

Sermon for Sunday, October 29, 1978, by Dr. Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"TOO POOR NOT TO TITHE"

I Timothy 6:1-10

Text: "For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this
craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their
hearts with many pangs." I Timothy 6:10

In several weeks--on November 12 to be exact, we will be asked to renew and hopefully deepen our commitment to Jesus and to the church for 1979. Our denomination and our congregation in particular, has always put a stress on tithing as the standard for Christian giving. Now, there are a lot of things we ought to be tithing. We should tithe our time to the Lord. Many of us don't do that. For many of us our time for the Lord consists of Sunday morning for a couple of hours. But a Christian is one who recognized that life itself is a gift from God and that all of our time should be lived for him, and that a tenth of our time should be specifically committed to the Christian enterprise. Now if we took that seriously, we wouldn't have any problem of getting Sunday School teachers or evangelism visitors or people in our prayer ministry, or a lot of other opportunities to serve the Lord here at Central, because we would feel a compulsion to tithe our time and we would need opportunities like teaching, or like singing in the choir to do that. Also, we ought to tithe our talents. I suspect that there isn't a congregation in this city with as much talent in it as we have here at Central and we ought to tithe our talent. Many of you are literally loaded with ability, but it hardly occurs to us that this is a special way that we can serve the church. I suspect that many of you this morning have a talent for singing, but you are not in the choir this morning. We're getting our bell choir together and I know some of you are probably pretty good bell ringers. You have all kinds of talent. Some of you have the gift of hospitality, but you aren't really using it to make our visitors feel welcome. We have so many visitors. I asked the visitors in the early service to hold their hands up so we could get an idea. If you're a visitor would you just raise your hand--I want our congregation to see how many of you are visitors. We're glad to have you here today. Somebody make them feel welcome today! And there are literally hundreds of talents among us that are not being lifted up for use by the Lord.

But actually I want to concentrate this morning on money. Someone has said that money is tainted, but the only taint for most of us is that there 'taint enough of it! (that's a joke with a southern expression--you don't have to laugh if you don't understand it!)

I believe in tithing. The first reason I believe it, is because I love Jesus. I think back to what my life was like before Jesus came into my heart and I wouldn't go back for anything in the world to those pre-Jesus days. I wouldn't want to live out my life without Jesus in my heart. I am so grateful to him that he took me as I was and claimed me for his own, that he filled me with his Spirit and that I have the blessing of God at work in my life. And I tithe just out of sheer gratitude for what he has done in my life. Some of you might say, "Well, you know, you are not all that much". That's true, but you should have seen me then. And I am so grateful! You may remember the prayer that a man made after Jesus came into his life. He said, "Lord, I'm not what I'm going to be, I'm not what I ought to be, but I thank you Lord I ain't what I use to be." And that's the way it is for me. I tithe because I am so grateful for Jesus coming into my life. I'm so glad I'm not what I once was.

The Bible teaches us clearly that the tithe is the minimum standard taught in the Bible. It is taught in the Old Testament and Jesus reaffirms it as valid. Sometimes people say to me, "Well, pastor, tithing is the law of the Old Testament.

We live under the New Testament that has done away with the Law for we live under grace." Well, that is true. We do live under grace. But grace and its fruits are never less than the Old Testament Law. As nearly as I can tell, there are at least three examples in the New Testament about giving. One is the example of the Widow's mite. In this case, she gave all that she had and Jesus said because of it, she was greatly blessed. An example is that of Zachaeus. When he came under the grace of Jesus, he responded with his material possessions and he said, "The half of my goods I give to the poor." An illustration comes from the lips of Jesus who spoke of the carefulness of the Pharisees to tithe mint, cumin and anise. And he said this about the tithing, "These you ought to have done." So there is the answer to the question about giving. Give it all, give one half, or tithe. Those are the examples from the New Testament.

So, if you ask me should a New Testament Christian tithe, I find that a hard question to answer. I have to say, "Well, at least a tithe." But the question is hard because it is the wrong question. You see, when you say to me, "Must I tithe?" you are really asking the wrong question. You are really asking, "what is the least I can give?" And that is the wrong question, isn't it? I think the question we should ask ourselves would go something like this: "Assuming the tithe as a minimum, how much can I give?"

A second reason I believe in tithing is because I believe in the church. Without the giving and the commitment of Christians to the financial support of the church, the church could not exist. Can you image what this community would be like without the influence of the church? Can you image what the world would be like without it? In my own mind, the church is the single most significant catalyst in our society today and I suspect the world--which is bad enough--would be intolerable without the steadying influence and moral influence of the church. Admittedly the church is under-supported. We can't do nearly as much as we want to do or ought to do because we Christians don't give the church the full support it deserves. But I wouldn't want to live in a world without the influence of the church.

Now, right away a lot of people will ask, "Well, must all of my tithe go to the church. Must all of my giving come to the church?" Well, that is a hard question to answer, too. A lot of us support things other than the institutional church. We support the United Way, which is certainly a worthwhile thing. We support things like Campus Crusade, Young Life, and other para-church organizations. I think I would answer the question this way by asking another question: what is your motive in giving to non-church institutions? If you can honestly say that it is motivated by love and compassion and concern and is actually helping others, then I think that is a legitimate expression of Christian stewardship. However, I would go on to emphasize this: first, the church must always be the principal object of our devotion since it is the visible body of Jesus in the world and his chosen instrument. And second, I personally believe that para-church organizations should be supported by giving that goes beyond the tithe. That is what we do at our house. We have four or five commitments to things other than the church, but our tithe goes to the church.

