The Church, part 18
(2 Corinthians 8-9 and assorted Scriptures)
(preached Pine Grove 10/29/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

If you turn your TV to many supposed Christian channels today, it won't be long before you are bombarded with someone begging for your money..

For many, the turn off to the gospel and to Christianity is the constant sight of so-called evangelists on TV begging people for money while wearing gold jewelry….

And I can hardly blame them…

Think of the long list of men who called themselves pastors and took advantage of people financially…

Jim Bakker 1989 - Conned his listeners and supporters of his ministry out of 158 million dollars…

Jimmy Swaggart - Morally corrupt but also guilty of conning his listeners into supporting him to the tune of 12 million dollars a year in the late 80s

Oral Roberts - Once locked himself in a tower and told his followers that if they didn't send in at least 8 million dollars that God was going to kill him…

And there are plenty of them today doing much of the same thing to the tune of much larger sums of money…

Christian networks have only grow and allowed more con artists to hide behind the name pastor to legally steal millions of dollars from people…

Just recently in 2015 a late night show host, a man named John Oliver responded to a televangelist's beg for money…

Oliver had no intention of supporting the ministry.

He only wanted to expose the con game that these men run..

So he wrote televangleist Robert Tilton a letter and included $20 in it asking to be added to his mailing list..

Tilton responded with 50 or more letters over the next 7 months asking for more money in the 1000s of dollars..

Now, here is the hard part for us to see…

Oliver is not a Christian…

He is a clear unbeliever who is seeing and exposing a dark side of supposed "Christianity" to the world…

So you see, these money hungry con men with Bibles do tons of damage to the name of Christ…

My least favorite part of their pleas for money is when they call on people to have faith to send in their money…

I want to scream at the TV, if you were a true man of God, you would have the faith to believe that God could provide for your ministry without going on TV and begging for money…

Now, I want to add something that is often overlooked in these scams and that is the people who send in the money….

We often see them as victims and feel pity for them…

But I assure you that they aren't all victims…

Most are people who don't know the word of God and think that God's favor can be bought with a few dollars given to support a false prophet..

Anyone who picks up a Bible and reads anything about money should understand that these men on TV are nothing more than false prophets who have been around forever..

Paul called them peddlers of the word of God in 2 Cor. 2:17….

They pretend to sell the word of God in order to turn a profit…

But you can't have a phony business unless you find a sucker to support it…

And people support these ministries because they don't know the word of God and what it says about money and the proper way to give it to God…

Well, that is not going to be the case with us…

Because for a few weeks now, we have been looking at a Christian and his money….

And we have been answering some questions about money because money is a part of the world in which we live..

And it can be a good part of the world if we understand some principles about it…

Now, the reason we are examine money is because we are in the middle of a long series looking at the church…

And trying to understand how we can be a church that blesses the Lord and is blessed by the Lord..

So we have been looking at 9 characteristics of an effective church, and we have kinda stalled at characteristic 8 as we see that effective churches are made of generous givers to the Lord…

Which had led to a short series within the series on the Christian and his money….

And for the past two weeks, we have looked at money in terms of 4 questions for the Christian….

1. How are to feel about it?

2. How are we to acquire it?

3. How are we to spend it?

4. How are we to give it?

And last week, we made it to question 4, which is probably the most relevant question to all of us…

Because we need to understand what the Bible says about how we are to give our money…

And we began to talk last week about the concept of giving 10% to the Lord as a tithe, which is the principal that most of us have heard all our lives….

Yet, we also learned that the NT never uses that 10% figure or the word tithe when it speaks of how the church is to give to the Lord…

Therefore, we set out to find out how this number came about which took us to the book of Genesis, where we find the first mention of the idea of 10% and a tithe…

However, before we get to that idea in Genesis 14, we took a look at the first examples of offerings to God in Genesis 4, Genesis 8, Genesis 12, and Genesis 13..

And these examples of how to give to God involve some of the biggest names in Scripture…

The first example of giving in the Bible is the story of Cain and Abel who brought offerings to God…

The second example was Noah and the offering he gave to God after the flood…

And the third example that we looked at last week were the two offering that Abraham gave to the Lord…

And what we noted about these offerings was this…

#1- None of them were commanded by God…

#2 - None of them spoke a percentage related to what they offered to God..

#3 - None of them were called a tithe to God.

And I tried to highlight the fact that the first truths that we see in these first examples of giving is the idea of voluntary or freewill offerings…

God seems to desire his people to give to them out of the overflow of their heart without the need for laws and rules of giving…

Now, we need to move on in this examination of giving and the next place we arrive is Genesis 14, which is a favorite stop for those who teach 10% giving to God…

So, turn in your Bibles to Genesis 14….

