

"A SIN WE SELDOM MENTION"

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and 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. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground: neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts."

--- Malachi 3:7-12

At the time Malachi wrote these words there was a great spiritual declension in Israel. The words, "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from Mine ordinances and have not kept them," summarize a condition of spiritual decline that had been existing throughout Israel for a long time. After mentioning the wide condition of spiritual dearth, the prophet probes into the cause and prescribes the remedy for it.

Israel's spiritual condition was well reflected in the material condition of the land. Malachi said it was directly connected with her refusal to obey the law of the tithe. This disobedience involves two things -- rebellion and robbery. God does not prosper and bless those who rebel against Him. Robbery is not a matter of expediency, but it is a clear and distinct matter of immorality, dishonesty, and low ethics. This sin of robbing God is one that is seldom mentioned today. His Word certainly directs our attention to it now. It says that we commit the sin of robbing God when we withhold tithes and offerings from Him. Concerning this sin, which is seldom mentioned, I shall endeavor to point out a very few facts.

I. The Causes of It.

1. Lack of knowledge.

Some have not had their attention called to the fact that one tenth of their incomes belongs to God. In such cases, preachers and teachers are partially responsible for their robbing God.

2. Dishonesty.

Some constantly try to be dishonest.

3. Stinginess.

Some strive to keep from parting with any money.

4. Ingratitude.

Many do not appreciate what the Lord has done for them. They act as though He actually owed it to them.

5. Selfishness.

Some think only in terms of self and what they can get. They take the attitude that the Lord and the world owe them a living, and that everything which comes into their possession actually belongs to them.

6. Unwillingness.

Some simply do not want to and, therefore, refuse to obey the Lord. They even assume the responsibility of disobedience.

7. Alienation of heart from God.

"Ye are cursed with a curse."

II. The Curse.

They robbed God, and yet they seemed to be unconscious of the evil of their conduct. Sin so blinds the eyes and blunts the conscience that men often do wrong, and scarcely know that they are doing it. But sin brings its own punishment. God blighted their fields and blemished their flocks, so that the land groaned beneath the curse. And the only way to remove the curse was for them to turn from their evil ways.

III. The Consequences of It.

1. Loss of influence for good.
2. Loss of self-respect.
3. A positive hindrance to the work of God's cause.
4. A consciousness of guilt.
5. A withholding of Divine blessings.

Bad times are the result of past unfaithfulness on the part of people toward God. You may be reaping sparingly because you have sown sparingly. Our sins close the windows of heaven against us. God will open those windows of heaven against us. God will open those again if we will trust, honor, and obey Him.

Robbery means taking either by fraud or violence that which belongs to another, and appropriating it to our own use. How wicked to rob a man who has done us a kindness; but how much more so to rob a God who loves us with an everlasting love! It is a fearful crime to rob God, and yet it is done every day, and that by his professed friends as well as by His open enemies. God is robbed whenever His requirements are disregarded, whenever His rights are resisted, whenever His demands are refused, and whenever the interests of His kingdom are neglected.

a. Men rob God of affection -- "My son, give Me thy heart."

b. Men rob God of worship.

Man is made to worship. God alone is the proper object of worship. To Him we owe reverence, homage, and praise. But to withhold these or transfer them to the creature is to rob God.

c. Men rob God of time -- Sabbath.

d. Men rob God of talents.

All gifts are bestowed by the Almighty One, and they should be improved and consecrated to Him. To devote them to sinful purposes and unlawful pursuits is to rob God.

e. Men rob God of service.

f. Men rob God of tithes and offerings.

IV. The Cure For It.

1. Return to God.

"Return unto Me, and I will return unto you." If you will return in penitence, He will return in blessings.

2. Pay God His dues.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."

- (1) The tithe is the Lord's. Leviticus 27:30. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord."

The tithe belongs to the Lord as interest on resources entrusted to us. It belongs to Him also as rent upon grounds and properties held and occupied by us. It belongs to Him as His share in a partnership business. He furnishes the capital, creates and maintains us as His working partners, and blesses the enterprise upon which we embark, with conditions that make success possible. He, the Silent Partner, requires the tithe as His share. God will not always bless those who rob Him.

In our text, God complains of robbery from two sources: -- tithes and offerings. The tithing God requires; the offerings are free-will gifts over and above the tithes. Hence in this demand, God speaks of tithes only. Everything is built on the ownership of God and the stewardship of man.

Tithes meant money. The produce of the field was the Jews' money. Tithes meant time. If the produce represented money, the cultivation of the produce represented time. Tithes meant talent. The man who would succeed in cultivation must use his talents in mastering and applying the principles of agriculture. God asks for the produce and the time, but He demands the talents also. Have you the talent of speech? God wants it. Of song? He requires it. Of organization? He asks it. Of literary ability? He will use it. Of humbler working power? He seeks it, and if you withhold it, you are robbing God. "Bring ye ALL the tithes into the storehouse."

Surely, you don't want to take and use that which is not yours!

(2) You will be the loser if you don't tithe.

You can't do wrong and get by. Boy wrecked car and heard Uncle Dave Macon playing and singing that song. If you take that which is God's and use it for self or any other purpose, you will lose more than you take from Him.

Deacon made sixty dollars -- refused to tithe -- next morning drove car over culvert and cost him \$110.00. Lord sees to it that some of you don't get certain jobs because he knows you would rob Him of His part if you get them.

Some of you won't deal honestly with the Lord, so some of your customers beat you. Reap as you sow.

If you succeed in making it, and then rob God of His part, He will see to it that your expenses will be increased more than that amount, and it will go and won't do you any good after all.

Misfortunes, bad luck thefts, dishonesty, etc. Can't put anything over on the Lord. He has a way of taking care of His own. Man withheld five dollar contribution; another made a fifty. One man decided to quit paying to church because he didn't like the pastor -- withheld sixty dollars -- another put it in the collection plate next Sunday.

(3) You will be abundantly blessed if you do pay God His dues.

"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." The figure is that of a great flood. This blessing means prosperity, honor, and happiness. "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground: neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts."

History is full of instances where God richly blessed those who honored Him with their substance, but I want to call your attention to one which is most striking indeed. Many years ago a lad of sixteen years left home to seek his fortune. All of his worldly possessions were tied up in a bundle, which he carried in his hand. As he trudged along he met an old neighbor, the captain of a canal boat, who asked the lad what he expected to do. He told his friend that the only trade he knew anything about was soap and candle making, at which he had helped his father at home.

The old man said: "Some one will be the leading soap-maker in New York. It can be you as well as anyone. I hope it will be. Be a good man; give your heart to Christ; give to the Lord what belongs to Him of every dollar you earn; make an honest soap; give a full pound; and I am certain you will yet be a prosperous man."

Arriving in the great city of New York, homeless and friendless, he remembered those parting words of advice. He was led through them to give himself to Christ and unite with the church. The first dollar he made brought up the question of the old captain. He gave the Lord one tenth of it. He said, "Ten cents of every dollar is 'holy unto the Lord'." After a few years William became a partner in the business, and after a few more, the sole owner. He was blessed wonderfully. He gave two tenths and the more he gave the more he prospered. Schools which bear his name now are monuments to his benevolence. William Colgate gave millions of dollars to the Lord's cause and left a name that will never die.