

# The Complaints of Jehovah

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The sermon highlights seven complaints of Jehovah against the people, including profanity, sacrilege, greed, weariness, treason, robbery, and blasphemy, and emphasizes the importance of living up to the honor and fear demanded by God's names.*

**Scripture:** Job 13:15, Malachi 1:6-8, Malachi 1:10, Malachi 1:13, Malachi 2:17, Malachi 3:8, Malachi 3:13-14, Matthew 5:23-24, Luke 21:1-4

**Topics:** "Accountability to God", "Worship"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan addresses the seven complaints of God against His people, emphasizing their formalism and self-satisfaction. He highlights issues such as profanity, sacrilege, greed, weariness in service, treason against God's covenant, robbery from God, and blasphemy. The people respond to God's accusations with indifference, asking 'Wherein?' Morgan stresses that true worship requires honor and fear of God, and that offerings must come from a place of genuine sacrifice rather than obligation. He warns against the dangers of treating God with contempt through insincere worship and the consequences of excusing sin.

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## Transcript

Against this people - formal and self-satisfied - God, by the mouth of His messenger, uttered seven complaints which may thus be summarized: Profanity, Sacrilege, Greed, Weariness in service. Honoring of vice - or Treason against the covenant of Heaven - Robbery from God, and Blasphemy against Him. To these complaints they responded with the question "Wherein?" There is a profanity far worse than that of the slum; a sacrilege far more terrible than the act of breaking into the sacred place and purloining the vessels of the sanctuary; a greed which is more atrocious than the greed of a man who professes no godliness, but openly worships Mammon; a weariness in service which even exceeds in wickedness an entire abstention from service; a form of treason by the honoring of vice, which is more awful than outward and open plotting - however diabolic it may be - to dethrone God; a kind of robbery which is more terrible than the actual abstraction of coins from the treasury of the Most High; a kind of blasphemy that in comparison makes the revolting blasphemy of the streets seem almost insignificant and obtuse.

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In proceeding to consider the first - Profanity, turn to the first chapter of the prophecy, and read the sixth and seventh verses (Mal 1:6-7): "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father,

where is Mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is My fear?" Now pass to the seventh verse (Mal 1:7): "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar" - and the last sentence of the verse - "in that," that is to say, in the offering of the polluted bread, "in that ye say, the table of the Lord is contemptible."

Here we find the people calling God, "Father," and yet giving Him no honor; calling Him "Master," and having no fear of Him; saying the table is contemptible by placing upon that table polluted bread; and yet they say "Wherein?" that is, they are perfectly satisfied that God is their Father, they are perfectly orthodox in that matter, they will not for a moment dispute with any one the fact that God is their Master, but fight for the position when any one dares to traverse it. Yet God comes and says: "Ye call Me Father, and ye call Me Master: where is My honor, and where is My fear?"

They bring their bread to the altar, and, I think that if you had had the opportunity of examining it, you would not have found it polluted in the ordinary, literal sense of the word. With a surprised inflection in your voice you would have said, "That bread is not polluted!" Yet it was polluted, by the hands of the very men who placed it there. What is profanity? The root meaning of the word is "away from the temple" (pro, from; fanum, temple), and it has come to be used with reference to things not sacred, but commonplace.

These people were guilty of profanity in the worst possible way, in that they took the names of God, and claimed the relationship that those names imply: Father, "honor"; Master, "fear"; and yet they did not fear Him; they accorded Him no honor save in their words, and their creeds, and their outward doings. Thus they degraded the sacred things of God to the common level of mediocrity, and in effect made the statement, "The table is contemptible."

No polluted man can offer pure bread upon God's altar; in taking or rejecting gifts He measures them by the character of the man who brings them. Let us take an illustration. It has often been asked why Abel's gift was accepted and Cain's refused. Sometimes we have been told because Abel brought a lamb and Cain fruit. The true reason was that Abel was righteous and Cain was unrighteous. Both of these men brought of the first-fruits of their own labor, and peculiar calling in life. I know there is another side to the subject, and one full of interest, that the very righteousness of Abel had spoken to him of his need of sacrifice, and therefore he was prompted to offer a lamb; but Cain's gift was refused because Cain was refused, and Abel's gift was accepted because Abel was accepted. In this case, men approached the table and laid their gifts upon it, saying "Father," and "Master"; but before they came to that table there had been no "honor" for the "Father," no "fear" for the "Master." They themselves were not accepted, and their gifts, therefore, were refused.

Profanity at its worst is to be found in the place of outward service, in the very tabernacles of the Most High. To-day, it is the profanity of Christendom. I do not say the profanity of the Church: the Church and Christendom are two things. Christendom is the outward profession of Christianity, which has libeled Christ, and driven the mass of the people away from our services and our ordinances. There is no profanity which is so awful as that of orthodox expression and heterodox heart. Gifts presented to God by hands that are impure, are themselves impure, for God only receives the gift according as He has received the giver. The offering that we bring to God is the true expression of the value at which we appraise the altar. If a man says, "I honor the altar of God," and then puts upon it something that his own life has contaminated, his true estimate of the value of the altar is not the statement he vouchsafes, but his contaminated gift. Such a consideration should make us exceedingly careful how we give to God, and save us from that heresy of heresies, of imagining that we can purchase our acceptance by our gifts. God receives or rejects all the gifts of man in proportion as He has received or rejected the giver.

If that be a true statement, how many gifts are not received by God which have been placed upon His altar? And is not this profanity within Christendom to-day more terribly profane and far-reaching in its evil influence than all the profanity of the slum?

II

The second of these complaints is to be found in the eighth verse of the same chapter: "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy Governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts." Here is a movement forward in evil, something beyond profanity, viz, sacrilege; the sin which grows out of profanity, as surely as the sin of profanity is committed. These men are now absolutely offering to God the blind, and the lame, and the sick. The Divine requirement under the Mosaic economy was that "the lamb placed upon the altar should be without spot or blemish - the finest of the flock," but these men have lost the sense of what worship means, in that they have retained the finest of the flock for themselves, and brought to the altar that which engenders its contempt, simply to keep up the form of sacrifice and the appearance which they so much covet. God calls them to account for this display of meanness, and He says - mark the poignant sarcasm of the prophet's words - "offer it to your Governor, the man who rules over you, the kind of offering you are putting upon Mine altar - will he accept it?"

Why this complaint? Because the offerings put upon the altar were valueless to the men who placed them there, and God always values the offering by what it cost the man who brings it, and never by its intrinsic worth. Have we learned that lesson even to-day; a lesson which the Master emphasized when He sat and watched the people of His own time - the direct descendants of these men of Malachi - putting their offerings into the treasury? He did not measure a single gift, intrinsically; but by its cost to the soul who offered it. The rich men gave of their abundance. He saw every gift, recognized its worth, was cognizant of its marketable value, in every case. Presently there came along a woman who was a widow, and she dropped in two mites. Listen to the Master of the treasury, - the One to whom the gifts are brought. What did He say? "That woman has done well"? He said something far more sweeping than that. Did He say, "She has cast in more than any man"? No! but "More than they all." In effect. He said, "Bring all the gifts that have fallen into the treasury to-day, and put them together, and these mites outweigh them all in the balances of God."

He measured the gift then, as ever, by its cost to the giver. The men who had put into the treasury out of their abundance did not forego any luxury when they reached home. There was no self-denial in their giving, and each might have said, as men often say to-day, "I do not miss what I give." To such, let me say, God does not thank you for your gift. The widow sadly missed her two mites. They meant a meal, and the only meal in view, and because her gift was sacrificial, God accepted and prized it infinitely more than any other. What does sacrifice reveal? Not a selfish seeking for favor, but a soul's estimate of the One to whom the gift is offered.

Sacrilege we have always thought was the breaking into a church and stealing therefrom. That is not so; it is going into Church and putting something on the plate. Do not forget that. Sacrilege is centered in offering God something which costs nothing, because you think God is worth nothing. God looks for the giving at His altar of a gift that costs something.

Men are perpetually bringing into the Christian Church the things they do not need themselves. I know there is much sacrificial giving, thank God, but there is also an enormous amount of sacrilegious giving

abroad in the world to-day, giving devoid of sacrifice. We offer to God in the Church, things which we would never offer to our governors. This is sacrilege. If the giving in the Church of God to-day was of the type and the pattern of the gift of the widow to the treasury in the days long since passed away, the work of God would never have to go begging to men and women outside the Church.

### III

In the tenth verse (Mal 1:10), God asks the people: "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nought."<sup>1</sup> (The majority of Modern Commentators in common with the revised version agree in translating the Hebrew word *chinna*, "in vain." This word occurs thirty-two times in the Old Testament, and out of that number is translated six times "for nought" in the Authorized. Five of these the Revised retains, and only here makes the alteration. The root idea of the word is "without a cause," and so it is translated fifteen times. I have deliberately followed the example of Dr. Pusey and retained the older translation as being more in harmony with the word in its original meaning, and with the general spirit of the context as I understand it.). This is the most awful indictment of greed to be found in the book. These people were opening His doors and kindling fires, because they anticipated gain thereby. There was an ulterior motive in every gift placed upon the altar, and in every deed performed, and service rendered. The service of God had degenerated into the slavery of a selfish interest; men "opened doors and kindled fires" in order that they might secure a reward. This utterance is in the form of a question and in that form only shall I make any application of it to the age in which we live. "Who is there among you that would shut the doors for nought?" Why do we render God service? - and I am going to take the highest point of view which is also the most solemn - because we hope for reward in the future? If so, we are treading dangerously near this most awful manifestation of greed.

God wants men who will render service to Him for the very love of Him, even though they never have reward. You remember Job's great word: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." How often is that passage erroneously quoted, as though Job meant to say, "If He slay me, it will be all right; there is something beyond it, I shall not lose everything." That is not the true interpretation. The word "slay" goes to the deepest fact of his being, and he intended to say, "Though He slay me" - not "Though He permit me to be slain by my enemies" - but, "Though I have no future, and never see Him on His throne, though He blot me out, yet I trust Him." That is magnificent trust, and goes far beyond the trust that hopes for reward.

Of course this is much higher ground than that intended in Malachi's days, but then we are living in a much higher dispensation. Is our service Divine or human? When we give the cup of cold water, if we give it for the sake of reward we do not give it at all. "When we minister to men who are sick and in prison, if we do it in order that He may give us His word in days to come we do not minister at all. God is asking for that abandonment of man to Himself which says, "We pour all at Thy feet, and if Thou shouldst crown us, we would rejoice, but only that a crown was ours to cast at the feet of Christ." When men reach that point, greed has gone out of their service. I make no application of this study save in the words of the text. Who among us?

### IV

Will you now turn to the thirteenth verse of the same chapter (Mal 1:13): "Ye said also. Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it." There is a process of degradation in the lives of these men. Profanity, sacrilege, greed, and then weariness. If a man is seeking for reward when he opens a door and

kindles a fire, he will soon be tired of the business, and will say "Oh, what a weariness!" and will snuff at it; but if, putting forth every effort and exerting his whole energy, he seeks the Kingdom for its own sake, he will never complain of fatigue.

I believe this is one of the most remarkable signs of the present time. Great principles are revealed in small things and unexpected ways, and Christendom is saying "The thing is a weariness," not in actual words, but none the less certainly. The ritualistic movement is Christendom saying, "God is a weariness," and snuffing at His law. This care concerning vestments, incense, and the like - what does it mean? That men are tired of spiritual worship, and must have the sensual side of their nature pleased and tickled instead thereof. The stern days of our fathers, when they worshipped in barns, and sat, cold and cheerless, for long hours in spirit conflict with God, and spirit worship of God - where are they? Gone, and now we must have everything that is aesthetic, and when we demand the aesthetic, we are saying of real worship, "What a weariness it is!" and are asking that things may be made pleasant and easy for us. Free Churchmen are not exempt from the same snare. All the unhallowed and ungodly cry for short sermons is evidence that men are saying, "What a weariness it is!" Scores of people in our churches to-day, who will hear an opera through and through - and not once only, - will pull out their watches and become anxious and fidgety if a preacher exceeds, by a few minutes' space, what is recognized as his allotted time.

It is a serious matter - a serious matter. When men are tired of hearing and meditating upon the things of God, the fault lies within; in the background there is greed, and behind that sacrilege, and behind that again profanity. Let us search our hearts, and find whether the things of God have become merely a duty, a weariness, that we would relinquish if we dare, and to which we only hold for the sake of appearances.

V

You will notice in the seventeenth verse of the second chapter that there is something further still: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or. Where is the God of judgment?" What did they mean? "Our God is a God of love; there is no judgment. That man you say is evil, is good, if you only knew it. God delights in him." That is beyond weariness and snuffing; that is treason of the very worst form. That is a countenancing and an excusing of sin. That is an attempt to gloss evil and treat it lightly, as of no importance. When man begins to excuse sin, and to say that it does not matter so much, that God delights in them that do evil, that there is no judgment; then he is committing high treason.

That again is a peculiar sin of our own day. Find me anywhere a people who are weary of a strong and robust Christianity and seek aesthetic worship, and I find you a people who cannot bear to be told of the judgment of God.

