



Malachi 3:6-12

“Can a Man Rob God?”

6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts;

12 "And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

In this whole book there has been a constant interchange between God and his people. The people have accused God again and again of being unfair to them, of not loving them, of favoring the other nations when they should have been favored. The Lord on the other hand has been showing them that what they view as curses are only his chastenings for their backsliding and disobedience. He has been a father to them, and as Heb. 12:6 puts it: "***For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.***" But instead of receiving his rebukes in this manner, and repenting they are becoming increasingly sullen.

Now the Lord points out his constancy, the fact that it is not he who changes. The people of God have accused Him in essence of being fickle. They say he has withdrawn his affections from them, when in fact nothing could be further from the case. It is not God who changes, he has fixed his love on his elect people and his mercy endures forever, it is changeless and timeless. His heart is always pure and constant. He even points out that the fact that they were never destroyed was solely due to the fact that he does not change, and his mercy and longsuffering endure. In essence he says, it is a good thing for you that your accusations are false and that I don't change, that's why you aren't consumed and destroyed.

But then the Lord tells them what is really going on, it isn't that I'm inconstant and fickle, it your heart that is constantly turning away from me. "***Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them.***" Here the Lord could point them to the book of Judges with its testimony of cycles of apostasy. The Lord being constant in his love, the people turning away to serve false gods, being smitten and afflicted, then crying out to Him again for deliverance, and being saved from their enemies. But always after he delivered them, no less than 7 times the same line is repeated "***Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.***"

So often I have seen exactly this cycle repeated in the lives of Christians, they will come asking "Why has the Lord gone so far away from me? It isn't fair!" and then nine times out of ten when you begin to question them you find it is not God who has withdrawn from them. They have walked away from him in any number of ways, and have been surprised and shocked that He hasn't followed them into their backsliding.

Then you have to gently point out to them who first left who...

IV. *True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God's withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light:[15] yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived:[16] and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.[17]*
WCF 18.4

When he points this out and invites them to return, as God always invites the wandering sheep who have gone astray, the prodigals who have gone off to the far country to come back, what is their reply?

It is this indignant "***In what way shall we return?***" What are you talking about God, we haven't gone anywhere!

Now, the Lord has already pointed out how they have been offering up profane sacrifices, diseased and blind animals on his altars, how their betrayal of their wives has led to the fires of the sacrifice being drowned in a sea of tears and generally how their worship, and preaching, and practice has become a mockery. In this at least you would think they would see room for reform! But no, they require more evidence.

So now God again shows them he is not blind to what they have been up to, he says, you have been robbing me.

Again we have the feigned shock. What? How can men rob God? Didn't you say O God in Psalm 50-

10 For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills.

11 I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine.

12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.

So how can we rob you? And the Lord answers in your tithes and offerings! Then he says, why O Israel do you think that you are being devoured. Why your harvests are so poor. Why you are being cursed.

There is an ancient Jewish parable about an Eagle that swooped down one day to steal meat that had been placed on the altar as a burnt offering to God. She snatched it up and swiftly flew back to her nest in triumph. What the eagle failed to see was that a burning coal from the fire stuck to the underside of the meat, and when she dropped it into the nest to feed her young, the nest caught fire and her nest and eaglets were consumed.

Men, think that they can defraud God, but it is inevitably a losing proposition. We only end up robbing ourselves of blessings and bringing curses down on our heads. So it was with the men of Malachi's time so it is today.

We were talking over lunch today about how it is possible that there has never been a period in history when the church was weaker and more divided. Why is that? Well one possible explanation is offered by *George Barna the Christian pollster revealed in a 2004 poll that the typical American adult watches football games more often than he attends worship services, and tithing, the practice of giving a tenth of one's income to the church, is "pitifully uncommon" among Christians and "almost nonexistent" among people younger than 40. In fact, only about 7 percent of all born-again Christians tithe*

Tithing which should be ordinary has become extraordinary in the church of Jesus Christ:

We read this morning about a Pharisee who had made fasting (which should be extraordinary) a constant duty...

"it is a good rule, neither to make ordinary duties extraordinary or rare, nor yet extraordinary duties ordinary: the doing of the first ordinarily issueth in the loss of them and quite leaving the off; the latter in a formal, lifeless performance of them." – Matthew Poole

The church is in the process of robbing God, and as a result we have stifled the blessings that should be ours. Yet I dare say we would react the same way on the whole if the Lord called us to return. What need do we have of repentance, revival, and reform we might say.

But some might say, Tithing now that was an OT practice, not a New Testament practice:

1 Cor 16: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

Here Paul is instructing the members of the church that it is their duty to give as the Lord has prospered them for the relief of needy members of the church. He instructs that this collection should be held on the first day of the week (i.e. Sunday) and presumably this took place at the time when the members of the church gathered together to worship the Lord. We learn from this that an acceptable part of our Sabbath day worship is the *collection* wherein Christians set aside a portion of the riches that God has given for the relief of the poor, the furtherance of the Gospel, and the "cost of all the Church's expenses."

Gal. 6:6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

1 Cor. 9:3 My defense to those who examine me is this:

4 Do we have no right to eat and drink?

5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about?

10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?

12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?

14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

1 Tim. 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

We see that blessings followed the generosity of the church in her giving.

Acts 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

"No man ever yet lost anything by serving God with a whole heart, or gained anything by serving him with half a one. We may compromise with conscience for half the price, but God will not endorse the compromise, and like Ananias and Sapphira, we will lose not only what we thought we had purchased so cheaply, but also the price we paid for it. Once cause of the spiritual barrenness of the church is the parsimony of its members."

What is the purpose of our giving? That the Gospel of Jesus Christ might go forth!

Jer. 3:22 "Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backslidings." "Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God.