

CHAPTER 9

WHAT EXACTLY DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PAYING MONEY TO LEADERS? ARE WE SUPPOSED TO “TITHE” TO OUR LOCAL CHURCH?

¹ We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedo'nia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (RSV)

³ Honor widows who are real widows. ⁴ If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. ⁵ She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; ⁶ whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Command this, so that they may be without reproach. ⁸ If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:3-8 (RSV)

How did the Early Church handle money in the first century?

I want to try very hard to be careful, precise, honest and comprehensive in the way I write this chapter. I say that because a lot of what is taught about giving money to churches and whether local elders/leaders/ministers should be paid salaries is twisted to suit the agenda of the person doing the teaching.

I want to try my best to avoid that and to deal with virtually every verse in the New Testament which touches upon this issue of money even if it appears to go against my own view. I am not here to try to win an argument but to be faithful and 100% honest in examining and explaining God's Word. That is a heavy responsibility which can't be messed around with.

So, you will already have seen that I do not believe local elders, who do not travel, or whose ministry does not require them to be full time, should ordinarily be paid any salary. An example of a local elder who needs to minister full time might be a highly gifted Bible teacher whose skill and knowledge are well known in the city or county where he lives and he conducts weekend teaching conferences which require him to spend all week studying and preparing. So, he's local, but not restricted to one church.

I believe ordinary local elders were very rarely paid in the first century unless there was something exceptional about their ministry or their circumstances which required them to work full time in ministry even though they did not travel.

So, the average local elder might serve a house church of perhaps 10-30 people and would receive no pay. That requires me to deal head on with the various passages which speak of not muzzling the ox when he treads out the grain and how “*the labourer is worthy of his wages*” etc.

I don't want to ignore such verses but I do want to argue that in the vast majority of cases their context and application is those *men who have itinerant ministries* not men who serve a small house church. The command not to muzzle the ox therefore mainly applies to those who travel as Bible teachers or evangelists or apostles and are in a different town every week such that they can't possibly get a paid job.

My contention is that the verses which refer to such travelling teachers/apostles etc are regularly misused and misapplied in today's denominational churches to give the impression that they apply equally to leaders who stay at home, in their small local church, as local elders/bishops/overseers. I maintain that those men, who were of course the vast majority, were generally not paid anything.

I believe I am supported in my argument by the fact that the New Testament never makes any reference to paying a salary to the leader or leaders plural of each local house church. I would contend that it never refers to paying such men *because it was never done* and we don't tend to talk about things which we don't do and which never happen.

Of course, my opponents who support the traditional model of church might argue from the same silence that it means the very opposite. i.e. that the practice of paying local elders was so widespread it didn't need to be mentioned. I recognise that arguments from silence are dangerous but it seems to fit my argument far better, particularly when you ask yourself how a small house church consisting mainly of poor working class people and slaves could afford to pay every leader.

Those who disagree with me, which is basically all the traditional denominational churches, argue that such men were paid then and should be paid today. However, I think you will find, once we have closely examined *all the passages*, that their argument doesn't stack up overall. But, of course, you must be the judge of that.

What does the Bible say about paying money to men in full time ministry?

Let's begin by looking at a detailed passage which could be said, on the face of it, to contradict my stance and to support the traditional majority view concerning paying local leaders. However, when we inspect it more closely, and in particular when we compare it with other passages, I believe we will find that Paul is actually teaching the opposite of what most people in the denominational churches claim he means. I refer to the passage 1 Corinthians 9:1-18. However, let us look firstly at verses 1-14 and then return to deal with 15-18 later.

¹Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? ²If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.³This is my defense to those who would examine me. ⁴Do we not have the right to our food and drink? ⁵Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?⁸Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law say the same? ⁹For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned?¹⁰ Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of a share in the crop. ¹¹If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? ¹²If others share this rightful claim

upon you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:1-14 (RSV)

Let me start by addressing head on *why* I claim that this passage and many others which advocate paying leaders are talking almost entirely about men who *travel around*, not men who stay in their local church, unless as we saw, they are exceptionally gifted Bible teachers who work full time in study and teaching but serve only the churches in their local area or city. This is the pivotal issue about which we must make up our minds if we are going to form any view on this issue of paying local leaders.

Let's look initially at verses 1-6 above. Take careful note in that passage of *what kind of leaders* Paul is referring to. Again and again, he refers to himself and others *who are apostles*, which means, effectively, "*those who are sent*" or, as we could call them today, "*missionaries*". The operative point is that all apostles travel. They never stay put in one place for longer than a few months (unless, like Paul, they are in prison).

Then, in verse 4, Paul says "*Do we not have the right to our food and drink?*" But the question here is who are the "*we*" that Paul refers to? I believe the answer is clear. He means the same people he has just been talking about in this passage, i.e. *himself and other apostles* – all of whom are men who travel.

This interpretation is further confirmed in verse 5 when Paul says "*Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*" Again, all of these men were apostles who travelled around the Empire, with the exception of James the Just, Jesus' younger brother who was so highly respected he was effectively viewed as the leader of the entire Jerusalem church.

