

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, November 15, 1992, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

MALACHI 3:10

“Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple...” (GN)

A BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE THAT CHALLENGES EVERY BELIEVER

It is stewardship time again, and I must confess that preaching about “money” is somewhat distasteful to me. I know it shouldn’t be because it is a part of the preaching of the Gospel; but, I’m always uncomfortable about it and afraid that a visitor here for the first time will immediately exclaim, “Oh, wouldn’t you know it; another preacher begging for money!”

Some of us get very touchy and defensive when we get down to the nitty-gritty of Christian commitment; when we get to the place where the rubber meets the road in our pocket or checkbook.

The Scottish people love to make fun of themselves when it comes to the matter of giving. Dr. Murdo Ewan McDonald of Glasgow tells about the collection that was taken aboard an American liner crossing the Atlantic. The Captain asked for a generous offering at the Sunday morning service to help the widows of seamen, and he got a very generous response. At the end of the service he made an announcement, thanking the passengers and crew for their generosity. He said that they had given \$1,404.04, and then he paused, and said with a smile, “the four cents puzzles me. There must be a Scotsman aboard!” Whereupon a voice from the back said, “There are four of us!”

Well, I thought that if I preach on Christian stewardship this year, I’ll “go for broke”, and tell you the sure-fire way to solve every financial problem this or any other Christian congregation could ever have.

This morning I preach to you on “The Principle of the Tithe”. I do so without apology, but without any attempt to high pressure anyone. I can only testify that nothing has more greatly enriched our own Christian lives than the consistent practice of tithing our gross income. We have always had three meals a day, a roof over our head, and resources to pay our bills on time. I firmly believe that if we sincerely seek to honor the Lord in this matter of the tithe, He will honor us in return. The Psalmist says, “Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, but those who reverence the Lord will never lack any good thing.” (Psalm 34:10 L.B.)

Now, let me mention three things about tithing:

1. TITHING is in the Bible. Our Lord spoke 38 parables, and 16 of them refer to property and money. Jesus in Scripture speaks more about money than He does about either promiscuity or the afterlife. It has been estimated that almost 60 percent of the Bible deals with money and property matters; and within the Bible there is the principle of tithing.

The Hebrew law concerning the tithe is found specifically in the Book of Leviticus, where, in the last chapter (27:30) we are told that “a tithe of everything... belongs to the Lord.”

But as you examine Scripture you discover that the principle of the tithe is a very ancient principle, going much farther back than the Law of Moses. In Genesis, Chapter 14, you find an example of tithing by Abraham. When Abraham had fought a battle to rescue his nephew Lot, we read that “Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying,

‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
And blessed be God Most High,
Who delivered your enemies into your hand.’

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” (Genesis 14:18-20)

Here we go back 4,000 years to Abraham, the father of the faithful, whose call, in effect, marked the birthday of the Church; and we find him offering a tenth of his possessions to God in gratitude for what God had done for him. He offers that tenth to Melchizedek, the King of Salem and Priest of the Most-High God, a man who served God whole-heartedly, and who actually represented God and God’s work amongst men.

Abraham’s action was an action of gratitude. It was not an attempt to buy favors. Abraham had already won the war, and he gave his tithe in the realization that God is the Owner of heaven and earth, and that everything he had he owed to God. So, the “tithe” is a very ancient principle pre-dating the Mosaic Law itself.

Moreover, according to the Old Testament prophets, God expects a tithe, and the failure to give the tithe is usually an indication of general spiritual failure. The very familiar passage here, of course, is Malachi 3:8-10, “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But, you ask, ‘How do we rob You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing Me. Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple... and thereby put Me to the test, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

But the thing we ought to notice here is that this is God’s prophet speaking to the people of Israel as they stand on the verge of judgment. God’s prophet is saying to these people, “You have turned away from God in your national life, and conspicuous in that turning away is the fact that you failed to acknowledge your stewardship obligations to God by giving Him your tithe.” It is my firm conviction that our country today faces the impending judgment of God to a greater extent than perhaps at any time in our national history. The forces of evil are proliferating all around us and will continue to do so. How imperative then that the Lord’s people be faithful in providing the tithe, to ensure the ongoing ministry of the Kingdom of Christ, as we combat the darkness of sin all around us.

Again, in the New Testament, in Luke 11:37-42, we find our Lord speaking to the

Pharisees and saying, “You give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.” The point to notice here is that Jesus immediately followed that by saying, “You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave these other things undone.” Jesus, you see, was assuming that His people should tithe; but at the same time, He was warning the self-righteous Pharisee that tithing isn’t everything in the eyes of God; but that justice and love are equally important. Do remember that our Lord assumed the tithe; He never abrogated it.

Now, let me make it quite clear that we do not believe in legalism. I do not believe that we should tithe just because it was a law under Moses, but we have just considered three sample passages from the Bible that we simply can’t sweep under the carpet: (a) the fact that tithing is an ancient principle, going back to Abraham; (b) the fact that God, through His prophet, warned a nation on the verge of judgment that they had been unfaithful in the matter of the stewardship of their resources; and (c) above all, the fact that our Lord, Himself, assumed the tithe to be the valid method of giving to God. Yes, tithing is in the Bible.

