

# Financial Stewardship

## How to handle our money matters God's way.

**God considers financial stewardship of vital importance.  
How do we regard this responsibility?**



We live in a society inundated by appeals for finances. While giving is clearly a part of God's plan for His followers, Biblical instruction must be the basis for how we give to God and His work. As a starting point, we must understand that when God teaches us how to handle our finances, He is not doing so to get our money. He is trying to help us benefit by what we have, and by what He gives in response to how we handle what we have. In a nutshell, God's principles are designed to make us succeed in God's eyes. He desires to use us—and that includes our finances—in fruitful ways.

God considers financial stewardship of vital importance. It might surprise some to learn that it is a dominant subject in the Bible. Over 450 separate Biblical passages concern proper handling of financial issues. Sixteen of Jesus' thirty-eight parables mention the handling of money and possessions. God gave us these Scriptures about money matters, because our attitude toward money matters!

God considers financial stewardship of vital importance. It might surprise some to learn that it is a dominant subject in the Bible. Over 450 separate Biblical passages concern proper handling of financial issues. Sixteen of Jesus' thirty-eight parables mention the handling of money and possessions. God gave us these Scriptures about money matters, because our attitude toward money matters!

## Tithing is the cornerstone

Let's examine what Scripture says about giving. The cornerstone of God's plan for financing His work is tithing—the returning to God of ten percent of our increase. We first read about tithing in the book of Genesis, where we find the patriarch Abram paying tithes to Melchizedek, king of Salem (Genesis 14:20), and Jacob vowing to give a tenth to God (Genesis 28:22). More than 400 years later, when God instituted the Law for the Children of Israel, tithing was part of the divine instructions. In Leviticus 27:30,32, we read: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord. . . . And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, . . . the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." The tithe was given for a specific purpose: to support the work of God. In Numbers 18:21 we read, "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi [those who performed the religious functions of their worship ceremonies] all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

The tithes are not only a provision that God has made for the maintenance of His work, but they also indicate a recognition on our part that all of our blessings in life come from the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Thus, when we pay our tithes, it should be with a heart of gratitude and a spirit of thankfulness.

The Prophet Malachi reinforced the importance of tithing by informing Israel that failure to pay tithes was comparable to robbing God. We read, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8). When this charge was brought against the Children of Israel, they seemed to be entirely unaware that their failure to bring in their tithes had brought on blighted crops, physical affliction, and oppression by their enemies. What a contrast their condition was to the blessings promised to those who fulfill this divine mandate. Malachi went on to say, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the

windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

In the New Testament, Matthew 23:23 shows us that the tithing principle was approved of and supported by Jesus. He rebuked the Pharisees for not practicing judgment, mercy and faith, though they were paying the tithe. He stated clearly, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other [the paying of the tithe] undone."

## **Offerings: commanded and commended**

Tithing is unquestionably part of our responsibility toward God, but does faithfully giving ten percent of our income back to God fulfill our financial responsibility toward Him and His work? Careful inspection of Scripture indicates that offerings given in addition to the tithe are also commanded in both the Old and New Testaments.

The Lord told Moses, the leader of Israel, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering" (Exodus 25:2). The word *terumah*, which was translated offering, actually means a "freewill offering." Deuteronomy 16:16,17, records another instruction given to the Children of Israel. Three times a year, at certain prescribed feasts, the men were to come before the Lord. We read, "They shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee." The writer of Proverbs says, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase" (Proverbs 3:9), and this specifically referred to the *minchah*, or gratitude offering, commanded under the Law.

The theme of freewill offering is restated in numerous places in the New Testament. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, told the people, "When thou doest thine alms . . ." Note that He said "when," not "if." In Luke 6:38, Jesus instructed His followers, "Give, and it shall be given unto you." In Luke 11:41,42 we read Christ's words, "Give alms of such things as ye have." This clearly was in addition to tithes, for He goes on to say, "Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, . . ." Paul taught the principle of freewill giving to the Early Church, instructing them, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give . . ." (2 Corinthians 9:7). This does not imply that giving itself is optional, but rather, just the amount.

## **Giving more than our surplus**

Is it sufficient to just give what we can comfortably offer from our monthly income? The answer to this question is found in Luke 21:1-4, the familiar story of Jesus observing "the rich men" and the "poor widow" putting their gifts into the treasury. Jesus said that although the widow gave only two mites, she put in "more than they all." Why? Because she gave from her poverty, while they gave from their abundance. Jesus commends giving that affects our lifestyle, no matter what the amount. If we give only out of our surplus, we've missed the point. Biblical charity is more than offering just what we could afford to do without anyway.

Paul could have stressed tithing, and as a former Pharisee, might even have been expected to do so. But in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, when speaking about the needs of God's people in Jerusalem, he does not mention tithing. Instead, he instructs the believers to set aside gifts "as God hath prospered him"—in other words, in keeping with their income. In 2 Corinthians 8:3, he encourages the same group of believers to emulate the believers in Macedonia, who gave as much as they were able, and beyond. So, how much should we give? The New Testament does not dictate a prescribed percentage, but it is clear that we are to give of our living, not just of our surplus.

We cannot out give God. He will bless our lives as we follow the instructions He has given. Acts 2:44-47 tells us that the early Christians who gave of their substance to God enjoyed gladness, singleness of heart, and favour with all the people. Is that what we are experiencing in our lives? If our enthusiasm for giving is more a joyless "have to" than a joyful privilege, then perhaps it is time to examine our commitment to Christ.