



Stewardship.Simplified.

Florida Baptist Financial Services

Generosity Message Series
Message III – Understanding the Tithe

Pastor Tim Maynard
Fruit Cove Baptist Church

Understanding the Tithe **“Do I Have to Tithe?”** **(Malachi 3:7-12)**

Tiny and Martha showed up at the County Fair as they did every year. This year, as in years past, Tiny was drawn to the double-wing antique crop dusting airplane. You could ride in the open cockpit plane behind the pilot for \$10.

Every year, Tiny and Martha argued. Tiny wanted to ride in the plane. Martha’s argument was, “I know you do Tiny. But it costs \$10 and you know, \$10 is \$10.” So each year, after the argument, they would walk away without a plane ride.

This year, the pilot saw them coming, and listened as the same old argument started, with Martha ending “Tiny the ride costs \$10 and you know, \$10 is \$10.” This time, the pilot interjected. “You folks come here every year and have the same old argument. This year I’m going to make you a deal. Ride in the plane with me. If you take the whole ride and never say a word, I won’t charge you for the ride.”

So reluctantly, Martha agreed and she and Tiny got in the back of the plane behind the pilot and he took off. He got up pretty high, and then started doing some tricks: a backward dive, a barrel roll, he killed the engine and went into a free fall, but no matter how much he maneuvered, he heard nothing from Tiny and Martha.

Once on the ground, he turned around and shook Tiny’s hand. He said, “well sir, you did good. I never heard a word out of either one of you, so the ride’s on me!” Tiny said, “Well I almost said something back there when Martha fell out during the barrel rolls, but you know \$10 is \$10!”

And ten percent is ten percent. Today, I want to address a fairly controversial topic in our stewardship conversation. The topic is tithing.

“Do I Have to Tithe?” Let me answer the question now. NO.

Well, let me remind you once again. God is not trying to get your money. He already owns it. But we have to learn how to master it, because if we don't it will become our master. And money is a cruel taskmaster. “You can't serve God and money (mammon)” Jesus said.

What is the Tithe?

“Tithing” is the act of giving ten percent (the word “tithe” is ten or one/tenth)...ten percent of our increase or of our income to the Lord. The tithe is one of several offerings commanded of God's people in the Old Testament, and was used as a means of supplying “the storehouse” (the place where food would be stockpiled to feed those who worked in the

Temple as volunteers as well as the poor). It was a kind of social system to take care of those who weren't able to care for themselves. Let me note again: In the OT it was *commanded* and *expected* of God's people, it normally was produce or animals, and their refusal to deal with this was what this portion of Malachi 3 was talking about.

Some would make a case today that New Testament Christians are free from the Law and therefore the tithe doesn't really apply to us today since the requirements of the Law have been fulfilled in Christ. "*I have not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it.*" I would absolutely agree with that statement. We are not under the Law, but under grace because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

But I will also argue that while the LAW of the tithe has no bearing on New Testament believers, the PRINCIPLE of the tithe is still in effect. Let me defend that thought.

What was the Purpose of the Tithe?

Tithing's original purpose according to the Law:

- 1). Supply the “storehouse;” the Temple, with food for priests and the poor
- 2). Identify the people of God as covenant people
- 3). It was an obligation to be met to honor God as a sign of being God's covenant people

But....

It is not a duty imposed on Christians today

HOWEVER the principle of the tithe goes back far deeper into the Word of God than the legal code. It actually predates the Law by more than 400 years. We are never told WHEN it began, just THAT it was in place.

What is the Principle of the Tithe?

Melchizedek, who was a type of Christ, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, and was discussed in some detail in Hebrews 7. He received a tithe

from Abraham. Those who say that tithing is not in the New Testament have skipped Hebrews 7 in their reading, because nearly the whole chapter is about tithing and Melchizedek. Melchizedek we understand, was a type of Christ in His role as high priest.

Jacob, one of the three main patriarchs, (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) offered a tithe as worship to God after God appeared to him at Bethel.

So was the tithe simply a legal obligation, or was it an act of worship? It BEGAN as an act of worship, 400 plus years before the Law was given and then BECAME a legal regulation under the old covenant.

Jesus did not discontinue the tithe. He spoke about it, and could've said, "Y'all really don't have to worry about this anymore." It was in existence even when the initial purpose for the tithe had ended. So it ended as a legal obligation, but continued as an act of worship and of honoring God.

