

XII. Covenant Robbery

18-Feb-07 Malachi 3:7-17

Theme: We rob God whenever we do not give Him completely of our time, resources, words, and hearts.

Key Verses: Malachi 3:8-10 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. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰Bring 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.”

Review

Last week we looked at Malachi 2:17-3:6. This section begins with the people of God complaining about God’s injustice. All they can see is their own relative poverty and the prosperity of the pagan nations around them. In their twisted minds, they don’t understand that the lack of God’s blessing in their lives is due to their own sinfulness; instead, they blame God and think He is absent from their lives.

However, God is not “missing-in-action,” and He announces through Malachi that He soon will be coming into their midst. Because the Levites had failed in their responsibilities, God says that He is going to send another messenger of the covenant, a messenger that is everything the Levites were not. The messenger that Malachi speaks of is the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord. He comes to purify His own people through the refiner’s fire and with the launderer’s soap.

Covenant purification occurs when God the Son comes in the midst of His people to refine them and to make them acceptable. He will purge out their covenant faithlessness and their adultery, both physical and spiritual. He will eliminate their sorceries and false worship so that their grain offerings – the sacrifice of themselves and their work – will be a sweet savor and a soothing aroma to the LORD. Although Jesus will draw near in judgment, because He is immutable—He does not change—He will not utterly destroy them for their sin. Instead, He is engaged in refining and reforming His covenant people.

This work of Christ to purify His church will continue until He returns a final time. Whenever you pass through the fires of adversity in your life, rejoice; for although those times are not physically pleasant, they are spiritually profitable. After all, the reason Jesus puts us through the crucible of His refining fire is so that we will become beautiful reflections of His glory.

Introduction

In the previous section of Malachi, we saw how the people complained about God’s absence. They blamed God for their relative poverty and the lack of obvious blessing in their lives. In the section before us today (3:7-17), God will demonstrate the true path to blessing: being faithful in our tithes and in our words. It is because God’s people had robbed their LORD of tithes and offerings that He had sent leanness into their lives. It is because God’s people had robbed their LORD of respect by their harsh words that it seemed as if He favored wicked pagans over them. But the problem was not with God, nor is it ever with Him. The problem always lies in us – His people.

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

Malachi has already demonstrated in the second section of his book (1:6-14) how the people of God had robbed Him in worship by offering worthless sacrifices (1:7-8). Chiasmically, this sixth section of Malachi is parallel to 1:6-14 and contains a similar theme: Malachi reminds us that we rob God whenever we do not give Him completely of our time, resources, words, and hearts.

Exposition

A. Robbing God of Tithes (3:7-12)

1. The Charge (3:7-9)

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?’ ⁸Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation” (Malachi 3:7-9).

Remember, one of the biggest problems with God’s people in Malachi’s day was their self-righteousness. They believed that they were right with God, even when they were not. After all, they were God’s covenant people. They offered sacrifices; they said their prayers; they followed the law. And as a result, they believed that God owed them – that He was required to bless them materially for their efforts. What they didn’t understand was that their works were feeble and contemptuous. They couldn’t earn God’s favor, and He was not pleased with them. So they interpreted their relative poverty as God’s fault rather than theirs. They blamed God and accused Him of injustice.

As we saw last week, it was not God who had changed, for He is immutable – He cannot change (3:6). But in a sense, the people of God have not changed either. They were exactly the same as their forefathers. Israel always had the tendency to drift away from their covenant LORD; it had been happening since the covenant at Mt. Sinai was first ratified. Remember the golden calf (Ex. 32)? The entire history of Old Testament Israel was one of rebellion against God, followed by periods of discipline and then repentance. That’s why God reminds them that “from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them” (3:7a).

The remedy for God’s people in Malachi’s day, and the remedy for God’s people of any generation is the same: we must return to God; we must repent of our sin and seek the forgiveness that only God can give. This is the constant message of the prophets. It is even the theme of the entire book of Hosea – “return to your loving Husband.” For example:

⁷Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

⁶So you, by the help of your God, return; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually (Hosea 12:6).

¹²“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” ¹³So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm (Joel 2:12-13).

³Therefore say to them, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Return to Me,” says the LORD of hosts, “and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 1:3).

