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# Understanding the Issues

Malachi 3:7-12

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## Summary

**Precepts** for Christian grace giving as developed in Old Covenant categories.

## Introduction

This morning we start a series entitled *The Grace of Giving*. The intent in presenting this series of messages is to cultivate in you a biblically based, God-honoring approach to proportional, sacrificial giving; to instill a commitment to obedience. It is not our purpose to abuse the pulpit and thump you over the head with our Bibles. It is our desire to be instructive and corrective in our messages; not to be destructive.

The way we handle the money that the Lord has entrusted to us is a significant measure of our spiritual condition. We 'know' that all that we have belongs to God but do we really believe it? Do we trust in Him and put that trust into practice through faith in wise uses of the portion that He grants us.

God's plan for church finance is a simple one. By the faithful tithes and offerings of His people, the work is to be supported. God never intended for the work of the church to be supported in any other way. To use raffles, bazaars, bingo, and the like is not in His plan. Nor does He desire for the church to go into the world begging. The Lord is not pleased with high-pressure campaigns and other cleverly designed schemes to raise money. His simple plan is for His people to give a minimum of a tithe to support His work. This is the beginning place of Christian stewardship.

The fact that Jesus stood by the treasury of the temple (Mark 12:41-44) and watched His people put in their money indicates that He is interested in what they gave, and how they gave it. The subject of money is a touchy one for some people, but it should not be. We should be eager to know God's intended method for our giving and be eager to obey God in this area. God has given us many wonderful promises, which depend on our obedience in this area. As we become obedient to God in our giving, we will begin to see His blessing of provision in an amazing way. Anyone who is serious about following the Lord must take giving seriously.

There are four reasons why some do not tithe. The first is that they have never been taught to tithe. Because of the way some people react, many preachers never approach the subject. But we do not do our people a favor by neglecting this teaching.

A second reason for Christian's withholding their tithe is lack of trust! That is sin. They don't trust God to meet their needs. You hold back on tithing because in your heart you're worried that you won't have enough.

The third reason people do not tithe is that they misunderstand the place of tithing in the Bible. Some do not think that it is for today. But this is a misunderstanding of the principle of tithing as God's plan for giving. I suspect the real reason they object is that they do not want to tithe anyway. American humorist Frank Hubbard has said, "When a fellow says, it hain't the money but the principle o' the thing, it's th' money." And he is right. Do you really believe that you are glorifying God by not tithing? We will attempt to clear up this misunderstanding in this series.

The fourth reason that people do not tithe is because they refuse to do so. I hope you are not in this category. If you are you may want to look closely at your life. If you do you may see the hand of God's judgment on your life. You see, Many people are living lives filled with tragic events; events which cause them not only financial suffering, but emotional suffering as well. They may be suffering, because as Christians, they refuse to give God His tithe. They, in the words of our text today, have been, "cursed with a curse." May God give you repentance today if you are in this category of those who refuse to tithe.

May God enable us by His grace to hear and to heed His warnings and encouragement from the Word.

## Analysis - The Meaning of This Text

In the book of Malachi, the Lord repeatedly refers to His covenant promises with Israel reminding them of their unfaithfulness. God's love for His people permeates the book. The promises had only made the people and their leaders more stubborn in their self-righteousness. They thought that their relationship with God could be maintained by formal ritual alone, no matter how they lived. However, the Lord not only wanted outward compliance to the law but an inward acceptance as well.

The prophet lays out before them their corruption, wickedness, hypocrisy, infidelity, compromise, false worship, and arrogance. In a rebuke of both priests and people, the prophet reminds them that the Lord's coming, which they were seeking, would be in judgment to refine, purify, and purge.



God through Malachi posed penetrating questions that revealed the hearts of His people. The people, in response to the Lord's accusations, were cynical and defiant. Malachi exposed how the people dis-

honored God. In our text this morning Malachi accuses them of theft. We may well stand liable to the same accusation. Let us examine this text to see what it says and how the Israelites were to hear it. Turn to our text in Malachi 3.6.

6"For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, "In what way shall we return?"

