**Preaching Tithing**

**From Rev Colin Turner**

Giving out of our relationship with God

Giving is not about the mathematical sums of whether we have enough to pay the Parish Share or the roof bill, or the Rector; it is about an attitude of heart and mind towards our possessions which springs out of our relationship with God.

Jesus says Luke 6:20 “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Blessed is Makarios – the Island of Cyprus which was considered to be the most blessed and perfect place on earth – not pie in the sky but the physical place of Gods blessing.

Yet that blessing comes with conditions. v23 “Give to everyone who asks you”. If you have received from God you give, because we acknowledge that everything we have is a gift from God. We can only sit lightly to giving because in Christ we materially possess nothing. Because we have experienced the wonder of the love of God for us. John 4:19 “We love because he first loved us”.

Too often our giving is out of coercion, or guilt.

Aself-absorbedparishioner was told by her priest to go to her community and do something kind for a needy person. Unable to bring herself to actually approach one of the local unfortunates, she scribbled, "Best of luck", on a £20 note and thrust it into the nearest hand. The next day she was startled when the same man approached his benefactor. "Nice work, lady", he said cheerfully. "Best of Luck paid ten to one."

Often our giving is as reluctant and hit and miss as that, and sometimes it may have surprising results.

2 Corinthians 8:2f speaks of “overflowing joy; rich generosity; privilege of sharing”. Joy is a grace word. Paul says that he wants his hearers to know about v1 “the grace that God has given the Macedonians” to give very generously. Karl Barth says, “in grace God essentially gives himself”. The ability to give freely is a gift of God to us just as grace is – it is not something, which we earn, or need to do to deserve God’s love for us. It is allowing him to be himself in us.

There is a sacramental aspect of giving; God meets us in the act of giving even as he meets us in the receiving of bread and wine. We do not enjoy this blessing if we do not take part. Giving gets better as you do it. But you do have to do it. Sometimes it seems as if God drops us in at the deep end and we have to trust him to hold us up. At other times God is quite happy for us to begin with a doggy paddle with a float board with one foot on the bottom. But the purpose of learning like this is to begin to do it properly with both feet off the bottom and eventually swimming confidently and strongly trusting the water to hold us up.

Sally, a single parent in our congregation, was convinced that she needed to tithe, before I preached about it! However, she had a number of debts, so she made an agreement with God that she would tithe as soon as she had cleared her £1,000 overdraft. Within the week she had received an unexpected bonus and back pay of £1,100 – enough to pay off the overdraft and to give God the tithe of this income!

Practical giving

Even in Malachi 3:1-10 where the clearest teaching on tithing is given, it is in the context of being spiritually right with God. v4 “the offering . . . will be acceptable to God”. He goes on to speak of, ”robbing God by withholding tithes and offerings” and telling them to “bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.”

Tithing is not compulsory – it is not mentioned in the New Testament [possibly because it was the norm] but it is not commanded. As with our salvation it is a choice – ‘choose you this day’ .

What is a tithe? It comes from the word meaning a tenth. It is an acknowledgment that all we have comes from God. In returning to him a tenth, we show we know this as a fact.

It is a tenth of all your income. Gross before tax. ‘Whole tithe’ v3 means whole – all not just a bit or a part. It is putting God first. So you say, what about income tax, I have to pay that. First do you owe God any less in ‘having to pay him’? Second the difference between your gross and net income is the benefit you receive from living in a country that looks after your health and welfare and provides, for you.

A tenth of your gross income; pension; annuity; financial gifts, bonuses, allowances, Family Income Supplement, Child allowance, birthday and Christmas money – not physical gift, inheritance, and - and – if I have not included it is almost certainly included!

You need to be accurate about this. Have a book. Every time you receive money write it in one column and in another the tenth, which you give to God. Then at the end of a month you can add that column up and make sure you have given it. This is not being legalistic.

If you go into a bank and give them a £100 cheque to cash and the teller passes back £97 you will say ‘hey where is the other three pounds?’ and you will not leave without it.

The same is true of the tithe – it is not ours it is God’s. That is why we will need to take the tithe off the top of what you receive – or else you will not be able to afford it!! God’s accountancy does not work in the same way as ours. In a remarkable way God allows 90% to do the work of 100%. You can only tithe what you actually have, especially if you are dependant on a non-believing partner. Why not trust God for a month. He says ‘test me in this’. If it does not work you have little to loose. If it does you have everything to gain.

How do I give?

I want to share with you a wonderful device that God has provided for tithing if you are in work and your employer runs a Payroll Giving Scheme. This is a way of not paying any tax on the money you give through this means. So you do not need to do any complicated sums on how much tax will be reclaimed on your Gift Aid. You simply look at the Gross total on you pay slip and divide it by 10 and ask your employer to send this to your church as Payroll Giving. If you are very fortunate, your employer’s scheme will also be able to reclaim a bonus amount from the Government, which every so often they will ask you what to do with.

If you pay tax and are not able to use Payroll Giving, then Gift Aid is vital. It can also help you to give very generously and not even know that it has actually gone out of your account. You can tithe your estate – set apart a 10th in your Will to the church – you will never miss it!!

The tithe Malachi says is to go to the storehouse. v10: Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house

That is to your local church. The church should be supporting and engaging in all the work of mission and evangelism and caring. You cannot split your tithe up – it all has to go to the local church you support. The Bible also speaks of offerings, love gifts, alms, and generosity, on top of the tithe. Giving for the fun of it; with spontaneity; because there is a need; because God prompts it.

It is an enduring spiritual principle that we a can only be blessed for what we do, not for what we intend to do. So do it. The church will experience blessing as we tithe. You will find that when you talk about tithing to a tither they will smile. When you talk about it to a non tither – there are always problems, objections, and a worried frown.