The tithe goes back to “honoring God” with the first fruit of our increase as we talked about 2 weeks ago. We are acknowledging our belief that God is the owner of everything.

Our hearts are idol factories. Our hearts are always inclined to bow before “the work of our hands.” Today making money, “staking our claim,” making a name for ourselves, building our ownership of this world's goods is the most common idolatry of 21st Century Christians. We don't steward money, we MAKE money. We BUILD our net worth. We STOCKPILE our finances as security for the future. And generally speaking, WE take credit for it.

Jesus told the story of a rich farmer in a parable in Luke 12 whose testimony involved a lot of “I's” and “my's.” He thought HE made the crops grow. HE owned the farms and barns and crops. HE was responsible for building his own kingdom of corn and barns. HE had plans to reap the harvest of blessings from his farm. And then the Lord came and kicked his sandcastle

kingdom down. One thing the man didn't take into account: God owned his soul.

Folks we repeat this story every day. We are either living this life believing that God is the center of everything and everything we see, or we live believing that our mission in life is to grab all we can and stuff it in our pockets and keep it for ourselves.

When I say that tithing is not a legalistic issue, that also means...and I sincerely believe this...that God is not going to punish you for not tithing. The reality is: You'll mess yourself up! You'll punish yourself!

The punishments and curses that were talked about in Malachi 3 are not things we need to fear if we don't tithe. But there are still consequences if we fail to follow this principle:

1). We will not be content with what we have. (debt).

We can't afford to give that much, but we can always find ways to purchase the things important to us, can't we? The Average American family carries about \$5700 in cc debt, and lives about \$7400 per year beyond their income.

2). **We will not be as fruitful as we could be.** Can we ask God for blessings when we won't honor Him with what He's given us? Are we really trusting God to care for our eternal soul if we can't trust Him with earthly treasure? Jesus said "If you can't be trusted with earthly (temporary) things, who is going to trust you with eternal things?"

3). **We will not be the blessing God wants us to be...to others**

What would it look like if, for one year, every family in the church...every household...took this principle to heart and just trusted God for it. You know if everyone in this church started tithing today, I would not get a raise. We would not build a bigger building. But we could bless so many people in our community and in the world. You know, when you look around, have you noticed that many hospitals have denominational/church names? Baptist Hospital? Methodist Hospital? St Lukes, St Vincents...I am yet to

see one hospital, one charitable cause, one orphanage, named after great atheists or unbelievers? Christians do these things! We build schools! And orphanages. We plant churches and support missions around the world. How? By God's people being faithful in giving of tithes and offerings. But I wonder what a blessing we could be if we were all trusting God in this?

I talked once to a couple in debt...they started tithing and within 8 months were looking at paying off their last credit card...debt free except for their house. Incredible. I don't think that is something that just happens rarely. I think it's a matter of shifting our priorities of how we see and how we use money.

Folks, I just want you to know the blessing, the JOY of stewardship. I want you to get a handle on your finances before your money owns you, and you waste your life building sandcastles that won't last. I want you to come to the Lord....RETURN to the Lord...with your whole heart. I want you to tear

down the idols and false gods and allegiances that grow up inside of us like weeds.

And I want you to know the blessing and freedom of HONORING THE LORD with all that is in you and seeing the blessings that HE wants to pour out on you, but He can't if you're not trusting Him in this.

“Do you want fries with that?” Neal told me that should have been the title for the sermon three weeks ago. You know, you can go to a burger place (always liked Five Guys) and just order a great hamburger. But when that clerk says, “Do you want fries with that?” well that just makes it so much better, right? And God is saying, “I want to upsize your order. You can settle for the ordinary if you want...but I want to open the windows of heaven and pour out so much on you that it overflows your life! Instead of living out of want, we live out of His abundance and His blessing. Don't cheat yourself out of God's best. Return to Him in this matter. Bring the

tithe. And then see that God always keeps His Word as He pours out more and more of heaven in your life!

1). We give because it honors God that we trust Him

2). We give because it blesses others. Our giving impacts eternity

3). We give because we are blessed when we do. We experience joy, because God loves a cheerful giver

4). We give because it keeps our perspective (Rev 3:7). “You say I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing,” but you do not know you are wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked.”

5). We give because “God so loved the world that He gave...”

So....do you want fries with that?