

Your money or your life?

Introduction...

In the UK we spend 557 billion on sports, 17 billion on beer, 12.5 billion on Cigarettes, 9 billion on pornography, and only give 7.1 billion to charity.

The interesting truth is that, **what we spend our money on is what we believe in, its what has gripped our hearts...** So what about the church?

Well the view people can have of the church in regards to money is that of a highway man. A mysterious figure creeps up on you, catching you by surprise and thrusts a pistol in your face asking for your money or your life.

Everyone has heard someone say, 'The church is only there to rob you of your money.'

Firstly I want to dispel the highway mans lie. **Church is not about money but**

Jesus. However, those who love Jesus want to use their resources for him (time, talents and money). It is sad to read that only 5% of Christians tithe, and for those who do only 2.6% of their total income is given.

Interestingly God does not need our money but allows us to work with him using all that we have, because in so doing we worship God and receive his joy and fullness. We get the privilege of working with the almighty God...

So lets look at some principles...

The Bishop of London at the wedding of Prince William and Catherine, said these words: ...the more we give of self, the richer we become in soul; the more we go beyond ourselves in love, the more we become our true selves and our spiritual beauty is more fully revealed.

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This is true in every area of our life including our finances.. Even the wealthy atheists see these truths, and the importance of generosity... Bill Gates, Warren Buffet and the many other wealthy captains of industry have pledged much of their wealth to charity. However, its not just about the wealthy giving out of their wealth... We are all called to be generous for Jesus.

So how or what should we give?

Everything is God's, we are His stewards, all we have is His – Psalm 24. So we should be willing to give anything, because its Gods in the first place. However, the definition of tithe is derived from the Hebrew word, asair, which means to give the tenth part of. The bible teaches us that at least 10% of our income should go to the church, so that it can be used to bring Gods Kingdom to the community we live.

This is what the bible says...

The OLD TESTAMENT:

Genesis 14: Abraham tithes 10% to Melchizedek.

Malachi 3:6-12: Bring the whole tithe (10%) into the storehouse (church), that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing (spiritual blessing) that there will not be room enough to store it.

Nehemiah 10:35-39: ...and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God.

Isaiah 58v6-12: Tells us that the fast God has chosen, is one that leads to action through our giving (time, money and talents).

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

2 Corinthians 9:6-8: God loves a cheerful or hilarious giver...

Acts 2:32-47: All that believed were together, and had all things common... sold their possessions and goods, and distributed as people had need. The people shared and gave everything, no one had need.

Proverbs 28:27: "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses." A little later, Proverbs adds that "He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor."

Mark 10:21: "Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

Matthew 6:3: "When you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Matthew 23:23: Jesus said, "You should tithe, yes."

In the Old Testament, it is made very clear that God's people need to tithe. In the New Testament God makes it very clear that we need to tithe, but takes it further, that we should be generous; hilarious in our giving. We should be motivated to give because of Jesus and the needs of the world, not selfish ambition. 10% then becomes the base mark of what we give to the church, while we still need to be open to what God asks of us. The bible also talks about offerings which are to be above our tithing. Offerings or gifts can be used in other places, not just the church, where as tithing is to the church. These commands are for us, and we have to choose to obey or not.

Should we tithe Gross or Net?

This question is one that is open to debate. Some would argue that the bible talks about the first fruits, and the whole tithe, and therefore, we should give of our Gross. Also our tax is supposed to go on services that benefit us; i.e health care, education... These would be things we would have to pay for, if we were not taxed on them. We should therefore tithe Gross. On the other side of the argument some would say that we can only tithe out of what actually goes into our bank and is free for us to use. We have no control over our tax, and therefore it is not for us to use, i.e tithe. Tithing therefore is 10% of a persons Net income. As the answer to this question is not 100% clear, we should pray and be led by the spirit on whether to give Gross or Net. What is clear, is that we should tithe all of our income (salary, benefits, credits, business rental incomes etc) to the church.

Why do we do this?

As we have seen Jesus tells us to be generous, and the bible commands us to tithe, as part of our worship. If we don't we are in a sense robbing God. But lets also remember that we have a generous God, who gives us good things, who has even given us life through his death, and so we to, made in his image, should be generous. Mary gave away a year of her wages to worship Jesus (Matt 26), this is extravagant worship and one that should challenge us all.

In Summary how should we therefore tithe?

The principle of tithing or giving generously to the church for mission and aid is seen though scripture, it is part of our worship to God. The principles of tithing is to the church, whilst offerings, or giving or gifts can then be on top of this to other things. In a sense tithing 10% to the church is just a guide, a bench mark, the bible tells us to be hilarious in our giving, and that we should be led by the Spirit, incase God wants us to give more.

I found this great paragraph whilst studying this topic, which I hope is useful:

Giving is the principle in the Bible and the tithe was a standard. Saying I will love my wife is a principle, but saying I will love my wife until the day I die is a standard. We are to abide to the principles of giving, but the Holy Spirit gives us his standard, and may I add, that the standard from the Holy Spirit is beyond ten percent. In the end we will be judged accordingly if the Holy Spirit should prompt us to give more, voiding a tithe mandate.