"WHAT A BORE!"

Melachi 3:7

"Return unto me and I will return unto you saith the Lord."

Here is a cry that is as old as human guilt. About the first thing that man ever did in this world was to turn his back on God. He has been doing it ever since. But God has never been able to let him alone. When Adam fell instead of going up and down the garden crying, "Oh my God, where art Thou?" God had to come and search for Adam. And He has been seeking man, calling after man, shouting to him to come back from that day to this.

PART I.

To whom is God speaking in this invitation?

He is not speaking to confessed and backslidden sinners. Of course, he calls to them. There is no man that He does not woo. It is for sinners that He came. "It is a true saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

But God is speaking here to religious people. He is speaking to people who are actively religious. They did not consider themselves backslidden at all. They were going about pious performances. They were drawing near to God with their lips but their hearts were far from him. They had suffered the tragic loss. They had lost their love.

God puts His finger on the sore spot at once. In the opening of this book He has this declaration. "I have loved thee, saith the Lord." But what answer does these people make? They are not softened. They are not melted to grateful tears. They answered, "Wherein hast thou loved us?"

What an impudent answer! But I take it that it was not an
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answer of the lips, it was an answer of the life. They acted every day as if the love of God were all a fake and a farce. It is possible to do this and yet talk about the love of God beautifully all the while. These people had some how allowed the sense of God's personal love to them to die. And the outcome of that was that their own love had died also. That is always the case. "We love Him because He first loved us."

PART II.

How had these people come to backslide? How had they lost their love? They had not done so deliberately and purposefully. It is a rare rare thing indeed that a man comes to a moral crisis when he says "here and now I break with God and cast His love behind me."

Neither had these people lost their grip on God because their circumstances were such that made a life of vital religion impossible. We believe in the possibility of falling from grace. We also believe quite as firmly in the possibility of standing true in any situation and under any circumstances, provided we are in those circumstances by the will of God. These people did not have to fail. That is evidenced by the fact that there were some among them who did not fail. There was a little group, a few of the faithful among the many faithless who stood loyal and true to God. They succeeded because they did what their brothers fail to do.

1. They thought on the name of God. That is, they gave themselves time to meditate, to pray, to realize God and God's wonderful love. These others did not think. Isaiah's charge is true concerning them. "My people doeth not consider."
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Now you know quite well that if you cease to think of your business that you lose your business. If you cease to think of your friend you lose your friend. Friendship must be kept in repair. The most intimate of all relationships must be kept in repair. That is equally true of the relationship between man and God. The supreme tragedy of life is to forget God. This group to whom God is calling to return had forgotten. A faithful little handful had remembered, therefore stood true.

2. These that had stood true, the story says, spake often one with the other. That is, they had fellowship with each other. They met together for worship, for testimony, and their meetings were so beautiful, were so fragrant with the breath of love, so many winsome things were said about that God became secretary of the meeting and kept the record of the proceedings because they were too precious to be forgotten.

But these who had failed got in the wrong crowd. They chose their associates among those who never spoke to God except to take His name in vain. They left off the coming together for worship, and mark you, the man who deliberately turns his back on the house of God is just as certain to backslide as the law of gravitation is to operate. I have yet to find one single vigorous Christian who lived in disregard of the duties and privileges of public worship.

3. Those backsliders lost their hope, while the little group of the faithful kept their faces turned in expectation toward the dawn of the great tomorrow. Religion at that time was at a low ebb. Such seems to be the case today. But there were those that found light in the midst of darkness; who found strength in the midst of weakness; who found hope in
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midst of despair. They lived on God's promises. They fed upon His Word. Therefore, they grew strong and radiant. These others forgot that Word, lost hope, lost heart, turned from God altogether.

PART III.

What was the outcome of their loss of love? How was the fact that they were backslidden in heart indicated? They did not turn their backs on the Church altogether. Some do that but these kept up religious appearances and to a certain extent religious performances. In truth the situation depicted in this book is one strangely modern. I do not believe that any prophet more accurately describes our day than does the prophet Malachi.

1. Though they continued to serve, their service was altogether faulty. This is true

(1) Because it was a cheap service. It was the duty of a pious Jew to offer sacrifices to the Lord. He was to give the very choice of the flock. The lamb offering was to be one without blemish. But these had gone so far from God that they no longer gave Him the best but the worst. If they happened to have a sick or wounded sheep that was utterly worthless, that they could not sell or could not eat themselves, they offered it in sacrifice. That is, they gave God what they did not want themselves.

Against this unholy practice the prophet burns with indignation. He said, "You are treating God as you would not dare treat the governor of your providence." They would not dare treat a negro as they were treating God. And cheapening of service did not end with them. Today God has to put up with the fragments, with the mere scraps and crumbs. Many of us give Him the crumbs of our thought and the crumbs of our time and
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flying Him tips that we would not dare give to a Pullman porter.

(2) Being a cheap service it was also a joyless service. There was no enthusiasm in it. There is never any enthusiasm in doing what costs you nothing. These people were offering to God the very cheapest service possible, but even then it tired the life out of them. "What a weariness!" they said. "What a bore!" How dead tired they were! Why? Not because the load was so heavy, it was very light. They were tired because they had no heart and no taste for what they were doing.

It takes you a long time to weary when your heart is in what you are doing. I have seen folks that could dance till four o'clock in the morning and come away rested. But these same people would be wearied unto utter exhaustion by a sermon thirty minutes long. There are hundreds of Church people in Memphis that can go to the cheapest of cheap movies and stay three hours, but they cannot stay in Church till the benediction is given even though the service lasts but one hour. Where is the trouble? It is not that the singing is insipid or the sermon dull, it is this, that you have no appetite for it. Your love has grown dead. And when love dies you soon grow weary.

(3) Being a joyless service, it was also a useless service. It brought no gladness to the heart of God. Certainly not. God takes no pleasure in the gift that is given unwillingly any more than you do. What a weariness is it said these people. What is God's answer? "You have wearied me." A tired worshiper makes a tired God. When the heart goes out of our service it brings no joy to God, it only gives Him grief and weariness of heart.

Not only did it bring no pleasure to God it brought no help
either to themselves or others. In fact, it did positive harm. "Your words have been stout against me," God charges. And hear them answer in astonishment. "Wherein have we spoken so much against them." "Why," said one, "I have never said a word against God in my life." Not with your lips but about the worst thing you can say against God is to claim to know Him and yet be totally unlike Him. To claim to be Christian and yet live just as the world lives, that hurts for it proclaims the fact that one of two things are true; either we are not what we claim to be or that Christ can't do for a man what He claims to be able to do.

2. The second outcome of their backsliding was strife and unbrotherliness among themselves. They could not get on with each other. There was some kind of row going on all the time. When a man looses his love for God he will under provocation lose his love for his brother. "Did not one God create us," the prophet asks in amazement. "Yes." And we say every one, "Our Father," but if that means anything it means also to say, "our brother." There is nothing so deadly to the individual, there is nothing so deadly to the life of the Church as hate.

3. Another glaring sin to which their backsliding had led was that of easy divorce. The stylish thing was for a man to separate and marry as many times as possible. Women at that day had no rights in the matter. The responsibility was all on the man. Today the responsibility rests on both. Women are free. Eighty per cent of the divorces being granted today are granted thru the petition of women.

Now I am aware that there are scores of social workers who have found a far better plan of marriage than God's plan. Remedies are almost as plentiful as blackberries, but I am convinced that God's plan has not
yet been improved on. He declares that marriage makes husband and wife one, that this oneness can only be broken by unfaithfulness. And He says emphatically, "I hate divorces." And if He hated it then he hates it now.

4. The final sin to which their backsliding had led was that of dealing dishonestly with God. "Will a man rob God," asks the prophet in awe and wonder. "Yes," man will rob God." There were those that were cheating Him. They could not believe it themselves, so they asked in indignation, "Wherein?" The answer came, "In tithes and offerings."