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, "In what way have we robbed You?" In tithes and offerings. 9You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. 11"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; 12And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts. (NKJV)

## The Charge against Israel

(v.7-9)

Israel was robbing God of what He required of them and deserved from them as His people. They brought marred sacrifices before the Lord - what they felt they could afford to give Him (what they had no use for themselves!) Their sacrifices were entirely unworthy of God, and it was disobedient to His command.

The real root problem was that there was no devotion in their service for God -no love for God - no honor and respect for the Holy One of Israel. They begrudged and withheld. It's easy to fall into "begrudging" and "withholding" if all you have is a mere form of "religion"; All external, nothing of Spirit and truth. The word "robs" means: "to defraud, to spoil". Malachi says you have sought to defraud God of what is rightfully His! Stealing means not only taking what is not yours, but also "keeping back for yourself what belongs to someone else".

Israel was committing grand larceny against God. They were thieves. They, having received from God all that they owned, did not return to Him what was required of them. In turning away from the command of God, they had turned away from God Himself. Robbing God had a ruinous effect on Israel; distancing them from God.

## The Command to Israel

(v.10)

God clearly commands Israel to do what the statutes specified they must do. They are warned of the consequences of disobedience, but enticed to be obedient.

### The Precept to Honor God

Each family was called upon to fulfill their obligation; to bring in the whole tithe into God's house. The whole tithe was 10% on their increase as well as the firstfruits of their children, livestock and harvest. It was a measurable, proportional amount directed toward specific obedience. It was to be brought into God's house (the Temple) where storerooms had been built to hold all that was given. The charitable giving of the people of God that was not brought to the house of God was not recognized as the tithe. Generous giving was commanded and encouraged.

### The Purpose in Honoring God

Nehemiah, a contemporary of Malachi, spelled out the purpose for Israel's obligation to tithe. He records how this was understood and implemented by the very people who heard this message. Turn to Nehemiah 10:37 for a moment.



37to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. 38And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.

39For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God. (NKJV)

We see from this text that the tithe was given in order that there might be provision for the ministry of the house of God. That which was brought in was to sustain the priests, provide for the needs of the Temple facilities and to maintain the services and ministries of the house of the Lord. Nehemiah tells us that the commitment to do this was motivated by a desire not to neglect the house of the Lord. (Nehemiah 10:39)

### The Pleasure in Honoring God

The grace of God is so evident here! God says: "I want to encourage you to try this. Test me out. Your obedience in this area, rather than impoverishing you, will cause me to open the windows of heaven and to pour out provision for you more than you need." The obvious illusion here is to the giving of the manna in the wilderness. God provided on a daily basis all that they needed and in abundance. What emerges here is that God desired that they give with an eye to the command and a heart to the pleasure.

## The Consequences for Israel

(v.11-12)

Faithful, God honoring obedience calls forth blessing from God. It is His pleasure to respond to the prompting of the faith He gives to us by gracing us with blessing.

### The Blessing Described

(v.11)

The sense here is that God would shield those families who obeyed God from the effects of the curse; it says He will “rebuke the devourer”. God is not promising to send these awful disasters if they do not tithe, but is providing a deliverance from the natural effects of living in a sin cursed world. Their efforts at tilling the ground would be attended by special protection by God so that there would be an abundance of produce

### The Blessing Observed

(v.12)

The effect on the people around them would be to see the lands of Israel as being a place of special delight. The land would have glorious gardens, havens of great harvest, islands of bounteous blessing in the midst of a sin-ravaged world.

But beyond this, the people would be a delightful land says the LORD of hosts, the all-sufficient, all-satisfying One, the Almighty.

## Application - The Message of This Text

### What Should We Give?

The Elders believe that the Bible is clear on this point. The beginning point of Christian stewardship is the tithe. Some may say, “That is the Law, and we are free from the Law.” This is a misunderstanding of both the Law and the tithe in relation to the Law.

