

Out of all of the topics that I could preach on, there's one which fills me with fear and trepidation. It's one which I'm really reluctant to preach on, because I don't want to be seen as 'that sort of preacher' or for us to be known as 'that sort of church'....

And I'm talking about "giving" or "tithing".

In some churches, you'll get a message on giving or tithing every single Sunday, and usually it comes just before the offering's taken up, to remind everybody to put plenty of cash on the plate.

*I once heard a pastor from a mega-church tell us his preaching plan. And what He did was, He preached in 4 different areas over 4 weeks and then he'd do them again:*

1. *So every month, you'd get a message on "being saved"*
2. *You'd get a message on evangelism – how to share your faith*
3. *Another week would be about serving – how we can serve in the church, and that would include gifts.*
4. *And every fourth week, He'd give a message on tithing.... Because churches need money to run, and a mega-church needs mega-amounts-of-money to run in a mega-sort-of-a-way...*

And it's easy to see why the Christian church can get a bad name for being money-hungry. And we've all

heard of pastors and tele-evangelists, who've been caught out in greed, and have amassed fortunes for themselves in the church business...

*In the U2 song, “Bullet the Blue Sky”, there’s a spoken bit that says:*

*“And I can’t tell the difference between ABC News,  
Hill Street Blues, And a preacher on the old time  
gospel hour,  
Stealing money from the sick and the old...  
Well the God I believe in isn’t short of cash  
mister!!!!*

And so I don’t want our little gathering here to be known as “that sort of church”, where they’re just after your money... But at the same time, I am charged with teaching the **whole** word of God – not just the bits that don’t scare me.

*One truth that I’ve found, is “Often, the last part of us to be saved, is our hip-pocket”. And maybe, that’s because people like me, have shied away from our responsibility of teaching what the Bible does say about giving and tithing.*

That of course, is one of the advantages of doing what we do here – we work our way through **whole** books of the Bible. I preach my way through an entire book, and avoid nothing that’s in it. That way, I only preach on

things as often as **God** brings them up.... And so today's lesson, is about tithing and giving....

It's a topic which, if we haven't considered it... - well we should've...

How much money should I put on the plate? – or of course here, how much money should I put in the little wooden box? Or how much should I send off to missionaries? Or how much should I put towards chaplaincy???? There's lots of good ministries craving our financial support – the need is **way** beyond our capacity to give, and so, knowing the need is so great, how much should we give?

Well, some people will tell you, “The **tithe** is God's model for giving – you should give 10%”. But of course, then the discussion comes, “Well, is that 10% of gross or 10% of net?” “Is that 10% before tax? Or 10% after tax?”...

But then some **others** will say “No, No. Tithing is an Old Testament principle, for those under the old covenant. But we're not under that covenant any more – we're under a new covenant of grace, so forget all about tithing...

Which is it? Well, today I'm going to take you through a logical lesson on what the Bible says about tithing and

giving. And then I'm going to share with you, how we've applied that in **our** family... But what I'm **not** going to do, is tell you that you have to do the same. How much **you** give – is something that's between you and God. I'm going to share with you what the Scriptures say about it. I'm going to tell you how the Holy Spirit has helped us to understand it, but I pray you will allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in **your** giving.

Are you happy with that???

1. Righto, so let's start with Tithing – what is a tithe?

Well, the word “tithe” means 1/10 – 10%.

Israel were an agrarian society – that means, ‘they grew their own tucker’. Everybody had an inheritance of land, and so **everybody** had the potential to grow food and fibre for themselves. And Leviticus 27:<sup>30</sup> “**Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the YHWH's; it is holy to the YHWH.**”<sup>31</sup> If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it.<sup>32</sup> And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the

YHWH. <sup>33</sup> One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed."

OK, so 1/10 of the animals that matured, 1/10 of the grain that was produced, 1/10 of the fruit that was grown – were to be given to God. But why? –for what purpose??? What happened to this **enormous** amount of produce??? You realise – we're talking 10% of their gross national product – that's an enormous amount of produce... - I'll tell you what happened to it – it went to the tribe of Levi.

When I said that God gave an inheritance of agricultural land to the 12 tribes of Israel, that isn't entirely true: there was **one** tribe that missed out, and that tribe, was the tribe of Levi... And they didn't miss out because they were being punished for something – they missed out because they were being rewarded.

That sounds a bit back-to-front, doesn't it? ... Back in Exodus 32 is where we find the people of Israel running amuck... Moses had been up on the mountain Sinai getting the Ten Commandments, and the people thought "Moses, you've been there too long – God's deserted

us”, and so they gathered together their gold ear rings and made a golden calf. Remember the story?

Well, when Moses came down from the mountain, he was devastated by what they’d done. And he said, “**Who is on YHWH’s side? Come to me?**” And the Levites all stood with Moses, against the Golden calf and against the idol worshippers... (And at Moses’ command, and they took their swords and killed about 3000 of the offenders)...

