

Giving for the Gospel!

For many, if not most, the thing that they guard most carefully, even more than their time, is their money. When money is even mentioned from the pulpit on a Sunday morning, many cringe and shift uncomfortably in their seats, possibly (at least for the men) shifting their weight over their wallet to guard what they hold most dear. We should not shy away from money-talk, especially since Jesus talked about it so much in the gospels. The purpose of this paper is to address the subject of giving and to answer a few questions: where does the mandate “to give” come from; why do we give; how much should we give; and what should motivate our giving? This is not meant to be an academic paper, but rather a helpful guide to God’s people at MCC for knowing what the Bible says about tithing and giving. I hope and pray that you find it helpful.

The tithe, or giving of 10% by God’s people, originated in the Old Testament. Therefore, let’s begin our search there! In fact, let’s go all the way back to the book of Genesis. However, before we start, let me explain what I’m setting out to do in this first section of my paper. My intention is for you to see the connection between the office of priest in the Old Testament and the office of pastor/elder in the New Testament. The reason this connection is important is that the original tithe was intended to support the priests and their ministry. In the same way, a part of the tithe given in our churches today is used to support pastors/elders and their ministry. Alright, here we go! Back to Genesis! Adam and Eve, the first two humans created by God, were given a very distinct calling. Adam and Eve were called “to work” and “to keep” the Garden of Eden, God’s sacred space (**Genesis 2:15**). This was a call to protect God’s sacred space from outside evil influence. What does this have to do with tithing? Just keep reading.

The same two Hebrew words (“to work” and “to keep”) are applied to the vocation of the priests and Levites in **Numbers 3:7-8; 18:7**. They were called by God to *serve* and *protect* the tabernacle, God’s sacred space. They were tasked by God “to keep guard over the sanctuary and over the altar, that there may never again be wrath on the people of Israel (**Numbers 18:5**).” The worship of God under the old covenant, with its sacrifices and numerous stipulations, was serious business. If things weren’t done a certain way, or if the priests and utensils used in the sacrificial system weren’t washed according to God’s clear instructions, then death would befall God’s people (**Exodus 30:20**)! Wow! The priests and Levites were called to represent God’s people before the Creator, performing the different sacrifices necessary for appeasing the wrath of God and ultimately pointing to the once-for-all sacrifice to come—Jesus Christ!

This same priestly vocation is now applied to all of God’s people and yet it is the Lord’s will to set pastors/elders over God’s people to lead in this work. Pastors/elders have been called by God to protect God’s sacred space, the Spirit-filled body of Christ (the church), by preaching the full counsel of God, shepherding followers of Christ and equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (**Ephesians 4:11**). Again, please understand that I believe that all members of the church are called to protect the body against false teaching and to teach the word to one another; however, as clearly seen throughout Scripture, pastors/elders are called to lead in this role! Paul continues to unpack the purpose of the pastor-teacher’s ministry as “building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (vv. 12-14).”

Simply put, the equipping work of the pastor-teacher is to help produce unity and maturity amongst God's people and to help safeguard God's people against false doctrine (outside evil influence)! Sound familiar?

Therefore, it may be argued that pastors today function in a role similar to priests and Levites, having been tasked by God to serve and protect His body, the church, God's sacred space, against false teaching! Again, this task is for all God's people and yet pastors/elders are the ones, provided by God, to help lead the charge and cultivate a culture of discipleship around the gospel of God in the church! Again, what does this have to do with tithing?

The Levites were to be supported by the Israelites through the tithe. **Numbers 18:20-21** reads, ²⁰ And the Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel. ²¹ "To the Levites I have given every tithe for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting..."

W.H. Bellinger writes: "The Levites have no other way of supporting themselves and so receive the tithe, one-tenth of the livestock and harvest from the people (see **Deut. 14:22-29**). The Levites perform a significant work for the people and put themselves at risk in so doing. It is appropriate that they receive support."

The tithe was God's design for supporting the ministry! Is this same support for the ministry and God's ministers encouraged in the New Testament? In **1 Timothy 5:17-18** Paul writes: ¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."" Here, Paul instructs God's people in supporting those tasked with ministering to God's people. Let me be clear here. Pastor/elders are not to be viewed as superior-Christians or celebrities within the household of God! May it never be! Instead, pastors/elders are those uniquely called to lead the charge in the great commission work of God's church, a commission that applies to all believers! They are to lead the charge in teaching God's word, but at the same time are merely co-workers and co-servants of King Jesus in the work of gospel ministry that should be happening through all of God's people. But is this the only point of giving in the Bible? Is it only to support those tasked with preaching and safeguarding the gospel for God's people?