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

Malachi stands at the end of a long tradition of prophets when he quotes the words of Zechariah, written about 100 years previously: “‘Return to Me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of hosts” (3:7b). However, the chutzpah of Malachi’s generation exceeds that of previous ones, because they immediately challenge the command: “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’” (3:7c). The inference is clear – they deny their need to return to God; rather, they believe it is God who needs to return to them!

Once again, we see the patience and long-suffering of God. Rather than throw the lot of them overboard, He gives them a concrete example in verse 8 how they can return. God says, “You want to know how you can return to Me? Well, for starters, you can stop robbing Me. I know it sounds incredible, but that’s what you have done – you have robbed Me of what is rightfully mine!”

Now it should come as no surprise that there is an immediate objection from God’s people, disputing God’s latest claim. When God says they have robbed Him, their reflexive response is to ask, “In what way have we robbed You?” (3:8b). However, God is ready for them and gives them the answer: “In tithes and offerings.”

The Jews of Malachi’s day didn’t understand why they were poor and their pagan neighbors were better off. Tithing was at the crux of the matter. They had robbed God by not bringing the entire tithe into the storehouse and distributing it properly (3:10; see Neh. 13:4-13). As a consequence, God cursed them (3:9) and made their lives difficult (*cp.* Amos 4:6-11).

What is a tithe? The word “tithe” means “a tenth.” This is the basic starting point for giving. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20), and Jacob vowed at Bethel to give a tenth of his possessions to God (Gen. 28:22). The Mosaic law picks up on this percentage and requires that a tenth of all the produce of the land and the herds be dedicated to God as “holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30, 32).

In the Mosaic economy, how was the tithe used? Well, the primary function of the tithe was to support the Levites (Num. 18:21, 24). Remember, the Levites received no inheritance of land in Canaan; instead, they served God both at His sanctuary and as His messengers, scattered throughout the land to teach the law to the people of God. They were full-time ministers of the Word, and the tithe supported their gospel ministry. It is important to note that the Levites were not exempt from the principle of tithing. Of the tithes that they received, they were in turn commanded to offer a tenth to the priests (Num. 18:26-28).

But the tithes also served another purpose in ancient Israel. In addition to supporting the priests and the Levites, the tithes of God’s people were used to take care of widows, orphans, and strangers (Dt. 14:28-29). Of course, Malachi has just condemned Israel in 3:5 for exploiting these very groups of helpless people, and now the means of their sin is clear – they have been faithless in tithing.

The Hebrew word Malachi uses for “offerings,” *tərûmāh*, is often translated as “heave offering” in the Old Testament. This word is different from *minəchāh*, or the grain offering used elsewhere in Malachi (1:10-11, 2:12-13; 3:3-4). The English translation of “heave offering” is probably derived from the actions of the priest in raising the offering upward towards God (see Num. 15:20).

The “heave offering” is often used to describe gifts or contributions to God that were set aside specifically for the priests. Sometimes these offerings were grain products (*e.g.*, Lev. 7:13-14),

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

but more often the heave offerings were part of the sacrificial animal that the priests were allowed to eat (e.g., Lev. 7:32). In fact, in the Pentateuch where the principles of tithing are given, the tithe is usually described in terms of the *tərûmāh* or heave offering. For example:

²⁴For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering (*tərûmāh*) to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.’” ²⁵Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁶“Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: ‘When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering (*tərûmāh*) of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe (Numbers 18:24-26).

There is a strong parallel between the tithes and heave offerings of the Old Testament and our tithes and offerings today. For example, both are used for the support of full-time gospel ministers and the work of the gospel ministry. The tithes and offerings of Covenant PCA go first and foremost to support our ministers, Pastor Roane and Pastor Zugg. Our tithes and offerings also support others called to full or part-time ministry, such as our missionaries, including Covenant members Brenda Carter, Jane, and Ian Coulter. Of course, our tithes and offerings also support the ongoing operations of Covenant, but they also are used to help those in need, just like in ancient Israel. For example, our “Deacon’s Fund” is used to provide financial assistance to those who need it, both within and outside of the church.

2. The Test (3:10-12)

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. ¹¹And 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 (Malachi 3:10-12).