It is an old story so far as many of you are concerned. You have heard sermon after sermon on tithing. You have heard it until you say "what a bore it is!" Yet, I guarantee this, it is not tiresome if you are really doing it. God said then that the man who withheld his tithes was guilty of robbery. He was robbing not man but he was robbing Him in whose hand his breath is, and whose are all his ways. I wonder if you are holding out on God.

PART IV.

But this book is not simply a message of denunciation. It is one of invitation. God never rebukes us except in love. The heart of it is this. "Return unto me and I will return unto you." How will we return? It is good to be sorry for sin, but that is not enough. It is good to ask forgiveness, but that in itself is not enough. These people literally covered God's altar with their tears and their crying out, but that got no where. What was the matter? They were unwilling to give up their sin.

"Come back," God says. Anybody can do that who is willing to
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turn loose that thing to which God objects and enter into God's services. That is repentance. That is salvation. That is what we need to do whether in the Church or out of it. For the "goodness of God leadeth to repentance."
Will a man rob God? Will he? I know he will sometimes rob a man whom he finds defenseless and in his power. I know he will rob a brother at times when his face is turned away and he believes the dark deed will never be known. I know he will rob sometimes when he thinks he will never be detected or can defeat justice when he is detected. But will he rob the all seeing God? Will he rob him in whose hands his breath is and whose are all his ways? A burglar had to turn the face of Christ to the wall before he could rob a house in New York. But are there men who have the timidity to rob God himself before his very eyes. Will the finite rob the infinite? Will the beloved rob him who loves him with a tenderness passing the love of woman?

As a theory we are ready to give an emphatic denial to this question. But when we appeal to experience, when we face the facts as they are we can no longer deny. Man will rob God. These people to who the prophet was speaking were guilty of the awful sin of robbing God. And yet they were religious men. They were men who were religious in their praying and in their church going and in a thousand observances, and yet they were robbing God.

And there men to-day all about us who are robbing God. Nor they simply the unchristian or the anti-Christian. Many of them, as these of old, are religious people. Many of them are men who are scrupulously honest in every other relationship. They would never think of beating their house rent. They would never dream of defrauding their grocer. They would never dream of beating a hotel bill. Yet they will rob God. They will refuse to deal fairly with Him before whom all hearts lie open and by whom all secrets are known. It is a startling charge. It is one that is calculated to make us think, to make us wince, to make us examine ourselves and repent.

These people are startled by it. They would not confess it. They entered an indignant plea of not guilty. They said wherein have we robbed. They said prove your charge. And the answer of the prophet is clear and to the point. Ye have robbed me in tithes and offerings. That is the guilt of these people was not in the fact that the had loot the temple. They had not tampered with the treasury of God and taken his funds therefrom. They would never have dreamed of so awful a sin. But why had they robbed Him in refusing to give Him what was rightfully His. They had held as their own what was God's own. That was their sin and that is the sin of thousands even in the church to-day.

God expected of these people tithes and offerings. That is they were to give to the cause of God free will offerings just as we do. They were to decide for themselves as to how large or small this offering was to be. But there was one decision that was not left up to them. They were not to decide the proportion that they were to set aside as the acknowledge of God's ownership and worship. From the beginning man has made some material return to the gods for the use of his world. But the proportion is to be decided, not by man, but by God, the owner. The amount as a fact of revelation, just as the amount of time that is to be holy to the Lord is a fact of revelation. This amount was a tenth. The law of the tithe was not a law of Moses. It was in vogue centuries before Moses was born. Tithes were paid by Abraham and the Hebrews says that he paid them to Christ. The law of the tithe is based upon the spiritual needs of man. It belongs to the eternal righteousness of things. As such it is a moral law.

Now, because these people had withheld the tithe they were accused of robbery. Because they refused the tithe the windows of heaven were fast closed above their heads. They were making it impossible for God to do for them and with them what he longed to do. I wonder if we think that we are guiltless when we are breaking the same law. I know that there are those who are ready to say that we are not under the law, but under grace. I know that there are those who claim that that this law was done
away in Christ. But I call your attention to the fact that Christ never set aside any moral law. A moral law exists in the very nature of things. It is true and binding before it is ever announced. He set aside those types and shadows that were fulfilled at his coming. But a moral law he did not set aside. There is no argument against the tithe that might not be used with equal weight against the Sabbath.

But sad to say, those who oppose the tithe do it not on the basis that men ought to give more, but less. I think I never heard the law of the tithe denounced by a man who was giving a fifth. The real reason that most men reject the tithe and claim that it is no longer binding is that they do not want to give God that much. But since when has it become a law in God's world that increased opportunity lessened our obligation. I am ready to admit to you that a tenth is not the extent of the obligation of many men. I am simply preaching as the minimum for all men. Certainly it was so under the Jewish dispensation...to say that less is required now is to say that a man's obligation grows less as his opportunity increases. This is not the case and we know it is not the case to whom much is given, much shall be required. Freely have ye received, freely give. If then for these men of the twilight to refuse to give the tenth was to become guilty of the awful sin of robbery, how much greater is our guilt who live in the glorious light of the noontide.

Why had these men refused to give the thithes? It was not because of their ignorance, it was not because they were too poor. Never have I met a man who tithed who claimed that he had prospered less since he began to tithe. What was the secret of his dishonesty, of this unfair dealing with God? This sin had its source in the same fell soil in which it grows today. It was a sin that was born of their loveless hearts. God comes to them with the wooers words upon his lips. He says I have loved you. And the answer is not a gushing response of love and gratitude. The answer is a virtual denial. They as wherein. They had no sense of the love of God. For themselves and losing that they had not love for God. For it is a profound truth that we love him because he first loved us.

And stinginess, selfishness, dishonesty have the same source still. If these men were without excuse for having no sense of the love of God in that dark day, how much less are we to be excused for saying wherein hast thou loved us as we stand under the shadow of the cross. We have had such a revelation of the love of God as they never dreamed of. If that love has touched our hearts we will be glad to give. We will be glad to give largely if we can. If we cannot we will be glad to give of our poverty. We will give of our abundance, or we will cast in of our two mites. For eternal delights to give and is wretched only when it cannot give. And whenever men begin to withhold their gifts and to cheapen their service it means that the fires of love have gone out on the altars of the heart.

Those men were offering a cheap service. They were bringing offerings still, but they were cheap offerings. They were bringing some lame and the torn to the sacrifice. Offer it to they governor, cries the prophet in his pained indignation. Give it to the representative of Artaxerxes and see if he will appreciate it. Treat your friend, your President with as little respect as you to Almighty God and see if they will appreciate it. Tip your governor as you tip the porter and the Lord of the universe and see if he will smile upon you. Cheap giving, it is the sin of the ages.

And the prophet calls upon these sinners to repent. Now. Not by sobbing, but by doing what they ought to do. By bringing the tithe into the storehouse. No amount of praying or working or tearshedding will take the place of that. It is good to shout and pray. But I have little confidence in the shout or the prayer that a man will not back up with his money (Bud Robinson's crowd). Methodism is today calling us to that type of repentance. It is seeking to raise more than a hundred millions of dollars. It is asking for a million tithers. It ought to have ten times this, but it is asking
for a million, if we succeed in it is a new era of conquest and prosperity will come to the church at home and abroad. I trust that there will be hundreds in this church that are willing to be come a part of this million.

What is to be the result of thus dealing honestly with God. First he said that he would destroy the destroyer. There has possibly never been a greater menace to man than covetousness. Few sins have ever been such soul wreckers as greed. The love of money is a destroyer. It is the root of every kind of evil. It made Akin the enemy of his Nation and his God. It made Danzi as rotten in his body as in his soul. It made Judas a traitor and a murderer. It is one of the sins that crucified Christ. When a man begins to deal fair with God in the use of his money, he is saved from the destroying grip of greed. Tens of thousands are ready to the new sense of God that has come to them as they have taken Him into partnership with them by dealing fairly in the use of money.

