

Belonging (Why We Need the Church)
The Church is a Place to Invest in Eternal Things
Malachi 3:8-10

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Text Introduction: We have been examining this question of “why we need the local church?” We have learned that it is the place where we encounter God through worship and the place where we exercise our spiritual gift. Today we will learn that the church is the place where we **invest in eternal things**.

Text: ⁸ "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!"

You ask: "How do we rob You?"

"[By not making the payments] of 10 percent and the contributions. ⁹ You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are [still] robbing Me. ¹⁰ Bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way," says the LORD of Hosts. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.

Introduction: I don't know if you are aware of this or not but people don't like to hear sermons on giving and certainly don't like to hear sermons on tithing—the giving of 10%. Obviously, I mean that statement somewhat tongue in cheek, but here is a serious statement. In most recent times, the validity of the tithe has been called into question from some very surprising voices. Several well recognized preachers and teachers have been arguing that we should not be preaching tithing as a Christian discipline. In fact one professor in one of our Southern Baptist Seminaries wrote, “Pastors perpetuate the 10% figure out of pragmatism, tradition, and ignorance.” Nothing like beginning a sermon knowing that one of our so-called experts in the field of Biblical interpretation believes that you are ignorant.

In reading the arguments against tithing from these contemporary and yet conservative voices, their arguments might be summarized in three basic ways:

1. Tithing is not mentioned in the New Testament—I basically will give them this point so long as they give me the point that it is understood that the measure go above the 10% not below the 10%.
2. The emphasis on grace—That is they argue that tithing is of the law, therefore in Christ we are not followers of the law, but instead grace is our new law. Our recent study of the 10 Commandments has led me to believe that Christ always calls us to go beyond the principle of the law even in abandoning the legalistic following of the law. We do not exclude a proper following of appropriate defining works even though we are saved by grace.
3. The abuse of preachers beating up “their sheep” through the use of strong tactics. I read of one account of a highly well known preacher of a quite significant church announcing from the pulpit that the reason that appliances break down and kids get sick is the failure to tithe. I obviously am quite disheartened by this kind of strong armed tactic of preaching.

But neither do I think that we throw out a great Christian discipline just because some misunderstand and others misuse!

My goal this morning is not really to convince you that tithing is Biblical. I believe that principle, and I am happy to defend that principle. My goal however this morning is to help you to see the eternal value of giving through the local church. Herein is one of our great reasons to belong to a local church. We realize that we are part of something larger than ourselves and we are contributing to something that has eternal consequence.

We've turned to that most basic Scripture of the Bible on the subject of tithing. The context of this passage is not so much about giving money as it is turning their back on God. The greatest problem is that Israel is oblivious to the fact that they are being disobedient against God. The whole book of Malachi revolves around rhetorical questions God asks Israel to "shock" them back into thinking about their relationship with Him. One of those shocking questions is, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!" Their answer, "In what way have we robbed You?" They have no understanding of their disobedience against God. They are so wrapped up in their own lives, that they have forgotten God's basic instructions to them.

Why a Tithe?

1. The tithe is a Biblical Measure of appropriate giving.

The tithe predates the law (Genesis 14:20). Jesus said that He came to fulfill the law. Jesus affirmed the tithe. In Luke 11:42, Jesus seems to affirm the tithe by saying, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." The New Testament Church practiced proportionate giving. (1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 8-9) When we say things like, "The tithe is an Old Testament principle," most times we are actually looking for a way to give less. Instead of looking for a way to give less, we ought to always be looking for a way to give more. The recognition of grace always leads us to do more not less.

2. The tithe is a Basic Measure of discipline for Christian stewardship.

I need discipline in my life. Money is an incredibly powerful temptation in our lives. Most of us need some principles of discipline in our lives in order to be good stewards of God's resources. These things we cannot deny. We are God's stewards. We own nothing. All that we have is ours only because God says that it is ours. But how often, we like to claim ownership. Tithing is a basic principle that allows us to prioritize the things that God entrusts to us.

Does the Church Today Represent the Storehouse of the Old Testament?

The second issue in Malachi is whether or not the storehouse is the equivalent of the local church. Whereas, it would be a difficult argument to make that this is a one-to-one correlation, I do think there is a connection. Here is what we can say.

1. It is obvious that the storehouse was a place of collection for the work of God. The storehouse is connected to the community of faith that one was a part.

2. It is obvious that the New Testament church practiced giving through the Church. The New Testament Christians set aside in their assembly an offering. In Acts 4:35, the believers laid their offering at the feet of the apostles. In Corinthians, there is evidence that the church collected money together and then gave it away. (2 Corinthians 8-9) In Philippians, there is reference to the local church giving to finance the missionary work of the Apostle Paul. We must confess that the modern church has evolved a great deal from those original first century Christians. However, the bringing of the tithes into the local church is a strategic and practical plan for carrying out the ministry of the church. I don't know of another way.
 - Acts 2:44-46
 - Acts 5:1-2
 - 1 Corinthians 16:2
 - 2 Corinthians 8-9
 - Philippians 4:15-16

How Shall We Give?

1. In Obedience—Remember that the whole context of the Malachi passage is their disobedience against the LORD. Malachi is a call to repentance.
2. With Purpose—“that His house might be full.”
3. With Faith—God is able to meet your needs. Isn't it interesting how we say that we are trusting God with our eternal life, yet we are afraid to trust Him with our life right here? Don't be afraid to trust God with your tithe. He promises to meet your need.

Can I ask a question in closing? What are you doing with your money? And, what if any is the eternal impact that your money is having?