



February 2009



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

SHOULD CHRISTIANS TITHE?

By Calvin Edwards

One of the questions that we have been asked most frequently at Good News Unlimited relates to tithing. Should Christians tithe? To whom should the tithe be paid? At GNU we have sometimes been accused of “taking tithe.” Of course this strikes us as being a little humorous because it implies that the accuser has a monopoly on tithe and that persons may not choose for themselves where their contributions should go.

Tithing is a widespread and ancient custom. References to it have been found in cultures other than Israel. There are about two dozen references to tithe in the Old Testament and anyone can read them all in a few minutes with the aid of a concordance. There is no evidence of widespread tithing in the patriarchal age, but as the temple system grew, tithing became a more sophisticated system, and indeed an important part of the Israelite economy. Its key value was that it provided for persons who otherwise would not have adequate provision for their daily needs. The Levites who were dedicated to maintaining the sacrificial system even away from Jerusalem; the priests in the temple at Jerusalem; the widows, the fatherless and the aliens—such were those who benefited from this system.

Built into the system was recognition of the fact that God was owner of all. Thus, both divine sovereignty and one’s obligation to the needy were acknowledged.

Tithe is only mentioned three times in the New Testament: in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:12); in the historical argument used by the writer of Hebrews (7:4-10); and in the fourth of Jesus’ seven woes

I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ Luke 18:12 NKJV

pronounced upon the Pharisees. He states: “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 (Matthew 23; Luke 11).

In all the writings of John, Paul, Peter and James there is no mention of tithe. Nowhere is there any indication that the Old Testament system of tithing was to be continued in the Christian church. Jesus does assure the Pharisees that they should have tithed but this cannot be interpreted as instruction to the Christian church. There is no evidence that the old system of the theocratic state of Israel was accepted by the early Christian church as its model for the support of the ministry. This is not to say persons should not tithe; it is only

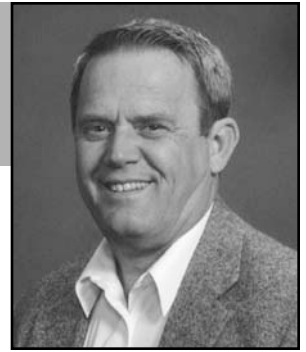
Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. Hebrews 7:4-10 NKJV

Continued on page 3

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

www.goodnewsunlimited.org

EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

“Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1, 2).

These are uncertain times! The ship of economy on which our hopes were floated is floundering. The superstructure of our social security apparatus is cracked and broken. The change in fortunes has been rapid and spectacular. Government and corporate rhetoric struggles to keep up with each day’s developments. High priests and prophets of financial markets watch agog as their remedies and stimulus packages achieve nil impact. High priced executives and hedge fund moguls, having emptied the pockets of eager investors, walk away from their stricken companies. It is as if we are living through—and are part of—an object lesson in misplaced confidence. The words of John of Patmos appear eerily apt: *“In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin” (Revelation 18:17).*

In America and the rest of the developed world, there are thousands—millions of men, women and families who have become suddenly bereft. We are told to expect much more of the same in the months to come.


Amid the debris of loss and shattered dreams, the time is ripe to consider another way. Long ago, Isaiah wrote about things of supreme import, which could be enjoyed even if one had no money at all. He was speaking about the extraordinary generosity of God. God operates according to a law of giving. His way is the way of grace in which nothing is bought, or it wouldn’t be grace. God is not an accountant, a merchant or a broker, or an investment advisor. Everything he has is given ‘without money and without cost.’ In the system that mankind has contrived, everything is for sale. The markets dictate worth. Society esteems most highly, persons who are beautiful, handsome, athletic, famous or rich. Capital expenditures on the

handicapped, the sick or terminally ill, the insane, the old, the unemployed, homeless, destitute and imprisoned, must always fight their way against a vast consensus, hostile to God’s law—the law of giving.

The law of acquisition (selling) lets us down; our aggregated lust for more is never appeased. We remain *thirsty*. What money can buy is poor recompense. Only God can truly satisfy. What can be earned never quenches human longing. The free and overflowing love of God is the air we were meant to breathe, and the law on which our personal and social well-being must stand.