Second He declares that He will open the doors of Heaven and pour us out a blessing that we will not be able to receive. It is an awful fact that in withholding the use of our money we can make it impossible for God to carry out His plans both in ourselves and in the world. God is able to bless us beyond all that we can ask or think, but niggardly and selfish giving makes this blessing impossible. In robbing Him we rob ourselves. In robbing Him we rob the world. When we give as we ought and only then will the doors of Heaven be opened to us and will all the Nations call us blessed.

The conflagration in Europe is just ended, but the Church of Jesus Christ is engaged in a war that is not ended. It is a war that will never end till the Kingdoms of the world become the Kingdoms of the Lord and His Christ.

The war in Europe has brought to our mind certain important facts that we have tended to forget. First it has taught us again that the world is one. We see now that one part of it can not worship God and another part of it worship Mars. There was a time when Nations were separated from each other by murderous mountains and estranging seas. There was a time when a Nation might have Small Pox in the private ward of this world hospital and another part not be infected, but modern science has taken out all the partitions. Today we are all in the same ward. We did not want to get into the war in Europe, but we had to. There is not part of the world that has not suffered because if one member suffers all the world suffers with it.

Second that religion is the world's only hope. This is the growing conviction of all classes of men. No war has ever been so expensive in men and money as this war, but the next if there be a next will be infinitely more. Science is yet in its infancy and invention in its swaddling clothes. The development of the next century if uncontrolled by Christ will enable the world to commit suicide. Japan must be christianized or she threatens to become the Germany of the Orient. Napoleon said that when China awoke she would shake the world. She is awakened now and she must be christianized or she will shake it back towards barbarism. That there is none other name under Heaven whereby men may be saved but Jesus is but the statement of a scientific fact. It takes the gospel to save men from Hell here to say nothing of the after life. We refuse salvation by ideas we must use salvation by bullets. In one way or another our neighbors will cost us something. At one time we had to spend $177,000 to police Mexico--double what we spent to christianize them in a whole year. At last we have learned that war is expensive and that all energies must be bent in order to win. The unstinted use of our financial energies will win this spiritual war. It is the only force that will. Will you share in the sacrifice? I saw a wounded soldier on the street and I saw that one wounded man multiplied into millions. Then I thought of the million crosses in Fla Flandor's field. The war has cost us much.
but not too much. No man says that the price was too much. The cost of this other war will be great. Will you share it?
"Will a man rob God?" Will he? I know there are men that will rob their fellows. I know there are those who will rob their own children. I know there have been children who have robbed their own parents. But will a man rob God? Will a man steal from Him in whose hand his breath is and whose are all his ways? If he steals from another man there is hope that his crime may not be known. But will a man steal from Him who sees him and knows him as he is and through and through?

A certain home was looted by a burglar in New York a few years ago. In one room where a number of valuables were stolen there was a statue of Christ. When the owner went into this room the morning after he was surprised to find that this statue had been turned with its face to the wall. This burglar who had taken his liberty in his hand and his life in his hand and his very soul in his hand was yet unable to rob with the sightless eyes of this statue of Jesus seemingly looking out at him. His conscience you see was not yet altogether dead. But will a man rob God? Will he get his hand into God's coffers while God looks at him face to face?

Now as a theory we should certainly answer this question with a very positive no. We would answer that certainly no man would be wicked enough and heartless enough and mad enough to rob his God. No man would have a sufficient amount of rashness to steal from Him upon whom he was absolutely dependent for every blessing, whether spiritual or temporal. And yet such is not the case. We can not answer this question in the negative. We must answer it, if we tell the truth, in the affirmative. Man will rob God.

This inspired prophet knew men by the score in his day who were robbing God. He knew a whole nation that he declares was simply a nation of robbers. And sad to say, such men are present with us still. There are men all about us even now who are robbing God. And stranger still, some of them are religious men. Some of them are thoroughly loyal to the Church. And yet, according to this inspired word they are guilty in the eyes of heaven of robbing God.

That fact ought to lead every one of us to a thorough examination of ourselves. It ought to lead us to ask this question - "Lord, is it I?" For mark me, the men against whom the prophet brought this charge in his day were not regarded as criminals and the men against whom God brings this charge still are not so regarded. There are plenty of men today who are honest in all other relationships of life, who would not dream of cheating their grocery man or beating a hotel bill or being dishonest in any respect with their fellow men who are guilty of rank dishonesty in their dealings with God.

"Ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" said God through the lips of His prophet. And the people were astonished when they heard it. They resented the charge. They were indignant under the lash of it. They demanded proof. They said, "You have accused us of this ugly crime, now produce your evidences. You say we are robbers. You say that we have stolen from God. Make your charges good." "Wherein have we robbed thee?" That was the question that they asked. And I am not saying for a moment that they did not have a right to ask it.
And what was the answer? Did the prophet withdraw his charge? Did he say "I spoke unadvisedly with my lips"? Did he say "Excuse me please. I was rash in my accusation. I spoke without an adequate grasp of the facts. I spoke without a sufficient regard and loyalty for the truth"? Did he retract? Did he apologize? No, he did not. He said, "You have asked for proof. You have asked for the specific way in which you have stolen from God. Well, I will tell you. You have robbed Him of tithes and offerings."

Now, I wonder what they said when they heard that word. Their answer is not given. Frankly I do not believe that they said anything. I do not think they said anything for the simple reason that there was nothing to say. They knew that the accusation brought by God through His prophet was absolutely true. They knew that their conduct could be adequately described in only one way and that was the way in which it had been described, as a robbery of God. They knew that they were guilty of dishonest dealings with their Lord.

But why was it dishonest for them to withhold the tithe? Why in refusing to give a tenth did they lay themselves open to the just charge of thievery? The answer is plain. God had taught them that He was the owner of all. He had demanded of them that in recognition of His ownership they should pay to Him one tenth. The paying of the tithe was not a law of Moses. It was in vogue centuries before Moses was born. It was a truth of revelation. The Jew was not to decide how much or how little he was to pay to the Lord. He was no more to do this than he was to decide what part of his time should be holy to the Lord. The fact that God demanded one day in seven and that he also demanded one tenth came as facts of revelation that were terms not by man but by God Himself.

It is easy to see therefore the rightness of the prophet's charge. God the owner of all had announced the law of the tithe. He had ordered emphatically that "the tithe is mine." To refuse to give a man what is his own is to rob that man and to refuse to give God what is His own is to be guilty of robbing God.

Now I know what we are ready to say in the fact of facts like these. We take the seet unction to ourselves that while the Jew could not withhold the tithe without being guilty of robbery we in this Christian dispensation can, because we live under grace, as we are fond of saying, and not under law. But I want if I may to give you a few sensible reasons why every Christian today should give one tenth. I do not mean that the tithe is the extent of every man's obligation. There are some people that ought to give far more than a tenth. But I do think that there is nothing more clear than that every Christian ought to give one tenth today as a minimum.

In the first place, I think it is wise for the present day Christian to tithe because it is scriptural. I know of no place in the New Testament where the law of the tithe was explicitly set aside. The only place where Jesus mentioned the tithe He mentioned it to sanction it rather than to set it aside. He said to a certain group of Pharisees, "You tithe mint and cumin, etc. and neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice, love and mercy." Then said Jesus, "This ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone." That is, he said "Your tithing was right, altogether right. The trouble with it was that you did not go far enough."
So you see that Christ did not set aside the law of tithing. Christ never set aside any moral law. A moral law is a law that exists in the very nature of things. For instance, "Thou shalt not kill" is a moral law. It is wrong to kill not because it is forbidden by the Ten Commandments, it was wrong to kill before the Ten Commandments were ever written. Because it is wrong to kill therefore killing is forbidden.

The keeping of the Sabbath is a moral law. Jesus said when He was here that the Sabbath was made for man. That is, it fits into the needs of man. His whole nature demands it. He demands the Sabbath physically. He demands it mentally. He demands it morally. It is right for a man to keep the Sabbath not simply because he is commanded to keep it but he is commanded to keep it because it is right for him to do so. He can not reach his highest and his best without the Sabbath. It is a law, therefore, that does not exist simply because it has been written down. It exists in the very nature of things and it is binding whether it is ever written or not.