What are such people really doing? Lowering the standard of Divine government, and the moment a man within the Church is guilty of that, he is flagrantly guilty of high treason against God.

All this talk about God being such a God of love that He passes lightly over sin, is the misunderstanding of what love is. Love is the sworn foe of sin forever, and the instant God begins to excuse sin, as we are too often rashly doing, He proves He does not love man. Narrow that down to your own personality, or rather let me speak of mine. If God excuse sin in me, and let me go on, just saying, "Well, he is frail and infirm, it does not matter," God Himself by such action ensures my ruin. It is because He is a consuming fire to sin, and never signs a truce with it within the sphere of His own kingdom, or in the world anywhere, that He is a

God of love; and directly people begin to say, "Where is the God of judgment?" they are guilty of high treason, and I believe that has been the peculiar sin of many years.

The men of our own times whom God has most signally used have been sons of fire as well as sons of consolation. Who were the sons of consolation? They were Boanerges, the sons of thunder, and no man is a true son of consolation unless he is also a son of thunder.

A man must have a keen, clear vision of sin, as an enormity of the ages never to be excused, if he is to be tender and compassionate toward the man who is a sinner. That is a false conception of love which imagines God is not a God of judgment.

## VI

Again, in the third chapter and the eighth verse, you have the sixth complaint, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me." What a fearful charge! How had they robbed Him? For they said, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" "In tithes and offerings." In other words, there was a certain Divine claim that God made upon these people; there was a tithe to be given to Him, and they had responded to the demand. "That is what God asked," you say; "surely that was right." Do not make a mistake. People are habitually telling us that God demanded the tithe. That is utterly at variance with the true position. God demanded the tithe only as a minimum, and they had carelessly given Him what He claimed - the minimum - in tithes and offerings. They had robbed God in that they had not responded to the Divine claim in the spirit in which it was made, but had offered that which was allowed by measurement and rule rather than in the spirit of love.

What is the Divine claim upon Christendom - or Christianity, shall I rather say? God is not asking you for a tithe. Some give a tithe of their income. That may be the correct thing; but while there are instances in which it is right, there is a reverse side to the picture. Some men have no business to give a tithe of their earnings - they cannot afford it; and there are men who are robbing God by giving only a tithe of their incomes. I knew a Congregational Church some years ago in which a man sat in one pew and another man immediately behind him. The income of the first man may roughly be estimated at

## VII

In the thirteenth and fourteenth verses we Read (Mal 3:13-14), "Your words have been stout against Me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say. Wherein (what) have we spoken so much against Thee? Ye have said. It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?" Now, this is the sin of blasphemy. What is blasphemy? The word means to speak injuriously, to say something that shall injure the one against whom you have spoken it; and men have come to use it mostly of Divine things. To blaspheme is to say that which injures God, and His cause and His kingdom. He says to these people, "Your words have been stout against Me," that is to say, "You have blasphemed Me stoutly"; and they say, "Wherein?" And He goes on, "You have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked 'in black' before the Lord? What is the profit of all this?" Do you suppose any of these people have been saying that in actual words? You cannot suppose it for a moment.

The very worst form of blasphemy is the misrepresentation of God by people who profess to love His name, and look apparently with exuberant delight for the coming of His kingdom. The man who openly blasphemes, and who, standing under the sun, looks up at the heavens and says, "I hate God," is far less

dangerous in the influence of his life than the man who says "I love God" and disobeys Him. The blasphemy of which to be afraid is that which joins with the great congregation in saying, "Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come," and all the while thwarts the will of God and denies His kingship within. Oh brethren, if the Church believed in God's kingdom and God's will, and if the whole catholic Church of Jesus Christ, on Sunday next, in the power of the Spirit, breathed that prayer with unquestionable honesty, how the kingdom would come on apace! It is on account of the blasphemy within our own immediate circle, of men and women who pray the prayer and do not believe in the kingdom, that the thing is hindered, and that the Church of Jesus Christ has become an enervated dilettante in the councils of kings, doing nothing in its corporate capacity to lift the world to heaven and to God.

There are souls, however, to-day, forming God's elect (of whom we shall speak before finishing this series) whom God is using to lay His own foundations, and to do His own work, prior to the coming of the Master to His Church; but Christendom as a whole is at fault and powerless, because Christendom has not believed nor acted upon the teaching of the Master. I know this picture is appalling; but if you can find a brighter one in your outlook, you can do that of which I am absolutely incapable. Do not, however, form final estimates, until we have completed this series of studies. There is a bright light, and one which is brighter in the Church than ever it has been in the past decades.

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