Although God commands His people to be faithful in tithing, He does so by means of a challenge or test: “Try me now in this.” Rightfully, He deserves everything we have, for it all belongs to Him. We often hear that He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10b), but God is more explicit than that just a few verses later: “For the world is Mine, and all its fullness” (Ps. 50:12b). He is the Creator; everything is His. All He is asking for is for us to give 10% back. He is graciously allowing us to keep the other 90%. And yet, just like the ancient Jews, we often tightly cling to all that God has given us, reluctant to let any of it go.

In God’s challenge, He describes three blessings that follow from faithful tithing: 1) sufficiency; 2) security; and 3) satisfaction. The first blessing is *sufficiency*. God promises in 3:10 to open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessings upon His faithful children. The Jews complained that the heathen were better off financially than they were. They saved every penny they earned, but it was never enough. The more they kept for themselves, the less they had. And so God shares the secret of financial security and blessing: If you want to keep it, give it away!

³⁸Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you (Luke 6:38).

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

Have you ever taken God up on His challenge to tithe? To see if He would open the windows of heaven and pour out a superabundance of blessings upon you? I have, and I can tell you that God is faithful to His promise. When I first started working after college, I decided that we would begin tithing. However, I soon had a financial problem. My dental insurance hadn't started yet, and I had a dental bill for about \$350. How was I going to pay it? Back then, \$350 was a large amount of money to me. Rather than use tithe money to pay the dentist, I determined I would continue tithing to the church and prayed that God would help with the dental bill. Within two months, my company initiated a large stock purchase program, buying shares of stock back from employees at a premium. Those who had been working for the company a long time made a lot of money. However, I had only been there a couple of months and had not yet qualified for the stock purchase program, so I was entitled to nothing. But the company was generous, and paid \$500 to all new employees in my position. See how God answered my prayer? After tithing on the bonus, and having income tax and other deductions taken out, I had exactly enough to pay the dentist!

Now God is not promising that if you tithe, you will become a millionaire or that you will live in the lap of luxury. But He is promising to provide for you and meet your needs:

²⁵I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread (Psalm 37:25).

This principle of sufficiency leads into the second promise God gives to tithers: *security*. The economy of Israel was primarily based on agriculture. So pestilence and drought were two major concerns. If the crop failed, then economic poverty and famine would follow. In 3:11, God is saying that He will provide security to faithful tithers, so they don't have to worry about crop failure. If God's people were faithful in tithing, God would be faithful to provide them with everything they needed. Being faithful means we don't have to worry about tomorrow – God will take care of us. Jesus teaches us the same principle:

³¹“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Matthew 6:31-33).

The third blessing that flows from faithful tithing is *satisfaction*. The sufficiency and security of God's blessing upon His faithful people lead to contentment in your situation. Instead of complaining about how everyone is better off than you are, you will be satisfied because you live in “a delightful land” (3:12). Notice how the satisfaction of God's people becomes obvious to those around them: “All nations will call you blessed.”

The Jews of Malachi's day were guilty of covenant robbery. They robbed God of His tithes and offerings. They robbed the priests and Levites of their rightful income (although by their conduct they did not deserve it!). They robbed the widow and the orphan and the stranger in their gates from the financial assistance they desperately needed. But most of all, they robbed themselves of the blessings of God. By choosing to keep their tithe instead of give it to God, they lost out on His sufficiency, security, and satisfaction.

B. Robbing God of Respect (3:13-15)

¹³“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ ¹⁴You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it

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that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free” (Malachi 3:13-15).

God called the Jews of Malachi’s day to return to Him (3:7). They immediately asked how they should return. God gave one specific area in verses 8-12: they could stop robbing God of tithes and offerings. In verses 13-15, God gives a second area of practical application: He calls them to stop robbing Him of respect through their harsh words (3:13). This accusation is reminiscent of 2:17, where God says that their words weary Him.

True to form, they dispute this latest claim from God, asking for examples of harsh words. God obliges by giving two cases. In the first case, they bemoan the futility of serving God. They say, “It is useless to serve God” (3:14). Consistent with the rest of the book of Malachi, the Jews don’t see any results out of their so-called “obedience.” In their self-righteousness, they believe they have kept the law and are worthy of being blessed by God. In their description of walking “as mourners before the LORD of hosts,” they are saying they have approached God in humility. They claim they have lived according to the command of the prophet Micah:

⁸He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Of course, as we have already seen from Malachi’s indictment, they have done nothing of the sort! They have offered worthless sacrifices, they have been unfaithful to their wives and to God’s covenant, they have complained and slandered God, they have robbed Him of His rightful tithes and offerings, and yet they claim they have served the LORD in humility! Once again, Malachi reveals their hypocrisy in their failed attempt to blame God for their own shortcomings.