To serve and promote that law—which is nothing else but the law of Christ, the gospel—is the task of Good News Unlimited. We cherish no illusions about the strength of the law of selling. The fallout caused by its present debacle has touched GNU. Contributions are affected to a point at which we must cut our long-serving radio ministry in the Sacramento Valley, and beginning this month, scale down our magazine output. Some months you will receive a newsletter like this one instead of our traditional color publication. This means you will still be getting a printed communication from GNU every month, but in the course of one year, eight of them will be four-page newsletters and the other four will be in the normal sixteen-page format.

Yes, the law of selling is formidable. It would be intimidating if we did not believe that grace is stronger. Let us be clear: God does not need anyone’s money in order to get his work done. But *we* need to place, whatever his gifts to us are, at the disposal of his law of giving, in order to experience his joy, and take *delight in the richest of fare*.

Money is scarcer, but since God is not subject to the law of money, these are days of opportunity for the gospel. Together, let us be faithful. GNU’s best days may yet be ahead. We ask for your continued prayers and that you consider GNU’s ministry to the poor, the homeless, the privileged, and the unprivileged, as you distribute your gifts that help to share the gospel message with many around the globe. 

GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

Good News Unlimited magazine is published every month by Good News Unlimited, P.O. Box 6687, Auburn, CA, USA 95604-6687.

Good News Unlimited is an interdenominational Christian organization proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ and his kingdom of grace. Special emphasis is placed on the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ’s righteousness alone. GNU also links the gospel to the needs of the whole person, to life-style, and preventive medicine.

Good News Unlimited magazine also seeks to keep readers up-to-date on all aspects of GNU’s ministries. This includes news on national and international radio broadcasts; public seminars, congresses, and Bible schools within the USA (as well as

public meetings in Canada and overseas); and the dissemination of literature, audio and video material. (A comprehensive catalog is available free on request.)

Good News Unlimited is a nonprofit religious corporation supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in the USA and Canada. An annual review of GNU’s accounts is made by an external auditor. All regular donors to GNU may receive a financial statement on request.

Good News Unlimited is reached by phone at 530.823.9690. Fax 530.823.5338. E-mail gnu@goodnewsunlimited.org.

This magazine is free upon request.

February, 2009
Vol. 28, No. 2

Published by Good News Unlimited

Copyright © 2009

Editor
Ron Allen

Printer
Auburn Oaks Printing, Auburn, CA

Graphic Designer
Debbie O’Brien

Proofreader
Philip Rhodes

OVERSEAS ADDRESSES:

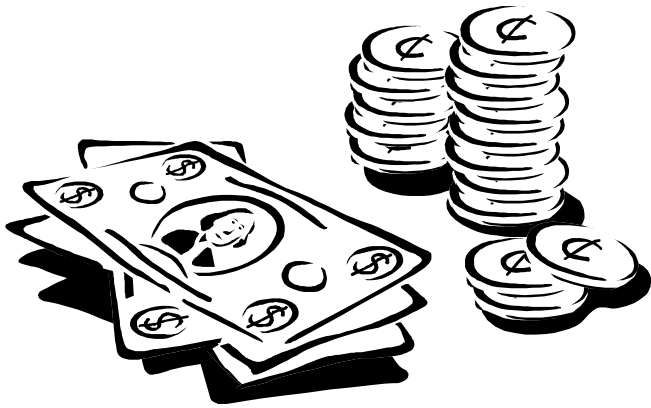
Australian office:

P.O. Box 6788
Tweed Heads 5th
NSW 2486, Australia

Canadian offices:

P.O. Box 537
Abbotsford, BC V2S 5Z5
Canada

222 Olive Avenue
Willowdale, ON M2N 4P6
Canada



to point out that it is not the system that was fundamental to the economics of the early church. A new system, which Garry Friesen has called “grace giving,” was promoted by the apostles (see *Decision Making and the Will of God*, pp. 367-375).

Probably the first Christian fund-raising letter was written by none other than the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). He is trying to raise support in Corinth for some impoverished saints elsewhere (8:4, 13-15; 9:1). These two chapters give the clearest view of the New Testament position on giving. Several principles emerge. These principles are summarized in 9:7: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” Giving should be individualized—each person must make his or her own plans. Giving should be the result of a decision one makes “in his heart.” Giving should be spontaneous. Giving should not be compelled as the old Jewish tithe was.

But how much should one give? Are there any guidelines here? Yes, indeed. Speaking of the Macedonian churches, Paul says, “...their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (8:2-4). Giving should flow forth from joy. It should be generous, even to the point of sacrifice. It should be tailored to individual abilities (8:11). Giving should be “according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (8:12). That is, it should be proportionate to one’s resources.

