

Generous Wisdom 101: Tithing – 1 Cor 9:13-14

Introduction – The tithe is far more than an instrument to fund the church. It is more like the lab assignment after the lecture on generosity, thanksgiving, avoiding covetousness, or making the “eye good,” as Jesus speaks of in Matt 6:22-23. Generous people tithe and people who tithe are blessed to become far more generous people. It is neither a fee for this lecture nor a bribe to pay off God. It is both the evidence and future seed of God’s blessings.

Legitimacy of the Tithe – New Testament Christians are not explicitly commanded to tithe, so are we sure that we have to?

1 Cor 9 – The chapter is about the authenticity of Paul’s apostleship and in that context he argues that he has the right to earn a living from his ministry. He quotes from the Old Testament directly (v9) and provides inspired commentary on the text (vv10-11). He then alludes to the Old Testament commands of tithing to provide for the priests and Levites (v13) and argues, “even so,” or “in the same way” (v14). In the same way as what?

Pre-Mosaic Understanding (Gen 14:20, 28:22) – The practice of giving a tenth was already in use before the Mosaic code was given.

Moses’ Instructions (Deut 14:22-29) – As the people of God are constituted under Moses, the tribe of Levi receives no land and is instead given to the priesthood. They would live off the tithes of the people brought to the tabernacle and later the Temple. It is this way, “in the same way” that Paul is referring to in 1 Cor 9:14.

Instructions on the Tithe (Deut 14:22-29) – Let’s take a look at some of the details of the tithe here. As we do, look for how God grows us up in generous wisdom through the practice.

From Your Increase (v22) – With each harvest (paycheck) you are to “truly tithe” before the Lord. This is not a tithe on your possessions, but upon your increase, which reminds us, “what do you have that you have not received...” (1 Cor 4:7). Tithing reminds us that everything we have is from the Lord.

Learning to Fear God (v23) – Tithing expresses your complete dependence upon God’s kindness and grace. God isn’t your first creditor, nor your first tax. He is your Provider and you are bringing your tithe in tribute to Him as Lord (see also Deut 26:1-11). Tithing teaches us to fear God.

The Joy of Receiving and Giving Enjoyed (vv24-26) – This doesn’t look at all like that trip to the post office on April 15th.

Worshippers were to bring their tithe to their Lord and then enjoy a portion of it with one another in a feast of thanksgiving. Joy is expressed in all we have received and joy is expressed in all we can give.

Don’t Forget the Levite (vv27-29) – Surrounding the tithe and the feast is the local care of those who minister the things of God as well as those who are under hard providences who are in your midst. And this is done with an eye to even greater blessing (v28).

“In the Same Way” (1 Cor 9:14) – The New Testament assumes the same principles.

Proportionate Giving (1 Cor 16:1-2) – Tithes and offerings are to be given as one prospers. Paul is also concerned that the offering is not given out of arm-twisting, last minute guilt.

Support of Ministers and the Church (Gal 6:6, 1 Cor 9:9-11, 1 Tim 5:17-18) – In all of these passages, Paul is clear that those who serve as ministers in the church should not at all be sheepish about making their living doing so.

Joy in Giving Still Required (2 Cor 9:7) – Paul is addressing particular offerings and not specifically the tithe supporting the local church. And so even beyond the tithe, God loves a cheerful giver, one who is applying all the teaching of the Old Testament.

Expectation of Future Blessing (Phil 4:17) – Paul’s eye is not on the gift, but the fruit that will come to the givers. We give, that we might reap again, that we might give again.

FAQ’s on Tithing – When these questions are asked from hearts leaping with desire to serve the Lord, there are helpful guidelines. When the questions are really smokescreens for legalism, covetousness and greed, they only heap upon you greater condemnation.

Net or Gross? – These are not biblical terms, but in general, remember that the tithe is on the increase.

Where do I tithe? – It appears that lawful recipients of the tithe would include those who minister to you in the gospel and the surrounding ministries of that work, those who are providing you with biblical teaching, brothers and sisters in particular need, and the poor in your midst. It also appears that part of the tithe is to fund some form of feasting before the Lord.

What if I am in debt? – Again, generally speaking, what these passages teach us is that when you think you cannot afford to tithe, the truth of the matter is that you cannot afford not to.

Obedience in Tithing (Mal 3:8-12, Gal 6:6-10) – Obedience in tithing results in a people who are known for their generosity, a people who trust in the Lord and not in their economy, a people who reap great blessings from their God. Disobedience in tithing is simply robbing God and reaping to the flesh. How does one become a more generous person? Start with the tithe. How does one become a more generous nation, unencumbered with covetousness and debt? Start with the tithe.