

How much should I give? (by Keiyeng Nation)

There are a few ideas or things you may have been taught about giving along the course of your Christian life. One might be the concept of ‘**Tithing**’, which has its origins in the Old Testament Law given to God’s people (the Israelites) through Moses. Tithing was where God’s people gave 10% of everything they owned (whether money, crops, animals, cloth etc) to God by giving it for the use of the priestly Levite tribe. The male Levites’ job as Priests in God’s Temple disallowed them from working at anything else to earn money or possessions, so they needed these to be given to them. In God’s magnificent, logical, and orderly wisdom, He arranged that the Levites’ daily needs should be provided for by the other 11 tribes’ tithes.

So what about us in the New Testament? Is tithing (giving 10% of our money, goods, and possessions) still the way to go?

The question behind the question here is to what extent are New Testament believers bound to obey the Old Testament Law? This is a huge question with a big answer that’s hard to reduce into a few paragraphs. But I’ll try!

Historically, there are two positions that give the extreme answers to this question – ie. ‘not at all’ (Dispensationalism) and ‘fully’ (Theonomy). And here I’ll do some quoting from the contemporary Old Testament scholar, Tremper Longman III (!):

“One finds a tendency in dispensationalist writing to distinguish between the OT as a time when God worked through law and the NT as a period of grace. ... [Schofield’s] view ... cannot help but lead to a minimalisation of the law, a disregard for the OT law as such. It does not, as Bruce Waltke points out, take into account Paul’s assertion that the law is “holy and right and good” (Rom 7:12).

... On the other hand, the school of thought that goes by the name theonomy ... argues that the OT laws and penalties are still in effect today. ... In brief, theonomy’s approach to the law is to take Jesus’ words seriously, dogmatically, and literally. ... Strict continuity is assumed between the Old and New Testaments. Theonomists believe that it is the job of government to enforce OT law, which thereby becomes a blueprint for contemporary society.”

[Making Sense of the Old Testament: Three Crucial Questions, Tremper Longman III, p105-106]

Longman’s (and our) view is that there are distinct points of *Continuity AND Discontinuity* between Old and New Testaments. So, when it comes to NT believers’ obedience to the Law (or not), we have to understand what these points are. Here’s where this post could seriously blow out so at risk of being too brief, this is a summary based on Longman’s [p108-123] -

All OT Case Law (laws that concern specific situations) is an outflow, or *application* of the Ten Commandments to the specific situations of the Old Testament people of God.

Jesus himself upheld (and extended the scope and application of) the Ten Commandments in his teaching, so we must uphold them.

Jesus also perfectly summarised the essence of the Ten Commandments (and their accompanying case laws) in the two greatest commandments in Mark 12:29-31 -

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

The relevant 'case law' (or application of the Ten / two Greatest Commandments to our specific situations) inevitably looks hugely different for us (Christians in the 21st Century) compared with the OT / God's nation of Israel before Christ.

The New Testament provides 'case law' for New Testament believers, exemplified in Jesus' and the apostles' teaching about what pleases God.

Instead of obeying the case law of the OT, we obey the 'case law' (or commands) of the NT, both of which are expressions / applications of the Ten Commandments / two Greatest Commandments *contextualised for the stage of redemption-history at hand*.

Neither the Israelites nor we can obey God's commands to earn salvation. Rather we obey Him to please Him because He has saved us.

So, back to tithing! Do we give 10%, more, or less?

The NT 'case law' on giving doesn't specify percentages, but rather, attitude. Paul teaches Jesus' followers (that's us!) to give generously. To illustrate this he gave the Macedonian Christians props for urgently pleading with the apostles for the privilege of giving! He motivated generosity on the basis of Jesus' generous giving to us. And he taught that God both enables and affirms our generosity when it's enacted for Him. (read it all in [2 Corinthians 8-9](#))

Back to the 10%. We personally think there's lots of merit for letting 10% be a minimum figure rather than a maximum. If the NT teaching is 'generosity', then the whole point is that we seek to out-give ourselves, rather than scrimp! But having said this, because 10% is not a NT command, NT believers have freedom in Christ to give less – particularly if and when circumstances necessitate it. (Beware using this as a cop-out though!)

I'll finish with a fantastic summary borrowed from David Cook at BLT in January 2008.

In the Old Testament, it was 1 in 12 (tribes who were consecrated to serve God as His priests). In the New Testament, it is 12 in 12. As Christians, we are ALL made holy to serve God as His priests (mediators) to the non-Christian world, as a constant, never-retired-from vocation.

In the Old Testament, it was 1 in 7 (days consecrated as holy to the Lord to remember and honour Him). In the New Testament, it is 7 in 7. All our days and times are His; we remember, serve, and honour Him with all of what we do on all our days – both at work and at rest.

In the Old Testament, it was 10% (of money and possessions given back to God). In the New Testament, it is 100%. All of our money and possessions belong to God; we are merely stewards of His resources. We are to use ALL of it to serve and glorify Him; all of it is holy and to be used in God-honouring ways – whether given in offering, given away to the poor, invested for His kingdom – not ours! – or spent in enjoying His Creation-gifts with thankfulness.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)