

“FOOTBALL FAITH (#3): FIRST AND TEN”

(Malachi 3:8-10)

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[PROPS NEEDED: Bowl of 10 chicken wings; “Tithing Rap” Song; Drama]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 11-8-09]

–I–

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read Text: Malachi 3:8-10 and Pray.
2. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Drama/Skit
3. We’re in the midst of a series called Football Faith in which we’re connecting the biblical concept of “Stewardship” with metaphors from the game of football in an effort to help us more easily practice Stewardship in our everyday lives.

A–As most of you probably already know, in football the phrase “*First and Ten*” refers to one of the main objectives of the game: ...namely, to drive the football down the field (either running or passing) in order to eventually score.

B–And the goal of those drives is to net a series of “*First* downs” which are each made up of *ten*-yard gains – hence, “*First and Ten.*” ¹
4. Well, in Christian Stewardship, I believe “*First and Ten*” reminds us of an essential biblical practice for every believer called ...what do you think?... (right) “Tithing.”

A–Think about it: Tithing is nothing more than the giving of what the Bible calls the “*First Fruits*” – the first **10%** – of our income to the work of God specifically through the work and ministry of our local community of faith (our church). ²

B–We find it described in today’s scripture reading from Malachi 3.
[Contemp. Service ONLY:] Let me read it to you... (Read Malachi 3:8-10)]

C–According to this scripture (and others), the tithe is what God considers to be the biblical standard for giving – the *minimum* that we’re expected to give back to God for His work in our world.

D–And if we think about it, the concept of the tithe is actually quite reasonable:

1–We don’t bat an eye at giving 10-15% for tips at a restaurant, and the government takes 30% or more in taxes out of each paycheck.

2–So, all things considered, 10% for God and 90% for us is a *good deal!* (even with taxes taken out, 60% for us isn’t bad!). ³
5. And yet, today’s scripture says the believers there were “*robbing God*” and “*under a curse*” because they were failing to share God’s tithe with their community of faith.

A–You know, the sad fact is that most of us *today* are very much like these folks in that far too few of us as Christians actually take tithing seriously.

B–I’ve said this in previous years but it’s worth repeating: Did you know that if every church member in the U.S. were to suddenly lose their job and go on welfare, and yet still tithe from that public assistance income, giving in our churches would increase over 30%!?

C–Let’s think about our own church as an example:

1–According to the most recent estimates, the average Cobb County household income is \$58,289 per year. If all of our church’s families made this, and yet only ½ tithed faithfully, we’d surpass this year’s financial ministry needs (our budget) by 114%! ⁴

2–Put another way: ...If every family in our church was suddenly reduced to the national *poverty* level of \$22,050, but every family tithed on that income, we’d *still* surpass our ministry needs by 62%! ⁵

3–So WHY, then, is that we currently have a financial deficit of nearly \$47,000 for the year?

D–Now, I know it’s been a tough year for a lot of people, and we *do* have reserve funds (if needed) that can cover our deficit for now, but it still doesn’t explain why nearly 60% of our members have given \$0 to the work of *God* through their church this year, ⁶ and others of us have only given *token* amounts!

E–You see, I think it’s true what I once saw on a bumper sticker: “*If you love Jesus, tithe; Anyone can honk!*”

–II–

6. Now, if you *don’t* currently tithe, please understand: I’m not here to judge you. I don’t think you’re a bad person, or that you’re “going to hell” because of it. But here’s what I think happens with many of us: ...

A–In keeping with our “football” theme I have up here 10 chicken wings [**SHOW BOWL OF 10 WINGS**]. God gives us nine of these to use and take care of our needs for *now*, and for us to put a few away in the freezer (e.g. “savings”) for the *future*.

