



CHRIST^{THE} KING

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

What We Believe - A Biblical Theology of Giving *By Pastor Peter LaPointe*

You are probably familiar with the concept of the tithe – the ten percent of your total income club that pastors love to wield against their stingy congregations from time to time. I want to expose you to a teaching about such things which might, on the surface, seem rather like heresy, but which I believe will free you up to make an intelligent decision concerning your giving to the Lord and His work. I could easily call this article “Why I Don’t Believe in Tithing”. Got your attention? Good!

What is a tithe and what does it have to do with me?

In the Old Covenant (Testament) God created a theocracy which was to be administered by prophets and priests. The material focal point of this ‘God is our King government’ was first the tabernacle and then the temple. Accordingly, God instituted, for the maintenance of the priesthood, the temple and everything in and about the temple, a pattern for giving, which we know as the tithe. Some scholars believe there were three such annual tithes, two amounting to 10 percent each and one of 5 percent. If this is the case, then the average Israelite gave back to God one quarter of his income in the form of produce of the land (grain, animals, etc.) If this is true, a case could be made that God’s people have been robbing him for two millennia!

Thankfully, your pastor is convinced that the Old Testament tithe, being tied to Israel in the Old Covenant, is no longer a requirement for God’s people today. It was a part of Israel’s ceremonial law, which has been fulfilled in Christ (much like dietary regulations, circumcision and the like). However, many Old Testament principles have a new and deeper New Testament application (cf the Sermon on the Mount). So what does the New Testament have to say about giving? A good bit!

Essentially, New Testament teaching on giving can be summarized as follows: Give ***Sacrificially***, give ***Systematically***, give ***Spontaneously*** and give ***Smilingly***. Clever, is it not?

First, Give Sacrificially.

Luke 21:2 is the story of the poor widow who put into the temple treasury twice the smallest amount possible. She is remembered not because she put in much – she did not. She is remembered because she put in ***all!*** Everything she had! Why? Probably because she trusted God to provide for her needs. This is an act of simple trust and worship. Jesus admires such carelessness! Compare her giving to that of the rich and famous, who only give for tax benefit, or to make a show, or to assuage a guilty conscience. These give much or little – no matter! They give only from their excess! It doesn’t really hurt. There is no sacrifice involved at all. It will never be missed! Faithful, sacrificial giving pleases Jesus. Read also II Corinthians 8:1-9.

Second, Give Systematically.

There are several passages that speak of a careful, thoughtful process in giving. I Corinthians 16:1 shows a very deliberate and calculated process for the weekly collection of offerings for the relief of the saints. II Corinthians 9:1-5 shows the same process of thoughtful calculation. The principle seems to be that we give best when we have carefully planned our regular giving. Our giving should reflect order. There should be a “system” to it.

Third, Give Spontaneously.

This seems quite at odds with the former principle, but it is not. Rather, this represents an altogether different category of giving – the love gift. According to Jesus, there is a place for spontaneous giving, where you “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3). Of course, unless you have a severe personality disorder, this is quite impossible! But Jesus is using a figure of speech to communicate spiritual truth. According to Jesus, when given opportunity to give (or serve) in order to help the helpless or needy, we are not to give it a second thought. Our heart’s inclination is to be ready and willing whenever the need arises.

Fourth, Give Smilingly.

Back in II Corinthians 8 and 9, where Paul teaches about sacrificial and systematic giving, he also gives us another principle. Chapter 9 verse 7 reads “So let each one give as he purposes (thoughtful system) in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Do you see it? We are not to be “bah! humbug!” in our giving. We are to love to give. If we love to give, we will do it with great pleasure! Pleasure is pleasant! Pleasant things bring smiles to our faces! Giving sacrificially, systematically, spontaneously ought to be a source of immense joy!

So there you have it. Maybe you would like to be told how much to give – what percentage. Sorry, can’t do it! You have to figure it all out while you are working out your salvation in fear and trembling. There are no gimmicks. God promises to bless those who trust Him. This means you may give in these ways and be financially blessed. It might also mean that you run out of money. The only thing God promises to His people is that He will be their God and take care of their real needs. That’s why we are called to live by faith and not by sight. As my former professor Steve Brown says: “Now you think about that!” Shalom!