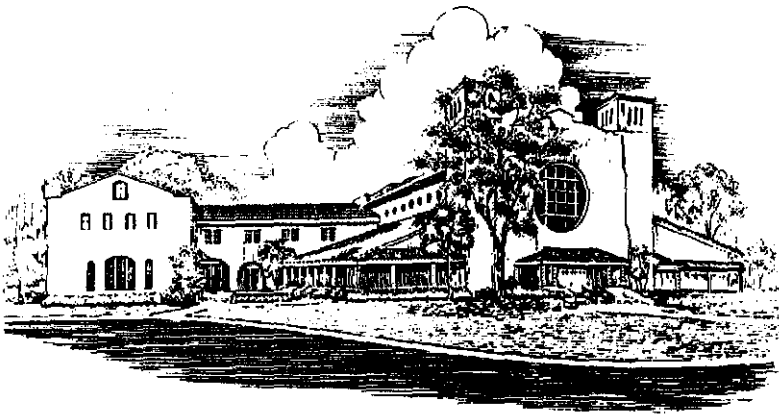


# First Church Pulpit

## "ON TIPPING AND TITHING"

**Text:** "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse . . . and put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."  
— *Malachi 3:10*



## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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We used to belong to a private club back when we lived in Pittsburgh. I make reference to the practice there, so that the private clubs in Fort Lauderdale, and you custodians of the same, might not be bothered by what I say. There, as is customary in many other clubs and fancy restaurants all around the nation, each time you go for a meal, whether it is a small or large occasion, the club policy was to add an automatic 15% to the bill, called the "gratuity", or the "tip", for the employees. Just as surely as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the total came and the tip was included.

Now, I have no objection in private clubs, or anywhere else, to being kind and generous to those who serve, and especially when they are good at their work. But whether they are or are not, one automatically assumes the responsibility to comply with such a policy, if one joins that club. I mean, you do not have to go there, you can go and join somewhere else. After all, this is a free country. No one ever compelled anyone to join a private club, unless it is the boss who says you should be there.

I recall in my memory, however, occasions of being unhappy with the policy. I did not set it, and I am a Scotsman enough not to want to give up any money unnecessarily; but more than that, I did not like it, because from time to time (this is true in any business, church or restaurant facility) things did not work out the way they were planned to go. You recall it snows

up there, and travel can be difficult. One winter night the chef could not get to the club, and a couple of the waitresses were ill. With too much to do, the waiters were a trifle surly, you know what I mean.... Further, for a variety of reasons, once in a while the food is just not what it should have been, and so on. On those occasions I did not like it when policy required that I pay the 15% tip anyway.

One night, about a week before Christmas, while we were there, one of the waitresses was moving a little too hurriedly, and she actually dumped a cup of pure white vichyssoise on the red dress of a woman. I thought it was funny, and I quipped: "It is a lovely combination, red, white and green." She did not think it was humorous. The club manager came running over and said: "I am sorry, we will do anything you ask, we will pay for the cleaning...." (She was above that; it was a very expensive dress and she was not worried about the cleaning bill. "It is the principle of the thing!" she said.) Well, he did not know what to do, so off she went, I guess, never to return again. But wouldn't you know? When the bill came, there was a full 15% that went to that waitress, and they charged for the vichyssoise as well. I mean, that was a mistake, I realize, but nonetheless, it did happen.

There were other times, you know the feeling, when on special occasions the service was wonderful to me and my family, e.g. when we had our parents Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary there. On those occasions, I wanted to give an

extra gift, for the help had been so kind and good. And yet, there was also a club policy adamantly opposed to covering the palms of the employees of that club with extra cash. Now I know clubs here have the same policy at times, but I never met a waiter or a waitress who would not take some extra cash on the sly, no matter what the policy was, if you do it discreetly (I don't know how I found that out, but I happened to notice that over the years). That part of the policy bothered me even more. At times, if I received extra, I wanted to give extra. By the policy of the club, however, I was not permitted to do so. Each and every year the President's Letter came out, "The State of the Club". It always read: "Please (underlined) do not tip employees." You could tell those Presidents had never been waiters in a club, or they would not have been so final. You were forced to pay, here is the point, a definite percentage if you wanted to eat at that club.