The same might be said of the law of the tithe. The tithe fits into man's moral needs. God could get on without our giving but we ourselves could not. To refuse to give is not only to rob God but it is first and fundamentally to rob ourselves. Man needs to give the tithe because in so doing he acknowledges God as the owner of all. It is an act of faith and worship and obedience.

Now it is true that the New Testament gives us a fuller understanding of our relation to property. It brings to us the high doctrine of stewardship. It reveals to us the fact that not only does God own the tenth but that He owns all. But it does not set aside our obligation to give the tenth but rather emphasizes the fact of our duty to handle the nine tenths according to the will of God.

Now, if a man argues against our obligation to tithe in this day on the basis that we ought to give more he would have some reason. But I notice that most of the people who object to tithing object to it not because they want to give more than the tithe but because they want to give less. Nothing can be more unreasonable and unscriptural than their position. Didn't God require a tenth of the Jew and accuse him of robbery when he withheld it? And yet he requires only one twentieth, or one fiftieth or one hundredth of you? Does not the whole Bible teach that the greater our opportunity the greater is our responsibility? Can we believe that God expected more of the man who lived in the twilight than He expects of you and me who live in the blazing noonday? Since when has it come to pass that an increase of opportunity means a decrease of obligation?

Oh heart, Jesus did not so teach. He said, "To whom much is given of him shall much be required". These Jews to whom the prophet is speaking lived some twenty-five centuries ago. They lived almost five centuries before the birth of Christ. You and I live after nineteen centuries of Christian triumph. We have a far better opportunity that they had. A wealth of spiritual truth is our possession reaching beyond their wildest dreams. "Freely have ye received", Christ is saying, "freely give." And yet there are some that will stand in this blazing glory and count themselves saintly while doing far less than the people of that distant day who were accused of being robbers of the Lord God. May the Lord help us to be reasonable and fair.
Then I believe that the present-day Christian ought to give a tithe as a minimum in the second place, because it is the most satisfactory way of giving. Its satisfactoriness is obvious to any one who will consider the matter. In the first place it is systematic. There is some method in it. Now I tried to tell you a few weeks ago that if you expected to succeed in the Christian life you must, for conscience' sake, have certain religious habits. For instance, you can not be a Christian and take a glance into the Bible at odd times just as you may happen to think of it. You need a fixed habit of Bible reading. Likewise, you need a fixed habit and time for prayer. You need, also, to make a business of your Church attendance. And you need just as much to make a business of your giving. To refuse to do so is haphazard and unbusinesslike and can not bring the best results.

It is the most satisfactory way, in the second place, because it is the best way to guarantee that you will be what God loves, a cheerful giver. And God loves such because He is that much like ourselves. That's the kind of giver I want. If a man gives me anything and does not do it cheerfully I do not want it at all. But giving is a terrible ordeal to some folks. The prospect of being called on for money is more painful than the anticipation of a surgical operation. I have seen people to whom the collection plate was a positive instrument of torture.

But this is never so with a conscientious tither. If you tithe you have a certain fund that you do not consider yours in the least. You no more consider it yours than you would consider yours $10 that I would give you to hand to a friend of mine. You have already put this money on the altar of your Lord. Therefore, when the appeal comes you can decide intelligently and conscientiously how much of God's money you ought to put into it. There is no fighting with your own selfishness in the matter. In this way it becomes possible for all of us to be really and truly cheerful givers.

Then this is the most satisfactory method, in the third place, because it gets the most satisfactory results. Through all the years the Kingdom of God has been retarded in its growth by the lack of money. We have improved in recent years and improved greatly but there is still room for greater improvement. How much shame we have brought to the cause that we really love by allowing the Church of the living God so often to lie like a rag-clothed Lazarus and beg at our gates. How the mission fields have suffered for lack of funds with which to do their work. A few years ago we spent a hundred and seventeen thousand dollars a day policing Mexico, more than we spent by far in a whole year in trying to win them to Christ. And yet everybody knows that vital Christianity is the greatest police force, putting it on that low and sordid basis, that the world has yet discovered.

Now, if every Christian tithed all the financial problems of the Church would be solved. Every temporal need of the Kingdom of God could be met by this means and met adequately. Our Church enterprises, our missionary enterprises, our educational and social enterprises, everything that makes for the spread of the Kingdom of God could be adequately financed. For our financial calamities today grow out of the fact that so many of us are doing far less than was required of the Jews before Jesus Christ was born.

If you would tithe you would give more than you have been giving. I know what the non-tither is accustomed to say, "I don't tithe but I
think I give more than a tithe." Now you sit down and figure up and try it. Many a man that thinks he is giving more than a tenth if he would sit down and count it up would find that he is actually giving less than a fiftieth. We exaggerate our gifts and minimize our incomes.

Finally, present day Christians ought to tithe because tithing when rightly done is a real means of grace. I know it is possible to tithe from wrong motives in such a way as to bring no spiritual blessing. It is possible to pray and attend Church and do anything else in such a way as to receive no blessing therefrom. I am not forgetting that the Pharisees who went up to the temple to pray was a tither. I am ready to confess at once that it is possible to tithe, yes, it is possible for you to give all you possess to feed the poor and your body to be burned and yet not be a Christian. A man can give without being a Christian. That is true, of course. But this also is equally true. No man can be a Christian and at the same time refuse to give.

What was the state of these men who were robbing God here in the text? The prophet lets us know. They were spiritually dead. Their selfishness and stinginess and sin had fast closed the windows of heaven above them. For to refuse to give is to refuse to live. The Dead Sea is dead because it takes everything that comes to it and gives nothing in return. And that same program will kill any individual and any Church in Christendom.

But how is it that a mere refusal to tithe brought to these people spiritual death? You can understand the answer to that question by seeing what lies back of their refusal to tithe. It was not because they did not think it was their duty. It was not because they were ignorant. They had stopped tithing because they had lost the sense of the love of God and losing the sense of the love of God they themselves had ceased to love and obey God.

"I have loved thee", saith the Lord. "Wherein hast thou loved us?" is the answer. They have lost the sense of the Divine love. Therefore they do not love God back again. For it was true then as it is now, "We love Him because He first loved us." Therefore, ceasing to love God they had left off their obedience. Their service had become a cheap service. Their giving had become a cheap giving.

For mark me, they were still giving. God had asked for the firstlings of the flocks. The lambs offered to Him must be without blemish. But now they offered the crippled and the lame and the useless. They gave to God what they did not want themselves and what nobody else would have. "Offer such gifts to the governor" said the prophet, with fine and biting scorn, "and see if he would accept it at your hands. Treat the minister of Artaxerxes as you treat the infinite God and see if he will appreciate it. Tip the tax collector as you tip the Lord and the porter in the hotel and see how you fare." And that is the method of some of our giving today. We tip the cause of the Lord on what we do not need for ourselves.

Such giving always means spiritual poverty. God called on these people as He calls on us. And the repentance that He is asking at our hands is more than that we come to His altar with our tears and with our crying out. These people had done that. The repentance that He seeks is the repentance that means obedience. And obedience requires the giving of the tithe. "Bring the whole tithe", He said "into the storehouse."
And then He proceeded to tell us what will be the result of their doing so. He said, "I will open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room to receive." That is, the right sort of giving brings spiritual enrichment. I feel confident that that is one of the secrets of the prosperity of our own Church. There are so many people here who are honest and fair with God in their giving.

It is easy to see why spiritual blessing comes in the wake of such giving. Tithing for the Christian means the acknowledgment of God as Lord of all. It means the putting of yourself and all that you have in His hand and the using of at least one tenth for His cause and for His cause only. And thus giving to the Lord your substance you have the privilege of giving to Him all else. And surrendering all that you are and have means that He gives all that He is and has to you. "For we are His witness of these, as is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him." There are literally thousands today who can testify to the new sense of God that has come to them as a result of their fair and honest dealing with God in the use of their substance. (The cattle king in Texas.)

