

**Shayla:** Should I give the church money though I am in financial straits?

**Responsa:**

Your financial challenges are faced by huge numbers of people and I believe that our economy will only get worse. This is therefore an important question. First, we need to clarify that there is a difference between a tithe and an offering.

Regarding the tithe, God said,

- **Malachi 3:8-10 HCSB** "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!" You ask: "How do we rob You?" "*By not making the payments of 10 percent and the contributions.* (9) You are suffering under a curse, yet you--the whole nation--are *still* robbing Me. (10) Bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.
- **Proverbs 3:9-10 HCSB** Honor the LORD with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; (10) then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Our yetzer hara compels us to hoard or consume everything so Hashem wisely commanded us to sacrifice not the last and poorest of our flocks, but the firstlings. We were commanded to give, not the leftovers of the field, but the firstfruits.<sup>1</sup>

There are generally two types of people who don't tithe; the rich glutton who won't and the poor, destitute man who thinks he can't. It may seem counterintuitive to ask a poor person to give out of his poverty. How can a starving man eat less? However, the Lord offers us instruction in the example of a couple of widows.

- **Mark 12:42-44 HCSB** And a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little. (43) Summoning His disciples, He said to them, "**I assure you: This poor widow has put in more than all those giving to the temple treasury. (44) For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she possessed--all she had to live on.**"
- **1 Kings 17:11-16 HCSB** As she went to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." (12) But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I don't have anything baked--only a handful of flour in the jar and a bit of oil in the jug. Just now, I am gathering a couple of sticks in order to go prepare it for myself and my son so we can eat it and die." (13) Then Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid; go and do as you have said. Only make me a small loaf from it and bring it out to me. Afterwards, you may make some for yourself and your son, (14) for this is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'The flour jar will not become empty and the oil jug will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the surface of the land.'" (15) So she proceeded to do according to the word of Elijah. She and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The flour jar did not become empty, and the oil jug did not run dry, according to the word of the LORD He had spoken through Elijah.

Faith is not tested so much when the cupboard is full as when it is bare. It is in those defining moments that our true character is revealed. The crisis is the crucible. In each case, the obedient widow was blessed by the Lord and quickly realized in a practical manner the truth of Jesus' statement.

- **Matthew 6:33-34 HCSB** **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. (34) Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

The hallmark of genuine d'vekut has always been a heart that is glad to give sacrificially to the common cause of God's kingdom.

- **Exodus 35:21-22 HCSB** Everyone whose heart was moved and whose spirit prompted him came and brought an offering to the LORD to construct the tent of meeting for every use, and *to make* the holy garments. (22) Both men and women came; all who had

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 22:21; Deuteronomy 26:2

willing hearts brought brooches, earrings, rings, necklaces, and all kinds of gold jewelry-- everyone who waved a presentation offering of gold to the LORD.

- **Exodus 35:29 HCSB** So the Israelites brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts prompted them to bring *something* for all the work that the LORD, through Moses, had commanded to be done.
- **Deuteronomy 28:47 HCSB** Because you didn't serve the LORD your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though *you had* an abundance of everything,
- **2 Corinthians 9:6-7 HCSB** Remember this: the person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. (7) Each person should do as he has decided in his heart--not out of regret or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.

However, I want to point out a few derashot from these passages:

1. They gave as their hearts moved. There was not a set percentage or a compulsory rule they were following.
2. They gave out of what they HAD, not what they did not. Those who had rings gave rings. Those who had cloth, gave cloth. Since you do not have money available, perhaps you are not to give money, but its equivalent value in services?
3. They gave gladly. If you cannot give the money without fear and worry, then do not give it.
4. We can learn from reversing the verse in Deuteronomy 28:47. They failed to serve with joy and a cheerful heart even though they had an abundance. Therefore, God would not have judged them had they not had this abundance. We are to give our praise offerings out of the surplus that God provides us, in grateful recognition of His generosity towards us.

There is one more passage I'd like you to consider.

- **2 Corinthians 8:12-14 HCSB** For if the eagerness is there, it is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. (13) It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality-- (14) at the present time your surplus is *available* for their need, so that their abundance may also become *available* for your need, that there may be equality.

Again the issue was one of freewill offerings given to sustain the poor believers in Jerusalem. Paul clearly taught that we are not to hurt ourselves in the attempt to help others but that the principle point in charity is to try to establish parity – equality. We are to give “according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.”

God categorically taught that we are to “owe no man anything” and to strive to rid ourselves of debt as bird tries to escape the net of the fowler or the deer the traps of the hunter.<sup>2</sup> You have clear instruction on that matter. Therefore, for you to disobey God's clear, express, written command would be foolish. Go pay your debts, and strive to not incur any more. Once you have worked hard and you have a little more to “share with anyone in need” then give a freewill offering of thanks to the Lord.

Only remember:

- **Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 HCSB** When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. (5) Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. (6) Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands?

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 6:1-5; 22:7; Romans 13:8