



Giving in the Kingdom of God

It is more than obvious that it is in God's heart to give. Giving reflects God's character. He wants to bless and He even gave His own Son. In that case, it's not just a case of giving your money, but certainly also about giving yourself.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:9-10)

We will reap if we don't become weary. Doing good goes beyond merely giving money. It also involves giving time, love, creativity, grace, forgiveness, joy, thanks, prayer, blessing, effort, compassion, etc. In short: doing good.

We also know that giving money is heavily emphasized and that it is incredibly important. Often, we specifically raise this point when it comes to giving tithes to one's local church. This local church is often called the storehouse. That's where we bring our tithes, which is the ten percent of our income that belongs to God.

I have learned to believe, apply and teach this principle since a young age. It has blessed us, it has taught us to give consciously and we've never had a problem doing so. I've experienced it as a principle, not an obligation, and we've always given with love. Still, it is important to explore the reasons why we do what we do, and in the end, what matters is that we listen to what Holy Spirit says. It's a godly institution in the law and the question is to what extent this institution must still be "mandatory" in our lives. After all, this is also an area in which our thinking is being transformed.

Of course, there are always people who are looking for an excuse not to do what they are supposed to do. They apply all sorts of escape clauses in an attempt to justify why they do not need to give. This most certainly is not my aim. Things can only go better when new revelation comes from God's heart. It will only result in a larger flow of provision entering into the Kingdom of God.

Two approaches

Generally, there are two approaches to thinking about tithing. One is tithing according to the law, the other is tithing as it happened before the law was given.

I don't mean to say that the law is not important. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus says that He didn't come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. In other words, everything He said and did was a pure interpretation of the law. Jesus came to show people how they should live. Rabbi Jesus' yoke, which is His personal teaching, His take on life and the proclamation

of the Kingdom of God, as a whole, was a perfect interpretation of God's will .

Giving is a timeless, godly principle, but I do not believe that it can be biblically proven that the entire tithe should go to the same local church every month. It can't be proven based on the law, either. Certain remarks about this topic have put many people under great pressure. It is said that we are blessed when we bring the offering to the storehouse, but that we are cursed if we don't. However, this is not what Jesus meant by fulfilling the law. This is not His yoke. It is quite a serious problem if one gives people who are saved by the blood of Jesus the feeling that they are cursed.

Of course, giving always brings blessing, but I don't believe it's in God's heart to put pressure on people to do so. Paul clearly emphasizes a generous gift that has been prepared in advance, and not one that is given by extortion (2 Corinthians 9:5).

Giving based on the law

Tithing wasn't a law that applied to everyone either. It was only applicable to shepherds and farmers. Tithing had to do with the produce of the land, fruit and herds. In that sense, Jesus wasn't required to give tithes either. That doesn't mean to say that He didn't give much. In fact, He gave everything, even His life. I don't mean to say that the rest of the nation didn't give offerings or that they weren't asked to do so either. However, nowadays we speak about everyone being required to give ten percent of their income. This usually is supported by using a verse from Malachi and the related curse:

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "How have we robbed You?" In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! (Malachi 3:8-9)

What were people supposed to do with their tithes, according to the law? The tithes were holy for the Lord and that means that they had to be used according to His instructions. In Malachi 3:7 it is written that God's people had turned aside from His statutes and hadn't kept them.

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you. (Malachi 3:7)

What were those statutes?

At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town. The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

We could call this the storehouse, which was managed by the Levites, from which they could live and out of which they could give. Their fields were outside the town or city walls and they were spiritually responsible for the people in their town or city. Once every three years, people would bring their tithes for that year: from the produce of the land, from the fruit of the trees and the first fruit of the herd and flock. Once every three years, not every year. The tithes were used entirely differently in the other two years:

You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and (...) if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe (...) then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; (Deuteronomy 14:22-26)

They were not allowed to consume the tithes outside the place God had chosen for them. It had to be outside their town or city. Everyone was allowed to participate: sons, daughters, servants and not even the Levites were to be forgotten during this celebration. Clearly, the tithes' purpose was that it had to be used in an atmosphere of celebration, sharing and communion with God.