Again, we dealign with Abraham at this very early point in human history…

This time, Abraham has been at battle with a number of kings in his area…

He had rescued his nephew Lot from being taken captive and in verse 17, Abraham is headed home and runs into a man named Melchizedek…

Let me read this to us…

Genesis 14:17-20…

17 Then after his return from the [r]defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of [s]God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said,
"Blessed be Abram of [t]God Most High,
[u]Possessor of heaven and earth;
20
And blessed be [v]God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."
He gave him a tenth of all.

As Abraham came back from a victorious and successful battle, he runs into a priest of God..

Seeing the man of God, Abraham simply gives him a tenth of the possessions that he had won in battle as a token of his thanks to God…

And if you have ever listened to sermons on giving, many pastors will turn to this passage to justify God's command and expectation that you give 10% of your income to God…

Now, let's think about this passage…

First of all, once again make a note that nowhere was Abraham expected or commanded to give 10% of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek…

Also, please note that this 10% was not part of all that Abraham had…

It was simply 10% of the spoils of battle…

And more importantly, it seems that this was simply a portion that Abraham determined in his heart to give to God on this occasion…

In his first offering to God in chapters 12 and 13, he may have given more or less…

In fact, Abraham lived for 160 years and this is the only time that we are told he gave 10% to God…

On other occasions, he may have given more or less…

We simply don't know because God doesn't tell us..

One more thing to note, this act of giving by Abraham was not called a tithe…

That comes in Gen 28, which is next stop of looking at OT giving to God…

Genesis 28:20..

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I [q]take, and will give me [r]food to eat and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father's house in [s]safety, then the Lord will be my God. 22 This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

In Genesis 28, Jacob is at a spiritual low…

He is trying to buy God's favor.

God, if you will help me, I will give you 10%..

This is not good.

Unfortunately, many pastors use this an example of what God expects people to give to him…

I only reference it here because it is the only other place in the book of Genesis that speaks of the idea of 10% giving…

So in all the book of Genesis which has many examples of giving to God, 10% is only used twice to describe what people gave to God…

And again, we need to note that all the giving up to this point in the Bible is voluntary..

It is not under compulsion or commanded by God…

Now this leads to a good question?

Has there ever been required or commanded giving to God in the OT?

And that is yes…

So let's go look at Genesis 41..

We now fast forward to another famous name in the OT and this time, it is Joseph..

Remember that Jospeh was sold in slavery by his brothers but it worked out for good because Jospeh ended up in Pharoahs' home and was able to help his family…

Well, while he was in Egypt, Pharaoh had a dream and Joseph was able to let Pharaoh know that his dream of fat and skinny cows meant 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine coming to Egypt…

So, there was a need to prepare for the years of famine…

Let's read from Gen 41:33-36…

33 Now let Pharaoh look for a man discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh take action to appoint overseers [ac]in charge of the land, and let him exact a fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven years of abundance. 35 Then let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and store up the grain for food in the cities under Pharaoh's authority, and let them guard it. 36 Let the food become as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land will not perish during the famine."

Ok, what do we have here in the Bible for the first time?

The idea of required giving in the form of national taxation…

What percentage is a fifth?

It is 20%.

So God introduces the idea of taxes to provide for the people of Egypt in a time of coming famine…

So, here we have the idea of required giving, and the idea comes from God in the form of taxation by government…

Now at this point in the Scriptures, we have seen two types go giving…

One type is freewill giving that comes out of the heart and it has no number or percentage attached to it…

And the other kind of giving is required giving to the government and it has a percentage attached to it of 20% …

So that is the pattern of giving established in the first book of Bible…

Freewill and required giving…

Freewill giving goes to God and required giving goes to government…

Now, we have to switch gears for a minute…

Because as Israel began to grow as a nation in the book of Exodus, God began to give them His laws to govern their behavior as His people in the world…

The laws were meant to set Israel apart as a nation in the world….

Their diet, their specific ways of worshipping God, their sacrifices were all designed to draw attention to their God…

Yet, many people even today see these laws as binding on Christians…

And so you have people today that put Christians under laws of the Sabbath, dietary laws, civil laws…

And this is certainly true for laws that God gave to Israel in regards to giving to Him..

And this is where the 10% preachers really turn to justify their call for Christians to give 10% as well….

And it usually goes like this….

If Israel gave 10%, we should at least give 10% today…

And they often use the laws of the book of Leviticus to justify that..

Unfortunately if you look at the laws on giving in the OT, Israel was required to give to God at least 23% of their income…

Leviticus 27 tells us that Israel was required to give 10% of fruits and animals to the Lord…

30 'Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. 31 If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of

his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. 32 For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. 33 He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed.'"
34 These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai.