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Now do the rest of you know where I am going? There could be a few visitors from Mars or Jupiter in the Sanctuary (or listening on the radio), who are not familiar with the Pledge Program of the Presbyterian Church. I will add a couple of minutes' explanation for them. The original point I was trying to make was that while I never objected to the cost of covering a gratuity for the employees, it sometimes troubled me that we were bound to do what the club said, no matter what the service. I am old enough to remember when it was 10%. Then it was raised to 15% some years ago.

It is rather like insurance premiums, isn't it? If the company decides to raise the premium, you either pay it, or you go to another company. If you go to a doctor, and he decides the cost of the visit should be 10% over last year, you pay for it, or you go to another doctor. If you go to the supermarket, and you do not like the price they place on half a gallon of milk, you either pay it, or you go to somewhere else to get your milk, right?

It is true everywhere else also: the pension programs, the theater, football games, concerts.... People may rant and rave about the cost. But, if you want a service rendered, you pay what is required. If by chance you had happened in a Jewish Synagogue this Stewardship Season, you would be assessed and billed by what the keepers of the Temple felt you could pay, or should pay...and you would pay it, or you would not receive a seat on the High Holidays! I was once told by some Rabbinical friends in Pittsburgh, that some of the Synagogue members, however upset when their assessment is very high, pay it willingly, because it indicates their success in the eyes of their peers. Everybody likes to be thought of as a success.

By the way, that same club I belonged to, had assessments. If some new Chairman of buildings and grounds decided the club needed a new roof, he just had the bill toted up, divided it by the membership, and sent the bill out. You paid the assessment, or resigned. When they said they needed a new driveway, I was troubled because I knew they did not need

one. But...the new president had to make it look good for him and his "train".... Some presidents of clubs do act like kings! Some Commodores do also, by the way, though you surely do not know any of them (that one might cost us a good pledge from a couple of the Past Commodores here). There are tyrants everywhere, in the church and in the clubs. But you know what I mean: the bill came, and I said: "Oh, my goodness, dearie me, I never authorized that!" My friend said: "If you belong to this club, you pay the bill, right?" Right!

Now, I hurry on to remind you the Church is not a club, far from it, I know that. It is the Church of Jesus Christ. I never asked our Session to send out bills, even if I sometimes would like to. It would make the ministry of the church a lot easier, I think, and we would not have to go through this gathering-in-the-pledges season every year, when we try to alert our members and friends to what God requires. But think about it with me, will you? I mean, think about how much you intend for next year to give to your Church, the Church of Christ. Just pray about it for a moment. Think about it especially in reference to what the Bible says, and what the Word of God means on the topic "Tipping and Tithing".

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There is a marvelous story in Genesis 28 concerning our subject. I am going to take a few isolated examples of tithing. There are thirty-two references to tithe in the Old Testament. When Jacob swindled Esau out of his birthright (with

his mother's help), he went on up the road, out in the open air at night. There he went to sleep, with his head on a rock (I guess that was the reason he had a dream). He had a dream about a ladder which went up to Heaven, and the angels were going up and down on it. Somehow in that experience the Lord spoke to Jacob, and promised him and that He would be with him forever, and with his descendants. Did you hear that? Isn't it wonderful to think that your children and your grandchildren, if you have such, and your neighbors and friends and mine, will one day benefit by what you and I do for the Church?.... Isn't that a thought to treasure? And we give them a head start if we give them a solid foundation. What we do for the Church of Christ is not only for you and me.

Jacob was so grateful for the promise of God to his generation and the generations to follow, that it says in pure plain black bold English in Genesis 28:22: "I will give a tenth of everything I ever earn to You." It was not a command; Jacob was under no threat, no bargaining whatsoever. It was just a note of gratitude. Jacob was so pleased that God had promised to be his God, and to be the God and Father of his children, that he offered it freely. And, through all of his days, Jacob did. I do not want to say that God is twisting your arm, or holding your feet over a fire; but the Lord does love a cheerful giver.

