

How Much To Give
August 28, 2016

The last three Sundays I have dealt with some common religious issues and questions. This morning I want to talk about another question that is commonly asked by those who follow Jesus. I know that some of you are new to the Christian faith and likely do not know the answer to today's question. The question is, "**How much should I give to the church?**" The question concerns money, but might also include time, energy, and other resources.

There is a lot of disagreement among Christians about how to answer this question. I believe they disagree because they have not looked at the Bible and history. We are going to start in the Old Testament part of the Bible. We need to see what God required of the Jews about giving in their covenant relationship with Him.

1. God commanded the Jews to approach Him for worship in one specific meeting place. Exodus 25:8-9 (Deuteronomy 12:5-7)

Exodus 25:8-9 (NIV) "... have them (the Israelites) make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

Note how particular God was in this. God showed Moses a pattern for the tabernacle. God told Moses what it was to be made of, how it was to be constructed, and the measurements of the major parts. (**picture of tabernacle**) The Israelites put it together just as God described. You can read the passages in Exodus and see how much detail God gave them.

While they traveled throughout the Sinai Peninsula, it was God who chose where to camp and set up the tabernacle. And later, as they were getting ready to enter the land of Canaan, God told them that He would pick a spot for the tabernacle to be set up permanently and no longer be moved from place to place. The Israelites were only to worship God in THAT place.

2. God designated one specific family to serve as priests. (Exodus 28:1)

God chose Aaron, Moses' brother to be the High Priest of the Israelites. **A priest is a mediator, one who represents God to man and man to God.** No one can choose this role for himself. God must choose people to be priests. God chose Aaron's family line to be the priests of God for Israel.

3. God designated the men of the tribe of Levi to be helpers to the priests. (Numbers 3:5-8)

The Levites were also to be guardians, caretakers, and movers of the Tabernacle. Remember, it was only at the tabernacle that the Israelites were to worship.

4. God provided the tithe to provide income to the Levites and priests.

The word tithe means "tenth".

Leviticus 27:30, 32 (NIV) "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD... The entire tithe of the herd and flock--every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod--will be holy to the LORD.

This tithe, from all the Israelites, went to the Levites. (Numbers 18:21)

You see, all the Israelites, except the Levites, were given land to grow crops on when they settled in the land of Canaan. The Levites were given a small bit of land to graze a few animals of their own, but they were not given land to grow crops. They were to receive crops and animals that the rest of the Israelites had raised.

The Levites gave to the priests a tithe of the crops and animals they had received. (Numbers 18:26-29)

Note that no money is given as a tithe. The tithe was of crops and animals.

So to summarize, we see that Yahweh designated one specific place for the Israelites to approach Him in worship. He designated one specific family to serve as priests. He designated one specific tribe as helpers for these priests. And He commanded a tithe of crops and animals to pay the priests and their helpers for the work they did for Israel.

Some centuries later, King Solomon replaced the fabric tent of the tabernacle with a stone temple as a permanent place of worship in Jerusalem. He did this with the blessing of God. And it was constructed along the same design lines as the tabernacle so it would match the temple in heaven. Otherwise nothing else changed. The Jews were to approach God only there, because it was in the temple that God lived among His people Israel.

When we come to the New Testament we see a new temple and a new priest. First we'll look at the new temple as the place to worship God. Paul the missionary is writing to the church in the city of Corinth. His subject is sexual immorality. But within that subject he has several facts of spiritual truth to teach us.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The context of this passage is about sexual immorality. Paul is commanding them to abstain from immoral sex. And one reason he gives is that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Immoral sex, sex outside of marriage, desecrates God's temple.

So the facts of spiritual truth he gives us are that...

> All that we are and own belongs to Jesus. Jesus purchased us, or redeemed us, bought us back to God. Jesus purchased us for God with His blood on the cross. Consequently, we belong to Him. All the money you have, not just what you put in the offering plate, belongs to Jesus. You are a steward of what He has entrusted to you.

> **Our bodies are the new temple of the Holy Spirit.** The Spirit of God comes to dwell within each Christian when they are converted. This building, that we call a church, is not the temple of God. It is not the house of God. It is not where God dwells or lives among Christians. Instead, God lives among us here, in our bodies.

> **By extension, then, there is no designated building or geographical place that we are commanded to worship God.**

You don't have to go to any special building. Your geographical location does not matter. You can worship God in a house, a store, a meadow, a jail, a space capsule orbiting the moon, or anywhere else. God has left the place of worship wide open.

