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Reflections

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." (Malachi 3:8 NKJ)

Malachi, the prophet, was speaking to Israel concerning her lack of acknowledgement and service to God. They were offering, if indeed they were bringing offerings to the LORD, sacrifices that were not of the quality required by the Law. They were also guilty of failing in their service to God with their tithes and offerings. God required that His people would bring to Him the tenth of their firstfruits and income in order to acknowledge Him and receive His blessing. They were, instead, withholding their best and failing to bring to His house that which was required. God's response to them was: *You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. (Malachi 3:9 NKJ)*

God then offers them His grace and mercy when He declares: *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. ¹¹ "And 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 NKJ)* What a glorious extension of grace to a rebellious people! But isn't that just in the Old Testament some might ask?

Let's look to the words of Jesus as He taught about discipleship. *"Give, 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 NKJ)* Some might complain that churches are always asking for money. Is that all they think about? Sadly it's true, that too many ministries have become fundraisers for their "special works" and, as a result, money has become too much of their focus. The excesses of some of these "ministers" has been an unfortunate source of angst and has given excuses for Christians to use as their reasons for not giving to the Lord. Jesus, on the other hand, taught that giving to the Lord was part of the normal Christian life.

Being one who gives is a principle of Scripture that is to be found throughout the Bible. Since the creation of the world, giving has been

part of acknowledging God as our LORD, our Creator, and the One from whom all blessings flow. Giving to God is to be an act of love and commitment as we acknowledge His provision for our needs. Paul, the Apostle, explains giving in this manner. *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And 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. (2Corinthians 9:7-8 NKJ)*

Giving is not just a 'give to get principle' as some might teach. Planting "seeds" to become wealthy is not, and has never been, at the heart of Biblical teaching. Instead we see that it is acknowledging God that is the most important aspect of our giving and of our lives. By living in this way, we know, and can rest in the knowledge, that He cares for us and will meet our needs. Jesus taught: *...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:31-34 NKJ)*

In this time of economic turmoil, unemployment, uncontrolled government spending and increasing lawlessness, it can seem to be impossible to give to the Lord. Many are just 'hanging on' or barely making it and wonder how God could ask us to give in such times? In the Scripture we see many examples of those who gave in spite of their circumstances and were blessed by God's provision for their needs. Are we giving to the Lord from that which He has blessed us, or are we using various reasons to restrain from giving? When your life is filled with the challenges of making ends meet, remember how when Jesus was teaching the large crowds of people they needed to be fed that he took a lunch given by a small boy and fed the 5000 with 12 baskets left over. Let's consider that we must seek first His kingdom and then He has promised to meet our daily needs. When we put God first in every area of our life, He has promised to not only meet our needs, but that He will give us a peace in our lives that can't even be comprehended. How can we be at peace when it seems that there is not enough money to go around? The answer lies in having the Prince of Peace living within you. Let's honor Him with our giving and our lives. **Pastor Doug**