

The Divine Attitude

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's love and responding to it with our love, obedience, and tithes, which leads to a deeper relationship with God and a greater blessing.

Scripture: Malachi 1:2, Malachi 3:10

Topics: "God's Love", "Tithing and Blessing"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the profound love of God for His people as expressed through the prophet Malachi, who declares, 'I have loved you, saith the Lord.' Despite Israel's complacency and rebellion, God's call to bring tithes into the storehouse is rooted in His desire for their blessing and recognition of His love. Morgan highlights that true worship and giving must stem from love, not mere obligation, and that God's promises of blessing are contingent upon this heartfelt response. The sermon challenges believers to recognize the relationship between love, obedience, and the blessings that flow from God, urging the Church to awaken to its calling and reflect God's love to the world.

Transcript

"The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi - I have loved you, saith the Lord "(Mal 1:1-2). That is the all-comprehensive word which Malachi was sent to proclaim. The love of God! That is the burden. Every word addressed to them concerning the details and conditions of their life springs out of that. In chapter 3 verses 10-12 (Mal 3:10-12), we have the Divine call: "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 delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts." In these two passages, the one declaring the burden of the (prophet, and the other giving the direct appeal of Jehovah, we have the call of love to these people.

We must bear in mind their condition, for it is a remarkable background to this study. They were perfectly satisfied men and women, and yet God, looking at them, charged them as He did, with sacrilege, profanity, greed, and so forth. To the people in such a condition, what has God to say?

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"I have loved you, saith the Lord." The word is infinitely stronger than appears upon the surface. "I have loved you, and do love you, I have loved you, saith the Lord." This declaration was made in the time of their sin and neglect, in the day in which He had to make the complaint which is so severe and searching, and yet He says to them: "I have loved you, saith the Lord." This is the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. He came to warn them that a day was coming, burning as an oven, wherein all stubble should be destroyed, because God loved them. Every message of coming judgment or blessing is a message of love, - whether spoken in words that sound hard, and harsh, and severe, revealing to them their true condition, or in words of tenderness, and comfort and wooing pathos.

If we consider God's claim to the honor and fear of these people, it is based upon love. Why does God want them to honor Him? Why is He anxious that they should fear Him? Simply to glorify Himself? Nay, verily, but for their blessing and good. "But," says some one, "is it not a Divine prerogative to seek for glory? Is not God, at all times, seeking His own glory?" Most emphatically yes; but what do we mean when we speak of God seeking His own glory? How is God glorified? I sometimes think that we have an idea that our song and presence in heaven will add something to God. Never! You cannot add to God. No tinge of brightness can you put upon the beauty of His character, no greater fullness of love can you give. How then can I glorify Him? God is glorified in the perfect realization on the part of His people of all the gracious purposes of His love for them.

The daisy that lifts its head from the sod to salute the king of day glorifies God, but does it add lustre to the Divine? Assuredly not. It is all that God meant it to be, and God is glorified by the realization of His own purpose. So with us. God wants us to honor and fear Him, because by doing so we shall realize His purpose. Why does He at times lift His rod upon His wayward and wandering children? Never "willingly," but because it is an absolute necessity for the creation of character. "The severest words of God to man, and His severest treatment, manifest most perfectly His unvarying and unchanging love. Let your mind go back quickly over the history of God's people, Israel. Mr. Richard Le Gallienne has written a book, "If I were God." I have often read the history of the ancient people, and felt "if I were God "they would have been blotted out. How conclusively that proves that neither Mr. Le Gallienne nor I know of what we talk when we propose such an hypothesis. And yet we can only argue of themes of the infinite wisdom and love by such daring leaps in the dark. Let us always confess when we cannot understand His methods that it is because we are finite, and He is infinite.