### Our Relationship To The Law

We are not free from the Law of God today. We are only free from the Law as a means of righteousness. But it is just as much a sin against God’s Law to murder, or steal, or commit adultery, as it was when the Ten Commandments were given. The new covenant, which Christ inaugurated, did not do away with the Law, it fulfilled the Law. It is true that we do not have to keep the ceremonial laws of Israel. They were never for us anyway. But the moral law of God has not changed. And in Christ, we fulfill the Law. As we follow Him, we keep the Law. As a matter of fact, Christ’s standard for keeping the Law is higher than the standards the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had. Over and over in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed to a higher standard than outward obedience only. The Pharisees were guilty of keeping the letter of the Law only, and not the spirit of the

Law. And Jesus said our righteousness must exceed that of scribes and Pharisees.

Where this argument really falls apart is when you see that tithing didn't originate from the Law. Tithing precedes the Law, and as we will see, it was neither instituted by Law, nor terminated by grace.

### **Tithing Precedes the Law**

Tithing may go back as far as the Garden of Eden. And Abel may have been the first to tithe. He offered the firstfruits to the Lord. This principle of firstfruits is one, which is important in Scripture. Firstfruits represent the totality of the thing. The first man's sin had a damning effect on the whole human race. Paul says in Romans 11:16, "For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches." The first is the governing factor for the totality. All of the firstfruits belonged to the Lord. The reason is, that this was a declaration that all belonged to God. It was and is a testimony that Christ is King and Lord over all. That is why our tithe should be the first of our income, not the leftovers.

Whether Abel was the first to tithe or not, we know Abraham tithed. He is the Biblical example of tithing. In Genesis 14, we find the story of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek. Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot from the Kings who had captured him. He had plundered these kings and was returning victoriously. Out of the blue comes Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of the Most High God, who brought him bread and wine and blessed him. Genesis 14:20 says that Abraham gave him, "a tithe of all." What Abraham did, was to give gratefully, voluntarily, and systematically. And he did it 430 years before the Law was given.

Now this required care on Abraham's part. He had to take careful inventory of his bounty and carefully calculate a tenth of all his income. You see, that is what a tithe really is. Some people believe (or make believe) that to tithe simply means to give. That is incorrect. The word tithe actually means tenth. It is a precise mathematical term. The Lord asks us to give Him a tenth of all our income. Abraham gave a tenth, and to do so he gave carefully.

Do you give carefully to the Lord? Have you looked at your income and tithing records to be sure that you are giving at least a tenth? You might say, "That's being legalistic." Well, let me ask you something. If you opened your paycheck this week and it was short \$100 and your employer said, "Don't be so legalistic, it's only \$100." What would you think of that? Do you want your employer to be careful in figuring your wages and to give you what is 'rightfully' yours? Then be careful in figuring your tithe to the Lord; it rightfully belongs to Him.

Tithing is an Old Testament word. But many other key words are as well. Words like “faith”, “atonement”, “redemption”, “righteousness”, “sin”, and the like, have their origin in the Old Testament, but not in the Law. Neither does tithing.

Melchizedek, according to Hebrews 7, is a figure for Christ. And Abraham is the forerunner of all those who trust Christ by faith according to Romans 4:11. So the symbolism is that the man Abraham, a picture of the believer, pays tithes to Melchizedek, a picture of Christ.

So we see that the tithe was established before the Law was given. We will also see that Jesus himself affirmed the tithe, and you find that this kind of systematic giving continued on in the life of the early church.

### **Tithing in the New Testament**

Paul almost echoes the words of our text in Malachi in I Corinthians 16:2, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here we see reference to proportionate giving, as God has prospered him. The NIV says, “in keeping with his income.” What is in keeping with everyone’s income? The same percent for all is. This is New Testament tithing.

Is the tithe net or gross? Those who make an argument for a net tithe, do so generally to evade the issue. Let me emphasize however, that the tithe is only a beginning place of Christian stewardship, not an ending place. In addition to tithes, there are offerings, which are gifts over and above the tithes. Some can give much more than a tithe because you are well able to do so. We are to give as we have been prospered, it says in I Corinthians 16:2, and we are reminded in Luke 12:48 that to whom much has been given, much is required. We should seek to grow in the grace of giving, just as we seek to grow in our knowledge of the Lord.

