

“GOD’S SIGN OF BLESSING”

(Malachi 3:6-12)

**[PROPS NEEDED: (1) Slide with word “Tithing”;
(2) “Signs” Tithing Testimony Video]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 10-30-11]

--I--

1. [Traditional Service ONLY] Read Text: Malachi 3:6-12 and Pray.
2. Tomorrow (as we all know) is Halloween -- a time for ghosts, goblins, witches, mummies, and kinds of “scary” things.

A--But today, I want to talk about something that -- to many people -- is scarier even than Halloween... [WORD APPEARS ON MEDIA SCREEN] *TITHING*... [ROB PLAYS SPOOKY CHORD MUSIC ON ORGAN & CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND...]

1--[IN DARK, DEEP MOVIE VOICE...] It’s a subject that strikes fear in Christian boys and girls, moms, dads, and grandparents everywhere.

2--...A practice that terrifies good people throughout the church, and makes them say “*Oh no, not another stewardship sermon!!!*”

B--[SPOOKY MUSIC STOPS; RETURN TO REGULAR VOICE...] Okay, that’s enough of that...

3. Seriously, though, *why* is it that this subject scares so many people?

A--If we look at today’s scripture from Malachi 3, we find something not so frightening...

[Contemp. Service ONLY: Listen to its words... (Read Malachi 3:6-12)]

[Trad. Service ONLY: Remember God’s words in Vs.10, “*Put me to the test...see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you & pour down for you an overflowing blessing.*”]

B--Now, I know we tend to think of tithing as something that challenges what we do with our wallets and pocketbooks.

1--But what we find here instead are words that tell us that, far from being something *scary*, tithing is actually a “sign” of God’s *blessing* in and upon our lives.

2--It’s His promise of how He *can* bless us *now*, and how He *will* bless us in the future IF we’ll learn appropriate priorities and perspective in our use of money.

3--It’s saying that the “blessings” that result from our being faithful in sharing of the “Tithe” are a “sign” that God is at work in our lives.

C--So with that in mind, let’s talk about (#1) *what* the “tithe” IS, (#2) share some responses to a few *excuses* we often give for not doing it, and finally (#3) what some of the *blessings* are that follow when you and I learn to faithfully practice it?

--II--

4. First of all, in the Bible, **the "Tithe"** ("tenth") refers to the giving back to God of the *first* 10% of our income for His use -- effectively, it is *God's* plan for how we handle money. ¹

A--It's what He considers to be the primary standard for giving -- the *minimum* that we're expected to give back for the Lord's work, with anything *above* that called an "*offering*" (which is why our collection in worship is called the giving of our "*tithes and offerings*").

1--The tithe isn't the "*left-overs*" or scraps of our income -- it's not "*whatever isn't taken by taxes,*" but is the *first* 10%, taken right off of the top -- what the Bible calls the "*first fruits*" of our labor. ²

2--And in the New Testament, the tithe was always given to God *not* through secular charitable help agencies (good though they may be), but *through the work of God's church*. ³

B--Now 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, 60% for us isn't bad!). ⁴

5. But the sad fact of the matter is that too many of us as Christians are scared of tithing, ⁵ and so we instead give all kinds of **Excuses For Not Doing It**. For example...

A--We say, "*I can't afford to*" (I.E., my income gets eaten up by Taxes, Social Security, and bills).

1--I'll be honest: I've never seen or even heard of someone whose faithful tithing caused them financial difficulty.

2--In fact, quite the opposite is usually the case: Don't ask me how, but when we are faithful to God in giving back His tithe, He always seems to provides more.

3--Someone once asked a tithing Christian, "*How is it that you give away so much, and yet always have so much left over?*" He replied, "*I suppose it's because when I shovel it out, God shovels it in; and he has a bigger shovel than I do!*"

4--The reality, you see, is that you and I really can't afford *not* to tithe!

B--Another excuse we use is, "*I don't want to be legalistic in my faith. I want to give as the Spirit leads.*"

1--But if you think about it, that's just not logical: we don't wait for the Spirit to "lead us" to do *trivial* tasks like brushing our teeth, taking a shower, or combing our hair -- so why should we treat the *important* task of giving to God any differently?

2--You see, tithing is NOT being *legalistic*; it's merely being *disciplined*.