So, if James the Just was paid (and there is no suggestion that he was) it would be because he was not just a local elder in a house church but was seen as an eminent Bible teacher who taught full time and couldn't be a carpenter or builder any more. Bear in mind also that Jerusalem was a big place and having a teaching role in the whole city, and probably much of the rest of Israel, was quite unlike being an ordinary part time elder in a small local house church. It must have involved some travel too.

Ask yourself also why Paul would speak of these men being "*accompanied*" by their wives unless they are continually travelling? You don't need to assert your right to have your wife with you if you stay at home. Therefore, undeniably, Paul is still talking about men whose ministry requires constant travel.

Verse 6 leads in to the vital group of verses 7-11 which make the famous point about not muzzling oxen when they tread out grain. That is a metaphor for not refusing to financially support ministries such as his. But note that verse 6, which gives us the context for that next section, refers to Barnabas and Paul, *both of whom were apostles* who constantly travelled, not local elders.

So, again and again, the context and setting for Paul's teaching on financial support for men's ministries is apostles, i.e. missionaries, church planters, itinerant evangelists and Bible teachers. It is consistently that way and no explicit mention is ever made, either here or in any of the other passages, about giving financial support to local elders who stay at their home church, except possibly 1 Timothy 5:17-18 which we shall examine shortly.

Finally, I would point to verse 14 which refers to “*those who proclaim the gospel*” as deserving to get their living by the Gospel, i.e. to be paid for their ministry work. Some might argue that we have here an ambiguous verse with some “wiggle room” which allows us to argue that the right to receive financial support also extends to all local elders who don’t travel but who do sometimes proclaim the Gospel.

But that interpretation doesn’t work and it can’t be referring to them. The expression clearly means those whose ministry focuses upon preaching the Gospel to the heathen in *new places* which are so far *unreached*. It doesn’t mean preaching the Gospel from time to time in your local church where you are an elder and where the Church is already established. At any rate, that is overwhelmingly likely to be the correct way to interpret the phrase and it makes vastly more sense than if we try to apply it to local elders.

However, if you read this same passage quickly, wearing 21st century denominational lenses, and especially if you assume that Paul and Barnabas are ordinary, typical church leaders, no different from any others, you could be forgiven for concluding that it supports the idea that all leaders should be paid salaries.

Look again at some of the phrases Paul uses which could be said to support the traditional denominational stance, though only if, in my view, you misunderstand them. If you already believe in paying local elders and if you just look at the verses at face value without delving any deeper to find out who exactly they are aimed at, they do seem to support the payment of all leaders everywhere:

- a) “*Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?*”
- b) “*For it is written in the Law of Moses ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?*”
- c) “*If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more?*”
- d) “*In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel*”

So, if you read this passage quickly without concerning yourself with the context, and without noticing that it refers throughout to travelling apostles, then you could use it to support your belief that local elders should be paid. You would do that by assuming that Paul is talking about all leaders, not just those who travel.

That is exactly what the advocates of the traditional model of church do, without ever realising, or caring, that they are squeezing their own theology into the passage. They are like Cinderella’s stepsisters squeezing their feet into the glass slipper, rather than approaching the passage with a genuinely open mind and allowing it to contradict their long held beliefs and familiar practices.

A difficult verse from my perspective which appears to contradict my stance

Paul makes this statement to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 in which he defends the right to be paid. But the vital question is to whom is Paul referring and exactly which type or types of “labourers” does

he mean? In particular, in this verse, which I consider to be unique, since I can find no other saying the same, Paul refers to *elders*, not apostles or travelling Bible teachers etc.

What, therefore, does he mean exactly? Is this one solitary verse reversing all the other passages and making financial support apply to local elders who don't travel and who don't have to be full time for some other reason? We have to face that question, or at least I do if I am to maintain my stance.

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NKJV)

So, I am willing to accept that this verse refers to elders, not apostles, and that it advocates them being paid. However, it is noteworthy that Paul speaks particularly here of those who "*labour in the Word and doctrine*". What do you think he means by that? In my view he has in mind elders who, though local, are especially gifted as Bible teachers and who spend a very high proportion of their time in Bible study and teaching.

Although there are many men, including non elders, who are capable of preaching a short sermon occasionally in a local house church with perhaps 10-30 members, they would not be capable or confident enough to preach for a whole weekend at a city wide conference involving several local churches combining together.

Different men have differing levels of giftedness. So, a man might well be capable of preaching a simple sermon every few weeks to a small group but not capable of doing so regularly, or to large groups or even conferences, where he teaches for the whole weekend, giving a series of talks which may have required 100-200 hours of study and preparation.

It is like the difference between an ordinary person who is capable of making dinner for a family of four and a proper chef who is capable of cooking food for a whole restaurant night after night, or even for a wedding banquet. Likewise, a man may be able to preach to 10-30 people for 40 minutes but not to 500 people for a whole weekend.

My point is that a controversial verse like 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (controversial because I cannot find any other verse which specifically refers to paying "elders" as this verse does) needs to be seen in its wider context. And I would describe that wider context as a large number of other verses which are all explicitly or implicitly referring to apostles and to other men with travelling ministries.