"Therefore, bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be meat in my house and prove me now herewith", saith the Lord,"if I will not open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room to receive." Surely you believe that it is right to give. Certainly you do not think that an increase of opportunity means a decrease of responsibility. Therefore, every Christian ought to tithe. He ought to tithe because it is scriptural. He ought to tithe because it is the most satisfactory way of giving since it is businesslike and adequate. He ought to tithe, finally, because to do so makes always for spiritual enlargement and enrichment.
WHY BELIEVE IN TITHING?

"Will a man rob God?" Malachi 3:8

This morning I am to speak to you about a subject that is not vastly popular. I did not announce it for fear some of you might conclude that you had better play safe and stay at home. But since you have come, I trust that prayerfully and with an open mind and heart you may listen to what I have to say. I am going to try to give you as simply and forcefully as I can why I believe that we all ought to practice tithing at least until we graduate into the larger practice of stewardship.

I

My first reason for believing in tithing is that it is scriptural. It is taught in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. Now there was a day when the word of the Bible was final. That is not the case any more. Therefore I am not affirming that tithing is right because it is taught in the Bible. But I do affirm that the fact that this sanest of books teaches tithing ought to give us pause and compel our earnest and honest attention.

To the ancient Jew, tithing was not regarded as optional but as a necessity. Not to withhold the tithe was to deal dishonestly with God. "Will a man rob God?" asked this indignant prophet. "Certainly not", seems to be the logical answer. Of course, men have been known to rob in every other relationship, but will a man rob the eternal God: in whose hand his breath is and whose are all his ways. A certain room was looted in a home in New York years ago. In that room was a statue of Jesus. This statue had its face turned to the wall. The burglar was unable to carry on even with the sightless eyes of the statue of Jesus looking at
him. "Will a man rob God?"

Those to whom this prophet was speaking felt outraged at the very thought of their being guilty of such a sin. Therefore the pew turned upon the pulpit indignantly, as it had a right to do, saying "You have made a hideous charge against us. You have accused us of dealing dishonestly with the eternal God. Be specific, get down to cases, put up or shut up." Then the prophet instead of apologizing stood by his guns declaring that they had robbed God by refusing to tithe.

That tithing is taught in the Old Testament is not even a matter of question. This law was based on the Divine ownership "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof". Since God owns everything man, the possessor, was to set aside some part of his substance in acknowledgment of the Divine ownership. This he was to do not for God's benefit. God already owns everything. He was to do this for his own benefit and for the benefit of others.

It is only by thus dedicating some substance to God that man can save himself from the dire danger of secularism. To possess without acknowledging such possession is finally to become convinced that you own. If I own what I have then I shut God out of my life and so far as I can out of his own world. The greatest danger that threatens us religiously today is not the denial of God but the ignoring of God. The man who makes no acknowledgment of the Divine ownership is likely to live day by day as if the supreme fact of the universe, the fact of God, were only a lie.

Now since man, the possessor, is to make some return to God in acknowledgment of His ownership, how much is that return to be? Who determines the amount? Man, the possessor, or God, the owner? The writers of the Bible believe that the decision was with God the owner. They believed that the law of the tithe was a fact of revelation. It was not merely a law of Moses. It was in vogue centuries before Moses was born. They regarded it therefore as a revelation from God.

They looked upon it in this respect as they looked upon the law of the sabbath. What proportion of man's time must be dedicated peculiarly to rest and worship? The answer is one day in seven. At the time of Jesus, the Jews were
misusing the sabbath. They had changed it largely from a blessing into a burden. But Jesus reminded them that the sabbath fits into human need. This He did with that sanest of words, "The sabbath was made for man". We can refuse to acknowledge the gift as millions are doing but I think there is not the slightest doubt that if we were to use the sabbath as God intended us to use it, it would be an unspeakable blessing. I am convinced that no man can walk roughshod over any part of the Decalogue and get away with it. Explain it how you may men can do more, take it the year around, in six days than he can do in seven. Just so this law of the tithe comes as a revelation from God and fits into human need.

Now let me turn to the pages of the New Testament. We find tithing endorsed by no less authority than Jesus Himself. First, He endorsed it indirectly. He lays down the fundamental principle that the greater our opportunities, the greater our responsibilities. Who has the greater opportunity - the man who lived thousands of years ago in the twilight of revelation or the man who lives in the bright noonday of truth that Jesus has brought into the world. Our opportunity is greater than of the men of the long ago. But even of those living in the twilight, one-tenth was required. Certainly not less is to be expected of us. Since when has it become a law that the greater our gifts, the less our obligations.

Then Jesus taught tithing directly and specifically: One day in a sharp rebuke to some of the religious leaders He said, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." What is Jesus rebuking here? He is not rebuking these men for tithing. He is rebuking them for leaving off justice and love and mercy. They were trying to make tithing a substitute for right living. Jesus said to these same men: "Ye rob widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers". We do not understand Him to discredit prayer. He was rebuking them for making prayer a cloak for rascality.

Jesus therefore set His seal upon tithing. I am not forgetting the fact that He taught a high school in the art of giving. He taught stewardship.
WHY BELIEVE IN TITHING? - Page 4

But stewardship no more does away with tithing than the college and university does away with the high school. I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of those who are consistent stewards reach that high position through the faithful practice of tithing. I therefore believe in tithing because it bears the sanction of both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Himself said to the men of His day that in tithing they were doing the right thing. You and I are not likely to go wrong if we follow the course that Jesus said was right.

II

My second reason for believing in tithing is that it is a sane and workable plan.

1. First of all it is a plan. That fact within itself should commend it. I have reminded you more than once that many fail religiously because they have had no technique for the practice of their religion. In matters of daily living, they have a plan. They do not set up one night and sleep another. Most of us go to bed every night. We do not eat on one day and then skip two. We do not go to our business capriciously or as the notion strikes us. We go to business every week-day according to plan. It is only thus that we can make a success of our business.

But in matters of religion, many are not so sane. They have no fixed religious habits. Instead of making a business of their religion, sometimes they pray each night and morning. Sometimes they forget. Sometimes they practice a daily reading of the Word of God. Often they go weeks without it. When Sunday comes church attendance and attendance to the church school is with many almost an open question. Instead of settling the matter once and for all and being in their places as consistently as they are in their places of business, they leave it to a passing emotion and therefore fail to grow religiously and often end by having a lesser sense of God than when they united with the church.

If this is true in matters of private prayer and in devotional reading of
the Bible and church attendance, it is equally true in matters of giving. Some never give at all. Many of those who are fairly liberal have no system of giving. Some condition the amount and willingness of their response on the one who approaches them. Sometimes it depends on the popularity of the minister. Sometimes it depends on how deeply their emotions are stirred. An old chap over in Tennessee was so greatly moved by a missionary sermon that he pledged $50.00 but when one of the stewards went to collect it he flatly refused to pay, saying that he was too religious that Sunday to look after his own interest. But tithing does not leave our giving to mere caprice or haphazardness. It is a sane plan.

Not only is it sane because it conditions our giving on principle rather than caprice but it is sane as it is workable. I have been reminded of what a hardship it would work on the poor. Well it would certainly be easier for some folks to tithe than others. But it is not the poor who shrinks most from tithing. Generally speaking, it is far easier to get a man to tithe whose income is $3,000 a year than to get one to tithe whose income is $30,000. Somehow when incomes increase it is the one-tenth that looms large and nine-tenths do not seem to grow. Here then is a way of giving that commends itself to us because it is a sane and workable plan.

III

My final reason for believing in tithing is that it is humanly helpful. Here is one of the sanest ways of testing the difference between right and wrong. Whatever is humanly hurtful is wrong. Whatever is humanly helpful is right. Tithing, I tell you, is humanly helpful. Wherein is this the case?