3--And far from being a legalistic *requirement*, the Bible says that tithing is merely a *starting point* for good financial management -- in the New Testament, for instance, Jesus *presumes* the tithe as a *beginning*, but then goes on to challenge his followers to give *sacrificially* (i.e., *as much as possible*)! ⁶

4--So, if we say we want to be "*led by the Spirit*" then we have to remember that the Spirit will *always* lead us to "obey God" -- and tithing is the biblical beginning point of obedience.

C--A third excuse I've often heard is, "*Well, I don't agree with everything my church does with the money it receives.*"

1--Well, join the crowd! But guess what, unlike giving to secular organizations and charities, when you and I tithe, we're not really giving *to our church*. No. We're instead giving *to God through it!*

2--Sure, the church receives it on God's *behalf* and should use it in ways that glorify Him -- and mark my words: God will hold churches and leaders accountable when they misuse financial gifts that have been entrusted to their care (like you've been hearing about lately in the news regarding a large Atlanta mega-church). ⁷

3--But none of this changes the fact that *we're* not called to tithe because we like or dislike a preacher, or a ministry, or a budget item, but *because we love God*. ⁸

D--And a common fourth excuse is: "*I tithe my time and talents, instead of my finances.*"

1--Well, today's scripture implies that that's precisely the excuse given in today's scripture -- the people there were doing all kinds of things *for* God, but were neglecting to tithe their grain (their equivalent of money).

2--So, Vs. 8 says that when we neglect to tithe, we are in fact "*robbing God*"-- e.g., our *service* to God does not *take the place of* our tithe, but is to be *in addition to it*.

3--Now, we emphasize this very clearly in the U.M.C. by asking new members to grow in faith by supporting our church's ministry through our *prayers, presence, gifts, service, AND witness*.

4--Notice: These *aren't* multiple choice -- our service is not *instead of* our gifts, but *in addition to* them.

6. So, you see, there's a lot of excuses we can give for not tithing. But in the end, that's all they are... excuses.

A--And on the 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--My wife and I have tithed faithfully for over 20 years -- and our financial commitment to God through our church every year is based off of our combined *gross* income (not net), and I can tell you that though we've had times that we've been financially tight, we've never had a time that our *needs* weren't met. So, it may seem crazy, but tithing works!

C--But don't just take *my* word for it. Listen to what some of your fellow church members have to say about it... [WATCH "SIGNS" TITHING TESTIMONY VIDEO...]

--III--

7. Now, I don't know if you tithe at present or not. 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.

A--Maybe you're not in a position to tithe right now-- but as we prepare for Commitment Sunday in a few short weeks, I want to encourage all of us to consider that tithing *is* what God wants each of us to work *towards* if we're not there yet.

1--If you only give 5% now, why not try raising it 1-2% for the next several years until you *can* tithe your 10% or more -- & God will *honor* that intention and effort.

2--...Because His desire is that each and every Christian be a *tither*, not a "tipper" -- NOT because God (or the church) needs our money, but because it's a way you and I can open our hearts to receive the blessings that He *wants* to give us.

B--Tithing, you see, need not be scarier than Halloween [ROB PLAYS ONE LAST SPOOKY CHORD]....

C--Instead, it's a "*SIGN of God's Blessing*" in & for our lives. Are *you* willing to follow it?

8. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ Today there are all kinds of people who want to give us advice on how we should handle our money. But here in Malachi 3 we find what the Bible teaches as *God's* plan for our handling of money: the Tithe.

2. Read Exodus 23:16 & 19, 34:22 & 26, Leviticus 2:14 & 23:9, Numbers 18:13, Deuteronomy 18:4 & 26:1, Proverbs 3:9, Romans 11:16, and others.

3. 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.

4. 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.

⁵ 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 their public assistance income, giving in our nation's churches would increase over 30%!?

⁶ Read, for example the story of the "Widow's Mite" (Mark 12:41-44) who gave not just a "tithe" but "everything *she had*". So, far from being legalistically tied to giving only 10%, we can certainly give *more than 10%*. In fact, if 10% was made legalistic, some Christians would even have to give *less!*

⁷ New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, Atlanta (led by Bishop Eddie Long).

⁸ To turn money into a tool whereby we voice our pleasure or displeasure about the direction or vision of a church or ministry is to misuse and abuse *God's* money.