

## How Much Should We Give?

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In the Old Testament, God commanded his people to pay ten percent of their income to support the Levites—the religious teachers of the day. And there was not just one tithe but three, averaging roughly 23% of their annual income—in addition to the temple tax and voluntary offerings. Today, we have received so much more blessing in Christ than those Old Testament saints could ever have imagined. Giving for the Christian is a wonderful opportunity to take the temporal money that God has given us and invest it in returns that are eternal. It is an opportunity to loose the chains that money can wrap around our hearts by making it clear that God is sufficient, and though he may use my money, I don't ultimately need it. But to really understand how much we should give, we need to carefully examine what the Scriptures say about giving.

### **Giving in the New Testament**

Many Christians assume that their responsibility starts and ends with a gift of 10% to a favorite charity though few do even this. But this is far from an accurate picture of Biblical giving. 10% of our income may well be a good starting point. After all, Abraham tithed to the high priest Melchizedek hundreds of years before the tithe was required by the law that was eventually fulfilled in Christ. And Jesus nowhere tells us not to tithe. But it's notable that in all the instructions to the churches in the New Testament, the tithe is absent. Instead, we see Paul instructing each Christian to give "in keeping with his income" (1 Cor. 16:2, NIV)—in other words, give as much as he is able. And he writes to the churches in Galatia, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches." (Gal. 6:6). All good things—not just 10% of what God has given us.

And yet it's clear that there are a few things we do with our money that are more important than giving to the church. If one were to give so much that he was unable to provide for his family's basic needs, the apostle Paul would say "he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim. 5:8)

Ultimately, money is but one of many stewardships God has given to us. So along with our time and our abilities and our relationships, we should take our money and make "the best use of the time" (Eph. 5:16) for the glory of God. Start at giving 10% of your income (or less if Biblical constraints such as 1 Tim. 5:16 so require) and see every dollar as an opportunity to bring glory to God. Would your next dollar better serve God if given to the church, or used to hire a babysitter so you can disciple a younger Christian? Would your next dollar better serve God if given to the church or used to take your family on vacation to enjoy God's good gift of creation (1 Tim. 6:17) and build into those relationships (Eph. 6:4). These are the kind of questions you'll need to answer as you determine how much to give. If you have no income, your goal should be to give of what you do have (money, time, relationships, etc.) so that the first day you have an income it is second-nature to give some of it as well.

### **Some Practical Considerations**

1. Give to your local church first. A good application of Galatians 6:6 (cited above) is that since your local church is your primary source of teaching, it should be the primary recipient of your giving.
2. Give regularly and deliberately. Paul told the Corinthians to set aside money on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2). Giving to the church should not be a spontaneous decision. Instead (ideally with your budget in hand), carefully consider how much giving will enable the best use of your money.
3. Give sacrificially and cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7) and he calls all of us to take up our cross and follow him (Luke 9:23). So, use your giving to make possible a life lived in sacrificial obedience, knowing that whatever you give up pales in comparison to what you are receiving in Christ.
4. Seek wise counsel. We should not give to impress others (Matt. 6:2). And yet we are foolish to make decisions about money alone (Prov. 15:22, 1 Tim. 6:10). Be transparent with at least someone at your church about your whole life—including how much and where you give.