Do bear in mind as well that all of these travelling apostles and evangelists are also elders. They all have that title as well as 'apostle', 'prophet' etc. So, in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 I think Paul is choosing to use the word 'elders' but he only has in mind a sub set thereof, i.e. the elders who travel.

There are no other verses, as far as I can see, which are referring to elders as 1 Timothy 5:17-18 does. So, we need to be careful how we interpret the verse and how far it extends in its application. Therefore, in my opinion, when Paul refers to "elders" in 1 Timothy 5:17-18 he doesn't mean all local elders but only those who have exceptional ministries, such as a full time Bible teacher serving many churches in the local area, whose ministry requires them to be full time.

An example might be a gifted Bible teacher who would not be able to teach a whole weekend conference if they also had to do a secular job, as they would not have the study time needed to support such a teaching ministry. So, such an exceptionally gifted local elder would be entitled to be paid but the same cannot be said of every other ordinary local elder whose ministry does not extend beyond the 10-30 people in his church.

Some might interject here and say that this is an argument for combining small house churches together to form big churches which enable a leader to be paid and to have time for study. However, that is not what the Early Church did. Instead, they continued to meet in small house churches throughout the first three centuries, until Emperor Constantine arrived on the scene.

When I have heard traditional pastors teach on the subject of giving to the local church, tithing and supporting leaders financially, these passages we have looked at are the main verses they usually go to, although only at face value with no deeper scrutiny as to their meaning and application.

They also carefully avoid other verses which more narrowly define which types of leaders are being referred to. Instead, they imply that these verses apply to all leaders engaged in full time church work, regardless of whether they remain in their own local church or travel around.

However, that is a crucial omission and, in many cases, a dishonest one, because I believe it becomes even more clear as we look at other passages that Paul is generally talking only about leaders who travel around and are not in their home town where they can get a paid job to support themselves.

Quite obviously, if you are a travelling evangelist or Bible teacher going from town to town throughout the Empire, or if you are an apostle, which means “*one who is sent*” i.e. a “*missionary*” who sets up new churches where none existed before, then you can’t realistically get a job. You therefore have to be supported financially by somebody. That was usually done by the “sending churches” back home which sent them out as missionaries, not by the churches they planted.

The argument therefore boils down to this one question: When Paul is speaking of paying leaders does he mean all leaders, even if they stay at home? Or does he generally only mean those who travel far away from home and keep travelling, i.e. *those who are sent*? The answer to that question settles the whole argument. Why then is this question not even asked?

And when that question is asked online, by people like me, why is it shot down in flames so the debate can’t even take place? The answer, of course, is that there are enormous vested interests at stake here with millions of church leaders whose whole careers, finances and lifestyle would be radically changed if we concluded that local leaders/elders/pastors in the first century were not paid and that we ought to adopt the same policy.

Nevertheless, Paul chose not to make use of his right to receive financial support. He preferred to pay his own way by working part time as a tentmaker.

Having made clear that men who (in my view) have traveling ministries, or specialist ministries which require them to be full time, deserve to be paid and can consider it a right, Paul actually chose, in his own case, not to claim any of his rights to financial support. Let me make clear though, right from the start, that his own personal choice to pay his own way by working part time as a tentmaker was a *purely individual decision*.

It does not mean that other (travelling) leaders are under any duty to imitate him in that or to refuse financial support. Those who are entitled to be paid are entitled to be paid. The only question for us therefore is who are they?

¹⁵But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it

1 Corinthians 9:15-18 (RSV)

I believe Paul's reasons for separating himself from the whole business of financial support and choosing to fund himself (at a very basic subsistence level) by tentmaking was because he wanted to avoid any possibility of being misunderstood, resented or falsely accused.

He knew there would have been absolutely nothing wrong with accepting financial support, even at a generous level. But he did not want to allow even the appearance of impropriety or exploitation which could have led to false accusations and arguments. So, overall, he felt it was safer, better, and less hassle, for him to support himself.

⁶Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. ⁹It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-9 (RSV)

We hear this policy spoken of again in Acts 18 which refers to Paul going to Corinth where he stayed with Priscilla and Aquilla because Aquilla was involved in the same trade as Paul as a tentmaker. So, during his visit Paul effectively worked for Aquilla in making tents.

¹After this he left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aq'uila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them; ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers.

Acts 18:1-3 (RSV)

This self funding policy of Paul's is then referred to again in Acts 20.

³³I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. ³⁵In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Acts 20:33-35 (RSV)

And the consistency of Paul's policy of paying his own way is made clear by this verse showing that when Paul stayed in Rome for two years, even though he was in prison, it was all at his own expense:

³⁰ *And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him,*
Acts 28:30 (RSV)

In this next passage from 2 Corinthians which comes within a letter in which Paul is rebuking the Corinthian church for various other things, we see him make a couple of interesting points about how he handled money when dealing with the Corinthian church in particular:

⁷ *Did I commit a sin in abasing myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel without cost to you?* ⁸ *I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.* ⁹ *And when I was with you and was in want, I did not burden any one, for my needs were supplied by the brethren who came from Macedo'nia. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.* ¹⁰ *As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Acha'ia.* ¹¹ *And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*

2 Corinthians 11:7-11 (RSV)

Paul points out that he never sought any financial support from them for himself, i.e. while present in Corinth ministering to them. He says that he preferred instead to allow other churches to help him financially so that he didn't need to ask the Corinthian church for anything.