1. It is helpful because it releases a stream of benevolences that would be largely adequate to the needs of the world. Jesus never belittled money. Paul never said anything so silly as that money is the root of all evil. Money, rightly used, is a means of unmeasured good. It can feed the hungry and clothe the naked. It can open doors of opportunity to the handicapped. It can be a means of carrying to needy souls around the world our gospel that is the power of God unto salvation.
But so often we accomplish only a meager fraction of what we might have accomplished for lack of money. Suppose the members of the Methodist church were to tithe for a single year. What could we not do for our needy world. If one-fourth of the membership of this church were to become conscientious and consistent tithers, I dare say that we would never have to call for another special offering. Tithing would bring in an income far more adequate than anything our church has ever seen.

2. Then tithing is helpful in that it makes possible the kind of giving that pleases God. "God loves a cheerful giver", Paul declares. We can easily believe that. That is the kind of giver we love. Who wants a gift that is wrung from grasping hands and clinging fingers? In prewar days before my wife started to reducing, I used to bring a box of candy most everytime I went away from home. But when I arrived I did not fling it in her face and say, "There it is. I bought it but I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't known there would have been an unholy row when I got home."

It is my conviction that she would not appreciate a box of candy given in that spirit. I am sure that God is far more fine and sensitive than she is. How then can we make giving into a joy? One way is to tithe. Cultivate the habit of putting away one-tenth of every dollar that comes into your hands. Count it as God's and not yours. Then when you are asked to give you will not have to have a fight with yourself. It will only be a question of how much of God's money you are willing to donate to this particular cause. Thus the closest of us can become cheerful givers.

3. Then tithing is humanly helpful because to those who practice it conscientiously, it is a method of bringing God into the ordinary affairs of daily life. One of our best stories to come out of the war is that entitled, "God Is My Co-Pilot". Colonel Scott has the conviction that as he flies he does not fly alone. If God has a part of every dollar you make, you do not work alone.
This new sense of God has been the experience of many. This is the case because tithing is an act of faith and obedience. In thus obeying God, we make possible His fellowship. This is only reasonable. Then it is God's own promise. Here are His words, "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord 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.

This does not mean that God is going to pay us for tithing. He is not a merchant who sells, He is a king who gives. But He cannot give us unless we by definite act of dedication give to Him. The hand that is open to give is open also to receive, but the hand that is fast closed upon its possessions cannot possibly receive what God is so eager to give. I read sometime ago of a little boy who got his hand fastened in a very fine vase. The father made one effort after another to rescue, then he decided he would have to break the vase. But when he had his hammer in hand he urged his son to open his hand wide and make one more effort. The boy looked at him in amazement and said, "Why if I open my hand like that, I will drop my penny." It is through hand-opening as an act of obedience that we are made capable of receiving God's best.

Finally tithing is humanly helpful because the tither is most likely so to grow in grace that he will not only set aside one-tenth as the Lord's own, but he will manage the other nine-tenths as God's trustee. That is to get into the graduate school of stewardship. I believe it is such dedication that makes abundant living and absolute certainty.

A deeply spiritual minister of my acquaintance, who has since passed into the Eternal Presence told of preaching some years ago at a camp meeting in the western part of Texas. His audience was made up largely of wealthy cattle men and of their employees. One Sunday morning this man preached from this text: "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price". At the close of the service, the
wealthiest man in all that country came forward and asked the preacher to go with him for a walk.

They strolled a mile or so till they came to a little hill that gave a look-out over all the surrounding country. "As far as your eye can see", said the cattle man said, "these broad acres with their houses and cattle are mine. I heard what you said this morning and I take it seriously. I have come to dedicate all that is mine to God. I want you to pray the dedicatory prayer." So they knelted and the minister prayed. Then as he was preparing to rise to his feet, the man grasped him hard by the arm. Then he put his own lips almost on the dust and prayed, "Father, I have dedicated to Thee my houses and lands but there is one other something that I want to dedicate. I have a boy who is the bond slave to drink. I want to dedicate him to Thee." At the afternoon service that enslaved boy found his freedom. If we deal with God honestly in the use of our substance, it will give us great boldness in prayer.

Here then is a plan of giving. It bears the endorsement of Old Testament and of the New. It is sane in that it affords a technique that is workable for everybody. It is humanly helpful in that it releases streams of benevolence more adequate to human need than any other plan ever tried. It changes giving from a chore into a joy. It brings a sense of God into life when rightly done. Faithfully practiced, it graduates us into the university of stewardship. Here we claim the rich blessing that God offers to every one of us, "Thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine". This is the case because God will never be in our debt. When we give all, He gives all. If you have a better plan than this, use it. If you have not, try this one.
"A STARTLING QUESTION"

"Will a man rob God?" Malachi 3: 8

Will he? I know he will rob the government. He will rob the city that has entrusted him in office. He will rob his fellows. Sometimes husbands will rob wives and wives will rob husbands. Fathers will rob children and children will rob fathers. But will a man rob God? Will the finite rob the Infinite? Will the creature rob the Creator? Would any man dare to be dishonest with the eternal God in whose hands is his breath?

At the first blush, we are ready to give an emphatic, "No." "Surely no man is so rash or so foolish." I read some time ago of a house in New York City that was burglarized. In one of the rooms turned inside out in search of treasures was a statue of Christ. When they went into that topsy-turvy room the next morning after the robbery, they found the statue of Christ with the face turned to the wall. Even this burglar could not carry on his task with the eyes of Christ upon him. But will men rob the living Christ? The Prophet answers in the affirmative. He accused the people of his own generation - religious people - that they were of such dishonor.

Naturally, those accused were outraged. They were highly resentful. They deny the disgraceful charge with emphasis. "He accuses falsely," they say. "You have said something you have no right to say. If we have not dealt fairly with God, sight instances for us. Tell us wherein we have robbed Him." Then what says the Prophet? Does he apologize for what he has said? Does he retract his harsh declaration, saying only that he has spoken too quickly? No! He proceeds to sight instances. "You have robbed me, even this whole nation in tithes and offerings."

With this jarring question as a starting point, I want to talk to you about a plan for financing the Kingdom of God. Most of you, I trust, will welcome this discussion. Of course, there are those who might be a bit impatient and say, "When will preachers stop talking about money." They will quit when we cease to live in a world
where money ceases to reap values. They will cease as soon as they stop talking about money in the grocery store, in the lodges, and the clubs, in the moving picture houses, and in every other institution that man has organized. It is necessary to talk about money and I am going to discuss with you a plan for financing the Kingdom. It is an old plan - we call it tithing!

By tithing, we mean the setting aside of one-tenth of your income as a fund to be used for the promotion of the Kingdom of God. You do not have to give it all to this church or any other church. It is simply a dedicated portion that you do not regard as your own, that you can use as you feel led for any enterprise that is seeking to make a better world. Tithing is not the only plan for financing the Kingdom, but it is a good one. It comes to us bearing the sanction of many centuries. It is worthy of our consideration, I think, for the following reasons.

I.

Tithing is scriptural. It bears the emphatic endorsement of the Old Testament. Personally, I think it also bears the endorsement of the New, but of this we will say more later. All Jews were expected to tithe. Not that tithing was a law of Moses, it dates back centuries beyond Moses. Nor is it strictly a Hebrew law. It was practiced by a few other ancient nations as well. This law grows out of certain fundamental and abiding facts.

1. God is the absolute owner of all. That is the emphatic teaching both of the Old and New Testament. It is the emphatic faith of all who believe in God apart from anything that the scriptures might say. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." "The cattle upon a thousand hills are His." "The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." "All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that has been made." You are not your own, you are bought with a price. The first realization that came to the saints after Pentecost was this, "Let no man say that the things he possesses are his own."

2. Now since God is the absolute owner of all, His ownership ought to
be acknowledged by the dedicating of a certain portion of our substances to Him. This conviction has belonged not to one nation and people but to all nations and people. Those who believed in many gods have felt that they ought to make some offering to the gods to acknowledge their ownership. Of course, this law as stated in the Bible is not so much an arbitrary law as a moral one. The rightness of it does not grow out of the fact that such a law was enunciated. It is right in the nature of things. It was wrong to kill, before killing was ever forbidden in the Ten Commandments. It was right to acknowledge God's ownership by the dedicating to Him of some of our substances, before such a law was ever stated and written down.

