very deeply most of the time. The subject of tithing.

#TRIGGERWARNING: pastor talking about money!

My message today is a little more of a bible study than a sermon, at least the first chunk. Some sermons are like an instructional exercise that show you how something works. Others are more like an inoculation against unhealthy ideas. Today is more like the second one.

I'm hoping this morning to unpack some often overlooked or mishandled scriptures on this idea of money and giving, so you will be well protected from teaching that would seek to manipulate you. Or maybe more commonly, guard you from those who would take shortcuts in explanation of the Bible for the sake of simplicity, which can have the long-range impact of making the Bible seem inconsistent and hard to understand.

And I think that's happened in the area of money for the church.

I believe if sound principles of interpretation are applied consistently, I think we get a careful answer to this question (and others like it!) And will be able to live healthy and fruitful lives!

Further, I hope a careful study will de-mystify this topic, and also encourage us to continue to give generously, and even grow in generosity as a whole church, so that we will experience the joy and blessing that comes along from being instruments in the hand of God for the work of meeting needs.

And finally, don't worry, I don't end up very far from what we have always taught on this idea of giving and generosity. I just hope that by clearing up some of the "muddiness" in these conversations around terms like tithes, offerings, giving, etc., that we can have greater confidence and less frustration around this topic!

UNDERSTANDING OLD COVENANT "GIVING"

- **Tithes** - described below
- **Vows** - Common practice in the ancient near east, the law regulates it. Costly and serious. Jesus warns against them.
- **Offerings** - Five distinct offerings:
 - Burnt offering - compulsory, atonement for sin, devotion to God - Leviticus 1:3-17 (referenced in Job and Genesis)
 - Grain offering - voluntary, expression of devotion to God - Leviticus 2
 - Peace offering - a common meal together. Included thank offerings, wave offerings, freewill offerings - Leviticus 3 & 7
 - Sin/purification offering - atonement for unintentional sin - Leviticus 4
 - Guilt/reparation offering - to cover an offense given - Leviticus 5
- **Contributions**
 - Exodus 25:1, 35:5, 21 - For the construction and maintenance of the tabernacle and later, the temple, and for blessing the priesthood & the poor

- **Taxes**

- Temple tax. Every male older than 20. Small amount for the upkeep of the temple
- Royal taxes: for the ruling of the kingdom, war, and fortune of the king.
- Jubilee and sabbath years - debts cleared, gleaning rights

- **Summary**

- To be quick about it, in the new covenant, vows are cautioned against, offerings for sin are fulfilled in Christ, contributions to the temple are impossible, and taxes were political.
- But what about the tithe? Why are we so focused on that in our day in the church. Why do we use it, and not these other giving mechanisms to encourage your giving to the church.
- That's what we're studying here.

UNPACKING THE TITHE

I. What is the tithe?

- A. Used as a generalized term for giving, but that's not what it means
- B. **Tithe = "tenth"**, biblical verbs in greek and Hebrew both mean **"pay the tenth"**
 - 1. Some people mistakenly understand the tithe as 10%, but that's not the case, it's the tenth, one for every ten. Let's do some tithe math to show you the difference
 - 2. **LET'S DO SOME MATH:** Each tenth of the increase that passed under the rod.
 - a) So if you only had 9 new sheep in a year, you wouldn't tithe. You didn't have 10. There fore there would be no "tenth" new sheep passing under the rod.
 - b) Tithe of 10 = 1
 - c) Tithe of 9 = 0
 - d) Tithe of 17 = 1
 - e) Tithe of 20 = 2
 - f) Tithe of 25 = 2
 - g) Grain, fruit, oil, wine, and honey was a little more straightforward. Easier to divide. But again if you only had 9 "parts" of these things, how ever parts were measured...
 - h) Now, when considered as a whole nation, you'd probably end up with roughly 10% of everything on average, but the point is that the tithe is not a 10% mandate, it's a mandate for every 10th thing. It will become increasingly clear why that is relevant as we go along.

II. SCRIPTURE ON THE TITHE:

A. Pre-law references to the tithe

1. Gen 14:18-20 - Abram and Melchizedek
2. Genesis 28:12-22 - Jacob

B. The Mosaic Law describes three tithes

1. General description:

- a) WHAT: Leviticus 27:30-33 - "every tenth of [promised/holy] land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees... ..every tenth animal from the herd or flock..."

2. Levite tithe

- a) TO WHO (levites): Numbers 18:20-24 - "I have given [the Levites] the tenth that the Israelites present to the LORD as a contribution..."
- b) TO MEET THEIR NEEDS
- c) WHEN: Each year, presented with the festival tithes
- d) The priests then tithe off of the tithe

3. Festival tithe:

- a) Deut 12:17-19, 14:22-27
- b) WHO (selves): "You must eat the tenth of your grain, new wine, oil, firstborn of the flock, vow offerings that you pledge, freewill offerings, personal contributions..."
- c) WHERE: "...in the place your LORD chooses."
- d) TO WORSHIP AND CELEBRATE
- e) WHEN: Deut 14:22-27 - "Each year..."

4. Distinction between the Levite and festival tithes:

- a) Deut 14: You can exchange the festival tithe for money. You must bring the rest to the levites for their inheritance

5. Charity Tithe

- a) Deut 14:28-29; 26:10-16 -
- b) WHEN: "Every three years..."
- c) WHAT: "...bring a tenth of all your produce for that year..."
- d) WHERE: "...and store it within your gates..."
- e) WHO: "...the levite, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow..." -
- f) TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

C. Examples and further passages

1. 2 Chronicles 31:5-10 - Describes practical obedience's result: Piles of leftovers from the tithe! More than abundance.