So, we see evidence that, at least on this occasion, Paul was willing to accept support, albeit that he obtained it from others rather than burden the Corinthian church. Paul's reason for choosing not to ask, or even permit, the Corinthian church to give him any financial help was that he was angry with them for their misconduct especially with particular leaders in Corinth.

In effect, he was not willing to receive any money from them because some of those leaders were false and he did not want to do anything to appear to validate or endorse them or make himself beholden to them when the main ingredient of his message to Corinth was rebuke. This reasoning emerges more clearly from the following passage, i.e. verses 12-15:

¹² *And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do.* ¹³ *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.* ¹⁴ *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.* ¹⁵ *So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 (RSV)

The next passage is a much happier one in which Paul acknowledges the generosity and faithfulness of the Philippian church which stood loyally with him when he was facing very hard times and was in great need. At that time, no church other than the Philippians gave him financial support.

¹⁰ *I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.* ¹¹ *Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.* ¹² *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.* ¹³ *I can do all things in him who strengthens me.*

¹⁴ *Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.* ¹⁵ *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedo'nia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only;* ¹⁶ *for even in Thessaloni'ca you sent me help once and again.*

¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:10-19 (RSV)

In this next passage from 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives greater clarity about his policy when dealing with churches and his great reluctance to make himself a burden to any of them. He again asserts his right to be financially supported but he tells them he chose not to make any demands of them but rather to support himself financially by working night and day to be able to fit in all the ministry work as well as tent making:

³ For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; ⁶ nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. ⁸ So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

⁹ For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behavior to you believers;

1 Thessalonians 2:3-10 (RSV)

Accordingly, when one looks at Paul's reluctance to receive financial support, even though it was his absolute right, it has to colour the way we see his approach to the payment of leaders generally. So, if we are faced with the choice between believing that Paul supported paying a salary to all leaders, or mainly limiting it to those who travel, it makes it harder to make the assumption that he supports it in all cases.

The very tone and heart attitude which Paul displays makes me lean towards believing he would wish to minimise, not maximise, the number of leaders who receive a salary. Of course, that isn't proof of anything but I believe it more strongly supports and matches my interpretation of the passages which deal with paying leaders rather than the stance taken by the traditional churches.

It was one thing for Paul to fund himself by tentmaking but he had no wife or children and so he could get by on the equivalent of a subsistence allowance, just covering food and clothing and basic essentials. But not all men could do that, especially if they had families, and so such men, if they were called to travel to pursue their ministry, were entitled to be paid.

That therefore includes travelling Bible teachers, evangelists and apostles who were operating as missionaries, planting new churches and bringing the Gospel to new areas. But clearly, if a man was made an elder in his own local church in his home town, with a membership of only 10-30, there was no need for him to give up his secular job as a plumber or bricklayer etc. He could very easily work as a leader part time and carry on with his job and support his family without needing even a penny from the church.

That being so, why would such a man want to resign from his job and look to the local church to gather money from its members to match the wage he used to earn in that job? It would make no sense at all, which is probably why we never hear of it being done. I realise that is an argument from silence, which we always need to be careful with, but it does seem obvious.

How could small house churches with 10-30 members possibly afford to pay their elder(s)?

Consider the chances of them being paid in practical terms. Let's imagine a house church with even 30 members. Let's also suppose that 10 of those members are housewives with no income and perhaps two are retired. Out of the 18 others, let's suppose that eight of them were very lowly paid or even slaves with no income at all so they couldn't afford to pay anything significant. That leaves only ten wage earners.

Therefore, that one local elder would have to have his salary paid by ten members in practice, not 30. How could they each afford to contribute one tenth of a man's salary? And that assumes there is only one elder, whereas there were often a group of 2, 3 or even 4 elders in a local house church.

On that basis, the idea of paying all of them becomes totally impossible. Few people have ever thought through the practicalities of this in financial terms but when you do the case for paying all leaders becomes very hard to sustain.

Again, some will argue that this is an argument in favour of joining house churches together and making larger churches which can afford to pay the pastor/elder and even to buy a building as well. However, although that might appear to solve the financial problem, *it is not what the Early Church actually did* and those who argue for large churches need to ask themselves why the Early Church didn't agree.

What about tithing to our local church? Does the Bible command that – or even mention it?

If you are a member of a traditional church, and especially if you have been for some decades, you will probably have come across teaching to the effect that God wants each of us to give 10% of our income to our local church. That was taught in every church I went to during the 1980s and 1990s though I think it has been less vigorously pushed in recent years.

The idea is based upon the practice of tithing (giving one tenth) which was part of the Law of Moses and was observed by the Jewish people. However, the Law of Moses completely ended when Jesus died, as I explain fully in my lengthy article "*Has the Law of Moses ended?*" which is on my website, plus in my commentary on Galatians.