This law, like all others that are moral, was not for God's benefit, but for ours. The man who fails to set aside some part of his substance in acknowledgment of the Divine ownership is likely in the process of ignoring that ownership to come to forget it altogether. That has been a tragedy of countless millions. The rich fool was a fool not because he was rich, nor because he was successful. His foolishness consisted in the fact, at least in part, that he had persuaded himself that by possessing a farm he owned one. Now those who confuse possession for ownership are headed for tragedy. It makes a vast difference in any man's life as to whether he looks upon God as owner or himself.

The man who begins by realizing the naught of the things he possesses has at least the foundation for the building of a worthy life. But the one who becomes confused here and who regards himself as the owner of his possessions is headed for moral bankruptcy. Such a false conception does something to the one who is controlled by it that is deadly. For one thing, it kills all sense of obligation. It relieves him from any burden of responsibility. It kills his gratitude. The man who never thinks, the man who never says "I owe," and "I ought," and "I must," is nothing more than a moral imbecile. He is a spiritual dwarf. He may have grown large in certain dimensions, but in the dimensions that go to make a real man, he is an utter pigmy. Every man then ought to make some acknowledgment of God's ownership in order to keep
alive in his soul the sense of gratitude, of obligation, and of responsibility that this faith always brings.

3. Not only does God own all, and not only are we to make some acknowledgment of that ownership, but the amount of that acknowledgment has been indicated not only by the Old Testament but by the practices of many peoples of varied nations and of varied ages. Just how the "tenth" came to be designated as the amount to be set aside as holy to the Lord, it is impossible to say, since it was believed in and practiced by so many widely different nations. Some have regarded it as a truth after Revelation. Anyway, it seems to belong to the fitness of things.

In this respect, it seems to resemble the Sabbath. According to Jesus, the observance of the Sabbath fits into human needs.
A JARRING QUESTION

"Will a man rob God?"

Malachi 3:8 *

Evidently the preacher is trying to be shocking. But perchance he was preaching to a rather listless and sleepy audience. He had to prod them a bit to get them awake. He was wise enough to know that the best of sermons are good for nothing if the congregation is not listening. Many a speaker is driven to say things that he would not otherwise say in order to quicken attention. Certainly the most priceless pearls of wisdom are as worthless as the gewgaws of the market place if left alone. Hence Malachi asked this insulting question, "Will a man rob God?"

Of course we are aware of the fact that we will rob everyone else in the universe. A man will rob his brother. He will rob those who have entrusted their wealth to him. He will rob banks and state treasuries. Now and then he will break into a church and rob that. Children will rob parents, and parents will rob children. But, of course, there is always a hope that they can get away with it. But they can have no such hope in dealing with God. Therefore we ask, "Will a man rob God?" "Yes," declares the Prophet, he will do just that. And if you desire to know who is guilty of this ghastly sin you do not have to look abroad at the benighted pagans. You have only to look at yourselves. Ye have robbed me. What an insult!

Naturally those accused were indignant. They refused to take such an ac-
cussion lying down. The pew spoke back to the pulpit. "You have made a harsh
and insulting charge. Get down to cases. Put up or shut up. Tell us wherein
we have robbed God." And this bold preacher instead of recanting, instead of
confessing his mistake and begging for pardon, got down to cases. "You have
robbed God," he replied, "in that you have refused to give tithes and offerings."
Yes, you have guessed right, I am going to preach to you on tithing. Why should
a present day Christian give a tithe of his income as a minimum?

I.

I believe in tithing because it is scriptural. There was a time when Christi-
ans accepted any clear word from the Bible as final. Of course that is not the
case today. Therefore I am not affirming that because the Bible teaches tithing
it is necessarily right. But I do affirm that the fact that this amazing Book
 teaches tithing is greatly in its favor. This is the case because the Bible as
a rule talks sense. It annunciates great principles that are more abiding than
the everlasting hills. Any man who treats the Bible lightly, any man who declares
that this Book does not talk sense, has either not read it or he is lacking in
sense himself. The fact, therefore, that this Book that is so sane and reasonable
and practical, teaches tithing, is very impressive.

1. Tithing is emphatically taught in the Old Testament. This no Bible reader
will deny. Every Jew was expected to give the tenth as a minimum. Failing to do
so he was accused of dealing dishonestly with God. This requirement was based on
a very solid foundation. It was based on the fact that God is the absolute owner
of all things. "The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof; the world, and
they that dwell therein." His hand kindled every sun and lighted every star. We
are the work of his hands. We are his both by right of creation and by right of
redemption. One of the first realizations that came to the saints at Pentecost
was the fact of God's ownership. "Neither said any of them that ought of the things
To this fundamental contention of the Bible we all must agree. If everything for which we are not solely responsible were to slip from our fingers, we would have absolutely nothing left. We ourselves would cease to exist. Since God owns all it is reasonable and right that we should acknowledge his ownership. This acknowledgement is of course not to be made for God's benefit. All is his already. It is to be made for the sake of ourselves and of others. The man who refuses to acknowledge God's ownership tends to fall in a very damning error. He tends to come to believe that to possess is to own. It was this confusion of possession with ownership that stamped the brow of the Rich Farmer with eternal idiocy. The man who thinks today that to possess is to own is in the eyes of God a moral embicile. But that tragedy is almost inevitable, if we fail to make acknowledgement of God's ownership by setting aside some definite part of our income for his cause. To the reasonableness of this, I think most of us are ready to agree.

But if we are to set aside some part of our income in acknowledgement of his ownership, how much is that to be? The writers of the Bible believed that the answer to this was a fact of revelation. I am not claiming that they were right. But I do affirm that the giving of the tithe is not a law of Moses. It was in vogue centuries before Moses was born. Abraham gave tithes. These Old Testament writers, therefore, accepted the law as they accepted the law of the Sabbath as bearing the divine sanction. How much time was to be in a peculiar sense dedicated to God? The Scriptures answer one day in seven. This does not mean that the man who misuses the Sabbath will necessarily wreck himself. It does mean that he will cheat himself. The sanest man that ever lived was Jesus. He said, "The Sabbath was made for man." That is, the Sabbath fits into human need. Therefore, if we treat it as we treat any other day we miss something. We thus cheat ourselves and our fellows. No man can walk rough shod over any part of the Decalogue without
paying the penalty. That is being demonstrated before our eyes.

Some years ago if you had visited in Manitou, Colorado, you might have noticed two stables of donkeys. One of these stables was owned by a man who had no regard for the Sabbath. Everyday, seven days in the week, he sent his donkeys to the top of Pike's Peak. The other stable was owned by a religious man who would not allow even his donkeys to desecrate the Sabbath. But what struck the beholder was that while the donkeys that worked seven days a week were poor, nightmare creatures that looked as if they were not finding life worth living, the others were plump and full of life. Even a donkey seems to know that the Sabbath was made for donkeys as well as for man. Just as the Sabbath fits into human need so does the tithe. It does something for man and helps him do something for his brother that he is not likely to do if he neglects to tithe. Such is the teaching of the Old Testament.

2. When we come to the New Testament we find a fuller revelation of man's relationship to property. In the New Testament the central idea is that of stewardship. It too takes knowledge of the fact that God is the absolute owner of all. It calls on man to use not only a dedicated portion for the glory of God, but to use all else that he has, his time, his talents, his personality, his all, as God shall will. But even this teaching no more does away with the need of tithing than colleges and universities do away with the need of grammar schools and high schools. These lower schools are necessary to prepare us for the higher. Even so, those who take their stewardship seriously are generally graduates of the school of tithing. Jesus himself plainly teaches tithing in two ways.

(1) By implication. He declares that our responsibility is in proportion to our opportunity. To whom much is given, of him much shall be required. We have seen that the tithe was required of the ancient Jew. We know also that the Jew did not have our chance. He lived in the twilight of spiritual knowledge while we live in the blazing noonday. He lived back in the dim past before Jesus had come to show
us what God is like. Our light, therefore, is far brighter than his. Therefore, of us more is to be expected, both materially and otherwise. For a Christian, therefore, to give less than a tenth is to act on the assumption that the greater a man's ability the less his responsibility. But, of course, we know that is not true, but that the opposite is emphatically true. Thus Jesus teaches tithing by implication.