2 Chronicles 31:5-10 (ESV)

5 As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. 6 And the people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been dedicated to the Lord their God, and laid them in heaps. 7 In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month.

(HEAPS HEAPS HEAPS!!! :-))

2. Nehemiah 10:37-38 - Reinstatement of the tithe
3. Malachi 3:8-12 - Israelites failure to tithe. Returning to the tithe law would result in rain, no more plagues of locusts, and produce from the land.
 - a) Passage is usually wrongly used in an analogical sense to encourage the church to give, but ought not be used this way.
 - b) The storehouse of the temple is not the church, it is each believer
 - c) The tithe was of the fruit of the holy land
 - d) The tithe was for the priesthood, of which all believers are now part
 - e) The blessing promised was agricultural: the cessation of drought and plague
 - f) There is no evidence or accurate hermeneutical method that would allow for translation of these things into modern, local church, applications.
4. Amos 4:4 - Minor reference about false worship

D. New Testament References to the Tithe

1. Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42 - Jesus to Pharisees, rebuking them for neglecting weightier matters of the law and paying attention to minute details. That they should have done both.
2. Luke 18:12 - Proudful prayer boasting about tithing
3. Hebrews 7:1-10 reference to Abraham tithing to Melchizedek to support Jesus's priesthood (not establish the tithe)
4. The question might be, however, is there anything in the NT to suggest the cessation of the tithe?

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN TITHE?

III. This is a complex question!

- A. How should we answer it?

1. Through careful study of the Bible, observation of church history, and a response of faith
2. So much mud in history here! Not a ton of consensus.
- B. Has to do with the relationship of the OT and NT
 1. Tripartite division of the law, three uses of the law
 - a) Moral/civil/ceremonial
 - b) Convict, restrain, guide
 - c) Classic reformed positions. But not all agree. Classic (moral law continues) vs. theonomist (moral and civil continue)
 - d) Dispensationalists disagree with the divisions.
 - e) Only what is repeated remains?
 2. Are Christians still bound by the OT? In what way?
- C. The hermeneutics are complex and disputed
 1. There is no clear, orthodox answer in the history of the church (many formulations)
 2. But I am confident of my position
 3. Our church has a long history of practice here
 4. Our teaching has not been consistent, or, I'd argue, always in line with proper hermeneutics
- D. If we are to tithe, to whom/where? And how?
 1. Do we simply draw the analogy that the tithe now goes to the church?
 2. Remember the tithes purposes, amounts and destinations
 3. Many complex issues are resolved when you realize this
 - a) It is difficult to know how to apply the OT commands
 - b) The tithe was always only from Jews living within the Holy Land, and only off of the produce of the land
 - c) Creating analogies from this does not work sufficiently, BECAUSE WE WEREN'T INTENDED TO.

IV. Answer is no, The Old Covenant is now obsolete

- A. Hebrews 8:13 - Hebrews 8:13 (ESV) - "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."
- B. Because it is fulfilled!
- C. The tithe has been fulfilled
- D. So yay! We don't have to give anymore!
 1. Not so fast. The bible has much to say about giving apart from the mosaic law. The new testament has much to say for Christians!
- E. But the OT provides the backdrop for the discussion
 1. They would have had vows, offerings, contributions, and the 3+ tithes in mind when taught about giving in the new testament!

- F. 1 Corinthians 9 gives us a clue that we are intended to have this old system in mind.

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 (ESV)

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? 14 **In the same way**, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

V. Christian giving is "post tithe" - grace-based giving - 2 Corinthians 8-9

- A. **Relationship driven** - relationship with the lord and with the receiver – 2 Corinthians 8:5b (ESV) "...they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us."
- B. **Grace driven** - Response to God's Grace
- C. **Love driven** - A practical demonstration of your love for God and others. (see also 1 John 3:17)

2 Corinthians 8:8-9 (ESV) -

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 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.

VI. How Much?

- A. Just as in the OT we are never given an exact amount - so now, no specified amount.
- B. **From the Heart** - Exodus 25:1, 35:5, 21 & 2 Cor 9:7

2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

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- C. **Generously** - 2 Cor 8:2-3
- D. **According to ability** - Deut 16:16-17 * 2 Cor 8:12
- E. **To meet the needs** of the ministry and the saints - 1 Cor 9:1-14, 2 Cor 8:13-14, 2 Cor 9:12
 - 1. Who determines the need?
 - a) The church does!
 - b) Overseen by the elders, administered by the deacons

VII. Troubleshooting

- A. What if I don't want to?
- B. What if I don't feel like it?

BOTTOM LINE:

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Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Final comments

- If you've made a lifelong practice of "tithing" (giving 10% of your income), my goal is not to call that into question at all! Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity.
- Perhaps you have a sense of duty, calling from God to do so. If you are able to follow through on that duty with joy and contentment and cheerfulness, then keep it up!
- But if you've been giving that tithe out of a sense of compulsion. We have a deeper conversation to have. I'm not saying you should give less, but we might need to talk through your understanding of what God asks in this area.
- God gave you money in the first place for the sake of meeting needs, your own and others.
- How does your giving compare with other categories of your budget?
- What if you tried setting aside that 10% as the first thing you did with your money?
- What if you grew beyond that?
- Love as you have been loved. How have you been loved?
- Give as it's been given to you. How has it been given?
- There is no guilt, shame, or condemnation here. This is about grace. We're just acting like our father. Everything we have has been given to us in the first place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss your upbringing with giving to the church. How have you thought of it?
2. What have you been taught regarding the tithe? Compare that with the sermon.
3. What questions come up for you when you consider the sermon?
4. Can you say with a clear conscience that you are following Paul's instruction in 2 Corinthians 9:7-8?