

[R2485 : page 150]

**"WILL A MAN ROB GOD? YET YE HAVE ROBBED ME."**

"Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." – Mal. 3:8-10.

THE TITHING system, so far as Israel was concerned, had its beginning when they entered the Promised Land, after their forty years journey in the wilderness. A tithe signifies a tenth; and under the divine arrangement made with Israel this was the portion of all their increase required to be devoted to holy purposes. One-tenth of the increase of their flocks, their herds, their seeds, grains, etc., was first to be set apart to the Lord's service, as sacred, to be used in the maintenance of the priestly tribe, the Levites, and for the relief of widows and orphans, and other unfortunates. The one-tenth of the family increase was also required by the Lord; but this had already been provided for in the selection of the tribe of Levi and its increase devoted to the Lord's service exclusively, as instead of the firstborn of each family.

The system of taxation in vogue throughout Christendom to-day somewhat resembles the tithing system, except that it is collected and not left to voluntary contribution: and it is assessed on the valuation of property, etc., and not wholly on the *income*. It covers the expenses of public schools, relief of the poor, improvements of streets, sewers, and general government expense. In the United States maintenance of religion not being included in taxation is left, properly, to the zeal and discretion of the individual: it is safe, however, to assume, that the majority of people do not contribute largely to religion and charity; while others strictly appropriate *one-tenth* of their entire income to these benevolences.

The effect of this tithing system, had it been carried out in the right spirit, would have been, (1) to teach the people of Israel generosity, and to inculcate in them a realization of their obligations to God, and that all that they enjoyed were his bestowments. (2) It would have made abundant provision for the maintenance [R2485 : page 151] of the priests and Levites, the widows, orphans, and unfortunates, and thus would have been a perpetual insurance fund of mutual benefit. It not only would have provided for the temporal necessities of the unfortunate, but also for the educational arrangements, which were in the care of the Levites.

But the Israelites, like all the other branches of the human family, were depraved through the fall, and had come under the control of the spirit of selfishness, the spirit of evil, – to which may be traced every impure, ignoble, unholy word, thought and act. Hence the Israelites begrudged the giving of so large a proportion as one-tenth of all their earnings, and since the contribution was left to the conscience of the people, and no officers were entrusted with the enforced collection of this tithe, by punishment of those who failed to contribute it, very soon many ceased to contribute altogether, while others gave stintedly and grudgingly. But however the people felt that they were thus at liberty to curtail the amount of their contributions to holy purposes, and however much they presumed that they would ultimately be gainers, to the extent that they would withhold their tithes, we find that they erred; for God himself not only was the ruler of that peculiar people, their King (1 Chron. 29:23), but he was also the chief executive officer to administer the punishments for the violation of his own laws. Consequently, in proportion as they attempted to defraud the Lord of tithes, in that proportion or a greater proportion they were losing, for the Lord sent upon them grasshopper plagues, caterpillar plagues, and various insects, blights and diseases, which more than offset the tithes which they were withholding.

In all this, and in every instance when thinking of Israel and God's dealings with Israel, we should remember that they were a special and

peculiar nation, differently dealt with from all the other nations of the earth. (Amos 3:2.) God did not exact from other nations a tithe, a tenth, but neither did he promise to other nations his special care and bounty and blessing. Other nations were left largely subject to the changeable conditions in nature, but Israel, as a result of the covenant sealed between them and the Lord at Sinai, came under special obligations to the Lord, including this tithing arrangement, and the Lord came under special obligations to them, in that he promised that, if they would live up to their engagements, observe his laws and statutes, to do them, he would bless them in their fields and in their cities, in their flocks, their herds, their crops and all.

Israel, therefore, was to know that God would not fail of his part of the covenant, and that if they lacked any good thing, any temporal blessing, it must be because sin lay at the door; because they had, in some sense or degree, violated their part of the Law Covenant. Consequently the coming of caterpillars, army worms, palmer worms, locusts and grasshoppers *upon them* meant special chastisements from the Lord, and were special evidences of divine disapproval toward them, while similar things coming upon the world of mankind in general meant no such thing.

In our Lord's day, at the first advent, he called attention to the fact that the holiness class of that day had gotten into a formalistic condition – that they were very exact about their tithes, being careful to tithe the very smallest of seeds: mint, anise and cummin. But he showed that their hearts were still selfish, and that these contributions were not according to the spirit of the law, but rather for an outward show, done vain-gloriously: that so far from having the spirit of tithing, a desire to contribute to the Lord's cause, and to the maintenance of the poor, these so-called holiness people (the "Pharisees") were quite ready to devour the widow's house, taking advantage of her necessities, etc., and that their long prayers were, in keeping with this wrong condition of heart, merely outward display.