You see, I think we have to be very careful here. We can so let other things claim our tithes and offerings that we fail to give the church the sort of support it deserves. We need to remember that Jesus instituted the church, that it is his body on earth to do his work. So, we have to keep those things in tension with the desire to support other things, which may in themselves be very valid words of the Lord and have his blessings.

So, I would say to you, your primary duty as a Christian is to support the church, which is the body of Jesus on earth, but there are other equally valid ministries that can and should have your secondary support.

A third reason I believe in tithing is because of what St. Paul says in I Timothy 6:10. There we read, "For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." That means a man's affection get misplaced. They get focused in on money. Did you ever stop to think what happened so many times in the New Testament because of money? What wrecked Judas? The Bible says he loved money and was a thief. He sold Jesus for a handful of silver. His downfall was money. Or here was the rich young ruler. He wanted to follow Jesus, so our Lord told him to get rid of what he had and to follow him. But he went away, the Bible says, very sad because he owned a lot. What was his downfall? Money. Or here are two respectable church members who own some property. They sell it in order to give the money to the church. But I guess inflation was present then, because they must have gotten a lot more for it than they expected. They must have decided, like Ananias and Saphira, that it was too much to give so they held back part. And their greed killed them. What got them? Money. Or here was a young assistant professor studying under the most famous teacher of that era--and perhaps of any era since. And young Demas betrayed Professor Paul. What tripped him up? Money. Or here is a business man who is prospering. His grain bins are full and the harvest is coming in. He tears down his old buildings to build large, new ones. But that night his soul is required of him. What was his downfall? Money.

Well, we could go on and on, but you get the point. The love of money can do dreadful things to us. But when you tithe it changes the focus of your affection. Jesus said that it was more blessed to give than to receive. And the man who is tithing, who is giving, is changing the focus of his affection from money to Jesus. Jesus once said that where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. I find that when people are giving at least a tithe of their possessions to the Lord, it turns their hearts to Jesus. He is becoming the treasure in their lives and that is where their hearts are.

I don't know about you, but I need that discipline in my life. I need that means of self-control so that money does not become the consuming passion of my life. If you are out in the jungle and there is a large herd of elephants with several very mean bull elephants, do you know how to stop them from charging? And the answer is, take away their credit cards. Well, there have been times in our lives when we have had to do that because things were getting out of control. We were satisfying our own wants and wishes and whims and desires. We were losing self-discipline and self-control. Tithing helps us keep our money in perspective and it gets our focus on Jesus. So I believe in tithing because I don't want to love money so much that it controls my life and, as St. Paul says, have my heart pierced with many pangs.

A fourth reason I believe in the tithe is because I am too poor not to tithe. I have a minister friend who tells a story that I really enjoy. It is the story of a member of his congregation that decided to go into business for himself and he came by to ask his pastor to pray with him about it. He covenanted with God that if God would bless him, he would tithe on all the profits of his new company. Well, things went along and God did prosper his business. Faithfully, each year he brought his tithe to the Lord. But as the years went by the company became more and more successful until at last its profits were very substantial indeed. That year the man came to his pastor with a check, but it was not very large. "Surely," said the pastor, "this isn't a tithe of your income?" "No," replied the man, "our profits were so large this year that I felt I couldn't afford to give that much money away." "Well," said his pastor, "Let's pray again. This time we will ask the Lord to bless you and reduce your profits so that you can afford to tithe again."

I am sure that man got the point! But I am too poor not to tithe. Let me tell you why. The Bible tells us that God makes a promise. He promises us that if we bring the tithes to the store house, he will open the windows of heaven and pour out such a blessing that we won't be able to contain it. Now, I believe that promise and so I tithe. Would you tithe if there were no promise? I have no way of knowing what sickness I have been spared; no way of knowing what tragedies I have missed; no way of knowing what disasters I have avoided; no way of knowing what pitfalls I have been spared. I cannot image what expenses would have been mine, what unexpected costs would have come my way, if I did not tithe. I know God is blessing me and protecting me and prospering me. I could never afford all of the things that might have happened to me, so I need God's blessing, I need his promise that he will open the windows of heaven and pour those blessings out on me. Yes, I'm far too poor not to tithe. I couldn't afford life otherwise.

Sometimes people give expecting to get some profit or some tangible material blessing. I think the greatest blessings in my life have been things that never happened to me. Let me share one example of how it works. I have a cousin down in Florida and she and her husband are dedicated Christians who have tithed for years. This year Sydney and I kept our Christmas cards, including one from them, and during the year, each night we would take several and pray for those persons. We sent cards each time to the people, telling them we had prayed for them. Not long after we prayed for this family, we got a letter back and she told us that on the day she got our card, she had gotten a similar card from a friend in Texas, saying the friend had prayed for them on the same day we had. She wrote, "I don't know what tragedy God was sparing me from through your prayers, but I rejoice that on that day when friends in Jesus were lifting us up, nothing bad happened in our lives." Well, that's the way it is. We are all surrounded by evil forces at work in our world that can bring us sickness and trouble and sorrow and financial disaster. How many times has God spared me or protected me? I have no way of knowing. But I do know this, I'm too poor not to tithe. And when those bad things do come into my life from time to time, I know I could never handle them except for God blessing me in the midst of them and out of the worst that life can do to me, he is bringing good.

How about you? As you are thinking about your commitment to Jesus and his church, what will you do about your financial stewardship? I hope that you will love Jesus so much that you will at least tithe. I suspect most of us are too poor not to tithe, anyway!