

GIVING & TITHING



DR. GENE SCOTT AND PASTOR MELISSA SCOTT

GIVING, TITHING, AND THE FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING Question-Answer Format

I asked Dr. Scott if I could ask some questions in an interview format regarding firstfruits and giving. I feel that there are many people who have not been taught why we should give. Unfortunately, giving has taken on many names and has become a charitable situation. People get intimidated because they simply do not have the information needed to make a spiritually sound step towards God. I can look at my own background where giving was always reduced to pocket change. Then, through the teaching of Dr. Gene Scott, I was blessed to understand what giving really means. It has opened up a spiritual understanding beyond what I could ever hope to articulate. For those that have been taught, I hope this will be a refreshing glimpse into what you already know. For those of you that are "newcomers," I pray that some of your questions on this subject will be answered. I also wish to note that Dr. Scott graciously gave permission for this to be printed in a Pulpit format (after all, his voice is the Pulpit).

Pastor Melissa Scott

Q. Some people have never heard about firstfruits. Will you explain it?

A. It's very simple. Firstfruits is the first produce, the first receipts of labor, the first income that you receive in the year or from any new venture.

Q. How is firstfruits different from tithes and/or offerings?

A. Well, first I'll answer it by saying where they are alike. Tithes are distinct from offerings, because offerings are a voluntary giving out of that which the Lord allows us to keep. "The tithe...is the LORD'S." (Leviticus 27:30) It isn't ours, it belongs to the Lord. Most of the world thinks they own what they have. Those that have been bought by the blood of Christ understand that the earth is the Lord's and that WE are the Lord's. He's made a good deal for us. He has promised to bless the ninety percent if we recognize His ownership by giving what is His to Him. According to Malachi 3:8 to keep the tithe is to be a thief and a robber. Firstfruits, likewise, are the Lord's. (cf. Exodus 23:19) To give the firstfruits is to recognize God's ownership and that whatever we receive and whatever we gain and whatever we get from our labor, from our life, is God's provision and we give Him the firstfruits.

Q. If we were to look to the Old Testament for examples of firstfruits, what would they be?

A. Well, let me pick a very shocking one first. When the Israelites came out of the wilderness into the Promised Land, it may seem strange that when they took the first city (which was in essence taking possession of the land), Jericho, they were not allowed to keep even one piece of silver or one garment. Everything in that city belonged to the Lord, because that was the first victory, the first taking of a city that was the first of many that they were to take in obtaining the promise of Canaan, and not one shred of anything was allowed to be kept by the people, because this city was the firstfruits. It all belonged to the Lord. The great sin of Achan was that he decided he could keep a few little trifling items and hide them in his tent. He paid with his life, the life of his family, and the entire camp suffered. There is no more drastic portrayal of God's sensitivity to the firstfruits belonging to Him than that example. Our response to that recognition is a response of honesty in relationship to God. We do not steal what belongs to the Lord. We receive His blessings on what He lets us keep, which also belongs to the Lord. Now Noah, the minute that they came out of the Ark provided an offering from the first fruit of his vineyard. The firstfruits every year were to be brought and when the crops were harvested, the firstfruits were to be brought to the Lord and given to the Lord. There was the added benefit promise that an angel would go before them the rest of the year to protect and look out for them and if they didn't give the firstfruits, the angel would be their enemy. (Exodus 23:20-21) That's really either the icing on the cake or a terror to those that disobey. The simple, honest understanding is the tithe is the Lord's and the firstfruits belong to the Lord. The first of anything that we have: the first week of the year or the first profit from a new venture. Firstfruits are not any more complicated than Tithe. The word 'tithe' means ten percent. 'Firstfruits' means the first of anything that you get. If you buy a lottery ticket and win the lottery on the first ticket, it's the Lord's.

Q. So I just asked you about the Old Testament examples of firstfruits. What about the New Testament examples?

A. Well, it's totally irrelevant to the New Testament because they were not yet taught on all the principles of the Old Testament. It took time to fill in their understanding. They had the Spirit of God in them, which is the spirit of giving. In fact, II Corinthians 8 says that the proof positive that we have the genuine Spirit of God in us is the way we give. God loves the hilarious giver. God gave His Son and His Son gave His life. If the Spirit of God is in us, we have the mind of Christ and it makes givers out of us. The New Testament Christians gave EVERYTHING! So to preach the tithe to them was meaningless, because they had already given one hundred percent. The firstfruits were meaningless, because they had already given the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth fruits. They gave it all. Now, some say that tithing is not a New Testament doctrine. That's false. Jesus said concerning the tithe, "This ye ought to have done." (Matthew 23:23) It is evidenced by the detail in which the Pharisees kept the tithe of every little unit that they figured the ten percent on. But it really has no meaning in the teaching of the New Testament because

they gave one hundred percent. It's only as you begin to understand the full principle of giving from the Old Testament that you understand the tithe becomes a ceiling on the giving, and there's a first, second and third tithe. They gave the first tithe, which is ten percent of all that they have. The second tithe is ten percent on all your earnings, and the third tithe they laid aside to pay the bill to go to the three great feasts in Jerusalem every year. In modern times, it is laid aside to pay your gas and your expenses of going to and from the House of God to keep your worship going.

