

Malachi 3:7-8

*"Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from My decrees and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'*

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob You?'"*

The deeper I get into the book of Malachi, the more it seems he is writing a Top Ten list of problems facing God's people. And even though this was written nearly 2,500 years ago, God's people still struggle with these same issues today. The simple message of Malachi is God is unchanging and the human condition is also unchanging. The standards God requires from His people revealed in the Old Testament and man's sinful fallen nature continue. Stephen's charge against the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51 is just as true of us today, *"You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"*

Our problem today is the same problem Israel faced: we do not see our need of God. As far as many Christians are concerned, they have not left God and God has not left them. The disease affecting the church today is one of spiritual delusion. We think repentance is something a person does when they become a Christian and then it can be placed on the shelf to gather dust. A.W. Tozer wrote the church is in the predicament it is in because "ignoble contentment has taken the place of burning zeal." Just like the priests in Malachi's day, the Church has a form of godliness but there is no power. We engage in the rituals and ceremonies, but the power of God is not in our motions.

Sometimes God needs to hit us where it hurts to get us to turn around and come back to Him. And where many of us are the most sensitive is in our wallets. Repentance that costs us nothing is worthless repentance. Repentance in the area of finance and stewardship is costly if it is genuine repentance. You can come to church every Sunday, but your checking account will speak more about your spiritual health than your attendance record because our wallets are closer to our hearts than we care to admit.

In Malachi's time, God spoiled the crops and shut the rain off because of the Israelites' selfishness. Their excuse not to give was because they had less even though they knew God had promised to bless and care for those who were faithful in their stewardship. God's own money was not available because the people were so tight-fisted they would not let it go. Consider this: a poll taken by George Barna in 2002 showed only 6% of evangelicals in the United States gave a tithe (10% of their income). A 2010 survey indicated the average church attendee in America gives 3.1% of their income to charities, religious or secular. As the wealthiest and allegedly most Christian nation, the divine message to God's people remains unchanged, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me."*