B–But God also says, “*ONE of those wings is mine... to be used by you to express your devotion to me, and then to be used by me to carry out my plan in and for the world.*”

C–But here’s what too often happens: we begin to feel that our 9 wings aren’t enough anymore, so ...God won’t mind if we nibble out of His “wing” for good things like...
 ...A family vacation [**Take one bites for each of these...**] ...Christmas presents [**Bite**],...
 ...Emergency savings [**Bite**],... Extra retirement income [**Bite**],... and so on [**Bite**].

D—Then after we’ve finished, we take what’s left and say “*Ok Lord, here’s your part*”
 [Hold wing up “to God”...] ⁷

7. In other words, we let the “stuff” of our world consume us, and by the time we get around to giving to God, there’s nothing to give but “left-overs”!

A—That happens to *us*, and I think it also happened to the people in today’s Bible story.

B—And yet, if we make the conscious choice to give God our “*First and Ten*” – the *first tenth* (instead of our left-overs) – then we’re not as tempted to eat *God’s* part.

–III–

8. You see, I know that there’s a lot of excuses we can give for not tithing. But in the end, that’s all they are... excuses.

A—On the other hand, someone once wrote that “*The Christian who tithes will be surprised...
 ...at the amount of money they have for God’s work.
 ...at the extent to which their own spiritual lives deepen.
 ...at the ease with which the 9/10 that remains meets their own financial obligations.
 ...at the way in which tithing prepares them to be faithful and wise stewards over all their possessions.
 ...And most of all, they’ll be surprised at themselves for NOT tithing sooner.*”

B—Now, I don’t know if you tithe right now or not.

1—Honestly, it’s not really *my* business. But it IS *God’s* business. And it’s *my* business to remind you that it’s *God’s* business.

2—Maybe you’re *not* in a position to tithe at present. But you *can* decide to *grow towards* tithing this next year – on that chart that Tom showed us earlier, you can move 1-2 boxes to the right until you *can* tithe (and God will honor that!).

3—And some of you who *already* tithe may be being called to *grow* in your faith by giving *beyond* the tithe – 12%, 15%, 20%, or more – into what the Bible calls “*sacrificial giving.*” ⁸

C—The point is for us all to do what the third word of our “*Will You Grow?*” focus calls us to do: to “*GROW*” in the development of our stewardship – to examine the level of our own giving to see whether or not it reflects not only what God asks of *us*, but of what *we* want to say about *God.*” ⁹

D—And I believe that giving God our “*First and Ten*” is the foundation of that! ¹⁰

9. [PRAYER]

10. [Contemp. Service ONLY:] Now, in case you didn’t get it while I was preaching, I’ve asked our church accountants to come out and “wrap” it up for you...
 [MUSICIANS SHARE “TITHING RAP”...] ¹¹

ENDNOTES:

