

CAN A CHRISTIAN ROB GOD?

Tithing vs. Free Will Giving

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There is a Scripture that is frequently used to let people know that if they do not tithe, they are in fact robbing God. We will examine this passage of Scripture as well as others to see if tithing is mandatory for the Christian today as well as answer the question... CAN A CHRISTIAN ROB GOD?

As Christians, we have a responsibility. Are we searching the Scriptures to see if what we are being taught is sound biblical doctrine or are we believing an individual just because what they are teaching sounds good? God commands all Christians to obey His word. Scripture teaches us to test ALL things and hold fast to that which is good (1Thess. 5:21), not to what sounds good. If what we are being taught does not line up with the Word of God, consider it "false teaching."

THE TITHE AND FREE WILL GIVING

2 Timothy 2:15... Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, *rightly* dividing the word of truth.

Rightly dividing the word of truth takes into account that we must always be careful to find out (1) who is speaking, (2) who is being spoken to and (3) what is being spoken about. Another way of putting this is to always-always-always look at the context of what is being said and taught.

Before we continue on with this topic, we need to define certain terms.

- Tithe: meaning a tenth
- Jews: Those who are descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve (12) tribes of Israel.
- Gentiles: all of the other nations of the world.
- The Church: Both Jews and Gentiles who by faith have personally received the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in their lives.

RESOURCES AND STEWARDSHIP

God has entrusted everyone with resources. This includes time, talent and possessions, which can be used to advance His kingdom. The way in which we use these resources is called "stewardship". Remember stewardship does not always refer to money. Yes money is a very important part of our resources, but what also needs to be understood is that our time, talents, abilities and non-monetary possessions are also an important part of stewardship.

Time, Talent and Possessions = Resources
How we use these resources = Stewardship

UNBELIEVERS AND THEIR RESOURCES

There are many unbelievers who choose to give their time, efforts and money to Christian and non-Christian organizations. Non-believers have very little (if any) interest in promoting the message of Jesus Christ. One can conclude that the majority of non-Christian stewardship is for charitable purposes rather than evangelistic purposes. This charitable giving is to be commended and encouraged but we must be careful to point out to non-Christians that using resources to help the poor and needy is not a substitute for accepting Jesus Christ as Savior (John 6:28-29). Salvation is by grace alone and not of any works (Eph. 2:8).

BELIEVERS AND THEIR RESOURCES

God has chosen believers to support the ministry of evangelism, discipleship and help for the needy. This can be done by involuntary assessment (taxation), free will giving or a combination of both. To get some type of understanding of what God requires of believers, let's look at the Old Testament requirements of stewardship and after that, the requirements taught in the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT TITHING (BEFORE THE CROSS)

Tithing was apart of the Jewish law and it was mandatory for all Jews. The Jews were the only ones who were ever commanded to pay tithes (See Lev. 27:30-32 and Heb. 7:5).

- 1st Tithe: This tithe was to support and take care of the Levites (who were the priests) since they did not have an inheritance. They were the descendants of Arron from the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi was the only tribe among the Jews who could not own any land, cultivate any land or engage in any type of business. Their job was to take care of the temple services and minister to the spiritual needs of the Jewish people. Basically, the tithe was a form of taxation and this is the way the children of Israel took care of the tribe of Levi. (Num. 18: 20-24 and Heb. 7:5).
- 2ND Tithe: All Jews were required to use 10% of their resources (crops and herds) to support the national feast and sacrifices. This was in addition to the first tithe to support the Levites (Deut. 14:22-24).
- 3RD Tithe: Every third year the Jews were to give an additional 10% of their produce for the support of the poor of the land (Deut. 14:28-29).

So in actuality, if you were to tithe (using the principles of the Old Testament), it would be 23% instead of 10%. The other fact that needs to be remembered is you would give your tithe only once a year and not on a weekly basis.

