

The Watford Word

www.watfordchurchofchrist.org

What's on

Sunday 09 June - 10:30AM. Malcolm speaking
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

Ukraine Update

The situation in Ukraine is becoming increasingly difficult. Please check out this link: <https://www.euromissions.org/ukraine-relief>

Tithing – Why?

As announced last Sunday we are designating June as a month of teaching and prayer regarding our new charitable status, and approach to giving. To start, I offer some thoughts on the context of tithing. Let me know what you think.

The Purpose of Tithing

Tithing, the practice of giving one-tenth of one's earnings or produce, is a central element in the life of ancient Israel under the Old Covenant (OC). Instituted by God, it served spiritual, economic, and social purposes. To understand the purpose of tithing under the OC, it is essential to explore its theological significance, its role in sustaining the Levitical priesthood, its contribution to societal welfare, and its function as an act of faith and obedience.

Tithing Before the Law

Even before the formalisation of the Mosaic Law, the concept of tithing was present in the biblical narrative, reflecting its deep-rooted significance. The earliest instance is found in Genesis 14:18-20, where Abram (later Abraham) gives a tenth of the

spoils of his victory to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High. This act of tithing by Abram signifies a recognition of God's blessing and sovereignty, predating the Levitical system and illustrating a principle of honouring God with material possessions. Another example is Jacob, who vows to give a tenth of all he receives from God if God will protect him and provide for him (Genesis 28:20-22). These pre-law instances of tithing indicate that the practice was understood as a way to acknowledge and worship God, laying a foundational precedent that would later be codified in the law given to Moses.

Theological Significance

Tithing was primarily an act of worship and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. By offering a tenth of their produce, the Israelites recognised that everything they had was provided by God. This practice was rooted in the belief that God was the ultimate owner of the land and all its yields. Thus, tithing was a way to honour God and express gratitude for His provisions. It served as a constant reminder of God's generosity and the Israelites' dependence on Him. Lev 27:30 states, "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."

Supporting the Levitical Priesthood

One of the main purposes of tithing was to sustain the Levitical priesthood. The Levites were set apart to perform religious duties and rituals. They did not own land or engage in agriculture like the other tribes. Instead, their sustenance came from the tithes collected from the people. According to Numbers 18:21-24, God instructed the Israelites to give a tenth of their produce to the Levites as their inheritance. This system ensured that the religious leaders could dedicate themselves fully to their spiritual responsibilities without the distraction of earning a livelihood. In turn, the Levites were required to give a tenth of the tithes they received to the high priests,

ensuring a structured support system within the religious hierarchy. Numbers 18:26 says, "Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering.'"

Societal Welfare

Tithing played a crucial role in the social and economic welfare of the community. Beyond supporting the priesthood, tithes were used to aid the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Every third year, a special tithe, known as the "poor tithe," was collected and stored in local towns to be distributed to those in need (Deut 14:28-29). This practice fostered a sense of communal responsibility and ensured that the vulnerable members of society were cared for. It also helped to maintain social stability and reduce economic disparities within the community. Deuteronomy 14:29 instructs, "so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

Development of Tithing

The practice of tithing evolved significantly from the time of Moses to Jesus. During the Mosaic period, tithing was strictly regulated and primarily focused on agricultural produce and livestock. As Israelite society transitioned from a nomadic to a settled agricultural community, the specifics of tithing became more structured, with clear directives on the collection and distribution of tithes. By the time of the Second Temple period, detailed systems were in place to ensure the tithes supported the temple services and the needs of the priesthood and Levites. However, during the intertestamental period and into the time of Jesus, tithing also began to reflect broader social and economic realities. By the time of Jesus, tithing had become a deeply ingrained religious practice. Jesus affirmed the principle of tithing but criticised the religious leaders for their legalistic approach, emphasising that justice, mercy, and faithfulness were more important (Matt 23:23).

Act of Faith and Obedience

Finally, tithing under the OC was an act of faith. It required the Israelites to trust that God would continue to provide for their needs even after giving away a portion of their resources. This act of giving was a test of their faith in God's promises and His provision. It was a tangible expression of their commitment to follow God's commandments and to live according to His statutes. By faithfully tithing, the Israelites demonstrated their loyalty to God and their willingness to adhere to His covenant. Malachi 3:10 challenges the people, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Conclusion

Tithing under the OC served multiple purposes. It acknowledged God's sovereignty & generosity. It sustained the religious leaders, was a means of supporting societal welfare, and a test of faith and obedience for the people of Israel. Through tithing, the Israelites maintained a close relationship with God, ensured the functioning of their religious institutions, and upheld the well-being of their community.

Having surveyed the OC perspective the question remains, "Is tithing relevant for a Christian?" What do you think? We will explore this next time.

Your brother in Christ, Malcolm

Watford Contribution Details

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