New Testament Christians gave it ALL! That wasn't God's plan because He doesn't want it all. He wants the tithe and He wants to bless what we are allowed to keep with His blessing. He will curse what we have until you will be cursed with one hundred percent. You would make a lot more with the blessing of God on the ninety percent after tithing and firstfruits.

Q. There's been a lot of distortion on giving. You have taught for thirty years how people should give. If you could briefly, in a few words, say what giving should mean, what would you say?

A. We are creatures and we have needs. God is the Creator and He has no needs. The first thing I'd say is what a shame it is that people in the churches raise money as though God needs the money. "The earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof." (Psalm 24:1) God doesn't need our money. Jesus told his disciples not to take a scrip, which was a begging bag that heathen priests carried to beg money for their Gods. God doesn't want us to be beggars for Him. God is the provider. Now, C.S. Lewis said it brilliantly. He says God as Creator has no needs. We as creatures have needs. God was kind enough to humble Himself to meet one of our greatest needs, the need to be needed. God could do His work with angels. He doesn't need us. But God bowed Himself in humility and let us partner with Him, and lets us give as an expression of our value for Him, His Word, and the opportunity to serve Him. Now, we need to understand the distinction between the tithes and offerings. The tithe is the Lord's. That gets to the guts of honesty in relationship to God. That gets to the guts of whether or not we recognize we are bought with a price and we are not our own. That gets to the guts of the Lord's ownership of everything, and the rest of the world are squatters on His territory. We as Christians recognize His ownership and we are honest in our dealings with God as He is faithful in His dealings with us. We give because we recognize we are the Lord's and the earth is the Lord's. We believe that He has promised, without any qualification, to bless those who honor Him with their tithes and offerings. Offerings go beyond the tithe and are a voluntary expression of value. Galatians 6 says, "Let him who is taught in the word share (koinonea in the Greek) share with the one who taught him in all good things." That's not spiritual prayers, that's THINGS—boats, houses, land, money, jewels. God doesn't need any of these things, but He wants us to express our understanding of the value of who He is and what He has done for us. All giving should be worship. It is a contraction of two words: "worth-ship." I once saw an engineer say the offering was a "downer" on the service. I thought, "My Lord, what a bad foundation of truth has been planted in him." The most worshipful act that we do in the Church is giving out of a heart of gratitude to God, an expression of value. When you go out in the world to buy something, you express value. You put down hard-earned money, the fruit of your labor, for something that you value. The true Christian values God and His Word above all things. We express that value by bringing the fruit of our labor, the tithe and firstfruits, and then making offerings beyond what is already the Lord's.

Q. You've already answered most of the questions. I know you have to hear somewhat often people say, "I don't know if I can make it. I don't know if I can participate in firstfruits." What would you say to that?

A. Well, would you rather make it with God on your side, or make it alone with God against you? That's the simple answer. In other words, do you want to do it your way or God's way?

Q. You've said God loves the hilarious giver, and we don't give to get, but considering most people don't understand about giving, what should people keep in their minds and their hearts when they give?

A. Well, I will say this, in Luke 14 Jesus said no man can come after Him except he forsake all, and He lists all the things to be forsaken: the family, houses, land. But He also states the paradoxical truth that no man has forsaken all but what he receives many times that, not only in the life to come but here also. Now, the paradox is that the forsaking is without the motive to get. But when you cross that hurdle and you give to God because of your love and value and worthship expression to Him, it triggers a response from Him. I often

teach the difference between the Greek words phileo, which is mutual love, and agapao, which God calls forth, which is an uncalculated giving of yourself to the other because of the intrinsic value or worth of the object. Everybody likes phileo; we'd like to love and then be guaranteed that we get loved back the same way. But when people are doing for me "to get," it makes me look out for me. If I'm drowning and somebody risks their life to pull me from the water, I'm not going to have to talk myself into liking them on the bank. That's the power of agapao. It's a paradox and complicated, but when God sees us giving without calculation, He will give us more than we can give to Him. That's the paradoxical truth. God loves the hilarious giver because the hilarious giver is giving out of happiness. It is the way you are when you first fall in love with someone, or you have that bright-eyed baby that brought new life in your home. You don't have to be whipped into giving, you have great joy in giving to the object of your love. God, who sees the heart, sees that expression of love and worship and uncalculating effort and He loves that true, hilarious giver. But paradoxically, He also is going to hilariously give back.

The one unqualified promise regarding tithing in Malachi is: "Prove me now herewith, and see if you honor me with your tithes and offerings, that I don't give you a blessing that you can't contain." (cf. Malachi 3:10) Now, it may not be the blessing that WE define, but it's the blessing that the God of all goodness will provide to us. You are never going to know until you try, and you aren't going to know until you keep doing it no matter what.

Q. If there was one thing in the Church world today that you would like to see happen, what would it be?

A. A change in the frame of reference to where God is preached because of who He is rather than God being preached because of what He does for you.

Q. Where do you send your firstfruits, tithes and offerings?

A. You send them where you get your spiritual food, to "the storehouse." (Malachi 3:10) You pay where you eat.

Q. Who do you make the check out to?

A. Whomever teaches you.

Well, Pastor Scott you are my teacher. Thank you.

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