

Why Tithing Has Nothing to Do With Legalism

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you, so that you, always having enough of everything, may abound to every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).

Over the years I’ve been doing this website—some 15 years now—I have occasionally written about tithing our income to the Lord through His church. Invariably, among the responses will come some hostile attacks, accusing us of preaching Old Testament doctrine, being legalists, misleading God’s people into a salvation by works and other such foolishness.

They could not be more wrong. Some people—like Judas—just cannot stand to see someone expressing love to Jesus by giving generously to honor Him.

“For what purpose is this waste?” said Jesus’ disciples (Matt. 26:8).

I decided I would tell you what I’m doing. I’ll save this draft and come back to it later and decide if I have permission from the Lord to post it or if I should delete it. *(Later note: I removed most of the dollar amounts, but left everything else in.)*

“How much are you all giving?” I asked that of my sister tonight.

Our family will be participating in a fundraiser for the family’s long-time pastor in Walker County, Alabama. Mickey Crane has faithfully served New Oak Grove Free Will Baptist Church over several decades.

In 1982, he helped my brother Ron and me conduct our Grandma McKeever’s funeral. Since then, he worked with us in services

for our brothers Glenn and Charlie and our parents, Carl and Lois. In recent years Brother Mickey has been in bad health and the church is inviting everyone to contribute to helping with his bills.

My sister said they haven't decided, and she has not heard from our brother, Ron. I wrote a check for \$200.

Each month, I write a monthly check to our church. I call it my tithe, but I do not sit down and laboriously figure out my income and compute the amount of a tithe. My wife gives a tithe out of her income, which is separate.

Two years ago, when our church did a capital funds campaign to raise several million for renovation of properties, I pledged \$10,000. I gave half of that amount last year and am halfway through the balance for this year.

I support a missionary with CRU, which is "Campus Crusade for Christ," to the tune of \$200 a month. I give my seminary \$50 a month and another \$100 a month to Global Maritime Ministries, the New Orleans-based outreach to ships' crews from all over the world. In addition, I support—although not on a monthly schedule—a ministry in South Africa, an outreach to Muslims in Texas and a start-up church in Chicagoland.

It all adds up to a double tithe, pretty much, although my church gets only the first tithe normally. (And yes, I do give to special offerings.)

Legalism Has Nothing to Do With It

I am one cheerful giver. Few things give me as much joy as writing these checks. I'm so thankful to be in a situation where I have it to give and to have arrived at the point in my spiritual journey when I know how much more blessed it is to give than to receive.

I receive plenty, just so you'll know. People are so kind to

invite me to preach and minister. A week ago, I ministered for two days, sketching and speaking at a men's conference 120 miles from here. They paid me generously.

The first two days of this week, I drove a similar distance and sketched at two colleges for the student ministries and was similarly rewarded. I've done two revivals this summer and will do two more this fall.

I receive whatever the churches choose to give me; there are never any monetary requirements. And they are unfailingly kind and gracious. All of which allows me to give more. (I will point out that next birthday, I will reach 80 years of age, which makes these invitations all the more remarkable.)

The text above is a great reminder: God gives us more so we may be more generous. We are conduits, channels, of His blessing.

We used to sing a song in church about that: "Make me a channel of blessing today; out of my life may Jesus shine."

Some of us have noticed that when we clog up the channel with our greed, the blessings dry up.

The old illustration about the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea still works. The sea called Dead is dead because it takes and takes but never gives. The sea called Galilee receives from the north and sends the water on its way to the south, and thus abounds with fish and life.

I said to a particularly greedy man once: "I want you to give your wealth away." (His greed was destroying his marriage and ruining the relationship with his adult children.) You would have thought I had asked him to jump from a plane with no parachute.

But he did take one teeny-tiny step.

The next time we counseled, he boasted, "I gave my daughter

\$100.” But never again, as far as I could tell. Some years later, when I saw his wife, she told me they were long divorced, and he was no longer living. His children finally got all his money.

A lot of good it did him.

I love the old line about that: “I’m doing my giving while I’m living so I’m knowing where it’s going.”

My children know without being told that I am not giving away their inheritance.

There is no inheritance until I’m no longer here.

And they’re good with that. They love me more than they desire a financial windfall upon my absence. I’m dead certain of that.

Thank you, Father, for the ability to give. And thank You for the desire. It’s all from You. {eoa}

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