Their second statement is even harsher than the first one: they again accuse God of favoring the proud and the wicked (*cp.* 2:17). But they go even one step further – they put the LORD their God to the test. God had told them to test Him in the manner of faithful tithing. But rather than accept that challenge, they create another one: tempting God to let the wicked go free and unpunished for their sins. Their claim is that the more wicked a person is, the more blessed he is of God. Of course, this is nonsense, for everyone will ultimately pay for their sins. It is also a dangerous statement because it is made in direct disobedience to the Law of God:

¹⁶You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah (Deuteronomy 6:16; *cp.* Mt. 4:7).

Through their words and heart attitudes, God’s people were robbing Him of the respect that was His due. They despised His name (1:6), His worship, His covenant, and His Word. Was it any wonder that they were not blessed by God?

C. Remnant Response (3:16-17)

¹⁶Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. ¹⁷“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him” (Malachi 3:16-17).

Lest we think that all was gloom and doom in Malachi’s day, in 3:16-17 we get a splash of good news. Although Malachi has condemned the nation as a whole, there still remained a faithful

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remnant. They are described as “those who feared the LORD.” This fear was not based on guilt or terror, but on respect for God. Those who fear the LORD are those who worship Him reverently and with respect.

The remnant is also described as those “who meditate on His name.” This means that God was first and foremost in their lives. Their hearts and their lives were focused on Him, in obedience to the great commandment of the law:

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

In contrast to the majority of the Jews who wearied God with their harsh words, the remnant spoke to one another in encouraging, respectful words. Unlike the harsh words against God which Malachi has condemned, the words of the remnant were full of life and hope. While the critical words of the Jews robbed God of respect, the words of the remnant were pleasing to the LORD, because their hearts were in the right place. Their words were heard by God and they were received, like the sweet savor or aroma of a pleasing sacrifice.

Malachi is reminding us here that it is not enough to refrain from complaining about God; we need to be active in speaking about the LORD and His work in our lives. All too often, we compartmentalize our lives and save the “Christian talk” only for Sunday morning. Malachi is challenging us to have God-centered conversations every day. Bible studies and prayer meetings are excellent ways for us to gather together throughout the week and speak godly words to one another. Let us take advantage of these opportunities.

The “book of remembrance” mentioned by Malachi in verse 16 is generally understood in one of three ways. First, the kings of Persia kept a book recording special services rendered to them (*cp.* Es. 6:1-2). Thus, the book of remembrance could be a record of the remnant’s righteous deeds, to serve as a reminder for their future reward. Secondly, rather than a description of their deeds, the book of remembrance could be a record of the names of those who feared God and served Him. This idea is found in Revelation 20:12, where the names of the righteous are written in the Book of Life. The third interpretation of the book of remembrance is that this book or scroll is a covenant renewal document (per Jordan). In other words, the remnant is recommitting themselves to fear the LORD and serve Him.

Understanding the “book of remembrance” as a covenant renewal document makes sense in context, because the next verse uses language reminiscent of the Mosaic covenant. Malachi makes clear that the remnant are considered a precious possession by God, just as He did when He claimed Israel for His own at Mt. Sinai:

⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6a).

Back at Mt. Sinai, God tells Israel they are His own “special treasure.” To the remnant of Malachi’s day, He says the same thing. Although the KJV and NKJV say that God will make us His “jewels,” the Hebrew word is not as specific. Rather, it means “valued possession,” and it is the same Hebrew word translated as “special treasure” in Ex. 19:5. This language of possession

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is covenantal marriage language, which fits in with the overall theme and context of Malachi. We belong to God and no one else. We are to remain faithful to Him and Him alone.

However, the remnant is more than a prized possession to be stored on a shelf somewhere and admired from time to time. God also says that we are His sons! Way back in 1:6 at the beginning of the second section of his book, Malachi introduced us to the concept of sons who despise the name of God. Here, at the end of the sixth section of the book (chiastic balance!), Malachi describes true sonship as those who serve God and fear Him.