And for this reason – for their loyalty to God – for their standing against idolatry, God rewarded them by designating this tribe of Levi, to serve in the tabernacle... They weren’t going to have time to farm. They answered the call of God, and they were rewarded, by becoming His ministers in the tabernacle – just like people answer the call of God today.

Now, the Levites are not to be confused with the priests. The priests were **from** the tribe of Levi, but more specifically, they were descendants of Aaron. Alright, so Aaron’s descendants became the priests. ... But the rest of the male Levites, were called by God, to serve Him in the Tabernacle in other ways (but not as priests) – they looked after all of the temple religious items, they carried the ark of the covenant, they set up and pulled down and transported the Tabernacle when they had to move it, they regulated weights and measures –

they did all sorts of stuff – public service, and religious service.

And their payment for this, was the receipt of the tithe.

And so the Levites were to receive this tithe from the rest of Israel, **as their right**. And if **everybody** gave them their full share of the 10%, then they'd have just as much as everybody else, because they then had to tithe to God. 1/10 of what the Levites received (so a tithe of the tithe), they then gave that to the priests, for their share, and for the running of the temple...

And, if you've ever had anything to do with church finances, I reckon that's a pretty good number to aim for – 90% of the offerings to be spent in ministry, and 10% of the offerings to be spent in maintenance and property costs, and so on...

OK? So that's what the tithe was... 10% of everything that was produced. (10% gross. 10% before tax)..

2. The second point I want to make is, “In the Old Testament, the tithe was separate to generosity.”

For the Levites, the tithe was their right – you weren't giving a Levite charity by bringing 10% of what you'd grown, to the temple. These men worked full time in God's service, and it was right for them to receive this,

so that **they** could feed and care for their families, and maintain a similar status-of-living, as everybody else, who **did** have land.

So the tithe was not charity – it was a right.

But God is also **very** concerned for the poor and the helpless – for the sick, the crippled, the lame – for the blind, the deaf, the widow and the fatherless – for all of those who cannot take care of themselves... Dare I say, “The alien” “The refugee”... You **cannot** read the prophets – you **cannot** read the gospels, without this **glaring** you in the face – “Be generous to those in need”...

So the Old Testament principle was “Give what you owe” in the tithe – not the second best bits, but 1/10 as it comes... And the second principle is, “Give generously to those in need”.

3. So, that’s the Old Testament, and it is true, that this is all part of living in the old covenant. And if you’ve ever been taught by somebody, the ‘**rule**’, that you **must** tithe 10%, well that’s wrong. The tithe is not a rule that **we** have to keep. But does that mean we’re exempted from giving? “No, it doesn’t.”

We don’t have any Levites in our midst, but right from the very beginnings of the church – right from the very

first disciples (and actually from Jesus Himself), the principle has always been there, of the right for those in service of the Gospel, to be supported by other Christians. And just like the Levites – not as charity – but as a right to be received by them, and a duty to be provided by other Christians. 1 Timothy 5: <sup>18</sup> **For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages."**

*I sometimes joke about 'having a real job' to fund my ministry habit... That's wrong. And I know other Christian workers have been offended by my saying it, because they are quite right – full time Christian workers, **are** in a job, and they **deserve** pay as their right – not as charity...*

So, if Christian work is to be funded, who does the funding?

*A minister once said to his congregation, "I have 2 pieces of news to share with you. Firstly, God has provided the full finances required, for ministry in this town..." and everybody shouted, "Hallelujah". "The other piece of news is, that money is still in your pocket."... There was no 2<sup>nd</sup> hallelujah.*

Alright, we know where it's got to come from – obviously from each of us – how do we know what we should give?

Well, in the Old Testament, and the New Testament, there's plenty of lessons on giving. We could start right here at the bible reading we had this morning... The Pharisees and the scribes tithed everything. Even down to the herbs in their garden – 9 leaves of mint to go with the mutton roast – 1 leaf of mint for the offering...

Now, Jesus got up them – not for tithing, but for neglecting justice; mercy; faithfulness. And He said:

**These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.** Don't neglect your tithe – still give to God, but also have generous and giving hearts on top of that. Now, that sounds familiar, doesn't it? ... Well it is – It's almost exactly what we find in the Old Testament. Give the tithe as a right to those who have given up their own source of income, so they can concentrate on service to God... **And**, be generous to those in need, as part of your regular life....

And so a principle I've always had – right through my working life – is the tithe (10% of gross), is the starting point of our offering to Christian ministry – It's the first line of our personal budget... And then, be generous to the poor, after that. But I don't look at it, as a tithe – it

is not a law – it is not a rule – I look at it as a starting point.