Our text calls attention to this neglect of tithes on the part of the Israelites, pointing them to the fact that if they had been faithful to the Lord their granaries would be full instead of empty; their flocks and herds would have been well-favored instead of lean; and their general prosperity would have been much greater. This is along the line of the Scriptural injunction, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." (Prov. 11:24.) In our text the Lord calls upon Israel to realize the situation, and restore that which they had withholden, and that then he would pour them out a great blessing, and would "rebuke the devourer," the pests which injured their crops.

### **SOME APPLICATIONS OF THIS IN NOMINAL SPIRITUAL – ISRAEL. –**

Many in Spiritual Israel draw from this Scripture the lesson that Spiritual Israelites should faithfully give a tenth of all their earnings and profits to the Lord's cause. This lesson is preached from pulpits of nearly all denominations and emphasized as obligatory upon their adherents. Such is the case with the Mormons, and as a result millions of dollars flow into their treasury, and are used in the propagation of that system of religion or irreligion, as each may be pleased to term it. We see the same method enforced by the "Seventh Day Adventists," with similarly marked results, – hundreds of thousands of dollars pour into their church treasury, and are used in the dissemination of **[R2486 : page 152]** literature, in the sending forth of evangelists to all parts of the world, and in the general propagation of their doctrines. We note also a similar tendency in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Already it has engrafted this feature of "Moses' Law" upon their young people of the "Epworth League," those who agree sign a pledge, called "God's Tenth – the pledge of Jacob," which reads: "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give a tenth unto thee."

The printed matter before us, descriptive of this tithing system, bears the imprint of the Methodist Book Concern – New York and

Cincinnati offices. It proceeds to outline suggestions respecting the manner in which so large a sum should be divided up. It takes as a basis of calculation an income of \$1.00 a day, or \$300.00 per year, the one tenth of which, \$30.00, it appropriates to pastor's salary and various other religious benevolences, but says: –

"Those who are specially interested in some particular benevolence are *permitted* to use a different ratio for these benevolences, provided one tenth of the income is given. *Tithing* should be figured from the net income, *not the net surplus* after living expenses have been deducted. Many examples are before us, where the Lord has proven his promise: 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse [etc., our text]' – not only rich spiritual blessings, but *temporal as well.*" [Italics are ours.]

We have not learned what measure of success has attended this effort, but infer that it is considerable; because the denominational papers are now calling attention to the fact that Bishop McCabe is starting a similar tithing scheme for the older Methodists. Some objections are urged against it – that it is going back to the Mosaic Law: but the majority apparently do not recognize clearly the dividing line between the Law Covenant and the New Covenant and are inclined to think the movement a proper one, in the direction of *duty*.

### **OUR APPLICATION OF THIS TO SPIRITUAL ISRAEL.**

While we believe that such a system may be a powerful influence for good or for evil, as respects the amount of money collected and disbursed; and while we believe also that such systematic giving is a helpful discipline to many of those who contribute, increasing their interest in the cause to which they give, and decreasing their selfishness and worldliness, – nevertheless we are not prepared to advocate this system amongst the Lord's consecrated people; because we find no authority for the tithing system under the New Covenant; and we may preach nor advocate neither more nor less than the laws our God has spoken unto us.

To Christians, begotten of the spirit of adoption to be *sons* of God, the Lord speaks not as he speaks to *servants*, saying "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" do thus and so. On the contrary he speaks to us as a father unto his sons. He communicates to us a knowledge of his will and plan, without putting exact limitations upon our acts. He merely places us under the perfect law of liberty – Love; the law which gives us perfect liberty to do all we please in harmony with love to God and man. He who loves much may give proportionately: he who loves little may give little accordingly. Our Lord desires that each should thus show forth his own developments in love. But, shall we consider that this liberty, which we enjoy as "new creatures in Christ Jesus," releases us from all obligations? Shall we consider that because the Lord has not specified that we must give *one-tenth* of our incomes, as he required of the Jew, under his Law Covenant, therefore we are at liberty to give the one-twentieth, or the one-fiftieth, or one-hundredth part, or nothing, to the Lord's cause?

Yes, we have just that liberty, – that is to say, God will not now withhold from us rain on this account, nor will he send pests as punishments as he did with the Jews under their covenant. Yet surely all who have been begotten of the spirit of adoption, all true sons of God, would rather say: If it were proper that the Israelite according to the flesh should give one-tenth of all his income to benevolent purposes, it is much more proper that we, the spiritual seed of Abraham, who have been still more highly favored than the natural seed, should render some thank-offering unto the Lord our God. And what shall we render unto the Lord? If the Jew, who had much advantage every way over the Gentile, should in all justice devote one-tenth of his income to holy things, how much more should we devote who, by God's grace, have still greater advantages every way – not only greater advantages than the Gentiles, the world, but greater advantages also than the Jew, the natural Israelite? What shall we *not* render unto the Lord our God, for all his benefits toward us?