The article's title presents it as a question because so many people believe we are still subject to the Law of Moses. However, I believe I prove beyond all reasonable doubt in the article that the Law most certainly ended at Jesus' death. That being so, the obligation to tithe also ended at Jesus' death.

Quite apart from that, the tithe had nothing to do with the Church and all the money went to support the Temple in Jerusalem, the Aaronic priesthood and the work of the Levites, not local churches. There never was, therefore, any valid connection between the Church and the practice of tithing and no tithe money ever went to any church or to any Christian (Messianic) leaders.

It was only centuries afterwards that the traditional, hierarchical, unbiblical churches began to teach that Christians should tithe to their own local church and to imply, or even directly assert, that the Bible requires this. But in fact it doesn't. I can assure you that if you scour the entire New Testament with a fine tooth comb you will not find even one verse which commands, or even suggests, that we should tithe to our local church.

No such verse exists anywhere, not even one! If you don't believe me, please check it carefully for yourself. I guarantee you won't find any support for the practice of tithing to your local church anywhere in the New Testament, not even by the most indirect deductive reasoning.

Why then do we see many (not all) of the traditional, denominational churches teaching tithing to the local church? How can all those churches be wrong and I be right? I think the answer is simple. Their teaching is not based on the Bible but rather on the traditional practices of their church or denomination, i.e. "*what we've always done*". And, as most people will agree, "*Anything that we have always done and are familiar with must be right – or we wouldn't have done it.*"

That kind of thinking may satisfy most people and convince them that what they are doing is right. But it is not acceptable to me. Neither is it biblical. Indeed, it is the very opposite of how we are meant to assess what we are told and work out what to believe. We must only believe *what the Bible says*, not what men say or the traditions and customs we have always known. Their ancientness and our familiarity with them is no basis for considering them to be valid.

I told the story earlier of Steve, the leader of a church we briefly went to, who came to see me a few weeks after we had started coming to his church. He told me that I should be tithing 10% of the profits of my law firm to his church. Unfortunately for him, he picked on the wrong chap because I knew the Bible and had thought long and hard about what it teaches about giving. That was primarily because I felt God had called me to a ministry of financial giving.

However, although I was very much in favour of financial giving, I knew the Bible does not teach tithing to the local church. So, I challenged Steve to show me even one verse which supports his stance on tithing. He was taken aback by my confident reply and was completely unable to cite any verse – because there are none. He then admitted the New Testament does not teach tithing to the church.

But then he said the shocking words "*But if we didn't teach tithing, how would the church get money?*" I was shocked by the brazen frankness of his response because I had never heard anyone be so open before about the fact that they were deliberately misrepresenting Scripture to get money – and justifying doing so.

I had heard many leaders advocate tithing to the local church, with varying degrees of honesty, because I am sure many of them believed sincerely that it is what God wants. But I am sure that some were well aware that they were twisting Scripture. They just didn't admit it openly as Steve did, not that he was sorry for it. On the contrary, he was fully justifying his tactic.

I had another debate, though a much healthier and more honest one, with the late Chuck Missler in 2008 when I went on a tour of Israel which he was leading. Each night he used to do question and answer sessions where the audience of over 100 could ask him anything they wanted to.

He was a great Bible teacher, with massive knowledge of the whole Bible. Moreover, he was a completely faithful and honest man. But I have to say he had a blind spot on this issue of tithing to the local church. He believed it to be the right thing to do and he advocated it.

This issue arose one night when one of the other people on the tour raised the issue of tithing and asked for Chuck's view of it. When he spoke in favour of it I joined in to disagree with him and a debate followed, mainly between him and me. Initially, Chuck assumed that by opposing tithing to the local church my motive must presumably be that I was reluctant to give or didn't want to give that much.

But I assured him that was not the case and that my issue was not reluctance to give but my belief that the Bible *does not teach* tithing to the local church and that it is a purely man made practice based solely on tradition and custom, not the Bible.

I told him that my reading of the New Testament led me to conclude that God does not command us to tithe to the local church, or to anyone else and that God's approach to financial giving for Christians is that it should be:

- a) generous, not stingy (in fact "hilarious")
- b) calculated by us, not prescribed for us as a fixed sum or percentage, as our own freedom is paramount
- c) given to whomever we choose, with complete freedom, not to the local church or any other specified beneficiary
- d) that our own families should be our main focus for support
- e) then widows, orphans and the poor and needy
- f) with a strong emphasis on helping such poor and needy believers inside churches, not unbelievers
- g) and yet there is nothing wrong with also giving to unbelievers if we wish to. They are simply not the priority.

I then concluded by challenging Chuck to point to even one verse in the New Testament which commands, or even implies, that we should tithe to our local church. Of course, he couldn't do so because there is no such verse. But because Chuck was a totally honest man, (unlike Steve) he freely conceded that. Instead he argued that the practice of tithing to our own church is, nevertheless, a good one and works well and should be encouraged.

