

**Tithing (Part 1) – Mal 3:7-12**  
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God calls each and every one of us to faithfully and joyfully tithe. Even eagerly. But before we get there, let me start with a few preliminary thoughts.

1. If you don't tithe, this is not intended to make you feel like a worm. It's not intended to condemn. It is intended to teach you what God desires and requires so you can live his way in *this* respect, just like all the others.
2. If you're convicted by this, the worst thing you can do is look for a viewpoint that allows you to avoid it. Because you'll find it. And they sound good. But I believe them to be a misuse of Scripture, or the result of a faulty or inconsistent method of interpretation.
3. Let the plain meaning of the Scripture speak. And listen with an attitude of assent instead of an attitude of suspicion. Instead of trying to get around tithing, embrace it. There's not only great joy in doing so, but great confidence. Confidence that you're in the center of God's will.

That said, here's the reality. According to nonprofitsource.com, Christians give less now than they did in the Great Depression of the 1930's. On average, we give 2.5% of our income now, versus 3.3% then. When unemployment was 25%. Not that 3.3% is laudable, but that 2.5% is deplorable. Especially when we're more affluent and have more discretionary income than ever.

Though the giving in our church is better than *that*, and continues to grow, it's still a problem. About 20% give nothing and only about 40% tithe. That's better than most churches, but still far below what God intends.

**Mal 3:7-12**

The same was true in Malachi's day. Malachi was a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC prophet who wrote just prior to the 400 silent years before Jesus came. And in chapter 3 of his prophecy, he's in the middle of recording a hypothetical conversation between God and his people at the time.

God says . . .  
[7] *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. [Does that apply to you when it comes to giving?] Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say [the people], 'How shall we return?' [And God says . . .] Will man rob God? [It's a rhetorical question to say, "Surely not. It's unthinkable.]" Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' [And God responds] In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.*

[10] *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. [11] I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine*

*in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. [12] Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.*

The point of this passage is found in the very first sentence of v10 – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*. It's God's design for giving to his work. Let's see if we can unpack it.

**When I Give God's Way . . .**

**1. I give 10% of my income (v10)**

A tenth. Because that's what the word tithe *means*. And that's how it's *used* in Scripture. Which you can see explicitly in **Lev 27:32**. God is speaking to Moses, giving him instructions about the Law, and says:

*Every tithe of herds and flocks [and then he clarifies it], every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the LORD [dedicated to the Lord].* Indicating that *tithe* and *tenth* are used interchangeably.

And it applies to *every* tenth animal. *Every* herd. *Every* harvest. *Every* source of income. If I earn \$10, I should give \$1. If I get a paycheck or a bonus, I should give a tenth. If I cash in a stock or bond, I should give 10% of my *gain*. If I sell a piece of land or get out of a business, I should tithe my *profit*. If I receive a monetary *gift*, I should give a tenth of that. That's why my Mom used to give our girls \$23 for their birthday. Because she wanted them to have a full \$20 left after they tithed it.

When I give *God's* way, I give 10% of my income. A *full* tithe as it says in v10a.

And I do so . . .

**• Off the top (Prov 3:9)**

When I give God's way, I give 10% of my income off the top. Before I pass go, before I collect \$200, before I do anything, **Prov 3:9** says – *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce*. Firstfruits, meaning the first of the fruit that ripened. The first of the grain that was harvested. The first of the oil that was squeezed. The first of the animals that were born. It's a principle repeated over and over again in the Scriptures.

Like when God said to Moses in **Ex 23:19** – *The best of the firstfruits of your ground [the best of them] you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God*. Not the worst of the first, the leftovers, but the best.

And several hundred years later in Hezekiah's day, **2 Chron 31:5** says:  
*As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.*  
Our tithe should come from the firstfruits. Off the top.

And in Nehemiah's day, a *contemporary* of Malachi, the Israelites said (**Ne 10:35, 39**):  
*We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD . . . We will not neglect the house of our God.*

Over and over again in the Bible, the command and example is to tithe off the top of our income.

Which in our day, means tithing on our gross. Before we pay taxes, before we contribute to our retirement – or our HSA or anything else – we should give.

When Becky and I were first married and I was still trying to *keep* as much as I could, I tried to rationalize that. Get around it. I was making a whopping \$21,000 a year, and 10% of that just seemed like a lot. I didn't *want* to give that much.

Thankfully, Becky graciously but firmly held her ground, and convinced me otherwise. And I say “thankfully,” because had we not given off the top when we were making a *pittance*, we probably wouldn't have done so when we made more. And probably would have missed out on God's *best* over the years. Or suffered under his correction. Who knows, I might not even be preaching.

When I give God's way, I tithe first. 10% off the top.

And I give it . . .

- **To my church (v10)**

That's the idea of the *storehouse* in v10. *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*. In Malachi's day it was a literal room connected to the side of the *temple*, that was used to store the tithes of grain, oil, and money. Grain, oil, and money that was used for the work of *ministry* and those who did it. Like the Levites and singers and priests (Neh 13:5).

So God is saying, bring a tenth of your income to the place he has designed and designated for discipleship, worship, and ministry. The primary place where you're fed and led spiritually. In *our* day, that's the local church. Or should be. It's an analogy you can't avoid.

Just like the temple was God's primary source of discipleship and ministry *then*, the local church is God's primary source of discipleship and ministry *now*. Which leads to the conclusion that when I give *God's* way, I give 10%, off the top, to my church. It's called *storehouse tithing*, and comes directly from Scripture. *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*. (10a)

3<sup>rd</sup> . . .

- **It's what God commands (v10)**

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*. (10) It's a command. And one that still applies for 6 reasons.

