

GIVING A TITHE AND BEYOND

According to a George Gallup survey, in the average church 17 % claim to tithe but only 3 % actually do so. This giving is split into various support categories, including Cross-Cultural Missions. OK, maybe Free Methodists are somewhat more generous. But we are still a ways from the tithe or ten percent!

There's a website dedicated to debunking the notion of tithing, titled. "No more tithing." "Christians can be free of the bondage of tithing and give the same way it is taught and demonstrated in the New Covenant. The Bible teaches that we are to enjoy being generous!" What an odd contrast-between tithing and joyful generosity! Why could they and should they not go together?

But the truth is you and I don't have to tithe! We don't HAVE TO tithe! Instead we GET TO give a tithe and, in fact, give beyond a tithe. I recommend we commit to tithing as a voluntary spiritual discipline. Tithing was required in the Law of Moses. But under the New Testament way of relating to God, tithing is a spiritual discipline.

But tithing was never intended to be a cap on giving. One saving grace of tax time for me is the excitement I feel when I pull figures together and find out how much we gave to God and God's Work in the last year. I remember the first year we gave 15 %. What a kick! I read of some affluent people who deliberately limit their life style so they can give more, up to fifty percent away.

Members of our church told me they had received counsel from a financial advisor that they were giving away too much. Obviously, we have to take care of our own reasonable needs. But give too much?

Generous giving of the tithe and beyond follows the example of our Lord and

enables the purposes of God's Kingdom to move forward. "You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor..." (II Corinthians 8:9) II Corinthians 8:1-4 celebrates how Macedonian churches gave generously to care for the needs of others.

Giving a tithe and beyond helps break the power money and things have over us "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

Giving generously of the tithe and beyond is a blessing to the giver. "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (II Corinthians 9:6-11)

After a pastor made an appeal for a worthy cause a member of the church handed him a check for \$50. She asked if her gift was satisfactory. The pastor replied, "If it represents you." After a moment of soul-searching she asked for her check back. A day or two later she returned with a check for \$5,000 and again asked the same question, "Is my gift satisfactory?" The pastor gave the same answer as before, "If it represents you." After a few moments of hesitation she took back the check and left. Later in the week she came again with a check. This time it was for \$50,000. This time, she said: "After earnest, prayerful thought, I have come to the conclusion that this gift does represent me and I am happy to give it."

Does our level of giving represent gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus? Have we artificially capped our giving at ten percent when God wants to use us to provide resources for His people and for Kingdom work by giving beyond the tithe?

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