So if you are keeping track in your head, there is 10% required giving to God…

And the reason for this 10% was to support the priests in the land…

The Levites were the priests to the people and that prevented them from earning a living so Israel was required to give them 10% of their income to do their work..

Deuteronomy 12 speaks of another required offering of Israel..

This offering was for a national festival to celebrate God's goodness to them each year…

This offering was also 10% above the offering to the priests…

So we now have required giving of 10% to the priests, 10% to a national festival, and then we read this in Deuteronomy 14..

28 "At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your [x]town. 29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the [y]orphan and the widow who are in your [z]town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

This is simply a welfare tax if you will to supply the needs of the orphan and the widow in the land of Israel..

And so every 3 years, Israel was required to give 10% extra for those less fortunate..

That would amount to 3 1/3% each year…

So now, we see Israel commanded to give 10% each year for the priests, 10% each year for national festivals, and 3 1/3% each year for the poor…

So at this point, we see 23 1/3% required giving for Israel in the OT..

Now that doesn't include the command to leave the corners of their fields uncut so that the poor could come and gather grain from them…

This doesn't include the command to let the land rest every 7 years…

So when you add it all up, Israel was likely required to give around 25% if not more in the form of required giving to their nation…

In other words, the OT tithe was much than 10%, and since it was required giving, it was more similar to taxation than a freewill offering to God..

At this point, the OT model of giving is a 25% 3 part tithe, and we have even talked about freewill giving to God…

So men who point to the OT as being the model for 10% giving to God are severely misguided..

God's people were commanded to give much more than that…

Now, at this point, we have seen 2 types of giving in the OT..

Freewill giving that was not connected to a percentage and simply came from what the people of God purposed to give God in their hearts…

And then mandatory giving that amounted to taxes paid by the people of God to support the priesthood, the festivals of the nation and to support the poor..

Now I ask you, which one is called the tithe?

Well it is connected to the idea of mandatory giving…

Freewill giving is never connected to the idea of a tithe…

The tithe is a command and the tithe belongs to God because he demands it..

Tithing is taxation in the OT and not giving to the Lord…

In a sense, what comes out of your paycheck today in the form of taxes is closer to a tithe that what you put in the offering plate if you follow the model of the OT….

When preachers speak of the need to tithe 10% today, they are often confused by what the OT teaches….

So what can we learn from the OT in regards to giving?

First, the people of the OT gave under the command of God but also gave voluntarily…

Now, does this change for the NT Christian?

And long story short, it doesn't and here is why…

The NT speaks of two kinds of giving as well…

The first is to pay your taxes..

Romans 13 clearly says that we are to pay our taxes to the government that God puts over us..

We talked about how we are to be in debt to no one but to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar..

The second kind of giving described in the NT is guess what?

Freewill giving, which simply says to give to God what you purpose in your heart to give…

There is no set amount to give…

The principle is to give cheerfully out of the heart not under the compulsion but voluntarily…

That is it…

No percentages…

No numbers….

No requirements…

Now, what I want to do next week is look at these two ways that the NT talks about giving…

In regards to paying your taxes and then in regards to what you give to God..

Conclusion

So here is a little summary for tonight…

#1 - The first offerings in the Bible were voluntary and not based on a percentage.

Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham all gave offerings to God that were not commanded and not based on a percentage.

#2 - The law of God in the OT established involuntary giving known as tithes that amounted to about 25% of the people's income.

These three tithes supported the priests, the nation's festivals and the poor..

#3 - The people of God in the OT also gave to God voluntarily on top of the tithe.

#4 - The NT teaching on giving also involves both mandatory tithing in the form of taxes and voluntary giving to the Lord.

#5 - God provides for His church.

A lot of pastors would call me crazy for teaching about giving in this way…

In their minds, if people aren't taught to give a percentage, churches will be forced to close doors.

In my mind, if I dont teach the whole truth of the word of God, God will close the pulpit to me..

If there is one way that the church has suffered, it is under the guilt of pastors who lord over and intimidate their people into giving…

I am firm believer that people give based on what the Lord puts on their heart…

IF that is 1% or 99% of their income, that is between them and the Lord and no one else..

God has no problem finding the money to fund his church, but he has a huge problem with men who lay guilt trips on people to give from the pulpit by twisting the Scriptures..

I would rather teach the truth and trust God to change hearts than twist the Bible and trust my skills of persuasion to get people to give more..

I dont want anyone giving because the preacher says to give this much…

However, I love watching people because the Spirit of God tells them how much to give..

And we will look at how the Spirt teaches us to give next week…

Let us pray.