

TITHING

Malachi 3:6–12

Introduction

The story is told that once God gave a man ten apples: three for food, three for shelter, three for clothing and one to give back to God. The man spent the three for food, three for shelter, and three for clothing. He looked at the tenth and it was brighter, redder, and juicier than all the rest. So, the man ate the apple, and gave the core back to God!

Our faith in Jesus embraces the whole of life—not just the spiritual, but the material as well. Tithing will not make you a Christian, but it tells a lot about where you are in the process of living out your discipleship as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Outline

1. Tithing is God's will for you.

There are Christians who have argued that this is not so.

a. Tithing is taught in the Law.

There is no argument that tithing is taught in the Law and the rest of the Old Testament.

- Leviticus 27:30, NIV—"A tithe of everything . . . belongs to the LORD."
- Malachi 3:6–12

The more subtle argument is that we no longer live under the Law.

The rebuttal to that is as follows:

b. Tithing came before the Law.

Hebrews 7: Abraham, the man of faith, tithed.

This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder. Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham. This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor. [vv. 1–10, NIV]

The writer of Hebrews makes the point that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek,—king of righteousness and king of peace. He was—a priest in the order of Jesus, not on the

basis of ancestry (from the line of Levi) but on the basis of an indestructible life—Abraham paid tithes not to the Levites, but to this example of Christ. And the writer says, “One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor” (7:10).

c. Jesus approved tithing.

Matthew 23:23—*You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.*

d. The response under grace should exceed the requirements of the Law.

“Are you saying that if I am not tithing, I am out of God’s will?” Yes,—in that area of your life. God puts it in stronger language, “Will a man rob God?”

2. **Tithing permits the needs of the Lord’s work to be fully met.**

Malachi 3:10—*That there might be food in my house.*

The fact of the matter is that the Bible not only teaches that the tenth belongs to God—so does the other 90 percent.

- *The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it. Psalm 24:1*
- *To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Deuteronomy 10:14*
- *For every animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. Psalm 50:10–11*
- *‘The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. Haggai 2:8*
- Every human life is owned by God. *The spirit returns to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:7*

Malachi’s point is that, while God owns all, He has turned over His property to our management and trusteeship. We are all lease-holders.

It’s embarrassing to have to ask for payment on a note. But, that’s what God is doing. He has designed His work to function on the tithes and to the extent we withhold our tithes, to that extent we place limitations on what God wants to happen among us.

We are under a “curse” for not tithing. Like the fig tree Jesus cursed—what is cursed withers.

You see,—no believer of Jesus Christ would intentionally hurt His Church—, but we can hurt it through our negligence and carelessness.

3. **Tithing brings a growth of our faith in the Lord.**

Tithing is a practical way to grow spiritually.

(Share a personal illustration from your own life regarding how your faith has grown through tithing.)

We apply the promise of Malachi 3:10 personally: “*Test me in this,*” says the LORD Almighty, “*and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*”

While it is right we apply this personally, let us not forget that in the original setting of this Scripture, the reference is to the community of faith as a whole. When all of us are supporting the church, then the floodgates of heaven will open, and the devourer will be kept at bay!

What reward do we seek?

There are five possible motives for giving:

- Duty
- Self-satisfaction
- Prestige
- Tax benefits
- Love

There is an interesting illustration out of Scripture—the apostle Paul collected a large offering at the end of his third missionary journey for the beleaguered saints in Jerusalem. His reward? Arrest and imprisonment—five years. But the gospel advanced. Love always has a return on investment.

Notice I said tithing would bring a growth to your faith. The opposite of faith is fear. We're afraid we don't have enough.

A backwoods farmer, sitting on the steps of his tumbledown shack, was approached by a stranger who stopped for a drink of water.

"How's your wheat coming along?" asked the stranger.

"Didn't plant none."

"Really? I thought this was good wheat country."

"Afraid it would rain."

"Oh. Well, how's your corn crop?"

"Ain't got none," said the farmer.

"Didn't plant any corn, either?"

"Nope, afraid of corn blight."

"Well," said the stranger, "What did you plant?"

"Nothin'," said the farmer. "I just played it safe."

4. Some practical suggestions for beginning to tithe, or increasing beyond the tithe.

- a. Settle the matter in your heart.

This is the standard for all God's people.

The tithe is preeminently fair for it asks the same minimum standard for all of us. Don't withhold your tithe because you feel your tithe is either too small or too large.

- b. There will never be a good time to start tithing.

What we are dealing with in the tithe is a way of life that brings a more prioritized and disciplined daily walk.

- c. Figure out what 10 percent is of your gross paycheck, dividend, profit on a sale, income of any kind.
- d. When you get paid, make out the tithe check first.
- e. Make out a budget that tells you how you can spend the other 90 percent. Don't be surprised if, on paper, it doesn't work. That's the faith element.
- f. Don't divide, or designate, your tithe.

"The whole tithe into the storehouse."

James Dobson, Guidelines for Fundraising—Rule #4. "We will ask people not to support [us] or any other Christian program until their obligations to the local church have been met. It is the first line of defense for the family."

- g. Tithe systematically, or regularly.
- h. Increase your faith beyond the tithe.

The late Ray Steadman told the story of a man who was responding to an offering and said, "I think I could give ten dollars and not feel it." The usher said, "Why don't you give twenty dollars and feel it."

- i. Expect fierce temptation from the enemy. He is going to hate it that you have made this commitment.

Conclusion

You will always be welcome at this church whether you ever give a dime or not. Your giving will remain a matter between you and the Lord.

A past president at Miami College (Pearson) once wrote an article in the college newsletter to constituents that made a lot of sense to me.

He was responding to someone's criticism that he was always asking for money. He responded.

You are probably right, but let me tell you a personal story.

I had a little boy; my first-born. He was a delight to our hearts, but he was always costing me something. He needed clothing, shoes, food, and he had special needs that I gladly provided, for he was my son. Then one day he died. It was an experience that I hope you will never have. He does not cost me a dollar now.

Every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth. Body, mind, and soul have their needs and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry has no need, and will not bother you.

What we give cannot compare to what God has given us: His inexpressible gift. All true Christian giving flows out of the character of God. Jesus came as the Giver, and not the Taker. May our discipleship of Him be marked with the grace of giving.

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