

## SHOULD WE STILL BE TITHING?

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It's an interesting fact that the prophets did not teach the importance of giving. They assumed it. As far as they were concerned, it was an integral part of everyday religion to give at least a 'tithes', i.e. one tenth, of all one's income to God. What was true of them, was also true of Jesus. Nowhere in the Gospels does he command his disciples to tithe – but appears to assume that they will. Indeed, the only thing for which Jesus ever commended the scribes & Pharisees of his day was their tithing (see Matt 23.23). When we move from the Gospels to Paul's Letters, we find no reference to tithing as such, but we do find that Paul devotes quite a bit of space to the subject of giving (see 2 Cor 8-9). It is clear that Paul was a believer in 'proportionate' giving (see 1 Cor 16.2), which actually comes very close to the idea of tithing. Some people today, however, argue that tithing is a form of legalism, foreign to the spirit of the Gospel; they say, "We are no longer under law, but under grace" (Rom 6.4). That is of course true, but it is no reason for those of us who live under the new covenant of grace to give less than those who only knew the old covenant – indeed, if anything it is an argument for us today giving more. I find it significant that when Paul writes about giving to the Corinthians, he doesn't major on the duties & responsibilities of Christian giving – rather he speaks about the "privilege" (2 Cor 8.4) of giving to God's work. For him giving was essentially an indication of one's love for the Lord (see 2 Cor 8.8,9). Paul, I'm sure, would have been amazed to have discovered that some people deduce that giving out of love rather than giving out of duty results in less than giving a tenth. Surely the reverse should be true. Indeed, the more we understand what God has done for us in Jesus, the more we want to give to God. Unfortunately, those who argue against tithing as a form of legalism give the impression that they want to give to God as little as they can, rather than as much as they can. So I myself tithe – and encourage (as distinct from 'pressurise') my church members to consider tithing. Indeed, because of the challenge of a major building project, many of us have double-tithed for a number of years, and at least one couple has triple-tithed. In so doing we have discovered great blessing, both in the life of our church as also in our individual lives. For, as the prophet Malachi knew, when we give out of love, then the Lord in his love gives in return (Mal 3.10). We have discovered that although we may not have all the money we might want, we do have all the money we need. What's more, we have discovered the happiness that money can never buy – the deep satisfaction and joy of having a share in God's work. Although I doubt whether Winston Churchill ever practised tithing, he hit upon some truth when he said: "*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give*". Or as Jesus said: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20.35). So let me encourage you, dear reader, to tithe, and, where appropriate, to discover too the difference that gift-aiding from source (GAYE) makes!

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