Then, by the time we get over to Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the tithe becomes a Command of God. There, it is not an option any more. And I could cite those references, if you like, but just

believe me they are there. Also, in the New Testament the tithe is mentioned seven times. Jesus deals sparingly with Commands. He mentioned only two. They are the Sacraments in our Church: Baptism, and Holy Communion. For the rest, he puts the responsibility on you and me. Yet, He never opposed the tithe; in fact, He endorsed it.

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Now, what is a Tithe, T-i-t-h-e? One of my church officers used to call it a "Tith" (rhymes with "give"), and that always made me smile. Are you laughing? Give a "Tith" to the Church. That surely changes the whole thing, does it not? I mean, did you bring your "Tiths" to Church?

A tithe (rhymes with "dive") simply means "ten percent". No one knows the exact origin of the word except, broadly speaking, in the Semitic languages it meant a small part. That is where it started. I mean, after all, a tenth is a small part of the whole thing, as nine tenths are left.

Religiously, it began with a gentle suggestion from Abraham. He was so pleased with a great victory in battle, that he gave ten percent of what he had gained to Melchizedek, the high priest, so that the Temple could function. Abraham did not want a nation without a Temple.

"Ten percent of what?" people often ask me. I have a friend in Georgia who says: "You can make it ten percent of your gross, or ten percent of your net

after taxes, whatever makes you happier, because God loves a cheerful giver."

I am well aware that main line Presbyterian churches do not believe in tithing. In fact, my Professor of Preaching told me thirty years ago: "Don't ever mention the ten percent tithe...you will turn them off." I wish I would have had the nerve to say it to him then, as I say to you now: "Who are you to tell me not to tell them what God says? Who cares how unrealistic it is? If it is the Word of God, it is the Word of God. And, we either follow it, or we don't."

You know, a peculiar thing happened when the tithe was commanded in Deuteronomy. The farmers (They were all farmers then, so you could say everybody) tried to find a way to get around it. They did not like the idea of parting with ten percent of all they had for God. Rather than blatantly turn their backs on it (They did not want to do that, it was punishable by death to openly violate the Law of God), they brought the sicklings, the diseased calves and lambs to the Lord. They kept nine good ones, and gave the bad ones to God, the runts of the litter. Oh, they were devils! They offered spoiled fruit, blemished bananas to the Lord, and they kept all the good stuff. Did you ever hear anything so absolutely insane?

The keepers of the Temple were not dumb either, though. They got their own shepherds out there in the fields. They herded all the calves and lambs together and had them to go through a chute like at the rodeo, where only one can come

through at a time. One - two - three - four - five - six - seven - eight - nine - ten: that one belongs to God. So they let the Lord decide, they said, when all the cattle paraded through. That took care of that.

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When we finally get to Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, we reach the words of our text, the zenith of the Scripture's attitude toward tithing. By the way, Malachi is a marvelous and engaging Little Prophet. It is really tremendously easy to understand that people shy away from him, because he is so straightforward and direct.

The Book of Malachi is divided up into six different sections. He says: "God has six arguments with His people. One of them is with the clergy, who do not do their work (by the way, clergymen don't like to hear that one). The people have been back from the Babylonian exile long enough that the priests got bored with the routine of things. They concocted a variety of possibilities, Malachi says, in order to fool the Lord. They did not do their full service. They endeavored to get more of the produce which the people brought, for themselves...devils, those clergy!"

Malachi says: "God has an argument with you clergy-people. "What is the charge?" they ask. "You are neglecting your duties." "How?" "You have not been regular in your worship service"...etc. Another argument which God has with His people is that justice is lacking in the land. "You let the poor people die of poverty..." he says. Etc., etc.

Finally, we reach two sections of Malachi's prophecy in Chapter 3:6, the words of our text. First, tithing and money are not really what it is about. The section begins in Verse 6 of Malachi 3: "I the Lord do not change...but you have changed." "How have we changed?" "You have been faithless to Me."