As we read these words in Malachi, we must remember that they apply to God's entire remnant, all those who fear Him and meditate on His name. If you are in Christ, then you are an adopted child of God and heir to these promises. A book of remembrance has been written for you, and you are God's special treasure. The apostle Peter adopts this same language when he speaks of the church:

⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own *special people*, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

What a wonderful privilege it is to be God's valued possession, His special treasure, His special people, to know that nothing can separate us from His love (*cp.* Rom. 8:35-39). Benton points this out: "We see here an expression of determination in the Lord's love for His people. They *will* be His. He is determined to have them in heaven and nothing will stop Him. That determination was such that Jesus went all the way to the cross for His people."

Conclusion

The passage before us today is about covenant robbery – robbing God of His tithes and offerings; robbing God of respect through ungodly words and hearts. As we conclude today, I'd like to make a few practical comments about robbing God, particularly with respect to tithing.

At Covenant, we have been very blessed to have a church full of "tithers." For fiscal year 2006, we ran a budget surplus of \$46,000; our tithes and offerings were 19% higher than our budget. Our per capita giving is nearly \$3500 per member. By comparison, the average per capita giving in the PCA is \$2263 (2005 data). These figures are not typical, to say the least in modern evangelical America.

If you go on the Internet and search on "tithing," you will find a number of well-meaning Christian sites which say that tithing was an Old Testament concept and is no longer valid in the New Testament age in which we live. They will claim that tithing is not mentioned in the New Testament, except for a few times where it clearly refers back to the Old Testament and does not carry this practice forward into the New Testament. What do we say to them?

I believe the basic error of those who say that tithing is not a New Testament mandate is a failure to see the essential continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The spiritual principles contained in the Old Testament are an expression of God's character and are still relevant for us today. That's why we are studying the Old Testament in this class – because it's still relevant! Unfortunately, many evangelical Christians fail to see the usefulness of the Old Testament in their daily lives, and they miss much of the richness of the Christian faith.

It is true that the New Testament does not have a lot to say about "tithing." But that is not to say that it is silent about sacrificial giving. In Romans 12:1, Paul exhorts us to present 100% of

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ourselves as a living sacrifice, not just 10%. Ten percent should be the lower limit on giving, not the upper limit! Consider how the New Testament encourages liberal giving:

⁶But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. ⁹As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever" [Ps. 112:9]. ¹⁰Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. ¹²For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, ¹³while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, ¹⁴and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul expounds many of the same principles found in Malachi 3:8-12. In verses 6-7 Paul establishes the Christian mandate of giving. While it is true Paul does not set a percentage, he does talk about giving "bountifully," with "all liberality," and "liberal sharing." Paul describes the usage of the giving for the support of the ministry (v. 12) and for meeting the needs of the poor (v. 9). And Paul even describes the same blessings of giving: sufficiency (vv. 8, 11), security (v. 10), and satisfaction recognized by others (v. 14).

The problem with those who advocate against the tithe is that they still acknowledge we should give financially. However, what is now the guideline? How do we know when we are giving liberally? If we say that 10% or a tithe is not a standard, then what inevitably will happen? We will give less and not more. We will give grudgingly and not gladly. We will grow more and more like the Jews of Malachi's day and less and less like the cheerful givers Paul describes. I found it extremely ironic after reading one lengthy treatise on the Internet about why New Testament Christians should not tithe, to see a link at the bottom of the page asking for charitable contributions for his ministry!

How do we rob God today? Well, of course we can rob Him by not giving at least 10% of our gross income as a tithe. But we can also rob God by not giving Him our time in prayer, in worship, in Bible study, in Sabbath keeping. We can rob God by not giving Him the proper respect in our words, attitudes, and conduct. We can rob God when we roll Him up and put Him in a little box and only take Him out on Sunday mornings. We can rob God when we don't have a thoroughly theocentric outlook on life, an outlook which mediates on Him. In summary, we rob God whenever we do not give Him completely of our time, resources, words, and hearts. After all, God has given us everything; He is only asking for a little bit back. Don't be cheap with your time and resources – God loves a cheerful giver!

Next week: Lesson 13 – Covenant Judgment – Malachi 3:17-4:6

Close in Prayer.