## **Why Should We Give?**

### **It Is Not Ours To Begin With**

We need to give because God is the owner of all that we possess. Everything that we have is a gift from God. Our life, our health, our mate, our children, and all our material and monetary blessings are from Him. So when we give to God we are acknowledging His ownership and lordship over every area of our lives. This was the idea of the bringing of the firstfruits in Old Testament times. By giving God the first of all our increase, we declare that He is Lord over it all. You see, we are accountable to God for how we use the material possessions, which He has entrusted, to our care. We are stewards of what

we possess, not owners. Our possessions have merely been entrusted to us for our use. All that we have really belongs to God. How we use what God has entrusted to us is the responsibility of stewardship. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

### **We Are Commanded To Give**

We also need to give because God has commanded us to give. In Malachi 3:10 it says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse . . ." Another passage of Scripture is Leviticus 27:30, which says, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD." It is clear that God has commanded tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22), which is, giving one-tenth of all your income to the Lord. God accuses the people of robbing Him. When they asked Him how, He said, "In tithes and offerings."

### **Jesus Didn't Nullify The Tithe**

Jesus also spoke of tithing, in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42. These are parallel passages dealing with the legalistic Pharisees who were interested only in external appearances. Look at Matthew's account:

23"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (NKJV)

In light of this, do you really think that Jesus lowered the standard of giving from 10% to something less? No! Jesus rebuked the legalistic Pharisees for being so exceedingly careful in tithing even the minutest possession, while they neglected the weightier aspects of the law; justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus had numerous encounters with the legalistic Pharisees, and in these encounters He was always quick to point out those things that were merely outward ceremony without spiritual value. His rebuke for their attitude towards healing on the Sabbath is but one example. If there was ever a place where Jesus could have abolished tithing, this would have been it. Jesus was never reluctant to point out bad practices of religious men. He could have pointed out with one word, the error of tithing if He wished to. But He did not. Rather than abolish the tithe, He affirmed it. He reminded these Pharisees that it was not an either/or proposition, but a both/and practice. He made a point of saying that they ought not to leave tithing undone, but to do it in the context of justice, mercy and faithfulness. They were to show mercy and tithe. He said clearly not to neglect tithing. Jesus taught that we should tithe. We should tithe because God has commanded us to give.

### **Give Because There is a Need**

Furthermore we should give because of the great need. The work of God in the church depends on the tithe. God has chosen to tie His work to the faithfulness of His people. In order for the church to be blessed, and enabled to carry out His work, we must all tithe. We are exhorted to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, “that there may be food in my house.”

Just think of what could be accomplished if everyone would just tithe. Think of the support that could be given to missions. Think of the extra money that would be available to local outreach. Buildings could be refurbished and needed improvements made. More money could be made available to the poor and hungry. Money could be channeled to agencies and ministries that are worthy. Money would be freed up to help struggling churches get on their feet. New churches could be started, and the list could go on.

All this could happen in most churches if the people would just tithe. Ten percent of all the incomes of the families in most churches would more than meet these needs. If all of God’s people in every church would be faithful to bring forth God’s tithe, there is no question that God’s work would prosper everywhere. The church would not only have enough money to pay basic operating expenses, the church would also have enough money to reach out worldwide. God has called the church to be the agent of the Kingdom on Earth. He has charged the church with winning the world to Jesus and training Christian disciples. And to do that great work it takes money.

### **Give Out Of Gratitude**

Perhaps the highest reason we should give is because of our gratitude for all the Lord has done for us. He has blessed us beyond what we deserve. Because of all that He has done for us, we can give out of a heart full of love for Him. We give because we want to. This is the best and highest motivation for Christian giving. We should give because we love Jesus. It is not really a very large thing, considering what He did for us. A missionary, C.T. Studd, said, “If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

### **What’s In It for Us?**

We all expect that there will be a reward for doing well. Even though all obedience ought to be driven by a desire to please God; it is also decided with an eye on what God will do for us.

