

# Will a Man Rob God?

Lynn Parker

The setting for Malachi's great question can be summed up in this manner. Babylonian Captivity is no longer fresh on the minds of the Israelites. Jerusalem has been restored, the temple has been rebuilt, and prosperity has replaced despair. No, they no longer serve Baal, but they are again in very real danger of leaving Jehovah God. The Jews go through the motions of ritualistic religion--saying and doing the right things in form--but their collective heart is just not set on fervent, zealous pursuit of holiness, righteousness, and love of God. Growing spiritually complacent and increasingly worldly, God's people fall down at idols of pleasure, indifference, and materialism.

Rather than honoring God with their firstfruits--their best--Israel was indicted for offering to God "polluted bread" (Malachi 1:7) and sacrifices that were blind, lame, and sick (Malachi 1:8). The Law clearly commanded: "But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves of sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein" (Leviticus 22:20-21).

In the midst of this message of admonition and rebuke comes the haunting question of Malachi 3:8: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." No person in his right mind thinks of attempting to rob Fort Knox of the gold stored there. Will man be so arrogant, so presumptuous, so irrational, so stupid to rob Almighty God of that which belongs to Him? The answer, sadly, is "Yes." Man has robbed God for centuries. The Israelites did it, modern man does it, and some members of the Lord's body do it--often without a pang of conscience. Notice in Malachi 3:8-10 the salient points in this confrontation between Deity and Israel.

1. First, the accusation of sin: "Ye have robbed me."
2. Second, the denial by God's people: "Wherein have we robbed thee?"
3. Third, note the consequences of their sin: "Ye are cursed with a curse".
4. Fourth, see the remedy of repentance: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."
5. Last, note the promise of blessing: "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."

One need not dig too deeply to see the modern application of the ancient principles set forth by Malachi. Our entire society is enthralled with self-gratification. Indeed, "One Nation Under God" has become a nation who has no time for religion, even though righteousness would exalt it (Proverbs 14:34). Hit the golf ball, fish at the lake, make time for aerobics, take the two-week vacation, run the kids to Little League, all the while expecting God to be satisfied with our leftovers! It is tragic to see congregations make the same budget each year when the brethren in the congregation receive raises, take on more credit card payments, buy new cars, and live in finer houses. All the while, mission workers grovel for crumbs that fall from the rich man's table and preachers cry for more workers to help in the kingdom. In many congregations, the various programs of work are supported by the same blessed few brethren. The majority doesn't have the time--or perhaps the zeal-- to serve God.

When considering Malachi's rebuke, don't be too quick in judging ancient Israel. The Lord's church also needs to hear this lesson from the prophet. The Israelites are, at the time of Malachi's work, the spiritual equivalent of the Laodiceans (Rev 3:14) who were so self-deluded and lukewarm they incurred the sternest of rebukes from the Lord. The Laodiceans were in denial, thinking themselves to be spiritual giants when the Lord portrayed them as "lukewarm." Israel may have thought that "no one will notice" as they gave God the culls, but the fact is that God's "eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job 34:21). Jesus told the Laodiceans, "I know thy works" (Rev 3:15). God knows what money is in our hands, what effort we could be expending, what opportunities come our way, and what talent we have. A few examples are in order...

1. A preacher contacts a wealthy brother in another location for help in a new work. The brother declined, saying all his money was being poured into the local work where he lived. Several months later, it is learned that the wealthy man gave only twenty dollars each week to the local work, and when asked to help in a coordinated effort of the local congregation, he gave not so much as a dime! "Will a man rob God?"
2. A teenage member of the church has his own job, a steady income, a nice car, but does not give of his means at all, saying, "My parents do my giving for me." "Will a man rob God?"
3. A couple takes on extra jobs to provide for a vacation cottage in a resort area, but now are so busy either working to pay for it, or spending every free moment there, that they rarely show up for work efforts and visitation of the local church. "Will a man rob God?"
4. A member of the church has the talent and the knowledge to teach Bible class but because of "burn out," lethargy, or just plain laziness, he refuses to lift a finger to help in the greatest work known to man. "Will a man rob God?"
5. A family sits down to an evening of television and telephone until they can barely hold their eyes open, then drag off to bed. They are too tired

to study their Bible, too indifferent to discuss spiritual matters, and too carnal to pray together. They rise up on Sunday morning unprepared for Bible classes and too sleepy to worship acceptably. "Will a man rob God?"

The fact is that we often duplicate Israel's sin in our own lives. Neglect (Jam 4:17), indifference (Rev 3:16), and love of the world (1 John 2:15-17) can incur the wrath of Heaven and withhold the blessings of God from our homes and congregations (cf Jeremiah 5:25). God's promise of blessings are conditional. The beauty of God's message is that when we become "zealous and repent" (Rev 3:19), God will open the windows of heaven and shower us with the blessings we need (Malachi 3:10; Matt 6:33).

It is not enough to attend church services and pronounce yourself faithful. God requires the best from you, and He will accept nothing less. Serve Him joyfully and energetically. Giving that truly costs us little or nothing (2 Sam 24:24) may be a popular way to ease the conscience but it's also a sure road to hell.

--Lynn Parker