(2) Then Jesus teaches tithing specifically. I know he did so incidentally and by way of rebuke. But that does not alter the case. One day in rebuking the Pharisees he said, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith. These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." What was Jesus rebuking? Certainly he was not rebuking tithing. He plainly declared that in tithing they were doing what they ought to have done. Then he said, "Ye devour widow's houses and for a pretense make long prayers," he was not declaring that prayer was wrong, but that they were wrong in trying to make it a cloak for their rascality. Even so Jesus was here rebuking the Pharisees for trying to make tithing a substitute for right living. Of course, we cannot make any religious observance a substitute for that. Prayer and church attendance are good, but they are a means to an end. They are to help us practice goodness, love, and mercy. But Jesus said that tithing is right. Here then we have a method of giving that bears the sanction of the Scriptures.

II.

My second reason for believing in tithing is that it appeals to my common sense.

1. It is sensible because it suggests a definite plan of giving. Many men make a religion of business, but too few make a business of religion. Here we put our finger on one of the weakest spots in the religion of multitudes.
So many of us have no system, no plan, no technique of religious living. If we were as haphazard in other matters of life we would either starve or go bankrupt within a month. For instance, every morning it would be a question whether we should rise at six, seven, or eight, if at all. Once up, it would be a question when we should eat, if at all. Then it would be a question as to when the children should go to school, if at all. It would also be a question when the husband and father should go to business, if at all. Every hour would be an hour of debate, and confusion, while we either starved or went broke. But instead, we have some system. It is not a question as to whether we shall rise in the morning or not. There is no question as to our going to business and our children going to school. These matters are settled once and for all. We have a system for every day living.

But when we come to matters of religion too often such is not the case. Sometimes we pray—sometimes we do not. Some days we read the Bible, but for weeks we skip it. Every Sunday church attendance is an open question. If the day is not too hot and not too cold, if it is not too bright and not too cloudy, we may go. But we have no definite plan. If it is raining on Monday morning there is no question of our going to business. We go regardless of the weather. We also pack every chick and child off to school as if the day were sunny. But if Sunday happens to be a rainy day, influenza, pneumonia, tuberculosis all hover in the air, and we must generally stay snugly at home. Thus, haphazardly rather than any plan governs our religious lives.

But if this is true of our religious practices in general, it is even more true in matters of giving. I fear that the vast majority of church people have no system of giving whatsoever. Some never give at all. Some give if they are approached by the right person. Some give if they like the minister. Some give if they happen to have a surplus for which there is no pressing need. Some give if their names can appear at the top of the list. Some give if their emotions are stirred. An old chap over in Tennessee pledged fifty dollars on a certain occasion when the
preacher had moved his congregation to tears. But when he tried to collect he was met with a flat refusal. "I was too religious," he was told, "to look after my own interests." Then often our gifts bear no right proportion to our ability.

We are greatly in need of a sane technique for religious living and for religious giving. Tithing appeals to me because it is a sane plan.

2. Tithing appeals to my commonsense, not only because it is a plan of commonsense, but it is a plan that changes giving, from what to many is a painful chore, into a privilege. "That agony it is for some to part with money! In one of McCuffey's Readers there is a story of a poor family, a father and mother who were blessed with some seven or eight children. A wealthy relative offers to adopt one of these children. The parents decide that they ought to allow the child to be adopted for his own sake. But when the time comes to decide as to which child they will give they find the decision difficult. It is night and all the children are asleep in bed. You remember how the story begins:

"Which shall it be, which shall it be,
I looked at John and John looked at me."

The scene certainly reminds me of taking up a collection. You take a nickel and a dime in your hand and look at them wistfully, and murmur, "Which shall it be, which shall it be?" Sometimes you put them both back. Sometimes you give the nickel. But often the buffalo looks so appealing you simply cannot let him go. But there is a way of making giving a delight. Set aside a twentieth of all that comes into your hands. Put this at once into the Lord's treasury. Then when an appeal is made, instead of having to fight with your own stinginess you will only have to decide what part of God's money you will give to this cause. Thus giving will be transformed from an agony into a joy. You will thus become the kind of giver that God loves, a cheerful giver.

3. I believe that tithing is sane not only because it is a plan, but it is a plan that is within reach of all. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying
that the tithe is the extent of every man's obligation. It has been many years since I have given so little as a tenth. There are some that ought to give a fourth or a half. But everybody, if they have faith and devotion enough, can give a tenth. If you remind me of the hardship that this will work on the poor, I will have to answer you out of my own experience, that it is not the poor that shrink from this plan, but the well-to-do. It is far easier to get a man to tithe on a small salary than on a large. Somehow most of us are so constituted that when we begin to prosper, it is not the ninth-tenths that increases, it is only the one tenth. Here is a plan that is within the reach of everyone that is willing to work it.

4. Finally, this plan appeals to me because it is adequate. There are so many fine things that our church could do that it is not doing if it had the money. If this church were to tithe for a single year we could build an educational plant, we could build a new auditorium, we could at the same time lead Methodism in our missionary gifts. If Methodism were to tithe for a single year, it would bring about a moral revolution. Given a tithing church we should never have to ask for a special offering for any cause from now till the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ.

III.

My final reason for believing in tithing is that it is a means of spiritual enrichment. This was the conviction of the prophet. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse," he urged, "And prove me herewith, saith the Lord 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." One of the best thermometers to test the spiritual condition of a church is its financial program. Some years ago I served a church that paid every dollar of its budget by the end of the seventh month. It is needless to say that that church enjoyed overflowing congregations and experienced
spiritual power beyond any church that it has yet been my privilege to serve.

That this plan of giving should bring spiritual results is not a matter of wonder. It does not mean of course that we buy our blessings. God is not a merchant who sells, he is a King who gives. "The gift of God is eternal life." But tithing, when rightly practiced is an act of love and faith and obedience. It, therefore, makes it possible for God to do for us what he could not otherwise do. He is always bending low above us in his eagerness to pour out blessings that there shall not be room to receive. But we often thwart him by our disobedience. It is only the hand that is open to give that is open to receive. God cannot give us what we refuse to take. And God cannot give to us when our hands and hearts are clinging to things.

Finally, tithing is a means of spiritual enrichment because it brings a sense of God into our daily lives. What is one of the greatest dangers that threatens our modern world? It is secularism. It is being taken up solely by the seen. It is becoming so aware of the visible that we lose all sense of the invisible. I have had wistful souls say to me, "How I wish I could do some definite religious work like being a minister or a missionary. I am eager to do something that would bring to me a constant sense of God." That privilege is open to every tither. If you take tithing seriously, then God becomes your partner. He shares your business with you. There are few things more conducive to bringing a sense of God into our daily lives. It helps to enable us to handle our everyday tasks as religiously as we handle the Communion cup on Sunday morning.

This is not mere theory. It is the experience of countless multitudes that I have a friend who is today a tower of strength in the church of which he is a part. When I first knew him he was pinched by poverty, and very near to utter spiritual collapse. His wife was in the hospital for a seventh operation. He was already all-but hopelessly in debt. But he came to church one day, and I happened to preach on tithing. He went home, got on his knees alone,
and said, "Lord, you see the situation. You know how hopeless it looks. But you have asked me to put you to the test, and I am going to do it." From that very day this man began to prosper materially as he had never prospered before. (But mark you, I am not saying that that is always the case.) But better still, he began to prosper spiritually. He came to possess a peace that passeth all understanding. He came to have the bracing sense that the eternal God was his dwelling place and underneath were the everlasting arms. Such spiritual enrichment has been the experience of countless thousands who have come to tithe as an act of faith and obedience. It might happen to you. At least here is the promise, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, and prove me herewith, saith the Lord 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."