The more we consider this matter, the more we might properly be perplexed to know where our giving should end, we who are the recipients of the manifold grace of God – not only of the present life, but also of the promises of the life to come – justification and its joy and peace, sanctification and its rejoicing in hope of a share in divine glory and honor and immortality, and all the good things which God hath in reservation for them that love him. The more our hearts learn to appreciate the blessings of divine favor which have been showered upon us, the more do we feel not only that a tenth would be too little, but that **[R2486 : page 153]** a half would be too little, and that *our all* would be too little for us to render unto our God.

Here the Apostle comes to our relief, and offers a suggestion, saying, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God [already received] that ye present your bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*" (Rom. 12:1.) Ah yes! that comes nearer to our reasonable service than anything else we can think of, and yet we realize that even such an offering is far too small, and does not at all counterbalance divine grace and mercy bestowed upon us. Nevertheless, seeing that it is all that we can give unto the Lord, we are glad to have the Apostle's assurance that, presented in the name and merit of our dear Redeemer, God would esteem it holy, and would accept the offering. And so, with rejoicing hearts, we lay our little all upon the Lord's altar in consecration.

However, let us not forget that the "new creatures" were accepted in Christ and adopted to sonship, because they *presented themselves* to God as living sacrifices to be wholly his and to do only *his will in all things*. And since he who thus gives himself gives his life and his *all*, it follows that all who made this covenant of full consecration thereby agreed to give to the Lord *more than ten times as much* as the Jew agreed to in his covenant. So then the obligation of the true Spiritual Israelite is the greater, not the lesser, obligation of the two, as compared with the Jew. Our obligation not only absorbs *all* the

income and profits on our capital and labor, but additionally the capital, the life, the principal.

But now the question arises, How shall we present ourselves? We have given our *all* in consecration to the Lord; in what way would he have us render it unto him? He does not wish us to destroy our lives, and thus become dead sacrifices: and if we present ourselves *living* sacrifices, how little there will be to render to the Lord! As living beings we have certain necessities of our own and obligations toward others (we must support our own lives and the lives and happiness of those who are immediately under our care, in our own families and households): and if we attend to these, how little time will be left for *special service* of the Lord. Surely, it requires the largest portion of our time and energy to provide the "things needful" of the present life; and thus, to our disappointment, we find that the *all* that we had laid upon the altar will mean comparatively little by the time that it is rendered to the Lord in special services or contributions, or efforts on behalf of his cause. What shall we do?

Realizing our perplexity, and how unsatisfactory this condition of things would be to those who are of a proper condition of heart, the Lord very graciously informs us of how he accepts the matter. He tells us that he accepts us as living sacrifices, and that this which we have fully and completely devoted or consecrated to him, and which he has accepted, he returns to our care and custody, making us stewards of those things which we have devoted – our time, our influence, our means, our talents – all. We are to do the best we can with these in our Lord's service, and if we do the best we can with them, to glorify him, he accepts the matter as tho every act and every word and every deed were rendered directly in his service, tho the majority of these acts and words and deeds may necessarily be used by us in attending to our own necessities, and the necessities of those depending upon us. How gracious is this arrangement by which we may not only render [R2487 : page 153] our all to the Lord, but give proper attention also to all the obligations of an earthly kind, and that with greater blessing, realizing



that, whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do (as stewards of the Lord, with an eye single to his service, his glory, his pleasement), is accepted of him as *done unto him*, – as tho it were direct service.

Let us remember also, during this Gospel age the Lord is seeking a peculiar people for a peculiar present and future service. He seeketh *such* to worship him as worship him in *spirit* and in *truth* – from the heart, and not of compulsion. Hence the Lord leaves the Spiritual Israelite *free*: he does not shower temporal blessings upon those who live up to their covenant, more than upon others, nor does he pour out curses, blights and troubles upon those who violate their covenant more than upon others. He leaves all the "house of sons" thus *free*, in order that each by his own conduct may manifest the *sincerity* or the *insincerity* of the covenant which he made.

Thus all of the sons of God practically pass judgment upon themselves.

