

What Do the Bible and Jesus Say about Giving 10 Percent?

Big Picture:

The Bible talks about money and how we should relate to money quite a bit. What are we to do with the money we have? A lot can and should be said. This article summarizes some key truths about one core concept: tithing.

The Bible before Jesus: 10%

Prior to Jesus, tithing was an act where a person gave 10% of what they earned to God, specifically to the people and institutions that helped individuals worship God. Example: "To the Levites [people that served in the Temple] I have given every *tithe* in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting..." (Numbers 18:21)

There is also evidence that there were tithes given to religious festivals, and also a tithe given to support the poor, orphans, and widows. Some believe this was in addition to the first 10% mentioned above (thus totally 23% of income and functioned in some way like taxes, given God's people were also a socio-political nation); others believe it was in substitution of the initial 10%. (See Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 14:23, 28-29; 26:12-13)

The tithe was related to and reflected a bigger concept in the Bible: the firstfruits principle. This was the idea that everything belonged to God, and as such the "first" and best things received (in livestock, produce, and children) should be given to God to reflect this reality and give thanks for His provision. See Proverbs 3:9, Leviticus 19:23-25, Exodus 13:11-15.

The Bible During and After Jesus: Don't Let 10% Constrain You

When Jesus came, he "fulfilled" the Law (Matthew 5:17-18). While there is debate as to what this exactly means, at the very least it means that Jesus: 1) lived the Law perfectly- both the letter and intention of the Law, and 2) acts as the one who tells us how we are to really live out God's desired righteousness (see context of Matthew 5).

What does this mean for the tithe? It is clear that the New Testament says we are not obliged to follow the Old Testament Law as a means of entering into and maintaining a relationship with God (see Galatians 5 as one of many examples). *As such we can confidently say that we are not "obliged" to tithe.*

However, note how Jesus calls us to a "living rightly" (righteousness) beyond the Old Testament Law (Matthew 5:20). For example, the Law had said "do not murder." Jesus goes beyond and says our living rightly has to be even deeper: hating someone is a violation of the right living God wants (Matthew 5:21-26). He notes this for a number of the main commandments. So what about "tithing?"

It turns out that Jesus, along with the rest of the New Testament, desires generous, joyful, sacrificial giving. In many passages, this would seem to imply going beyond 10% (Luke 19:1-10, 21:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). This must be freely chosen and should not be coerced (2 Cor. 9:7). As with the Old Testament, there is great blessing- material and spiritual, temporal and eternal- tied in with this; in fact, to abstain from giving may mean missing out on blessing (Malachi 3:6-12, 2 Cor. 9:6).

Our Challenge: Start with 10%

As such, at Ethnos we encourage all members to view giving 10% as a good starting place in their journey with God. We believe that giving 10% to the local church is ideal (for why, listen to the following <http://ethnos.us/resources/messages/who-should-we-be-generous-towards/>), with even more giving (beyond 10%!) to other causes. While this may seem impossible to do for a whole host of reasons (debt, low income, etc.) the reality is that giving in this manner is a means of seeing God work and provide.

To grow toward giving in this way (and deal with things like debt along the way!), we encourage you to check out our bi-annual giving workshop. If you'd like more, you can take an online class at <http://www.daveramsey.com/fpu>, or read *The Treasure Principle* by Randy Alcorn.