

GIVE GOD THE FLOOR!

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“From the days of your fathers ye have turned aside from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with the curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation. Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruits before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts. And all nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith Jehovah of hosts.” (Malachi 3:7-12) (R. V.)

There is no question concerning which the Christian Church is more muddled and “at sea” than the question of our financial obligation to God. Leaders have advanced one theory after another until the average Christian is hopelessly confused. As a consequence, he has drifted into practices that are wholly inadequate, slovenly and unchristian. I believe most of us have come to the place where we can say with John Wesley, “I am sick of opinions.” Let us turn from the world’s chatter and harken to the living God. Give God the floor!

God has the floor, and he is saying some pretty harsh things. His words make us wince. They knock our easy-going benevolence into a cocked hat. I hope, however, that we shall have the courage to look this whole matter squarely in the face. People whose relationship to the church is cordial but not intimate are fond of saying that we preachers should keep quiet about money. The

weakness of their position is that there is no Scriptural foundation for it. God certainly hasn't kept quiet about it. He fairly shouts it at us. Jesus had more to say about money than about almost any other thing. In this pungent paragraph from Malachi God tackles the money problem, and we do well to incline our ears.

Thieves in the Church!

This whole question is a much more serious one than the average man is inclined to think. Countless Christians are under the impression that they can do just about as they please with their money, and it will make very little difference one way or another. A careful reading of this passage ought to correct such an impression. God has issued commands regarding our use of His money which are as binding upon us as any one of the Ten Commandments. Has it ever occurred to us that our failure to meet God's requirement here is actual disobedience and rank sin? I submit to you, my friends, that when the Eternal God speaks He means it. He does not indulge in idle talk. His deliverances are not optional.

The gravity of this matter is clearly demonstrated when God says that when we fail to bring our tithes and offerings to Him we are actually robbing him. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Those are strong words. Can we bear them? How did these people rob God? Did they enter the temple, murder the priests and pillage the treasury? No. There is a more subtle kind of robbery than that. They robbed God by withholding from Him His portion. Shabby methods of doing business with God are not sanctioned anywhere in Scripture. When God's people do not meet their obligations to Him the day they fall due they are criminally liable. Thieves in the Church! Think of it! If robbery is a crime, then thousands upon thousands of God's

people are criminals. It would be a blessing, would it not, if a lot of well-meaning Church-goers suddenly wakened to the fact that they have been robbing God for years—piling up an obligation to startle and embarrass them at the Judgment Seat. Unless I am sadly mistaken, there is a reckoning day coming for the miser as well as for the murderer and the drunkard.

Let us be specific. If God's portion is ten dollars a month and we dole out ten cents a week, do we have to resort to the Bible to know that we are robbing Him? What must God think of a person who pledges five cents a week to the support of the Church and spends five dollars a week for things not essential to life? Five cents for religious nurture; five dollars for luxuries! In view of all the benefits which a man receives from Christ and the Church, are such practices above suspicion? Is a man a liberal giver when instead of one-tenth he hands over a bare one-hundredth?

Riches and a Revival

God has the floor, and he is saying another thing. What we do with God's money has a profound effect upon our spiritual lives. In Malachi's day the people were slipping spiritually. They were certainly on the down-grade. A return to God was sorely needed. But God amazes them by saying that the first step on that journey Godward was a financial house-cleaning. That sounds rather strange when it is a commonly accepted fact that among Christians no amount of money can buy religious experience.

Just what, then, does the prophet mean? How can the systematic payment of one-tenth of our increase set our feet in the path of spiritual achievement? Because it smashes selfishness. When you feel yourself becoming small and mean and contemptible and narrow start giving something away, and keep it up until you are emptied of self. It is experientially true that when a man gives in a niggardly fashion he is impoverishing

his own soul. Where self reigns, God cannot enter. Dr. John MacNeil, the Scottish evangelist, tells a story of a little lad who got his hand caught fast in a vase and couldn't get it out. He appealed to his father for assistance. His father noticed that the boy had his fist tightly clinched in the vase. "Open your hand, my son," he suggested, "and it will come out easily enough." "But," objected the child, "if I open my hand I'll drop my penny." There are a great many Christians today who will have to turn loose more than pennies before God the Father can do anything for them spiritually. He longs to bestow upon us His choicest blessings, but He cannot see where He can put them.

My hands were filled with many things
Which I did precious hold
As any treasure of the kings,
Silver or gems or gold.
The Master came and touched my hands,
The scars were in His own;
And at His feet, my treasures sweet
Fell shattered, one by one.
"I must have empty hands," said He,
"Wherewith to work my works through thee."