Ultimately, the difference between us was that Chuck had been brought up to tithe. He had been taught it since childhood and it had entered into his bone marrow as an obviously good thing to do. Thus, I believe he did not even question it but just accepted it as a given because he was so familiar with the practice.

That was actually an unusual stance for Chuck to adopt because, on so many other issues, he had an exceptionally original, enquiring mind which went back to Scripture and challenged all sorts of conventions and practices in the churches. But, somehow, he overlooked this one.

By the way, I am not attacking or criticising Chuck. He was a great man. But it serves to illustrate the point that if even he can have a blind spot about God's Word then we all can and we need to humble ourselves and be willing to be corrected if we are wrong.

Am I attacking traditional churches and saying that God won't use them or bless them?

I can answer that question immediately by saying no, I am not attacking any of these churches or saying God won't use them. Of course He uses them, unless they are apostate, and He will certainly not reject a church or a pastor just because they choose to follow the traditional model of church instead of what I maintain is the biblical approach.

We all make mistakes and I don't want, or expect, God to reject me and my ministry just because of my mistakes and areas of ignorance. None of us are perfect and none of us get everything right. So, I believe the men who pastor local churches and are paid for doing it will be blessed and rewarded by God, to the extent that they are faithful, preach the true Gospel and care for their people, even if their church structure isn't biblical.

That is what really matters and I freely concede that I would prefer to see a faithful pastor who cares for his people but is unaware of the issues I am raising in this book than an elder in a house church who has all the right structure and isn't paid but who doesn't preach the true Gospel or care for his people. I hope I am making that point clearly enough.

Nevertheless, that is not an argument for ignoring or rejecting what the Bible says. And as for the faithful pastor who is currently operating in an unbiblical, traditional church model, I believe that he and his people would be even better off if their church was to change to a biblical model, to appoint more elders, share the load, sell the building, and perhaps split into two or three separate house churches.

But if they don't and they choose to carry on with the traditional church model, I will not attack them or disparage them or deny the good work that many of them do. I have no grudge against them and am only trying to set out an alternative approach, which I believe is the biblical approach, and asking people to consider moving to it because I believe they would do even better and so would their members, if they did.

What then does the New Testament teach about financial giving if it doesn't teach tithing?

In the chapter so far, I have already looked at several verses relating to money and giving, and you'll surely agree that none of those require us to tithe to the local church, or to anybody else. I now want to go through some remaining verses which make up pretty much all that the New Testament has to say on financial giving in order to prove my point that tithing to the local church is not taught anywhere.

³² Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:32-37 (RSV)

I also briefly refer to this issue in chapter 15 below when addressing the question of whether the Early Church practised a form of communism where they all gave all they had to the apostles. I quickly

establish that they didn't and that in fact they all retained complete ownership of their own property at all times and were under no obligation to give any of it to anybody, whether before or after they sold the land.

However, let's look at what this passage, Acts 4:32-37, tells us about the giving done by the Early Church. It emerges clearly that their strong emphasis was on making sure that nobody in any of the churches was in poverty and to encourage those who had wealth to share it eagerly (but always purely voluntarily) with those who were needy.

They certainly did that and, moreover, so did Barnabas who was himself a leader and, for a time, Paul's mentor and senior partner in their apostolic missions work. Therefore, instead of the church giving money to Barnabas, he sold a field and gave the sale proceeds to the apostles for them to pass on to the poor.

Note therefore that:

- a) They all retained full private ownership of their property. (This emerges even more clearly if you read Acts 5:4 which I examine in chapter 15.)
- b) They gave whatever they freely chose to give and nobody told them how much it should be.
- c) The beneficiaries were the poor, not the leaders and not the church. All the money was passed on to poor individuals, not to the church itself.
- d) The apostles administered the money designated for the poor, at least in these very early days, but they didn't use any of it for themselves personally or to fund their work.

Let us look now at Paul's letter to the Romans:

²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. ²⁶ For Macedo'nia and Acha'ia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; ²⁷ they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go on by way of you to Spain; ²⁹ and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ.

Romans 15:25-29 (RSV)

Again, what we see here is a collection being organised by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to help the poor and needy in the churches in Jerusalem who were struggling with a famine. So, although apostle Paul was going to deliver the gift to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, which he was travelling to, none of the money was for his own use.

He was just the man who delivered it. And of course, as usual, it is not described as a tithe, is not compulsory, and no instruction is given at all as to how much people should give. It is left entirely up to each of them to decide – as we shall find in every other passage.

Let's look next at 1 Corinthians 16:1-3.

¹ Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he

may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. ³ *And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.*

1 Corinthians 16:1-3 (RSV)

In this passage Paul is again dealing with the issue of the famine that was happening in Jerusalem and he tells the church in Corinth, just as he did the Galatians, to put some money aside on the first day of each week and save it up ready for when he comes so he can collect it and bring it with him to Jerusalem to help the needy Christians there. But note what Paul is *not saying*:

- a) He isn't asking for money *for* the church in Corinth – so they aren't being asked to give to their own church.
- b) He isn't asking them to pay money to any leaders in Corinth or anywhere else, and certainly not to himself.
- c) He isn't specifying any amount or percentage.
- d) He isn't even commanding them to give at all. He is just advising them on when to give if they want to and how to gather it up most efficiently so as to save time and effort when he gets to Corinth. He is being purely practical and administrative, not giving any commands or creating any duties.