Unlike the Old Testament system of tithing which was more like a compulsory taxation for the theocratic state, the New Testament bases its philosophy of giving on the principle of grace. Buried in the middle of this long appeal by Paul is the theological affirmation which seems to undergird the whole argument: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (8:9). At the end of the appeal, Paul again refers to the “surpassing grace God has given you” and exclaims, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift” (9:14, 15). It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Paul sees generous, sacrificial, proportionate

giving as a logical and necessary response to the grace we have received in Christ. We should give, just as God has given.

Writers have pointed out several problems with tithing. In ancient times, incomes were certainly not as disparate as they are today. Some people give to GNU who net only \$400 per month. There are others who net well over \$5000 per month. After a tithe, the first person has \$360 to live on, the second, \$4500. That’s a huge differential. One has sacrificed incredibly, the other probably not at all. From a common sense point of view, tithing doesn’t seem to work in a modern age when income varies enormously.

Tithing tends to limit people’s giving. It operates as a kind

Unlike the Old Testament system of tithing which was more like a compulsory taxation for the theocratic state, the New Testament bases its philosophy of giving on the principle of grace.

of upper limit over which there is no need to contribute. Many of us should contribute much more than one-tenth of our income. The British scholar, F.F. Bruce wisely states: “Each Christian must come to a conscientious decision on this subject before God, and not be content to submit to the dogmatic statements of others; and it will be surprising if grace does not impel him to give a larger proportion than ever the law demanded.... A Christian’s giving should be regular.... He should not ask, ‘What am I required to give?’ but ‘How much can I give?’” (*Answers to Questions*, pp. 243, 244).

To whom should we give? Our first responsibility is to our own families. Beyond this we should move out to our local church, to gospel proclamation outside the church through Christian ministries, to the relief of needy believers, and finally the support of unbelievers who are in need.

Here’s a word about the type of organizations to support other than one’s local church. Three quick guidelines: One, support those ministries that proclaim the gospel, and operate in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read their literature and review carefully their statement of faith. Two, ensure that funds are spent wisely according to the purpose for which they were given. Three, support ministries that you have been particularly blessed by.

It has been said that the Lord measures not by what we give, but by what we have left over after we have given. A mere tenth may not be adequate. Some will give more, others less. Giving will be individual and proportionate to the way the Lord has provided.

—Condensed and reprinted from article by Calvin Edwards in GNU October 1984.



PROPHETS

A common misunderstanding is that a prophet is someone who predicts the future, but actually a prophet is someone who has insight into the present. A prophet is not someone who speaks whatever he wants, but who speaks the truth, and not just any truth, but God's truth. So a prophet is a messenger from God, sent by God to speak the unpopular truth.

The prophet Jonah said, "No way!" He tried to run away and ended up in the belly of a whale. The prophet Jeremiah said, "God, I can't speak, I'm too young." But God didn't buy that. The prophet Ezekiel was given a scroll, the word of God, and told, "Eat this and my word will be in you and everything you say will be from me."

God usually sends prophets because there is a problem, so prophets denounce sin—not just personal sin, but social sin, the sin of the nation, the sin of the religious community. This doesn't go over very well.

Everyone starts objecting to them, criticizing them, denouncing them, rejecting them and kicking them out. Prophets like Ezekiel and Isaiah got harassed, abused, arrested

and killed. No one wants to hear the truth. No one wants to hear about social sin. No one wants to be told that their beloved nation offends God, and no one wants to hear how their community of faith is really not faithful at all.

God has sent great prophets in recent history. We can tell they were great prophets because they all had a difficult time. Martin Luther King Jr. was a prophet of racial equality and nonviolence. Dorothy Day was the prophet of the poor and gospel peacemaking; Nelson Mandela the prophet of racial justice.

If these were great prophets, Jesus is the greatest prophet. He tells people to stop being violent, unjust and idolatrous, to stop supporting the empire and its wars, to start serving one another, loving one another, and forgiving one another. They say: 'Who do you think you are to tell us what to do? How dare you speak to us in that way.' How will you respond to God's word in Jesus, the greatest prophet?

-Father John Dear.



A common misunderstanding is that a prophet is someone who predicts the future, but actually a prophet is someone who has insight into the present. A prophet is not someone who speaks whatever he wants, but who speaks the truth, and not just any truth, but God's truth. So a prophet is a messenger from God, sent by God to speak the unpopular truth.