I believe it is clear from this passage in Malachi that when Christian people start giving God's way, systematically and proportionately, a revival will be forthcoming. "Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Does not God mean what He says? Why then do we persist in doubting the wisdom of the Tithe?

I will go further. Tithing blesses a man materially. I have always been cautious about urging this motive for tithing. Certainly if it is the only reason that a man has for tithing he is building the whole thing on selfishness. That is "economic morality." However, there is no covering up the fact that God honors those who honor Him. I believe that most consistent tithers will witness to

this fact. It is the testimony of Scripture. "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts." A successful business man who is a close friend of mine said to me not six months ago, "Don't hesitate to tell our people that it pays in every way. I know." Have you ever known a man or woman who gave the tithe a fair trial to say that it was a bad business policy?

Do not misunderstand me. This does not mean that tithing will make a man rich. Frankly, I do not find any commendation in the Bible for the man who gets rich under any circumstances. A man may easily acquire great wealth but to hoard it is a vastly different matter. The New Testament makes it clear that Christians are to be like most bank tellers. It may be in our power to handle thousands and even millions, but we are not to keep it. It is God's money, all of it, and it is to pass through our hands to a waiting and needy world. We are channels, not reservoirs. Prosperity is not a synonym for riches. A man is prosperous who has the necessities of life. We in America need to learn that. Now, can you cite a single instance which you know of personally where the necessities of life have been denied any person who cheerfully, systematically and consistently tithed? The arch critics of the tithing principle have never given the plan even a sporting chance. Ask the man who has tried it. Get the facts°

Ask Me Another

I am not unmindful of the many questions that arise in your minds as you read. Let us look briefly at a few. Here is a popular question: Should a man start tithing when he is in debt? Yes. You are in debt to God, deeply. How do you expect to get out of debt with Him without tithing? Do you consider your obligation to Him less binding than those you have to men? I know

it doesn't loom quite so large now, but perhaps that is because we are not accustomed to looking beyond our noses—seeing things in the light of eternity. Where is your authority for the custom of paying the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker, then grudgingly handing over to the Almighty a pittance of what is left. Yes, the quickest way to get out of debt is to take God into your business as your senior Partner.

Another popular question: How much of my tithe should go through the channels of the church? That is for you to settle. I would suggest the larger part of it. All other worthy causes and institutions receive their life-blood from the Church. They look to her for their inspiration. They enlist their workers from her ranks. The Church is the foundation stone of any stable social, moral, political or economic order. Business rests on integrity; integrity is the product of religion; religion is mediated through the agency of the Church; and the Church depends for its support upon your gifts and mine. Here is a truth that no good citizen, Christian or not, can afford to ignore. The forces of destruction which today are threatening the very foundations of our social order can be vanquished only through the triumph of the Christian Church. Think of this, too; the local Church has only one source of support, the gifts of her own members. If you and I do not underwrite the program of this church, who will? Remember, if you fail, your church has nowhere else to turn.

And now this third question: Are you not trying to make a Jewish Christian out of me? The tithe was binding upon the Jew, but not upon me. As Christians we are not under law but under grace. I grant that the tithe is the Old Testament standard. But is it repealed anywhere in the New Testament? No, the New Testament accepts the Tithe as a minimum requirement, and then goes beyond it. Is it reasonable to suppose that the New Testament standard would be lower than that of Judaism? Really it is much more exact-

ing, and I am convinced that giving which is not sacrificial is not Christian giving. The point is this: If we could persuade all the members of churches to tithe, to be good Jews, we would oversubscribe the budget. It is high time that we were bringing our gifts at least up to Old Testament standard.

Some of you will more than tithe this year if you keep your pledges intact. That is a distinct gain, not a loss. By so doing you will be nearer to the New Testament standard. Does it cut in deeply to give what you are giving? Does it mean doing without some things which you have always considered essential? If so, then you are doing this thing in a Christlike fashion. Does it make the blood come? If it does, you are entering at last into the "fellowship of His sufferings." I happen to know that there are some who have kept their pledges right where they were in the face of a greatly diminished income. There is something in that kind of spirit that smacks of genuine Christianity. It is the only kind that fits a religion with a cross at its heart.

My brother, regardless of your present financial situation, I challenge you—dare you to step out this year on a program of faith and begin tithing! You can't make a mistake. It's the only way because it is God's way. Let's stop this business of robbing God. It brings with it only greater spiritual poverty. When the door of faith swings open, God walks in. Give God a chance! "Prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts."