

Paying the Price

by Arthur Wallis

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rendering to God what is rightfully His, whether it be our devotion, time, gifts, or possessions, and challenges listeners to deal with procrastination and unbelief in their lives.

Scripture: Matthew 10:37

Topics: "Stewardship", "Tithing"

Description

Arthur Wallis preaches on the importance of giving God what is due, focusing on the areas where believers may unknowingly be robbing God: devotion, time, spiritual gifts, and money. Through Malachi's message, God challenges His people to return to Him and not withhold their tithes and offerings, emphasizing the need for genuine love and devotion. Wallis highlights the significance of dedicating time to seek God wholeheartedly and using spiritual gifts for His glory, warning against neglecting these precious resources. Additionally, he addresses the issue of material giving, stressing the importance of honoring God with our possessions and not withholding what rightfully belongs to Him.

Transcript

"Bring ye all the tithe 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." (Mal. 3:10, KJV)

Through His prophet Malachi, God told His people, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (3:7). One can almost hear their offended tone as the orthodox make answer, "Wherein shall we return? We have not wickedly departed from the Lord; why do You thus accuse us?" And the Lord answers them, His voice vibrant with anger and yet mellowed by grief, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me . . . in tithes and offerings . . . ,even this whole nation" (verses 8-9). God's people were robbing Him on a nationwide scale.

Is history repeating itself? How many earnest Christians are irreproachable when called to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's but are guilty when it comes to rendering unto God the things that are God's (Matt. 22:21)? Our consciences would be pricked if we failed to pay our debts to men, but there is often little or no concern that debts to the Lord remain unpaid. In this we must face the accusation of God, "Ye have robbed me."

The question that the unjust steward put to his master's creditors, "How much owest thou unto my lord?" (Luke 16:5), is a pertinent question for us to ask one another today. Can we forget that there was a day when the only feeling we had in our hearts toward God was one of enmity? He commended His love toward us while we were in rebellion against Him by sending His Son to die for us. With what infinitely long-suffering and relentless love He pursued us! We cannot estimate the grace, patience, goodness, and mercy that have followed us all our entire life. And much more is reserved for us in heaven. Let us now therefore consider four ways in which the church of Christ may be guilty of robbing God.

Devotion

It is possible that we are robbing God of the love and devotion that are His due. Of all the offerings we may bring to the Lord, the expression of our heart's affection is supreme. He cannot accept any substitute for this. He may have blessed us with many human loves, but He demands the firstfruits of our devotion for Himself. He is not content to accept the second best. He will tolerate no rival for that first place in the heart: "He that loveth father or mother [or anyone else] more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Is He likely to be satisfied with the pittance that is all too often confined to Sunday mornings, offered from cold hearts, and that we dare to call "worship"?

The following is an extract from *The Price They Paid*, an account of a movement of the Spirit among missionaries in India:

We were directed to Malachi 3:10, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse," and found that one tithe was worship and praise of Christ. The Lord brought our past lives into review before us, and we saw how continually we had denied Him fellowship, praise, and love. We spent a good deal of time in those days just worshipping and glorifying the Lamb upon the throne. The Lord commanded us also, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house." Again and again He comes to His house hungry for the meat-offering of our devotion, thirsty for the drink-offering of our love. He meets us there to receive His portion, and often receives nothing. Do we wonder that the heavens are shut up and there is no rain? He says, "Return unto Me with the warmth of true devotion, and I will return unto you with the rain of the Spirit."

Time

Are we robbing God of that portion of our time that He expects us to yield to Him in a special way? All our time is His, whether occupied with secular or domestic duties, and all should be done to His glory. But over and above this, God expects us to preserve time from the incessant claims of temporal things to devote utterly to Him and His interests. There is much to be possessed in the spiritual realm, priceless treasures to be sought and obtained. These can become ours only when we are prepared to give time to seeking them with undivided attention. "Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

At a certain missionary training college, the students are required to account for every minute of their day, that they might learn self-discipline in the use of time and how to use the moments to the best advantage. It may be a revelation to the reader to put pencil to paper in a similar way and account for the past week and how many of its 168 hours have really been devoted to God. Whether we submit to such a test or not, it is certain that it will all be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ when "every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor. 3:13).

Let us take heed to the apostle's words "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16, emphasis added). May we never have to regret the hours that we might have devoted to Him but squandered on ourselves and our selfish interests. Time lost can never be reclaimed. If we truly desire that God shall open the windows of heaven and pour out upon us the blessing of revival, then we must render to Him our time.

Spiritual Gifts

Gifts may be natural endowments that God desires to purify and set apart as holy unto Himself, or they may be spiritual gifts that are the manifestations of the Holy Spirit received by faith (1 Cor. 12). In either case, they are gifts from God, for "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (Jn. 3:27). This fact should keep every believer humble. It was to those who were zealous of gifts that Paul had to say, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). As the farmer scatters his seed in the expectation that it will return in harvest, even so God from whom comes "every good gift" (James 1:17), expects that each shall return to Him again, bringing an increase of honor and glory to His name.

It has been the continual objective of Satan to frustrate the purpose of God. Where human talents are made to serve selfish interests, to minister to our promotion, popularity, social prestige, or material prosperity, his evil purpose has in that measure been achieved. Yielded to God, however, our talents are transformed and multiplied beyond measure. "What is that in thine hand?" the Lord asked Moses (Ex. 4:2). It was only the humble rod of the shepherd. Cast down, it became a serpent. Taken up in faith, it became the rod of God by which signs and wonders were done in Egypt. If we yield our shepherd's staff to Him, He will transform it into the rod of God.

But we may also rob God by neglecting our spiritual gifts. The servant who hid his lord's talent in the earth was as guilty of robbing him as if he had invested it and misappropriated the dividends. Have we allowed temporal things so to swamp us, or personal considerations so to weigh with us, that our gifts have been unused? Let us own at once that we are guilty of robbing God, and take heed to the apostle's words "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1 Tim. 4:14). Let all who desire to use their spiritual gifts for God's glory observe well the words of Peter: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10, emphasis added).

Money

As we see in Malachi, God's people had been robbing Him in the matter of their material giving. The Israelites were commanded to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of all their increase (Prov. 3:9). God accuses His people of robbing Him in both tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8). They were speaking and acting as though they had fulfilled their obligation, but they were secretly withholding their natural gifts, imagining that they would escape detection and that no one would know. When they did give, they were despising God by offering Him beasts that were blind, lame, or sick (1:6-8).

How is it with us? We who live in the full blaze of Calvary and Pentecost, who are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, and who are looking for that blessed hope--shall we give less than they who only knew a shadow of the good things to come? Remember that God's love was measured by His giving (John 3:16; Eph. 5:25), and so is ours. The teaching of the New Testament is "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over. . . . For with the same measure ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).

Our heart attitude to our money and possessions may be an index to our spiritual state. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . ;but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . :for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Since it is obviously impossible for our hearts to be in two places at once, we cannot lay up treasure on earth and at the same time lay it up in heaven. Which are we doing? The command of Christ is "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Luke 12:33). Are we obeying it?

It is a spiritual tragedy when God's stewards feel free to lavish what has been entrusted to them on needless and even harmful luxuries while the interests of God's kingdom in many lands are declining through lack of means. Is it not clear that such Christians do not look upon their money as God's but as their own to use as they please? But instead of living up to our income, we are giving up to our income. When John Wesley commenced his ministry, he found that he could manage to live in simplicity and gave the rest away. Since he gave the Lord His due, is it any wonder that the heavens were opened on his ministry?

Is it possible that one vital reason why "the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit" (Hag. 1:10) today is that many of God's people are more wrapped up in their own earthly interests, than in those of His heavenly kingdom? It will be remembered that Achan committed a trespass in the devoted thing in that he secretly retained for himself that which should have been devoted to God (Josh. 6:19). This one man's sin resulted in the Lord's anger being kindled against all Israel, so that they turned their backs before their enemies and were smitten at Ai. The judgment that befell Achan and his family teaches us how solemnly God views this sin of robbing Him of His due, and it suggests a possible explanation for some of the reverses sustained by God's people in the wars of the Lord.

Much the same lesson is repeated in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). These two desired to give the appearance of utter consecration while they kept back part of the price. Deceit is anathema to God at all times, but more particularly when it is planned deceit in relation to holy things. No one had compelled Ananias and Sapphira to sell the land. But they wanted the blessings of consecration without paying the price. In their sin and folly, they thought that they were only dealing with the church. They did not perceive that they were actually lying to the Head of the church. Their deaths remind us that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

This solemn act of divine judgment is recorded for our warning. It is better that we should openly fail to pay our tithes than pretend to do so while withholding part of what is due. It is better that we should not seek revival, if we keep back part of the price. Revival is costly. Whether it be our devotion, our time, our gifts, our possessions, or whatever else it is we have not been rendering to Him, God demands nothing less than the whole tithe.

Conclusion

"Prove me now herewith" (Mal. 3:10). There is a divine challenge to sacrifice and faith. The bringing in of all God's due does not secure revival, for there must also be the exercise of faith. Let us beware that when we pray for revival we do not defer it forever in our thinking to some remote time in the future. God may be saying, "Now is the accepted time." It is an imperfect faith that always relegates the desired blessing to a tomorrow that never comes. If we would see revival, we must sooner or later deal with this procrastination of unbelief.

The acid test of a faith that is made perfect is the ability to prove God now. In the words of Charles Finney, "If God should ask you this moment, by an audible voice from heaven, 'Do you want a revival?'," would you dare to say, "Yes, let it begin here in my heart?"

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