

## The Taboo Topic in Church

Series: Response

Malachi 3:6-12

November 21, 2021

Well, today we conclude our stewardship series “Response.” The Bible says, “In **response** to all [God] has done for us...”<sup>1</sup> So, we are talking about how we respond to God’s blessings, and we are talking about how we respond financially to His call for commitment. Deuteronomy 16:17 says, “Each must bring as much as he can manage, giving generously in **response** to the blessings of God, your God.”<sup>2</sup>

Last week, I talked about 5 biblical keys to money management. I said that you and I don’t own a single penny! All of it belongs to God! Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”<sup>3</sup> Everything: your cash, your check, your investments, your house, your car. And the Scripture says that we ought to begin our money management by giving God one tenth of our income.

Oops. I just said something that I’m not supposed to say in church. Did you know that there is a taboo word for some churches, something you are not allow to talk about in church?

What’s the taboo word? Ok, here it is, the taboo word in the church. Are you ready? The taboo word is “tithe.” That’s right. The fact is that congregations don’t like it when pastors talk about money. Some people think we talk about money all the time. It’s like the guy who went to church on Christmas Eve every year, but finally stopped because all that the pastor ever talked about was the birth of Jesus.

There is the preacher story of two men who were shipwrecked on an island. One started screaming and yelling, “We’re going to die! We’re going to die! There’s no food, no water! We’re going to die!” The second man was propped up against a palm tree, so calm it drove the first man crazy. “Don’t you understand? We’re going to die!” The second man replied, “You don’t understand. I make \$100,000 a week.” The first man looked at him quite dumbfounded and asked, “What difference does that make? We’re on an island with no food and no water. We’re going to DIE!!!” The second answered, “You just don’t get it. I make \$100,000 a week and I tithe on that \$100,000. My pastor will find me!”

We pastors make jokes to try to ease into the subject of giving and tithing, because we get push back from people who don’t want us to talk about it. “Talk about something else, pastor, something more spiritual than money.” But I’m here to tell you that talking about money and helping us be faithful to God in our stewardship may be the most spiritual thing I can talk about.

You see, the Bible contains more than 500 references to prayer and almost 500 references to faith, but there are more than 2,000 references to money and possessions. Jesus said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell *combined!* One out of every 10 verses in the Gospels deals with money or possessions.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:24 (The Living Bible)

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 16:17, The Message

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 24:1 (NRSV)

If you have picked yourself off the floor at that revelation, ask yourself “why.” Why do you think Jesus did that? If He had only 3 years to launch a new faith movement, don’t you think He should spend more time talking about more important things?

Well, I think He did. In fact, I believe the way we handle our money is perhaps the truest indicator of the spiritual condition of our heart. Unfortunately, our finances are usually the **last** thing we give to God and trust Him with. Our money tends to be the last thing we give to God in faith.

So, today, I am going to talk about tithing, or 10%.

The tithe is a big deal for God. In fact, it is such a big deal with God that He spoke through the prophet Malachi on the subject. Malachi was the last Old Testament prophet, who served about 430 B.C. Throughout the book of Malachi, God tells the people things He is doing or things they are doing that are in fact disobedience, but they are so far from living a God-centered life that they repeatedly ask, “When?” Listen to a few examples:

- God said, “I love you.” The people replied, “Really? How have you loved us?”<sup>4</sup>
- God said, “You priests despise me!” The priests said, “Not so! How do we despise you?” God said, “By your shoddy, sloppy, defiling worship.” The priests said, “What do you mean, ‘defiling’? What’s defiling about it?”<sup>5</sup>

There are others, but it is clear that the people of Malachi’s day were so far away from a God-honoring, God-centered life that they didn’t even know they were disobeying God. They had been acting religious for so long, without daily seeking God and His leading, that they didn’t know in all their religiosity how far they had strayed.

Malachi then writes:

*Then God says, “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! “But [the people asked], ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’” “You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord<sup>6</sup>, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe,” says the Lord.<sup>7</sup>*

God is saying several things here.

**First, giving is part of worship.** God says to “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple.”<sup>8</sup> The “storehouse” was a place in the Temple for storing grain and other food given as tithes.<sup>9</sup> The people were to bring their tithes when they came to the Temple, when they came to worship.

Giving, at its core, is the essence of love. You spell “love” G-I-V-E because that’s what love’s all about. When you love someone, you want to give to them. You parents, do you simply pass over December 25<sup>th</sup> without even a thought?

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<sup>4</sup> Malachi 1:2

<sup>5</sup> Malachi 1:6

<sup>6</sup> “of Heaven’s Armies”

<sup>7</sup> Malachi 3:6-12 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

<sup>8</sup> Malachi 3:10

<sup>9</sup> Life Application Bible Notes, Malachi 3:10

While you can give without loving, you cannot love without giving. It is impossible to do that. You say you love God, then it's going to show up in your generous lifestyle. I can claim to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. I can claim to love God. But the Bible says there is one way to really test the sincerity of your love. 2 Corinthians 8 says:

*You are rich in everything—in faith, in speaking, in knowledge, in truly wanting to help. In the same way, be strong also in the grace of giving... I want to see if your love is true.*<sup>10</sup>

God tests the sincerity of your love by looking at your giving.

Why does He do that? God doesn't need your time. He doesn't need your money. What does He need? He wants your heart. The Bible says:

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*<sup>11</sup>

He wants what your giving represents. And He wants you to become like Him. "God so loved the world that He" what: "gave..." God wants you to be like Him, giving. If you love, you will give.

My friends, giving is an act of worship. It's as much an act of worship as singing, praying, thanking, listening, everything else. It's saying, "God, I love You so much I want to give back to You. You saved my life and I want to give back to You."

