

The Watford Word

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What's on

Sunday 16 June - 10:30AM. Danny speaking

Sunday 23 June - 10:30AM. Osagie speaking

Sunday 30 June - 10:30AM. Malcolm speaking

Sunday 07 July - 10:30AM. Church service (also Wellington country park service in Thames Valley)

Sunday 14 July - 10:30AM. Speaker Kerry Mathurin

Sunday 21 July - 10:30AM. Speaker Olyden Johnson

Saturday 14th Sept: AIM UK&I - "Family Life"

Saturday 7th Dec: AIM UK&I - "World Views"

Tithing – Relevant for Christians?

As announced recently we are designating June as a month of teaching and prayer regarding our new charitable status, and approach to giving.

Introduction

Talking about money is tricky. Even more so in a church context if there has been less than healthy teaching in the past. However, not to address it leaves us in the dark and at the mercy of assumptions and unexamined ideas.

Where does the idea of tithing come from? Tithing, the practice of giving ten percent of one's income to the church, has roots in the Old Testament (see last week's Watford Word). Many of us have grown up with the understanding that this is a vital aspect of our faith and stewardship. However, as we delve into the New Testament, we find a different approach to giving that may reshape our understanding. Today, I want to explore whether tithing, an Old Covenant practice, is still relevant for us as Christians, guided by the teachings and principles of the New Testament.

New Testament Perspective on Giving

In the New Testament, there is no explicit command for Christians to tithe as prescribed in the Old Testament. The following passage has

been used to justify tithing for Christians, and I have done so myself in the past:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." (Matthew 23:23)

As the *Word Biblical Commentary* states, "If the Pharisees wish to tithe even the smallest herbs, well and good—let them, as long as they give attention at the same time to the most important items of the law, items that bear directly on the welfare of others around them."

Jesus is encouraging the Pharisees to maintain their tithing commitments as Jews under the Old Covenant. There is no hint here that Jesus expects his followers to do likewise.

Instead, the New Testament focus shifts to the heart and attitude behind our giving. Our giving is to be driven by our *personal relationship* with God and the *needs* of our community.

The apostle Paul, in his letters, encourages us to give, but he emphasises the importance of the giver's attitude over a specific percentage. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul writes: *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* This verse highlights the voluntary nature of our giving, suggesting it should come from joy, not obligation.

Furthermore, the early Christian community, as described in Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-35, shared their possessions and resources to meet each other's needs. This mutual support and generosity go beyond the strict practice of tithing, pointing us towards a more heartfelt approach to giving.

In the cases above (2 Corinthians and Acts 2/4) the context (need) inspired the giving.

Theological Implications of New Covenant Giving

Under the New Covenant, we move from the legal requirements of the Old Covenant to a grace-based approach to giving. This shift reflects the broader New Covenant theme of internal transformation over external observance, as taught by Jesus and the apostles. Our giving should be guided by love for God and our neighbours, transcending a formulaic practice of tithing.

Jesus' teachings often focus on the intentions behind our actions. In Matthew 6:21, He says, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* He knows that our discipleship can be compromised by the allure of wealth (see the rest of Matthew 6). Jesus connects our financial contributions to the condition of our hearts, reminding us that our giving reflects our spiritual priorities and commitments.



Practical Aspects of New Testament Giving

While the New Testament does not mandate tithing, it does uphold the value of disciplined giving, depending on need, vision and priority. We will examine this further in a future article.

What we can say for now is that Christians are encouraged to give thoughtfully and according to our circumstances. In the context of taking a collection for needy Christians, Paul reminds the Corinthians that:

"if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have." (2 Corinthians 8:12 NIV11)

Contemporary Application

In today's context, we are invited to embrace a model of giving that reflects both our freedom and our responsibility. In other words, a spiritually informed blend of sacrifice and stewardship. Without a specific command to tithe, we must engage in thoughtful, prayerful discernment about how best to use our resources for God's glory. This means supporting our local church but also addressing broader needs through various forms of generosity. More on these other channels in future articles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the New Testament shifts our focus from the legal practice of tithing to a more heart-centred approach to giving. We are encouraged to give generously and voluntarily, guided by the principles of love and service that Jesus taught. While the specific practice of tithing from the Old Testament is not mandated for us today, the spirit of faith-inspired generosity it represents remains central to our Christian life and community. Each of us must prayerfully consider how to practice stewardship in a way that aligns with New Testament teachings and our personal convictions.

Your brother in Christ, Malcolm

PS - You might find this [article](https://evidenceforchristianity.org/is-tithing-required-what-about-giving/) on Dr John Oakes' website useful: <https://evidenceforchristianity.org/is-tithing-required-what-about-giving/>

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