In separating and preparing the tithes, it wasn't necessarily a matter of selecting only the "best". Of course I don't mean to say that you need not give God your best... but in the end, everything belongs to Him, because we belong to Him. Giving the "best" as a tithe, as is often preached, was not a requirement for tithing by the Israelites:

For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. (Leviticus 27:32-33)

Hence, the Israelites used their tithes from the first and second year to celebrate with their families at a specified location. These celebrations did not occur in the third year, because the Israelites then brought their tithes to the storehouse close to where they lived. That tithe was meant for the Levite, who also gave a portion to the poor.

The situation before the law

Let's consider the practice of tithing before the law was given. The history of Abraham and Melchizedek is often used to prove the principle of tithing. A part of scripture is then used that refers to the gift that Abraham gave to Melchizedek:

He gave him a tenth of all. (Genesis 14:20)

However, it is clear from the context that these were tithes of the spoils of the war Abraham had waged against the kings from the east. Hebrews 7:4 confirms that Abraham gave a tithe of the choicest spoils. Hence, it does not refer to the rest of his property and/or income. Abraham must have given a great deal throughout his life. He was an incredibly wealthy man, but that in itself is not proof. Biblically, we see that Abraham “only” gave a one-time gift to Melchizedek. He didn’t keep any of the remaining ninety percent of the spoils for himself, but only gave to the men what they had eaten and the shares to the men who had gone with him (Genesis 14:21-24).

Jacob provides another example of how people tithed before the law was given. He was fleeing from his brother Esau. One night, he slept at Bethel and had a dream. When he awoke, he said:

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. (Genesis 28:16)

He then made a vow, saying:

If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You. (Genesis 28:20-22)

Jacob made a decision out of his own free will. He even set certain conditions that God had to fulfill before he would tithe whatever he were to receive from the Lord. And so here again, giving tithes before the law can be interpreted as a one-time event.

Applications

Many ministries and churches believe that the law of tithing applies to believers today and teach that the entire tithe of all income should go to the local church. However, in this case only one law applies, of course, and that is the law that applies to tithing which is found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

There isn’t any New Testament law related to tithing. If the law from the Old Testament were to be taught correctly, it should be taught that the tithes should be given to those who serve and equip in the church, to collective activities such as meals and celebrations, and to supporting the poor. It should then also be taught that the poor and those on social welfare should be exempted from giving tithes. In some cases they should even be able to receive support from the churches that collect tithes – granted, of course, that there is transparency and clarity in this matter. In the Old Testament, the poor were even allowed to glean in the fields after the reapers during the harvest season (Ruth 2:2-17).

If you believe that tithing is a principle imposed by law, or in other words something that you must do, and if you believe that it is valid and applicable to the church from the point of view of the New Testament, then that's what you should do. The Biblical perspective on tithing and how it should be done according to the law, however, is very clear. Consequently, I believe that it is essential for our thinking to be changed about this issue.

If you believe that giving in the New Testament merely is a matter of the heart and of obedience to God, then that's what you should do. You are a steward and at the end of the day, what matters is that you use your money the way God wants you to. In the meantime, while seeking Holy Spirit's guidance, you could apply the principle of tithing while looking for your own level of giving from God's heart and your own level of supporting those who serve you spiritually, for example.

Sensitivity in this process of being changed in our thinking is very important. Given the current take on tithes in many congregations, this subject could become a matter of great debate. It is crucial to talk about it within a good relationship. Many problems would arise if everyone were to suddenly change their mind about tithing and withdraw finances from their own churches.

By the way, there will always be certain expenditures that should be shared. That's completely normal. When you visit a church, it's normal that you share in such a facility's expenses. That includes utilities such as electricity, water, the building itself, materials for the nursery and for the children services. That's just good manners. You should also give with all your heart as God leads you. That could be in terms of a financial offering, clothing, food, anonymous gifts to specific people who need it. This applies to people attending the local congregation, but also to visitors. We should always give more than we take.

Paul says:

*... in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,
(2 Corinthians 8:2-3)*

Giving is in God's heart and the New Testament extensively deals with giving. This chapter is not written to minimize giving. On the contrary, giving with God's heart is incredibly abundant.

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