



## Statement on Generosity

### Patterns for Generosity

- a. The practice of tithing is mentioned and commissioned in the Old Testament.

#### Pre-Mosaic Law

Genesis 14:18-20: And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a *tenth of everything*.<sup>1</sup>

Genesis 28:20-22: Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord[f] will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me *I will give you a tenth*.”

#### Mosaic Law

Leviticus 27:30-33: A *tithe* of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it. Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd’s rod—will be holy to the Lord. No one may pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If anyone does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed. These are the commands the Lord gave Moses at Mount Sinai for the Israelites.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> We know that Abraham definitely tithed. It is not certain if this was merely a unique incident or if it was instrumental in eventually establishing the tithe as the normative pattern of giving. In its immediate context, it seems to be a one-time event; however, within a few years of this event Jacob also chose to give 10% of “everything” to the Lord (Genesis 28), and 10% is established and commissioned in the Mosaic Law as well. The question becomes: Since Moses is the “essential author” of the Pentateuch, is there any type of causal relationship between Genesis 14 and the tithe principle that is established in the remainder of the Pentateuch?

<sup>2</sup> This tithe was given to the Levites so that they could perform the duties related to the place of worship (Numbers 18:20-32). Paul probably refers to this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:13-14. Paul states, “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (14). Yet, he does not affirm or deny the % of giving, and he himself does not tap into these financial rights in this context.

Malachi 3:8-12: Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, “How have we robbed Thee?” In *tithes and offerings*. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes, says the Lord of hosts. And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts.<sup>3</sup>

- b. The pattern of tithing is mentioned in the New Testament.

#### New Testament

Matthew 23:23: 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. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (also see Luke 11:42).<sup>4</sup>

Hebrews 7:4-10: Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham *gave him a tenth* of the plunder! Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.<sup>5</sup>

- c. Although the New Testament mentions the tithe, reputable biblical scholars disagree on whether or not the 10% standard ought to be commissioned to the New Testament church.

As we read the NT, there is a development of thought on the topic of giving with a distinct focus on heartfelt generosity. However, there surprisingly is little said about the % of giving. We would expect Paul, who was brought up in a strict Jewish home and who was a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Phil 3:5), to be intentional about laying down an established perspective on tithing. We do not find this in the Pauline literature. On the other hand, the silence could be expected if there was a

---

<sup>3</sup> This passage teaches that it is robbery to withhold tithes and offerings. It says tithes; thus, it might be referring to more than one type of tithe. Many argue that the OT teaches a few different kinds of tithing (Numbers 18:20-32; Deut. 14:22-27; Deut. 14:28-29); they could have served as a type of ‘national tax’ supporting Israel as a Theocracy. Also, it should be noted that God blesses His people when they give properly. Although this does not warrant an exact formula, in some way and in some sense God’s people will be blessed for faithful giving.

<sup>4</sup> Even though the tithe is mentioned in this passage, the main focus is on the flawed motive of the religious leaders who set their commitment to tithing above acts of justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

<sup>5</sup> Although the tithe is mentioned in this passage, the author of Hebrews is not primarily arguing for the % of giving in this passage. Rather, he is teaching that Melchizedek is greater than Abraham. He uses the tithing event as a premiss to support this conclusion. Melchizedek is greater because he receives the tithe and gives the blessing.

well-established consensus in the early church on the % of giving. In other words, Paul would not need to argue for something that was already embraced.

The New Testament, as a whole, does not indisputably embrace or reject 10% as the required principle of giving. For example, we do not find a verse that says, “The tithe is out of here for good.” We also do not find a verse that says, “The tithe is here to stay.” Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that the early church granted that the giving of God’s people would be equal to or even more than equal to the standard pattern of the Old Covenant. Then again, we realize how important it is to not move into a legislative position on tithing since we do not find a clear conclusion on this issue within the New Testament writings.