Let's now turn to 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 in which Paul is yet again discussing the famine in Jerusalem and praising the churches in Macedonia for their generous response to that crisis which he wants the Corinthians to imitate:

¹ *We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedo'nia,* ² *for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part.* ³ *For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will,* ⁴ *begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—* ⁵ *and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.* ⁶ *Accordingly we have urged Titus that as he had already made a beginning, he should also complete among you this gracious work.* ⁷ *Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in your love for us—see that you excel in this gracious work also.*

⁸ *I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.* ⁹ *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* ¹⁰ *And in this matter I give my advice: it is best for you now to complete what a year ago you began not only to do but to desire,* ¹¹ *so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have.* ¹² *For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he has not.* ¹³ *I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened,* ¹⁴ *but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality.* ¹⁵ *As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 (RSV)

Similar themes arise here so let's again list what Paul is, and isn't, saying:

- a) He praises the *joy and generosity* of the churches in Macedonia who, despite being in hardship themselves, still wanted to give to support the Christians in Jerusalem who were in even more severe hardship and famine.
- b) The Macedonians gave *according to their means*, not in accordance with any rule or command about what the amount or percentage should be.
- c) They gave *of their own free will* so there was no compulsion, command or instruction of any kind. It was entirely up to each individual to decide whether to give anything and, if so, how much.
- d) Paul explicitly states, for the avoidance of doubt, that he is *not giving any command* (verse 8).
- e) Paul's aim is not to burden anyone but to help create more equality by arranging that those who are currently enjoying abundance should help those who are currently in want so that later, if the situations are reversed, the giving can go in the opposite direction. In that way, any temporary poverty in one church or area can be eased by those who are not in poverty, to everyone's advantage.

The strong focus in the Early Church (but not today) on Christians giving to support their own families

Look how strongly Paul expresses himself when he speaks of a Christian's duty to support his own family, by which he means the extended family, i.e. grandparents, parents and widowed aunts or other relatives. Remember, there was no such thing as social security benefits so a widow in particular would be in real trouble if she didn't have a family willing to support her. The same would apply to elderly or infirm parents or grandparents:

⁸ If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:8 (RSV)

Paul goes on to give quite detailed instructions for how to deal with widows, i.e. those who did not have families to care for them. His key concern is that all widows who are genuinely in need should be supported. But he is also very concerned that this burden must fall first on the relatives, not the church. The church's job was to support those who had no relatives, as we see below:

⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband; ¹⁰ and she must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way. ¹¹ But refuse to enrol younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, ¹² and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge. ¹³ Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. ¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us. ¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan. ¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows.

1 Timothy 5:9-16 (RSV)

Would you agree that this emphasis on an individual Christian's duty to financially support his own extended family is not present in the Church today? I have never heard any preacher even mention it,

let alone emphasise it. Any talks I have ever heard on giving have focussed on the need to give to the church, not to our families.

When I have raised this issue, it has been pushed to one side dismissively as if that is just a matter for individuals to consider, not for the church to express a view on. And yet Paul emphasised it very strongly while saying only a modest amount about supporting travelling ministries and almost nothing (other than possibly one verse) about supporting local elders.

Indeed, I am reminded of an incident which illustrates the modern church's totally different attitude towards supporting our own relatives. A Christian man, aged about 40, came to see me at my law firm because he had heard I was a Christian lawyer. He didn't know me and I had never met him before. He then told me that his parents needed legal help but couldn't afford to pay for it and he was therefore looking for a Christian solicitor who would be willing to act free of charge.

The point was this man and perhaps his siblings, considered it to be my duty as a Christian lawyer to help his parents free of charge. But the thought never entered his mind, until I pointed it out to him, that there was another way to look at it, as per 1 Timothy 5:8, i.e. *for him to pay the legal fees!*

Somehow, his experience of church and his theology placed upon me a greater duty of care towards his parents than he had himself – even though they were complete strangers to me. He was a bit stunned when I pointed out that it was his duty, and his siblings', rather than mine and he was somewhat struck dumb.

We now come to a passage which is often preached on, though not always honestly or in accordance with its real meaning. Again, Paul is talking to the Corinthians and praising the Macedonian churches for their generous response to the famine in Jerusalem:

¹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the offering for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedo'nia, saying that Acha'ia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I am sending the brethren so that our boasting about you may not prove vain in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; ⁴ lest if some Macedo'nians come with me and find that you are not ready, we be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren to go on to you before me, and arrange in advance for this gift you have promised, so that it may be ready not as an exaction but as a willing gift.

⁶ The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. ⁹ As it is written,

*“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor;
his righteousness endures for ever.”*

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; ¹² for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ Under the test of

this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others; ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

2 Corinthians 9:1-15 (RSV)

Again, Paul praises the Macedonians for their generosity and, again, he emphasises that the money was given purely voluntarily, not in response to any command or rule and that it was “*not an exaction but a willing gift*”.