Our text in verse 10 says, “Try me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive

it.” This is the only place where the Lord says to prove or test Him. We have His permission to put Him to the test in this. Do you believe Him? Try Him out on this. See if you can out give God. Test Him. He gives you the challenge.

Luke 6:38 says, “Give and it will be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...” Proverbs 3:9-10 says, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty and vats will overflow with new wine.” II Corinthians 9:6 says “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he sows bountifully, will reap also bountifully.” God has committed Himself to bless you. John Bunyan said, “There was a man; some called him mad, the more he gave, the more he had.” God will keep His promise to you, if you will be faithful and obedient in the matter of giving.

## Where & When Should We Give?

To whom is the tithe due? The simple answer is the Lord. We tithe to God. But how do we do that? Is there a God-ordained agency, which enables us to do that? I believe the answer is an emphatic YES!

Let’s look again at what Paul says in I Corinthians 16:2. He says, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Two things are clear. The first is the when of giving. It is to be on the first day of the week. This is Sunday. We worship on the first day, the day of Resurrection. The Church calls it, “The Lord’s Day.” Secondly, just as the when is clear, so also is the where. Where are Christians to gather on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day?

They are to be meeting and worshipping together as the church on the Lord’s Day. In other words, tithing is an act of worship, and is to be included in our worship on Sunday.

The Church is the only human agency, which Jesus established. The church is the organization through which Jesus is revealed to the world, and through which the Kingdom of God is manifested. Therefore, the church is the place where the tithe belongs. The church is the storehouse (Malachi 3:8-10) where the tithes are to be brought to enable the work of the Lord to be accomplished.

All the work of the Kingdom begins with the local church. When people move away from their commitment to the local church, they begin to move into dangerous territory. The ministry in the New Testament has an even greater need than that in the Old for financial sustenance.

There is the responsibility to provide for its teaching and governing elders as Paul writes in Galatians 6:6 “Let him who is taught the word

share in all good things with him who teaches.” and in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, “<sup>17</sup>Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”

There is the responsibility to support the widows who have no family and the poor in the church according to 1 Timothy 5 and Romans 15:26. This is done by some method of systematic giving.

There is also the responsibility to support the missionary enterprise of the church, beginning at home and extending abroad in Romans 15:24 and 1 Corinthians 9:7.

If there are ministries that need to be done, I believe that the church should be the one to do them. The fact that many churches, even Clearcreek Chapel, are not is not so much a testimony to those who are, but a testimony against God’s people who send their tithe away from the Church thus making it anemic and weak. If God’s people would give God’s way, then God’s work could be carried out by God’s organization, the local church.

## Conclusion

The New Testament attitude toward stewardship and giving is addressed in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

10And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. 12For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. (2 Corinthians 8:1-12 NKJV)

- The GRACE of Giving - Paul tells the Corinthians that the grace of giving should be pursued as a virtue, just as we would seek after faith, godly and wholesome speech, knowledge of God and His ways, and love for the saints. We should seek the grace of liberality in our giving. We should be characterized by our generosity – our liberality in giving. (2 Corinthians 8:7)
- The EXAMPLE of Giving – Jesus, our savior, was the greatest example of giving. He became poor so that we may become rich. He gave His all for us; not just a tithe of Himself. He gave us His whole life. And Paul says that He is to be our example - He possessed the grace of giving in greater measure than any other man. (2 Corinthians 8:9)
- The EXTENT of Giving - We are called by God to give “out of what we have”. God simply says bring to Him out of what we have - what He has blessed us with. (2 Corinthians 8:11) Paul says that in response to our obedience in giving to the work of God, He is able to “...make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” and why does he pour these blessings into our lives – so that you “...may have an abundance for every good work.” - to give more - and to do the works of ministry He’s called us all to! (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- The ATTITUDE of Giving - The attitude of the Christian toward giving to God’s work needs to be cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7) and with “a willing mind” (2 Corinthians 8:12). You should be laughing with joy at the privilege of being able to give to God! (When was the last time you saw that in church?) That is to be our attitude.