"Forty years was I grieved with this generation." Read the history of the forty years and see how He treated them! He fed them, He carried them through all the days. He bore with their murmurings and patiently waited for them. He took all their rebellion and suffered it in long-suffering patience. He protected them during the watches of the night, and waited for them at the doors of the morning, and carried them through all the years - years in which He was grieved with them. Let us never forget this burden of love. Is it not this attitude of God that makes their attitude to Him so awful, and, moreover, is not the key-word of Malachi the one that gives its character to the whole book, so that the prophecy of Malachi to us is not a dirge as it would be, if we only read of their condition; but a shout of triumph because God says, "I have loved you"? That is the key-word to the whole prophecy, and with the background of our previous consideration, how brightly and beautifully the Divine love and tenderness shine out as we hear that word of the prophet.

This is an eternal truth - each word and deed and movement of God toward man is of infinite love. It is not always that men have understood this as clearly as did Malachi. Preachers sometimes forget it; but the truth stands that every God-called, ordained, inspired messenger of Divine things may approach the

people to whom he speaks, saying, "The burden of the word of the Lord to you: I have loved you, saith the Lord."

II

Let us now turn from the key-word to the special call. He has made His complaint; He has heard their perpetual responses, coming in that awful monotone - "Wherein?" and now He says to them by the mouth of His servant: "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 delightsome land, saith the Lord of Hosts." "We have in these three verses four notes: -

(1) The call of God: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."

(2) The challenge of God: "And prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts."

(3) The promise of God: "I will 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."

(4) The result: "And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delight some land, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Remembering the condition of this people, rebellious, and yet perfectly satisfied with their own position, let us ponder this message of God to them.

i. First, there is the call: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse." There were necessarily two sides to the covenant existing between God and the nation. There were mutual obligations. His promises were made upon conditions. If they failed to fulfill these conditions, the covenant was broken. They had failed, and yet He in grace called them to a renewal by the way of return to obedience. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse." What is God really asking for? Does He want a tenth part of their wheat, of their flocks, of their possessions, simply for Himself, to possess it? Assuredly not. He asks for the tenth part as a proof that they recognize His love toward them. The tithe is only valuable as a recognition of love, and the only force which is strong enough to provide the tithe is the consciousness of the truth of that first word of Malachi: "I have loved you, saith the Lord." If these people forget God loves, they will very soon forget to bring the tithe; and the only service that God seeks is the service of love that responds to His love.

He asks for the "whole tithe." It is an infinitely better word than "all the tithes." That is a mathematical phrase, and seems to suggest a mathematical or mechanical religion, but the "whole tithe" means not only

the produce of their land and labor, not only the outward form, but its inner intention. "All the tithes" is not necessarily "the whole tithe."

Supposing one of these men had possessed a hundred shekels. Has he not fulfilled the Divine requirement when he has brought of these hundred, ten for God, for mathematically that is the tithe? No! out of the hundred, ten perfect shekels may be placed upon the altar, the coins genuine to the eye of man, but in God's sight - counterfeit. They did not constitute "the whole." What was lacking? The recognition of love. There was not the response of love to love for which God is always asking: "Bring the whole tithe." There is an apparent wholeness to us that is the utterest fraud in the sight of God. There is a mechanical correctness, devoid of essential love, which God spurns. "Bring the whole tithe," and bring it in the right way; let it come as the recognition of His love. When it is thus brought, it means, borrowing a sentence from the 'New Testament, "We love Him, because He first loved us." Our love is but the offspring of His love, our tithe given, a recognition of His all bestowed.

God is calling for the investiture of form with power, and the one power which God recognizes is that of love. If we would see our organizations invested with power they must be invested with love, and the preacher is to preach, and the worker to work, not to give God a mechanical quantity, but in response to love. When that is an established fact the tithes are brought into the storehouse.

ii. Now for the challenge: "Prove Me now herewith." Get to know Me by answering My love with your love; respond to the love that is ever upon you, even in your rebellion and sin, with love, and by that response be admitted into love and knowledge and understanding. "Prove Me now herewith." This was God's challenge to the people.

iii. Mark the promise: "Prove Me 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 source of blessing - heaven's windows open; the measure of blessing - until there shall not be room enough to receive it. Now the word really is, until there shall not be a "sufficiency."

It is possible that our translators both in the Authorized and Revised versions have caught the true spirit of the word, but it is somewhat ambiguous. One daring commentator of other days suggests that it should read; "Prove Me now herewith, saith God, till there shall not be a sufficiency," "that is to say," says the writer, "God will keep on pouring blessing out until His own sufficiency ends; and when can that be? Never!" The writer says this is the most remarkable figure in the whole book. It is a magnificent conception even if it does not catch the first and true meaning of the word. The thought is that of the "prodigality" of Divine love. It runs over every measure, and goes before us, and encompasses us even in our sin, and He says: "If you will but bring the tithe, acknowledge the love, and look up and say 'Eternal Love, we love,' I will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that you cannot receive it."

What else? "I will rebuke the devourer." The insect that is destroying your crops I will destroy for your sakes. That word "rebuke" is the same which is used in the second chapter and the third verse, translated there: "Behold, I will corrupt your seed." Corrupt is the correct word. Lift that word and put it in here. "I will corrupt the devourer." The punishment was that all the seed was to be corrupt. The blessing was that not the seed, but the devourer was to be corrupted. "I will corrupt the devourer."

And then follows that perfect figure of beauty and strength: "Neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field."

iv. What is to be the result of this blessing? "All nations shall call you happy." God says that when His people return to Him, bringing the tithes, and He returns to them in blessing, there is to be a great consensus of opinion as to their condition. All the nations of the world will make an admission concerning them. There shall be none who shall deny their blessedness and happiness. "All nations shall call you blessed." The world is waiting for that. I do not think it has ever seen it. The blessing of God for the people has not been seen in Israel's history or in the history of the Christian Church. We have never reached it. I think it will come when the King comes, and in His own Kingdom He sets up the blessings of love which He described in the Sermon on the Mount; then all the nations shall say, "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord."

And what more? "Yours shall be a delightsome land," perfect in itself, the ideal realized as the result of obedience.

III

What are the thoughts which this study of the Divine attitude suggests for us? First, that of the great eternal love. Notwithstanding all the varied and varying conditions of humanity, love underlies all the Divine dealings, and love still marks the attitude of God to His people despite their failures, their rebellion, alas! alas! so often evident. There is a very considerable tendency to-day, on the part of the people whose eyes are open, and who are in a measure responding to the Divine call, to become a clique, or class, and look down on the failure of their brethren and sisters who are living the lower life of formalism. Directly you find yourself looking down with lack of love upon your fellow Christians, rest assured that you are departing from that very blessing of which you have been proud.

God is saying to us: "I have loved you." That is why He never gives you any rest about that particular habit, which appears so innocent, and yet which is the very crux of the controversy between you and Himself. "I have loved you, saith the Lord." It is the infinite proof of love when God does not let you rest. It is as dangerous to let your conscience assume a state of apathy as it would be to allow a sleepy man to slumber in the snows of the Sierras. Have you a controversy with God which has been going on for weeks, aye, for months, and even years, until you are weary of it, and in danger of growing rebellious because of His interference - Hold, man! - "I have loved you!" If God had not loved you, He would have left you to your own devices and evil. Your evil habit, selfish indulgence, is your enemy, and while God brings you back to this point, time after time. He is proving His love for your soul. "I have loved you." We must live in the element of this Divine love.

The next lesson I gather is that of the relation which exists between tithe and blessing. "Bring the tithe, and I will open the windows of heaven." How perpetually people in prayer meetings pray the promise and forget the conditions. We pray: "Open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing," and God replies: "Bring the tithes." It is as though God said to you: "It is for you to open the windows." What? the windows of heaven? Yes! heaven's windows always swing upon love's hinges. There is a very radical and practical application of this phrase, which one is slow to make and yet it must be made. Do not imagine because we are living in a spiritual dispensation we are no longer bound in the matter of material giving. We are to bring the tithes. It is not the tithe that God asks from you, but everything! You may make a proportionate statement of it if you will. As the Christian dispensation is greater than the Jewish, so must my giving be greater than a tithe, and when you have worked out the first ratio you will begin to understand the second. When men come and say, "Here we are, our interests, ourselves, our business - everything," then the windows of heaven are never shut - never!

I want you to see the subtle connection between tithe and blessing. You know that little verse that people sing in Conventions -

"My all is on the altar,

I'm waiting for the fire."