### **Principles of Generosity**<sup>6</sup>

#### a. Planned, Regular and Proportionate Giving

1 Corinthians 16:2: On the first day of *every week*, each one of you should set aside a sum of money *in keeping with his income*, saving it up, so that when I come no collection will have to be made.<sup>7</sup>

#### b. Generous, Personally Decided and Cheerful Giving

2nd Corinthians 9:6-15: Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and *whoever sows generously* will also reap generously. *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give*, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for *God loves a cheerful giver*. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: “They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!<sup>8</sup>

### **Place of Generosity**

#### a. The place of giving is first and foremost the local church.

A pattern that is wise and helpful is found in Acts 4. This passage describes how the people in Jerusalem brought numerous gifts and laid these substances at the feet of the apostles; they trusted God to order the apostles in a way that would relieve them of the burden of having to decide what

---

<sup>6</sup> Any consideration of giving must begin with God’s giving (see John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 8:9).

<sup>7</sup> Question: What is ‘in keeping with my income?’ Answer: In the OT they were required to start with a tenth. If you’ve never given regularly or proportionately, this is a great place to start.

<sup>8</sup> Also, see 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 for Paul’s example of the Macedonian church’s grace for giving.

to do with everything. The apostles assumed this responsibility. We believe this function is currently implemented by the local church. Elders of the church have been given the responsibility to exercise oversight; this spiritual oversight includes financial affairs. For these affairs, as well as others, each elder will give an account before other church leaders and ultimately before God.

Galatians 6:6: One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.<sup>9</sup>

1 Timothy 5:17-18: Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and “The laborer deserves his wages.”

- b. The church is called to participate in apostolic mission.

Romans 15:24: I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.<sup>10</sup>

### **Cityview Conclusions**

1. The New Testament is primarily focused on the motive of giving; it is focused on the why behind the what. Christians should give their time, energy, and money to kingdom causes with “cheerful” hearts. The quality of the intention behind generous giving is the main focus of the New Testament writers; CityView is committed to the same primary focus.

2. Every member is encouraged to view 10% as a good starting point. While reputable Bible scholars debate whether or not the tithe is carried over to the New Testament, this percentage is helpful in giving each member of the body of Christ an objective understanding of what generosity looks like in action. Although giving a little less would not be deemed wrong, we recognize that the New Testament usually takes believers a step forward. By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, as a believer’s inward appreciation for the generosity of God increases, his or her generosity in action will likely increase.

3. It is sinful and displeasing to God to possess a stingy comportment and to express fruitlessness in active giving.<sup>11</sup>

4. It is appropriate for New Testament believers to expect God’s blessing if they are faithful in the area of giving. Having said this, believers should recognize that blessings come in a variety of forms; they may or may not be financial in nature.

---

<sup>9</sup> In other words, where we are fed is where we first contribute. The local church is not necessarily the only place to give, but it should be the prime place to cheerfully give in order to support the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel throughout all nations.

<sup>10</sup> In the early church model people gave to churches, and churches themselves funded mission (Romans 15), poor relief (Acts 11:27-30; 2 Corinthians 8-9; etc.) and local church leadership (1 Corinthians 9:14-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Ecclesiologically, we believe the accountability for engaging in mission, serving the poor, and supporting leadership development actually lies within the local church; this community is overseen by called and qualified elders.

<sup>11</sup> It is possible to express a grace-filled harsh word. Brotherly love necessitates engaging someone if they are in sin (for example ... it would be permissible and loving to correct a fellow believer if they are participating in adultery). What is the point? Legalism is not the result of calling sin what it is. Legalism enters the equation when you encourage someone to handle sin in the wrong way (self-help, extra rules, condemnatory pressure, etc.).

“Is it permissible to tithe? Not only is it permissible, I would strongly recommend and urge you to do so. In choosing to give 10% of our income to the Lord, we are honoring a God-given, Old Testament principle. In the absence of a prescribed percentage for giving in the New Testament, why not adopt the Old Testament pattern? This does not mean you are sinning if you don't. To give only 8% or to give 12% is equally permissible. Not to give at all, or to give disproportionately to your income (which is the case with most Christians today), or to give grudgingly, is indeed sin. Let us be joyful and generous in our giving. After all, everything we own belongs to God anyway!” – Sam Storms