In numerous places throughout Paul's letters we have examples of collections being taken up to support gospel ministry and to provide for the needs of God's people (**1 Cor. 16:1-4; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 11:27-30; 2 Cor. 8:16-9:15**). In recounting his conversation with Peter, James and John, Paul writes, "Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (**Galatians 2:10**). **1 John 3:17-18** reads, ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." From these two examples we see that there was an enormous emphasis upon caring for the poor within the family of God in the early church.

We still need to answer a fundamental question: Why give? What should be the motivation for our giving? Based on the passages above, the most obvious answer is obedience. But what does our obedience spring from? It springs from a new heart, a heart transformed by the Spirit of God and the hearing of the gospel! R. Kent Hughes writes, "Jesus and the apostles saw giving as a token of the heart

response to the gospel.” The gospel of Jesus Christ, once embraced, results in a new way of living, thinking, speaking and spending. Yes, even spending. Entrance into God’s Kingdom, His saving rule, brings us face-to-face with *God’s economy* and *an eternal perspective*.

God’s economy concerns imitating the generosity and sacrificial love of King Jesus! Recall Paul’s words in **2 Corinthians 8:9**: “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.” Christ gave up His life to make us rich spiritually, namely to bring us back into a relationship with God! We imitate that sacrificial love by using our monetary resources to pour into God’s kingdom work! We give to see the gospel go forward! As Christians, seeing God’s Kingdom expand as the gospel goes forward should be our primary focus!

Next, a word on eternal perspective. The gospel changes our worldview and moves us to see beyond this momentary life into eternity. Rather than piling money away for our fame, security and personal kingdom, we are now moved by the gospel to give sacrificially to God’s Kingdom work! In **Mark 8:36** Jesus asks the following question, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” In the broader context of Mark 8 we find Jesus teaching on the subject of discipleship. A true disciple of Jesus willfully spends his or her life for the glory of God. A true disciple is more concerned with investing in eternal things than earthly things, because a true disciple is more concerned with God (see **Mark 8:34**). By giving we are investing in gospel ministry geared towards reaching unbelievers, near and abroad, for the glory of God!

But how much should we give? As seen above, the biblical principle laid out clearly in God’s word is 10% of one’s income. However, that should never serve as a cap! Tim Keller writes: “There have been times when people have come to me as their pastor, and asked about “tithing,” giving away a tenth of their annual income. They notice that in the Old Testament there are many clear commands that believers should give away 10 percent. But in the New Testament, specific, quantitative requirements for giving are less prominent. They often asked me, “You don’t think that now, in the New Testament, believers are absolutely required to give away ten percent, do you?” I shake my head no, and they give a sigh of relief. But then I quickly add, “I’ll tell you why you don’t see the tithing requirement laid out clearly in the New Testament. Think. Have we received more of God’s revelation, truth, and grace than the Old Testament believers, or less?” Usually there is uncomfortable silence. “Are we more ‘debtors to grace’ than they were, or less? Did Jesus ‘tithed’ his life and blood to save us or did he give it all?” Tithing is a minimum standard for Christian believers. We certainly wouldn’t want to be in a position of giving away less of our income than those who had so much less of an understanding of what God did to save them.”” Remember, as Christians we are now living within God’s economy and have embraced an eternal perspective, because of the gospel! Let’s summarize what’s been said so far and conclude by examining our hearts.

In summary:

- We give to support God’s ministers and the ministry of the church, as established in the Old Testament and continued in the New Testament.
- We give to care for God’s people who are poor and suffering.
- We give to support God’s kingdom work near and abroad.

- We give out of obedience, but most importantly, our obedience springs forth from hearts that have been transformed by the gospel!
- Lastly, as it concerns amount, 10% is the minimum standard, but not the cap.

As I mention on Sunday mornings, our giving should be done out of obedience, gratitude and a desire to see the gospel go forward. All of this is motivated by a heart made new by the Spirit of God! Furthermore, our giving is an act of worship, because our obedience to God's word is an act of loving worship to our King (**John 14:15**)! Let me conclude with Jesus's words in **Matthew 6:21**: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." How and where we spend and give acts like a barometer for the human heart. Does your giving correspond to a heart transformed by the gospel and committed to God's kingdom work? Are you more concerned with investing in the eternal kingdom work of God or are you more concerned with storing up wealth here on earth, wealth that will have no eternal value and will make no eternal difference? May we imitate God in our giving, who gave His very life to rescue us from His wrath against sin!