

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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BIBLICAL GIVING

This is a subject of great importance, and yet much misunderstood today. It is essential we bring the principles of the New Testament to bear when we consider the biblical doctrine of giving. However, the Old Testament principles must also be borne in mind to get a full biblical perspective.

1. In the Old Testament

- a) The amount of the tithe - Genesis 14 v 17 – 20. The amount of the tithe (10%) was established through Abram's gift to Melchizadek.
- b) The status of the tithe - Leviticus 27 v 30 – 32. The tithe already "belonged to the Lord". In other words, the Old Testament people were to regard 10% of their income as already the Lord's portion, and for which they were stewards. That meant that not to give it, as God directed, was theft, not just meanness. It was not their wealth that they were deciding to give, but God's wealth that had been entrusted to them.
- c) The purpose of the tithe - Deuteronomy 14 v 22 – 29. For two years in every three the tithe was to be taken to the centre of national worship (eventually Jerusalem) for the support and use of the priests and levites. One year in three the tithe was to be taken to the local centre of worship for the use of local priests and also for the alleviation of poverty in the local community. Thus, the tithe was for the support of those engaged in "full-time" service and as a social security provision for the poor. In addition, when people gave their tithe they were to do so with joy and have a celebratory meal.
- d) The importance of the tithe - Malachi 3 v 6 – 10. God held the people responsible for stewardship of the principles of justice and mercy that lay behind the tithe teaching, and again emphasised that they were guilty of theft by ignoring them. Indeed, their own blessing depended on their obedience in this vital area of national and personal life. The storehouse is very much part of the old covenant system and cannot be used to signify the Church under the new covenant, as the Church is not Israel.
- e) The principle restated - Matthew 23 v 23. Jesus demonstrated that the principles of justice and mercy that lay behind the rules on tithing still stood, and that without them the most fastidious observance of the tithe (such as counting out individual seeds in the ratio 9:1) was sheer hypocrisy.

2. The role of the Law today

This section of our study shows the general application of Old Testament principles to us today, living in the New Testament era.

- a) The Law is good - Psalm 19 v 7 – 8. We must avoid the temptation to reject God's Law as irrelevant in principle. It remains God's standard of absolute holiness.
- b) The Law still stands but has been fulfilled in Jesus - Matthew 5 v 17 – 20. As the perfect human, and born as a Jew, Jesus fulfilled the Law in His own life. Now we are "in Christ", His righteousness is our covering, and we are complete in Him. This is why God can extend His grace to folk in all cultures. In the Church age our

redemption depends not on our observance of the Law, but our being “in Christ”. However, just because we are justified by His righteousness, our own personal responsibility to live a holy life has not been removed.

- c) Now, our responsibility is the law of love - Romans 13 v 8 – 10. Under the new covenant, our way of achieving holiness is not through the letter of the Law, but through discovering its root principles of love, first towards God and then towards our “neighbour”. Through this love, the purpose behind the Law will take shape in our lives, maybe without our even being aware of it.

3. In the New Testament

- a) The basis of giving is faith and love - 2 Corinthians 9 v 6 – 11. For many Christians 10% is still a useful guide, based on the Old Testament principle, but we are not under a legal obligation. The whole basis of New Testament theology is our own personal walk with God, who knows our individual needs and has a specific plan for each of His children. This applies in the area of our giving as well as in all other aspects of our life. Understanding this will remove a lot of the confusion about gross or net income, stewardship of time, whether to tithe our possessions and gifts, what we do in times of unemployment or sickness, etc. We are not under a system of law, but in a personal love relationship with the Lord, who will guide us into personal faith and exercise of stewardship according to the work of His grace in our lives and in the light of our individual circumstances. In other words, our constant guide is: “Lord, what would you have me to do?” Therefore legalistic rules by churches in the matter of giving are unbiblical, in my view; they confuse the separate principles of God’s dealings with Israel and the Church. Any advice, such as 10%, gross rather than net, direction of gifts, etc., should be just that, advice. As stewards, we will each have to give a personal account to Him, and we need to use our God-given common sense here and now, especially in matters that may lead to debt. The direction of our giving should still fulfil the old principles of justice and mercy, and in particular ought to be for the support of those in full-time service for God and for those (Christian or not) with spiritual or physical needs, and not just to make our churches and life of worship grander and more comfortable. Similarly, whatever we do feel called to give, it then becomes His portion for which we are stewards, and not to give it would be theft. The New Testament shows there are two directions for our giving.
- b) Personal responsibility - Matthew 6 v 1 – 4. This is clearly taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and no Christian leader has the right to take away from individual Christians this God-given aspect of their giving. The joy of obeying the Lord’s personal directions in the stewardship of our finances needs to be experienced to be believed.
- c) Collective responsibility - 2 Corinthians 8 v 1 – 5. We also need to be aware of the joy of collective giving through our local church, especially at times of special need as was the case here. If this is such an important part of our worship together, then collective giving should be made to be open and joyful, and not just left in the hands of the treasurer, as so often happens. Similarly, the church officers should never take the contributions of individual Christians for granted. It may even be a good idea to revive the Old Testament custom of having a meal together when we have reached collective God-given targets.