

LESSON 2

Understanding Tithes and Offerings

AS HIS CHILD, OUR OBEDIENCE IN FINANCES MATTERS TO THE FATHER AND YIELDS ABUNDANT BLESSING. THIS REQUIRES UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE, AND DIFFERENCE BETWEEN, THESE TWO DISCIPLINES.

Jesus routinely exposed the heart of the matter to those with an ear to listen. Throughout the Gospels, we observe His ability to turn an ordinary situation into a soul-searching exercise.

During one such conversation,ⁱ often referred to as the “Seven Woes,” Jesus challenges a stubborn audience on the significant disparity between their perception of priorities and the reality of God’s righteous perspective. In one example, He observes their dutiful tithe, then exhorts them to value people over their own pompous adherence to the Law. His comments affirm the importance of the tithe in addition to the priority of exercising “justice, mercy, and faithfulness.” Both in Jesus’ day and our present age, this latter activity necessitates the generous and often sacrificial relinquishing of time, talent, and money. Such “over and above” giving, i.e. beyond the tithe, represents a critical aspect of funding the work to which He has called us.

By establishing a connection between these two principles He effectively puts to rest the argument of whether or not a tithe is a relevant concept to church life; the passage shows the Father’s pleasure in both. The Word conveys they are equally important, and a Biblical worldview solidifies it: if it matters to Jesus, then it needs to matter to us.



KEY CONCEPT: Tithing: stop debating & start honoring.

The concept of a tithe, a “tenth part” given in support of temple function and the priests’ livelihood, was established by Godⁱⁱ not as a tool to gauge our holiness through adherence (as the rulers above viewed it) nor to measure our level of commitment. Rather, 10% provided a starting point, a baseline by which His chosen raceⁱⁱⁱ could express their humble gratitude and sincere obedience in contrast to the pagan religious practices of the surrounding nations. Not unlike in Jesus’ day, participating in such an intentional act of honor to the Creator meets the practical needs of those in service in the Lord’s House today and provides a base of support for the local church to fulfill its responsibilities.

We deceive ourselves if we think that we are somehow “giving to God” any specific percentage of something that is “ours.” As established in our first lesson, it’s all His in the first place; so our attentive stewardship of the 90% we get to “keep” is really the crux of the matter.



DISCUSSION: Is the tithe meant to be a literal percentage, or just a guideline to giving? If it’s an “Old Testament” idea, why bother with it today?

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KEY CONCEPT: “Over and above” funds are offered beyond what God asks of us through obedience.

Training our heart to do “more than what’s expected” shows an understanding of Philippians 2 (NIV): “And being found in appearance as a man, [Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death – even death on a cross!” Imitating Christ, as the Apostle Paul exhorts us,^{iv} means going above and beyond, willing ourselves past our comfort and convenience – and thus bringing glory to God. This principle applies equally to our worship, our work ethic, our parenting, our academics, our service to the church and community, and to our giving.

Described in various forms as pledge, letter of intent, faith gift, commitment, faith promise, and so on, giving over and above is solidified in two distinct passages in Paul’s letters to the church in Corinth. We can “set aside” resources from what have presently,^v and we can participate “beyond our ability,”^{vi} believing God to supply what He divinely prompts us to contribute, that we do not yet possess.



DISCUSSION: Given the variety of “good” causes and needs out there, how are we supposed to know where “extra” giving should be directed? Does it all have to go to our home church?



DISCUSSION: Probe further: how can we as young people prove ourselves to be responsible with little (obedience), thus showing the Father that we can be entrusted with much (over and above)?

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PERSONAL / HOUSEHOLD APPLICATION

DISCUSS

What is your attitude toward “how much” we are to give, and to keep? Consider your level of commitment to your local church as evidenced by the amount you give, especially in the context of the many other things you purchase that are neither needs, nor Kingdom-related.

DECIDE

Establish a consistent, prayerful approach to every opportunity to give. Make a list.

DO

Follow through! Set aside a special savings account dedicated to the Lord; consider “adopting” a specific, known financial need within your fellowship, i.e. funding youth trips geared toward inviting unsaved friends, or updating the church office computers. As resources become available to your family, ASK your pastors/leaders what the most pressing needs are; avoid “designated giving” unless invited to do so (e.g. providing scholarships for kids to go on the youth retreat).

- i Matt 23:23
- ii Lev 27:30
- iii Deut 7:6
- iv 1 Cor 11:1, Eph 5:1
- v 1 Cor 16:2
- vi 2 Cor 8:3