*When you're operating heavy machinery, you've got an oil pressure gauge – And there's a point on that gauge that the needle should not go below. It doesn't matter – in fact it's good if it's up higher, - but if it's down below that point, some adjustments need to be made... And for me, the 10% is like that low point. If I'm **not** giving 10% well to **me**, that's an indicator that some adjustments need to be made to our life-style, so we **can** afford to be more generous in supporting ministry and mission... To me it's not a law, ... but it's a useful measuring stick of how my giving's going.*

The **greater** influence on our giving, is something Paul said: When the apostle Paul was urging the Corinthian church to give, in 2 Corinthians he said this:

2 Corinthians 9:<sup>6</sup> **The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> As it is written,

"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever."

<sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

.....And there's more there – you can read it all when you go home.

What are the principles?:

## 1.

Firstly, give as you have decided in your heart to give. (Sometimes we make the decision "Right, I'm going to give, and I'm going to support this ministry, and I'm going to do it regularly"... but then we never get around to it.) Give as you have decided in your heart to give. If the Holy Spirit has put it on your heart – if He has moved you to support a ministry – do it – make sure it happens... Because any minister worth his salt is not going to chase you up on that one – that'd just make him feel like he was chasing you for your money. Once you decide to do it, make sure it gets done – it's up to

you.

2.

Second principal: Don't do it reluctantly. We don't do it because we feel we have to... Why? Because **God loves a cheerful giver.**

God loves it, when we get joy out of giving. And it **is** a joy to give. Why do you think parents get so much joy at Christmas time – it's because they've got an excuse to give to their kids. We get joy out of giving...

You see, the Holy Spirit in our heart, can achieve what the Law was **never** able to do... There used to be a **law**, to give your 10% to fund ministry – that law failed (and of course when it failed, the first ones to suffer, were the Levites) – The Law of tithing leads to questions like “Is it 10% of gross? Or 10% of net? Is it before tax? Or is it after tax???? If I'm asking those sorts of questions, it's a pretty fair indicator, that I'm giving as a matter of law...

But the Holy Spirit in our heart, can achieve, what the Law cannot. Giving becomes a joy – it's not a rule. And the way I've looked at it, is “If these guys (these Pharisees) could tithe out of compulsion, well, if the Holy Spirit's in **my** heart, I shouldn't have any trouble doing it with the motivation of love and joy...

### 3.

Third principal: We'll always have enough. God provides seed for the sower. I've **never** seen anyone starve to death, because they've supported Christian mission. In my experience, when **we've** given, we've **always** had enough.

### 4.

Fourth principal: **When** we give, in return, we receive. Sometimes, it might be financial blessings – but **more** often, we receive spiritual blessings (which are far more beneficial).

**verse 10** He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply **your** seed for sowing (alright, so when we give, God will make sure we still have enough – not only enough to live on, but enough so we can keep **on** giving) and increase the harvest of your righteousness.  
**11** You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way

### 5.

Fifth principal: Those who give, partake in the harvest of righteousness.

Not all of us are evangelists, but we can help support evangelists. Not all of us are preachers, but we can help support preachers. Not all of us are pastors, but we can help support pastors. Not all of us are translators or missionaries or chaplains or healers... But we **can** support those who are.

And when we support these people, we are partaking with them – we are enabling them – we are working **with** them, in the ministry that God has called them and us to. We are sharing with them, in the harvest of righteousness, by supporting them. When we support them, they know we value what they're doing, as we partner with them in the way that we can.

Alright, so those are some of the principles.

I told you at the beginning, I'd share with you what the Bible says about it, and then I'd share with you how **we** apply it in **our** lives... (I've already done a bit of that)

When I was a young fella, and first started work, I took the law of tithing, and I kept it as a law. And let me tell you, it **can** be done. If it's the first line on your budget, you can **always** make it happen...

But as I grew older, I began to understand the difference between the Old Covenant and the New. And I

understood, that I didn't **have** to keep the tithing law... But I knew it could be done – so, why would I give any less? What could possibly be my motivation, for giving less? To give less, is that a craving of the spirit, or a craving of the flesh? And I knew the answer. The Spirit wasn't telling me to give less. The Spirit fills me with joy, when we support ministry... But the flesh is always competing for the dollar...

The ministries we support with our money, at this stage, are mainly Bush Disciples and chaplaincy, because we really value local ministry... But then, it's very important to us, to be generous to those in need. So, on top of our tithe, we have sponsor children with compassion, and give to others in need, as the need arises.

Now, I'm not telling you this, to put us up on a pedestal, or whatever... Just sometimes, it's helpful to have an example of how other Christians apply Biblical principles in **their** lives.

That's how the Holy Spirit has led **us**, to the point that **we're** at, with **our** giving.

If you truly want to know God's will for you, in the area of giving, search the Scriptures, and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you, into **God's** will for your giving. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you where to give, and how much.

You don't have to mirror what I do, because giving, isn't a law... But when God speaks, and guides you, obey Him immediately, because when we give, we give to God, what is already His.

Questions?