The second thing we need to know is that **giving is an act of commitment, thanksgiving, and faith.** When you tithe, it is an act of commitment, thanksgiving, and faith. It is an act of commitment because when you give that tithe, you are saying the 90% belongs to God and you are going to use it for Him. It is an act of thanksgiving because when you give that tithe, you are telling God "thank you" for being the One who gave it to you to begin with. It is an act of faith, because you are trusting that God and you together can do more with the 90% than you can with 100% by yourself.

You will only give first when you put God first. When you put God first, you will give first, and God promises in Luke 6:38:

*Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.*<sup>12</sup>

You see, many people have an erroneous view of faith. People say to God, "I'll believe in You if you heal my friend of cancer." Or "I will do this ministry for You if You do something for me." So when the Bible tells them, "Bring in the full tithe", they think, "Ok, God, I'll do that, if you give me a big raise first." That's not faith. Faith is doing what God says before He does anything. Faith is acting first, no matter what you think God will do. God is waiting for you to act on faith. If you don't, He won't. If you don't give your life to Him, He will not save you from your sin. If you don't publicly tell people of your allegiance to Jesus, He will not tell God about you.

We cannot expect Heaven to be opened or blessings poured out unless we give our tithe to the Lord and to His cause. So, if you do not tithe, well, He will not "open the windows of heaven for you."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:7-8 (New Century Version)

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:21 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>12</sup> Luke 6:38 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

<sup>13</sup> Malachi 3:10

But there is an amazing statement here: we are to test God. God says, “Try it! Put me to the test!”<sup>14</sup> Normally, we are not to test God. When Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness being tested, “the devil took him to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect you.’” Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’”<sup>15</sup> But in Malachi, God says it is ok. “Go ahead and test me. See if I don’t pour out so much that ‘you won’t have enough room to take it in.’”

The first generation of Christians were givers. The Bible says: “All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had... God’s great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.”<sup>16</sup>

Did you hear that? “There were no needy people among them.” They had all that was required to meet the needs of people. Can you imagine what would happen in our churches if we got serious about sharing with those in need? Can you imagine what would happen if we were so serious about community, that we made available whatever we had to those in need?

Do you see what we could do if we put God to the test and gave our tithe to God, who really owns it? If our church is like other churches and we give \$1,456 per year, if that is a tithe, then our average family makes \$14,560 a year. If we obeyed God and each giving family tithed even at an annual income of, say, \$20,000, we would have over \$100,000 more income right now than we actually have. We won’t have any trouble with money, because we gave out of commitment, thanksgiving, and faith.

Finally, **giving is done out of a grateful and joyous heart.** It is not a legalistic act of religion. It is not done out of obligation. Obedience yes; obligation, no. What do I mean by that?

The Bible says, “You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. ‘For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.’”<sup>17</sup> I have discovered that there are really basically two kinds of people in life: cheerful givers and fearful givers. Cheerful givers say, “I’m going to give. It all belongs to God anyway. He gave it all to me. I wouldn’t have anything without God so I’m going to give it all to Him and He can take care of all my needs.” Cheerful givers – that’s the kind that God loves.

Then there’s the fearful givers: “I can’t afford to do this. I can’t afford to give. I’ve got to hoard. I’ve got to watch what’s for me. I’ve got to protect my selfish interests.”

Cheerful or fearful – you make the decision. You can either become like God and become a cheerful, generous giver or you can become like Satan and become a fearful, stingy hoarder. I have never known a generous person to complain about how much money it takes to run a church. Poor givers gripe about how much it takes; generous givers express concern that they don’t do more. I have never known a family who tithed for any length of time who quit. I have never known a generous family that was not generally happy. I have never known a stingy, miserly family that was not generally

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<sup>14</sup> Malachi 3:10

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 4:5-7 (New Living Translation, Second Edition) Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16

<sup>16</sup> Acts 4:32-35 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:7 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

unhappy about many things. I have never known a person who was critical of most things, mad about many things, who was generous. I have come to believe that most people who feel we talk too much about money, never really want to talk about money at all. Generous people enjoy talking about it. I have come to believe that there is a direct connection that exists between a person's faith and a person's generosity. Those who give generously tend to become more faithful; and the reverse is true in both instances. Like God? Like the devil? God tests the sincerity of my love by how generous I am in life.

When it comes to giving our tithe, Malachi says to bring the whole tithe. Did you know that if every church member in the United States were to suddenly lose his or her job and went on welfare, and yet were willing to tithe from the minimal amount received from public assistance, giving in the nation's churches would immediately increase over 30%!<sup>18</sup>

God is calling each of us, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough [resources in My Church]. If you do, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!"

My friends, I'm glad our church needs money! If it didn't, it would mean it wasn't supporting missionaries and preaching the Gospel in other places. I'm glad our church needs money! If it didn't, it would mean it wasn't doing anything to support the homeless and needy and had no compassion. I'm glad our church needs money! If it didn't, it would mean it wasn't interested in leading children and students to Jesus Christ in those impressionable years and had no future.

Everything we have is from God; so when we refuse to return to Him a part of what He has given, we rob Him. Do you selfishly want to keep 100% of what God gives, or are you willing to return at least 10% for helping to advance God's kingdom?<sup>19</sup>

Come and bring to God's temple, this church, a portion of what is already His. Bring it with an attitude of worship. Bring it as an act of commitment, thanksgiving, and faith. Bring it with a grateful and joyous heart.

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<sup>18</sup> The Herald of the Covenant

<sup>19</sup> Life Application Bible Notes, Malachi 3:8-12