6 reasons that the Old Testament command to tithe still applies.

**1. Tithing is part of Scripture.**

And 2 Tim 3:16 says that *all* Scripture is profitable. All. Even the Old Testament Law. Of which tithing is a part. Tithing is part of the Old Testament Law, and the Old Testament Law is part of Scripture.

Which makes it *profitable* according to the New Testament. Profitable *for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*. Including the good work of tithing. (2 Tim 3:16)

So the command to tithe still applies, because it's part of Scripture, and *all* Scripture is *useful*.

**2. The Law was written for our sake.**

The sake of those on *this* side of the cross. Living under the New Covenant.

That's what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 9. Speaking of an Old Testament law God put in place 1500 years earlier, Paul asks, “*Does he not certainly speak for our sake?* (1 Cor 9:10) It's a rhetorical question to say, he does.

And then, just to make sure we get it, he says it again. *It was written for our sake* (10). For us. Not as a means to be *justified* before God (Gal 3:11), but as a standard to live by and *honor* God.

In addition to that, Rom 15:4 says – *Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*. Our application and obedience. Not just our information.

So the command to tithe still applies because it's part of the Law, and the Law was written for us.

**3. The Law is still *operative* in some sense.**

That's why Paul said what he said. Plus, Jesus says in **Lk 16:17** – *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void*. In other words, it still applies in some sense. We don't know *how* from that statement, but we *do* know that it's not null and void. The “how” comes from the Apostle Paul.

**4. Paul applied the Law in *principle*.**

That's the sense in which it's still operative. Like in 1 Cor 9:8-10 Paul applies the law about not muzzling an ox while it treads out grain, to paying pastors for their labor in ministry. He applied a law in *principle*, as an example for how to apply the Law in practice. How to apply it in general.

Does that mean we have to abide by all the *particulars* of the laws? Not at all. Heb 8:13 says that the Law is *obsolete*, and Eph 2:15 says that Jesus has *abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances*. The particulars no longer apply.

Not only that, but most of the time we can honor the principle *without* the particulars. Like I can honor the principle of the *Sabbath* and still work on Sunday (or Saturday). Because I take *Monday* off. 6 days I work, and a 7<sup>th</sup> I rest (Ex 20:8-11). I honor the principle without the particulars.

But sometimes, it's impossible to separate the two. And tithing is one of them. You can't separate the particulars from the principle, and still honor the principle; still give God's way. Because the principle is to provide for the work of ministry by giving a fixed, equitable, and consistent percentage of your income. In this case, a tenth. So if you fail to

honor the particulars (giving 10% of your firstfruits to your local church) you fail to honor the principle (of adequately providing for the church).

### 5. Tithing was practiced well before the Law was given.

It's found in Gen 14, a good 600 years before the Law was given in Exodus 20. After Abraham pursued King Chedorlaomer to rescue Lot, and regained all the stolen goods, he ran into Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God. And Melchizedek not only blessed Abraham, but received the *tithe* Abraham gave him. **Gen 14:20** – *Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.*

So the command to tithe still applies because it was practiced by God's people from the time of Abraham, well before the Law was ever given.

And then last, tithing is a command that still applies, because . . .

### 6. Jesus affirmed tithing specifically.

He said in **Mt 23:23** – *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin [tiny seeds and herbs], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*

You ought to have observed God's standards of justice and mercy and faithfulness, *without* neglecting his other standards like tithing. Far from doing *away* with the tithe, Jesus actually affirmed it. And if you say that doesn't apply to us because he was talking to people still under the Law, you'd have to rule out a whole bunch of other things he said as well. He spoke truth to *them* as a means of conveying truth to *all* of us.

6 reasons tithing is what God commands.

Not only that . . .

#### • It's how God provides (v10)

[10] *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse [he says], that there may be food in my house.* Tithing is how God puts food on the table. Which in Malachi's day, meant both *physical* food to sustain the priests and temple workers, and *spiritual* food to sustain the people.

And the same is true in our day. Right here in *our* church. Our tithes are God's means of providing for the work of ministry and those who lead it. It's how he ensures that the Gospel goes forward, the Bible is taught, people are disciplined, and worship is offered. It's how he provides for and perpetuates his primary means of reaching and impacting the world (the church). It's how he sustains and blesses his bride.

Whether it's paying the heating bill in order to *accommodate* the work of ministry, or paying pastors to lead it, our tithes are how God provides. How he ensures that there's food in his house.

And last, giving God's way by tithing to my church, is what he blesses.

#### • It's what God blesses (v10)

[10] *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of*

*heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.* "Go ahead" God says, "Make *my* day and I'll make yours."

Tithing is a major aspect of our obedience that God blesses. Sometimes monetarily and sometimes spiritually. Sometimes materially and sometimes emotionally. Sometimes it's an *abundance* of relationships, or one really good one. An abundance of peace, or a lack of difficulty. Or maybe it's an abundance of strength in the midst of it.

Whatever the case, God's blessing for giving his way is not necessarily a tit-for-tat thing. "You give me money and I'll give you more." But it is *real*. And significant. And good.

It's not *why* we give, it's not *why* we tithe. We don't give to get. But God sure does bless it. From the storehouse of heaven and the goodness of his heart, he blesses us.

### Summary

So whatever you do, don't miss it. Rationalize no more. Reject it no longer. Make whatever adjustments are necessary in your budget or lifestyle, and give *God's* way. Practice *storehouse* tithing. It's what he commands, it's how he provides, and it's what he blesses.

Prayer – God, help us in this. Crucify our greed and desire for control. Sanctify our hearts to conform to your Word. And purify our lives to give your way.

### You Are Loved