It is an absolute absurdity. Nobody ever waited for the fire when all was on the altar. Let a man sing if he like -

"A part is on the altar.

I'm waiting for the fire."

I do not know that he ought to waste the time in singing even that, but bestir himself to get the other portion on the altar. That is his business. When you and I put our all upon the altar the fire falls directly. You read in the story of Elijah how the fire descended straightway. God's conditions being fulfilled - God's promises never halt. It is you and I that are maimed, and lame, and halt. God does not halt. "Bring the tithes," and the moment they come the windows open and the showers of blessing descend. That is a law which applies equally to the individual, to the nation, to the Church, and to the world. We begin with ourselves. When my all is upon the altar, then the windows of heaven are open and the blessing descends. When the Church brings the tithe into the storehouse, and acknowledging and honoring Him, sweeps away all methods that so detract from the fulfillment of her mission and says, "Only for Thy glory do I exist," then the blessing is given. Man's tithes and God

Then we must go further still and notice, not only the relationship between tithe and blessing, but that between love and tithe. Tithes never reach the storehouse except in response to love. Mechanical religion cannot last; it always becomes weary and ceases. I may preach to you and use every argument I know as to your giving to God. You will never do it in response to human eloquence. When do men give to God? When they have a true vision of Him. That is the secret of giving tithes, and that, in its turn, is the secret of the opening of heaven's windows.

Out of that grows another question. How can we love? Only as we prove God in the path of obedience. This is a burden laid upon my own heart perpetually. I love God in proportion as I obey Him. The first steps may be taken in the dark without seeing a reason, but take them, and you begin to see the wisdom and tenderness, and compassion, and love of God. I love when I obey, and when I love, I obey. Which is cause and which is effect? There is an inter-relation in the progress of Christian love. But obedience is the first thing. In the beginning, seek first the Kingdom, and when the soul seeks the Kingdom by obeying the King, the soul discovers the Father, and discovering the Father obeys more readily, and obeying more readily, has a larger revelation which makes obedience easy and the horizon greater. We are changed from glory into glory, and at last we shall be like Him, and obey perfectly. Such is the Divine arrangement.

A delightful land in the mind of God is acknowledged happy by the nations. How is it that the world is so sick and tired of Christianity? How is it that men outside the Church have come to look upon us with disdain? Is it not so? You business men, tell me, is there not a sort of pity in the heart of scores of worldly men for Christian men today? Why is this? It is the fault of the Church, of the people themselves, not the creed. "Give me," said John Wesley, "a hundred men who love God with all their hearts, and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world." People who saw and mocked them in the early days grew to love them,

and came to say: "These people have what we have not; we will go with them, for God is with them." Again and again God has raised up a despised and unknown people to render concrete the blessings of His Kingdom and Government; and where this has been done the world has said, "This is a delightful land," and where the world has ceased to say that, it is because the people have wandered away from Him. Brethren, if the Church of Jesus Christ in this land returned to the Kingdom To-morrow morning, and every one of its members returned to the Kingship of Jesus Christ, the whole country would be impressed straightway, and within one twelvemonth would say, "These are the people, this is the delightful land, these the men and women of delights." Some one says to me: "What do you mean by returning to the Kingdom? Everything divided, having all things in common?" I mean one thing when I say returning to the Kingdom. Let them return to love, to the love "that suffereth long and is kind - that thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things." Love like that, and you will never say a bitter thing about an absent neighbor! You will never suffer an unkind thing to be said about some one "afar off." That is the place to begin, and if the Church of Jesus Christ did but reveal His will in all its breadth, and beauty of love, the nations would begin to say, "This is a delightful land; surely God is with this people, we will go with them also."

This is God's call to the Church, with its sleeping, slumbering energies. Oh yes, one must put it like that, because if the Church, the great company of men and women in the world to-day, who name the name of Christ, were living in the Kingdom, actuated by the love of God, responding to the forces of His Spirit, we could settle every question straightway. God is brooding over His sleeping people, His sleeping Church, and saying, "I have loved you." "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." "Prove Me," says God. There is one question for us: "Who hears the Divine call? and hearing, who will respond?"

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