In the Old Testament God was dealing with one people, the Israelites, in one country, Israel. Unlike our separation of church and state, in the Old Testament, it was all connected. There was an official state religion. And everyone was subject to it.

Now, God is inviting individuals out of all nations, peoples, and tribes to become part of His kingdom. God's kingdom transcends politics, patriotism, and national boundaries. In order to do this God needed His people to be able to worship anywhere. And that is what we have. We are not tied to buildings or certain geographical places. Wherever a Christian is, is a suitable place to worship Jesus.

Christians have a new temple. They also have a new priest. And He doesn't need any helpers. Jesus is our high priest. He is a better high priest than any of Aaron's descendents. He has offered a better sacrifice than any of them offered. Jesus offered a perfect sacrifice for all of our sins. He replaced all the old priests and all the imperfect sacrifices.

Hebrews 9:26 (NIV) But now he (Christ) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Note that this says He offered only one sacrifice on our behalf, but it was adequate for all of our spiritual needs. There is no ongoing work of Jesus as High Priest. It is finished. There is nothing left for Jesus to do. **Since the priestly work of Jesus has been finished, there is no New Testament giving system commanded of us.**

So where did the idea of giving to churches come from? It is the synagogue model. When the Jews were in exile and without a temple, they formed groups of ten or more families to gather for religious instruction, prayer, scripture readings, and worship. They called these groups synagogues, which means "assembly". Over time they became popular. These groups often built or rented buildings to meet in, instead of meeting in homes. And this required that they contribute money regularly for the supplies and upkeep of the meeting place. It is this pattern that the Christian churches copied.

As Christianity grew, churches needed places to meet together. So they built or rented buildings to meet in. This necessitated collecting offerings to pay for these places. At first, the elders and pastors were volunteers. But over the centuries, as the work load became heavier, churches began providing a stipend for these part time workers, and eventually a full time salary. Again, this required the Christians committed to this system to give regularly to the work of the church.

In the New Testament, we see Christians giving voluntary offerings to help support missionaries and to buy food for poor Christians in the churches.

For much of America's history, the standard model of churches has been to buy land, build a building, and hire a pastor. The kind of building they built has changed over time as what churches do there has changed.

For example, the Sunday School was invented in England in the 1780s. Up until that time, most protestant churches were one room, though sometimes they had a small foyer in the back. It wasn't until the Sunday School movement became so popular that churches began building classrooms for religious instruction. That, of course, required more money. Today, new churches almost immediately start looking for a place with a large room, smaller rooms, a room for a nursery, etc. Many churches start with a fulltime paid pastor, who is the church planter, and often hire a worship leader as soon as they can. All that takes money. And many falsely teach a required tithe to pay for it.

But this is not the only model of church God is using. Over the last 50 years, after missionaries were kicked out of China, Christianity there has grown into the tens of millions without buildings or paid pastors under the threat of persecution and jail by the communist government.

Now, as I said, we do see Christians giving money to various causes in the New Testament. There are several giving principles we see there. But none of them gave an amount or a percentage to follow. Jesus wants us living by faith. Jesus wants us to be led by the Holy Spirit. So in light of that, let me give you some recommendations on deciding how much to give.

Listen to your church.

God used the church to bring the knowledge of salvation to you. Give your gratitude to God for His church. We take up a collection every Sunday. You should be asking what we do with that money. You should be learning what we are accomplishing with that money. You should want to know if we are using it well and wisely, with honesty and integrity. I assure you, we are. But you should be seeking out that knowledge.

Listen to your heart.

What do you enjoy giving to? What kind of helping do you enjoy being a part of? For example, the work of taking the gospel to the world is not finished. You can give to those efforts through the church.

Listen to your Lord.

We belong to Jesus, so all we possess belongs to Jesus. Give in recognition of that. Ask Jesus to lead you in where to give. It may include the church, other Christian charities, or even non-Christian charities. Listen to your Lord and give accordingly.

If you are a tither, I am not trying to argue you out of tithing. Tithing is a good spiritual discipline. My wife and I have always given at least a tenth of our income to the church, and more to other causes. We always will. But if you do so, do so knowing that Jesus has not commanded all Christians to do so.

I encourage you to give. **Give intentionally. Give what you want to give. Give worshipfully. "Lord, I give this to the work of Your kingdom."**