This initial charge does not have anything to do with money, or time, or talent, or the tithe of anything. It is a matter of basic ground floor faith: either God owns the world and everything in it, including our life substance and all that we have ("What do I have that I have not received?" it says in the New Testament). Either we acknowledge that it belongs to God, all of it, or we miss the whole point of Malachi, and the Bible. The underlying offense is the lack of faithfulness...that is where it begins. If you love the Lord, commit your life to Jesus Christ, totally.

I have a Baptist friend in Texas, who never preaches a Stewardship Sermon (I suppose you want to become a Baptist and move to Texas). Do you know why? Everyone tithes. It is not an option in that church. You could cheat if you want to, I guess, no one asks to look at your tax returns. But everybody gives ten percent of his/her gross (or net) income, period. They do not even sign pledge cards in that church. Everybody promises to love the Lord and His works, and then gives the required return.

The tithe protects everyone. If you have a lot, it asks for much: 10% of \$100,000 is more than 10% of \$25,000. If you are out of work and have virtually nothing,

tithe what you do make. If you are poor and down on you luck, and you need help...come to the church and ask for it! (Did you hear me?) That is how important it is. If God has been good to you, then give that 10% in return. If you have had a tough time, then relax. Let someone else do it this year. If and when God blesses you bountifully, then you will reach up the ladder automatically. The widow's mite was praised by Jesus Christ. And to the Pharisee who stood up, and let everyone see how big his gift was, Jesus said: "It is not a matter of size. It is a matter of devotion." Her gift He found more valuable than his.

A friend of mine told me this story recently. A man who had been a church member for decades, was getting old. He had a severe illness, and he knew it. He contemplated the years of his life, and he thought: "Well, maybe I did not do it right, and it could well be that God is not happy with me!" To firm it all up, he called his minister to come and visit. When the clergyman arrived, he asked: "Dr. Smith, do you think I will get to Heaven?" Smith talked to him a little, explaining what he thought he knew about Salvation and the Gospel.... Finally the man said: "Do you think if I gave an extra twenty-five thousand to the church, God would let me into Heaven?" The minister said: "Well, I am not sure, but it probably would be a good experiment to try....!"

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Are you ready? Try it for three months. Try it next January, February and March.

Whatever income you receive after taxes, pledge ten percent of it as a Command from God. I have never known anyone who started to tithe, and turned back. Never! In thirty years, I have never met anyone who tithed, and regretted it. You do not even have to pledge it.

God continues: "Put me to the test. See if I will not pour out from the windows of heaven an abundance of blessings on you." First is our devotion to Christ, then follow our time and our talents and our treasures.

Now, drop back to the beginning, and then we are through. Remember that private club I was telling you about where I used to belong, which charged an automatic 15% for services rendered. I wonder if you can make the jump from the private club to here. What services has God rendered to you? There are no rules in this regard. There is no restriction on what you are allowed to give. But in proportion, as the Lord has prospered you, return to Him.

We give Thee but Thine own,  
What e'er the gift may be,  
But all we have is Thine alone  
A trust, dear Lord, for Thee.

I close with a story. It is short, and we can all smile and go home happy. When my mother was growing older, and the children were reared and gone, she had a little more money than she had had when we were young. That is true in many homes. She went to the beauty shop one day. She was not feeling up to par (in fact, she died not long after this). She went to have her hair done by an old

friend of hers at Claffey's Beauty Shop on Penn Avenue in Bloomfield, if you know the area. It is a modest place, there is nothing really fancy about it. The whole workś, everything, came to fifteen dollars.

Now, some of you husbands wish your wives could get a real permanent for that kind of money. Nowadays, you cannot do that, unless you have the equivalent of Claffey's Beauty Shop. I took her up to the parlor, and went to fetch her when she was finished. I said: "How did it go, Mom? You look lovely." "Oh, it was a long time under that big thing they put on your head", she said, "but it was fine. Do I look all right?" I said: "Beautiful. What did it cost?" She said: "Fifteen dollars, but you know what, Rich? I gave her a five dollar tip!" I said: "Oh, my goodness, Mom, you cannot afford five dollar tips!" She said: "I know, Son. But it makes you feel so good to be generous with someone else." How much more with the Lord? For now and evermore. Amen.

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