2. TITHING is the Christian method of giving. For one thing, it solves the problem of “How much shall I give?”. Let me say most emphatically that we should never compare what we give with what anyone else gives. The tither can hold up his head with any person. The tither becomes an obedient and faithful steward of a separated portion of his income which he administers for his Lord. Of course, we Christians believe that we are stewards not only of the 10 percent, but of the other 90 percent as well; and how we administer our total affairs is a matter of great importance between us and God; and in a very real sense reflects the quality of our Christian life.

Tithing is the genuinely Christian approach to giving. It is systematic, and it is proportionate. Now we must, of course, remember that over and above the Christian tithe is this principle enunciated by our Lord, “From the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luke 12:48) And also the same principle as pronounced by the Apostle Paul, “Upon the first day of every week let every one of you set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income”; or as the King James Version renders it, “as God has prospered him.” (1 Cor. 16:2). This means that for many people the tithe is not enough. It means that many people who would give the tithe would really be getting off easy! The tithe is the minimum; but for some it should not be the minimum: The amount should be more.

The envelope in which you place your contribution each week is entitled “My Faith Offering”. But, I would remind you that in the Old Testament, “the offering” of the people was the amount over and above the “tithe” which they gave to the Lord. The tithe was required; and so we rightly speak of “God’s tithe” and “your offering”. If your “tithe” is \$50 a week, and you donate \$60, then the \$10 is your “offering”.

This is something which everyone must take to the Lord in earnest prayer, as we examine ourselves and our financial resources, and make our decision. The trouble is that some Christians do not approach this matter of giving in any kind of systematic and proportionate way. They may decide on a certain amount which looks large at the time, but when it is broken down proportionately to income, and proportionately to what we do for ourselves, it is sometimes small

and meager.

3. TITHING is satisfying. You will notice that I did not say “rewarding”. We must be very careful not to tithe from any selfish motive, as an attempt to buy God’s favor, or as some kind of spiritual life insurance. I can’t tolerate these stories about some man who began to tithe, and within a year or two he became a millionaire! It would be foolish and unbiblical to promise you that if you begin to tithe, all your financial and personal problems will have evaporated by next week. That is just not true.

But it is true that, more often than not, when a Christian really begins to take this matter of his stewardship responsibility seriously before God and to look at that separated portion, the tithe; he also is in a position to take a look at the remaining nine-tenths; and he will, in all likelihood, become a better administrator of what the Lord has given him than ever before. In a word, the tither is given the wisdom to make the remaining nine-tenths go farther than the ten tenths otherwise would. And, in this sense, the tither undoubtedly prospers. No one ought to promise that if you tithe you are going to be immediately rewarded for it. But, I will tell you this – I have never heard a tither say that he has ever suffered from tithing or has become poorer because of it. Tithing is satisfying, and there is a sense in which God does open the windows of heaven and shower down His blessings upon you.

You will notice that I have not mentioned the amount we feel we will need to subscribe in order to carry out our mission as the Church of Jesus Christ for 1993. I do not intend to mention any such amount. I get wearied when I hear preachers say this kind of thing – “Now, if ‘x’ number of people will give \$50 a week, and ‘y’ number give \$75, and ‘z’ number give \$100, we will go over the top!” Let us be done with this kind of ecclesiastical mathematics. Consider becoming a tither, my Christian friend. If you do, the Church will never have the slightest concern about where needed money will come from, and we will pursue with vigor and enthusiasm the building of our new church home.

But more important – what glory it will bring to God! There is no law that says we have to tithe in order to be saved; but just as behind the nation Israel was the Red Sea, God’s redemption of His people from the slavery of Egypt; so, behind the Christian is the Cross and the empty tomb – God’s eternal redemption of His people in Jesus Christ. It is as we stand before the Cross that we should reflect upon this whole matter of stewardship.

“Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

If you linger at the foot of the Cross, it will do wonders for your sense of values and for your sense of perspective and for your whole understanding of Christian stewardship.

We ought to ponder these things deeply. Within our family circle we ought to talk to each other about it. Husbands and wives ought to discuss it. Young wage earners who love Christ ought to be getting into the tithing pattern.

We are saved by sovereign grace alone. In that context I would invite you, if you have

not done so already, to consider becoming a tither.

Do you know when I received the greatest joy in giving to the Lord's work? It was back in those dark days when Canada, like the USA, was ravaged by the awful Depression of the 1930's. College graduates were being fed in soup kitchens in Toronto; multitudes of people were losing their homes through foreclosure; and we hardly knew where our next meal would come from. When I was fourteen, I got a job at 25 cents an hour. I could only get about thirty hours a month: In fact, it averaged out at \$7 a month; and I was glad to help my mother even to that extent. But, do you know what she did? She encouraged me to pledge \$1 a month to help support a missionary from our church. And, I did; and I never missed a payment! I really felt good about being able to do that for the Lord. And, that's how I got into tithing.

Henry Drummond used to say, "The Christian life is like a club. The entrance fee is absolutely nothing; but the annual subscription is everything you've got!"

“...When I look up at the Cross
Where God's great Steward suffered loss
Of life, and shed His blood for me,
A trifling thing it seems to be,
To pay a tithe, dear Lord, to Thee
Of time, or talent, wealth or store –
Full well I know I owe Thee more,
A million times I owe Thee more!”

AMEN.