NEW TESTAMENT (AFTER THE CROSS)

Like the OT, many are called into full time ministry and Christians are commanded by God to support these ministries that are truly preaching and teaching the gospel. (Gal: 6:6, 1Cor. 9:6-14).

In the OT you had a system of taxation through tithing. In the NT it promotes free will giving as the means of supporting ministries. In the NT, there are two Scriptures that teach the "method" and the "motive" for stewardship.

- In 1Cor. 16:2 it teaches Christians the "method" on how we should give. It should be Periodic (1st day of the week), Personal (let each of *you*), and proportionate.
- In 2Cor. 9:7 it teaches Christians the "Motive" on how we should give. The key to NT stewardship is **NOT** the amount but the motive behind your giving. Giving is not to be grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. The Greek word for cheerful is *hilarion* meaning hilarious. It should be a cheerful desire to support Gods program and to express gratitude and appreciation to God Himself.
- In 2Cor. 8:12-15 Paul speaks about the purpose of the giving.

QUESTIONS THAT STILL ARISE IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TODAY

Question: Is tithing mandatory today?

Answer: No, tithing is not mandatory. Tithing was a part of the law and the law was nailed to the tree through Jesus Christ. Paul makes it perfectly clear that the law was nailed to the cross when Jesus died. Col. 2:14 reads...Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Note that Malachi 3:7, 14 refer to tithing as an ordinance. All curses and penalties of the law were abolished, ended and done away with when Christ was made a curse for us (See Gal. 3:13).

Paul states in Romans 6:14 that we are not under the law but under grace. Gal. 5:18 it says that if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Heb. 8:18-19 reads...For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. That better hope is Jesus Christ.

Scripture clearly teaches us that Christians are not under any law because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. And besides, if you are not a Jew, the law doesn't apply to you anyway.

Question: What percentage or proportion of my resources do I give?

Answer: There is no percentage or proportioned commanded. It is whatever you purpose in your own heart. The important elements of grace giving is your motive, your attitude and your desire.

Question: Is it still O.K. to give 10% as a free will offering?

Answer: Of course you can. If 10% is the amount that is purposed in your heart, then 10% is what you should give. Remember that this amount is not mandatory but it should come out of your heart cheerfully.

Question: Can a Christian rob God? (This comes from the mis-interpretation of Malachi 3:8 that many individuals use to promote tithing).

Answer: No, it is impossible for a Christian to rob God. Malachi 3:8 reads... "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings." Let look at this passage in its proper context.

- Who is God speaking to?
The nation of Israel (See Mal. 1:1, 3:6-7)
- Are you part of the nation of Israel?
No.
- Is there a tribe of Levi today to receive tithes?
No, the temple was destroyed in approximately 70AD.
- Was tithing a part of the law?
Yes
- As a Christian, are you under the law?
No. The law was nailed to the cross through the blood of Jesus Christ (see the Scriptures noted earlier).

Conclusion: God was not talking to Christians; He was talking to the nation of Israel who were Jews. There is no tribe of Levi today to receive tithes and the temple was destroyed about 70AD. Tithing was a part of the law and as a Christian, you are not under the law henceforth these passages of Scripture do not apply to any Christians.

Question: Is it true that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, which was before the law?

Answer: Yes he did but does this constitute mandatory tithing for today?

- Abraham's tithe was a freewill act without any request on God's part that he should do it.
- His tithe was not brought to any storehouse or sanctuary.
- Abraham was 80 years old before he tithed and its not recorded that he ever did again.
- Abraham was never given any promise of a "blessing" for his tithe.

Question: Doesn't Jesus mention tithing in the New Testament?

Answer: Yes He does. Jesus mentions tithing in Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42, 18:9-12. In every instance, Jesus was speaking to or about the unbelieving Pharisees who were the religious leaders of that time and who were under the law. Jesus did in fact say that they (the Pharisees) should practice tithing because they were under the law and that the law commanded it.

You will not find one Scripture where Jesus teaches His disciples to tithe. He never taught His disciples to observe tithing. John 1:17 tells us that the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.