Paul then goes on to give what I view as his clearest and most important piece of teaching on how financial giving should, and should not, be done and on the enormous blessings that God gives to those who give generously. In fact, it was this passage, especially verses 6-12, which inspired me to enter into what I call the “*ministry of giving*” many years ago.

Indeed, one reason why I set up my own law firm was in order to provide a vehicle to enable me to be give financially on a much larger scale. There can be no doubt that God blessed that project by causing my law firm to prosper and to grow exponentially in response to the giving I did. I speak of this in some of my other books and talks.

This passage, especially verses 6-11, are often preached on but I have noticed that sometimes they are given a slant which is not honest and which does not appear in the text itself. That is these verses, which point to the blessings that God will send to anyone who is generous, are presented *as if they were talking about giving to the church – which they are not*.

These verses are actually just proclaiming the great benefits that come from generous giving, particularly the benefit to the giver, and making the following specific points or promises:

- a) Anyone who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, meaning that a man reaps what he sows and that giving money away is viewed by God as sowing seeds. So, if you don’t sow any seeds, because you don’t give, then He won’t give you anything back either so you won’t reap anything. And if you only give sparingly you will only reap a small harvest.
- b) Conversely, if you sow bountifully by giving generously, God will cause you to reap bountifully as well, meaning He will cause you to prosper and succeed and to get your money back again with a lot more on top as a bumper harvest.
- c) We must each decide, entirely for ourselves, how much to give, and to whom, and it must not be done reluctantly i.e. begrudging it, under compulsion, or in accordance with a rule or command. Any of those things make the gift involuntary and thus it can no longer be classed as being done freely and cheerfully, which is what God wants. You have to get hold of this vital point, which is that God loves generosity and freedom and for people to give solely *because they want to*. He wants you *to want to give*, just as He wants to give, because He wants you to be like Him and generosity is a key part of His character.
- d) If you do make up your mind to give generously, and if that is your genuine desire, then God will provide for you in abundance. Then you will always have enough of everything and will always be capable of giving generously. He will ensure you are made able to afford it – if your heart’s

desire is to give generously, but not if you just obey commands and rules about giving which is effectively no different from paying income tax.

- e) God will not only replace what you give by giving it back to you, but He will *multiply it exponentially* so that you are not merely repaid or compensated but *enriched*.

I hasten to add, however, that although God promises to multiply what we give and to send it back to us, *that must not be our motive for giving*. We must not treat God like a vending machine where we only put money in because we want something back from Him for ourselves. That would be squalid and grasping and would not please God.

Instead, our giving must be solely *because we want to* and in order to help the poor and needy, or missions work or impoverished relatives etc, *not to get something back for ourselves*. There must be genuine generosity in our hearts such that we take pleasure from the act of giving and enjoy it.

Moreover, don't get the idea that when God promises to multiply your giving and return it to you it means He will do so immediately by return post. He might do, if you are a very new believer just starting to give and He wants to encourage you. But it is more likely that God will return your money to you months, years or even decades later.

He keeps meticulous accounts and might reward you in your sixties for giving you did in your twenties such that you have no way of remembering your giving or connecting the two things. But God does remember and He will never fail to reward any act of genuine generosity.

But I think He might well ignore any giving done purely in order to induce Him to give it back to you as with the "money preachers" who are always talking about how to get rich. God is not willing to be used or manipulated in that way. Therefore, just focus on giving generously and enjoying it and leave it to God to think about repaying you whenever it suits His purposes to do so.

So, we have been through all these verses, and would you now agree with me that none of the verses we have seen are telling us:

- a) to tithe to our local church
- b) to give anything at all to our local church, i.e. *for its own purposes*, but only ever for it to serve as a collecting point to gather money to send on to the poor and needy elsewhere, as with the famine victims in Jerusalem
- c) to give money to *local* leaders/elders/bishops/overseers, whatever you want to call them, but only for those men who have specialist ministries which require them to be full time or who *travel* far from home with itinerant ministries who cannot, therefore, get a job to provide for themselves and their families
- d) that there is any compulsion or command to give - it is always presented as being 100% voluntary
- e) that there is some specified sum or percentage that we should give – it is left entirely up to us to decide on the amount

- f) that there is any specific person or group *to whom* we must give. It is left up to us to decide whom we believe to be the most needy – except that we are told this *must include our own families* and are given general guidelines about widows and orphans etc.

In view of all that, would you therefore agree with me that there is no biblical basis for what millions of churches are teaching, namely that:

- a) our giving should be to the local church (whether or not they specify the amount or percentage)
- b) the money given to the local church should be used to buy and maintain a building and to pay the salary of the *local* pastor/leader/minister, even though *he does not travel* or is not a full time Bible teacher.

At any rate, if you think there is a biblical basis for the above practices, can you set out what that basis is and point to verses, or even one verse, which is a clear authority for that belief? Try it. But if you can't, then wouldn't you agree that you need to rethink your beliefs in this area and question what you have been taught and what you have always done in your life so far?