1. The following is one explanation of this phrase from an online article on football terminology: “*One of the main objectives in American football -- and a necessary one to score points -- is to gain a first down. In order to get a first down, the offense must gain 10 yards within a series of four plays. One problem that football players and officials have always had to deal with is how to measure the 10 yards needed. Even with all of our technology, the NCAA and the National Football League still uses a length of metal chain attached between two poles! Television viewers have always been at a disadvantage in knowing where the first-down line is in reference to where the offense is. A small arrow located below the end pole isn't usually visible on the television screen. But if you've watched any football games in the last few years, you probably noticed the fluorescent yellow or orange line extending from one side of the field to the other -- seemingly painted on the field. In fact, the line is computer generated, representing exactly the spot that the offense must get to for a first down. Sportvision, a company based in New York City, debuted its "1st and Ten" system on September 27, 1998, and football fans everywhere rejoiced! Sportvision provides ESPN and Fox Sports with the ability to enhance their football telecasts with this technology.*” [From an article “Football Terminology” (December 06, 2008), online at www.angelfire.com/ia3/coltsnflrules/terminology.htm].
2. The giving of the tithe through one’s local community of faith (church) is especially evident in the New Testament, as Christians there lived under the rule of a secular power (Rome). This is different from the Old Testament where the ruling power (King of Israel/Judah) were considered *spiritual* leaders, as well as governmental leaders. Hence in the Old Testament the tithe could be given through the state. Note, too, though that while the tithe was expected to be given through the work and ministry of a local community of faith (i.e., a synagogue or church), “offerings,” on the other hand, could be given through other philanthropic groups.
3. Remember, too, that the Bible actually teaches that *everything* that we have or supposedly even “earn” (i.e., 100%) belongs to God anyway. All that tithing does is to return 1/10th of that *back* to Him for His use.
4. Source for Marietta Average Household Income: Website www.atlanta-marietta.com/moving-info/moving-tips/cobb-county. The 114% mentioned here represents the difference between projected income from 50% of 550 member and regular guest giving units (which figures to be \$1,602,948) and a 2009 budget of \$749,381. If ALL church families had the Marietta average household income of \$58,289 yet tithed off that amount, we’d surpass our budgetary needs by over 328% (an income of \$3.21 million in contributions). In fact, if only 52% of our approximately 250 *active* church families (125 families) earned the average Cobb County household income of \$58,289 and yet tithed on that amount, we would still meet our ministry/budget needs for 2009 (and actually have a surplus of \$8,376!).
5. Source for National Poverty Level: 2003 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The figures here are arrived at in this way: 550 families x \$22,050 x 10% = \$1,212,750, which is \$463,369 (62%) greater than our 2009 ministry budget needs of \$749,381.
6. As of 10/31/09, our records indicate that 316 out of 550 family units (57%) have contributed absolutely *nothing* financially to the work of Christ through their church since January 1st of this year!
7. This analogy was first suggested by Pastor Dan Slagle, as shared in the sermon “Defined by Generosity” (November 2007) by Rev. Adam Hamilton (www.cor.org).
8. For example, Pastor Rick Warren, author of the book The Purpose-Driven Life, earns so much money from his book royalties that he calls himself a “reverse tither”: he keeps 10% for himself and gives away 90% for the work and ministry of God. In fact, in the Bible, anything given over and above the tithe is called an “offering,” which is why we pastors will often refer to the giving of our “tithes and offerings,” meaning

gifts of our 10% AND gifts of MORE than 10%.

9. Please note that though today's focus has been on the giving of our *financial* tithe, biblically the tithe can also be said to apply to the giving of our time, talent, service, and witness.

10. In the Bible, tithing is *not* the end/goal of giving in itself, but instead is merely the primary tool/means to *grow* us in our stewardship walk with God.

11. TITHING RAP SONG LYRICS:

*“Every day in the mail I get nothin’ but bills, I could rap all day ‘bout my financial ills
Money comes in and goes right back out, I know you know what I’m talkin’ about.
My wife just keeps crankin’ up the heat, And three times every day those kids wanna eat!*

*But listen up now to what I got to say: What I do every Friday when I get my pay
Before I buy the groceries or pay the rent, I gotta give God His full ten percent!
He gives me a hundred, I give back ten, I’m blessed all day from beginning to end.*

*I ain’t got a clue what tomorrow gonna bring, But I know who’s the giver of all good things
He’s got the 4-1-1 on all my needs, God’s got it all covered so it ain’t on me.
Give it straight off the top, that’s the way it’s gotta be, And everything’s good between God and me.*

When I say a hundred, you say 10! ...100! (response) 10! ...100! (response) 10!

*It ain’t complicated, lemme give you a hint, A tithe ain’t nothin’ but ten percent
I may not be the sharpest dude in the joint, But I know how to move a decimal point
I’m a tither now, that’s how I roll, I’m a grateful child on the Father’s dole.*

*Now you know how to do it, what’s your excuse? You can’t play God’s money fast and loose
Where’s your heart? Just follow the cash, I’m storing mine up in a heavenly stash.
When God gives you a hundred, give back ten, And be blessed all day from beginning to end.*