This is illustrated in the parables of the Pounds and of the Talents; in these the Master shows talents and pounds *recognized as his*, entrusted to his servants during his absence. The servant who had not sufficient love for the Master to use what he possessed *in his service* was reprov'd, and rejected from further stewardship as unfaithful, unworthy. So all the sons of God under the New Covenant, having presented their *all* to the Lord, are now only stewards of what they control – principal and increase. They are given a *free* hand to do with it as they choose: "Ye are not under law [as servants], but under grace [liberty – as stewards]." But at the reckoning day all unfaithful stewards who failed to use their Lord's goods with energy in his service – time, talent, influence, as well as money – will be rejected, put out of further stewardship. [R2487 : page 154]

While, therefore, the Spiritual Israelite of this Gospel age has a greater liberty than had the natural Israelite of the Jewish age, in so far as the express commands of the Lord are concerned, we find that, in proportion as he possesses the spirit of the Lord, he will realize a much

greater obligation than his Jewish brother, and where this obligation is realized and appreciated, it will lead to faithfulness, devotion. As with the Jew the Lord did not make the matter of tithing obligatory, in the sense of enforcing it, so with the Spiritual Israelite he does not attempt to enforce his covenant obligation of full consecration, but takes note of our courses in life, as indicative of the measure of our love and appreciation of his mercies and blessings. Yet as God watched over the Israelites, to give earthly blessings, bountiful harvests, etc., to those who were faithful in tithing themselves, so with Spiritual Israel, the Lord watches over us to give us, not temporal, but spiritual bounties and fatness in proportion as we are faithful in presenting our bodies living sacrifices to him. Do we see some stumble and fall from the truth, after they have been once enlightened, and after they have tasted of the heavenly gift and of the powers of the age to come, after they have had much advantage every way? Do we see some feeble and delicate in spiritual health, and ready to be stumbled by the Adversary? If so, we see some who have been unfaithful in rendering unto the Lord their God that which they have covenanted. Or if they seem to have been energetic in his service, and yet are stumbling, we may rest assured that it is because their energies and efforts were to be seen of men, and were not of pure devotion to the Lord.

It is well, of course, that our criticisms should be chiefly turned inward, and that each should question himself, rather than others, on so important a subject as this. We may not always know who are the Lord's, but we may always know that "the Lord knoweth them that are his" – the heart-faithful. And we may be sure that these shall not stumble, tho they be permitted to pass through trials and difficulties which would deceive and stumble, if it were possible, the very elect. To these the Lord will, with every temptation, present also a way of escape; he will succor them because they are his. As the Apostle Peter says, "If ye do these things [fulfil the royal law of love and devotion to God and the neighbor] *ye shall never fall*; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." – 2 Pet. 1:10,11.

"These things," which the Lord's people are to do, because they are begotten of his spirit, and because they are consecrated to his service, are all of them the things of love – the patience of love, the meekness of love, the long-suffering of love, the brotherly-kindness of love, the gentleness of love. These things can abound only in those who have been begotten of the spirit of love, and who, on this account, are already reckonedly dead (and daily dying) to their former selves, and to the selfishness which once ruled them, through inherited depravity by the fall.

Let each reader look, of course, to his own condition of heart, and judge himself whether or not he is rich in the spirit of the Lord, whether or not his soul is fat, whether or not he is growing in *grace* and in love, as well as in knowledge. If any, on inspection, find such fatness of soul, let him rejoice, yet nevertheless, as the Apostle says, "rejoice with fear," lest the present condition of divine favor and blessing should give place and some earth-born cloud arise to hide the heavenly Father from the eyes of faith. And should any, upon self-examination, find leanness of soul, spiritual poverty, lack of progress, or perhaps a retrogression in spiritual matters, let such remember the Apostle's words, – "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into [divine] rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." – Heb. 4:1.

Nevertheless, let not such be discouraged, but hearken further to the word of the Lord to fleshly Israel, in which he says to them, in the words of our text, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse... and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open unto you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Let all who desire to find blessing in rich and overflowing measure take the Lord at his word, and present to him the offerings which we have already consecrated, and which are not our own, (1) because they were bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and (2) because recognizing this fact, we solemnly consecrated ourselves to the Lord – presented our

bodies living sacrifices in his service. Let us resolve for the future to bring to the full measure of our ability a reasonable service, the rendering of time and influence and talent and means to the Lord and to his cause, to his service; – that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts may be pleasing to him: and let us seek that all our acts of life may be living epistles, read and known of all men, showing forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And not only so, but let us, in proportion as we have been lax or careless in the past, and unfaithful to our vows, put forth renewed energy, to compensate, so far as possible, for past neglect, "redeeming the time," remembering also that "the days are evil" – that the times in which we live are unfavorable, [R2487 : page 155] that the tendency of our day is towards selfishness and worldliness more and more.

Those whose consecration will be thus revived will no longer find themselves more interested in worldly riches, and the meat that perisheth, than in spiritual riches and the bread of eternal life, but contrariwise will seek and find opportunities, not only for serving the Lord in their ordinary vocation, but also will seek and find special opportunities of service. This will include the rendering to the Lord of thanks and worship. For in proportion as each becomes earnestly desirous of rendering service to the Lord, and of keeping his heart in the love of God, he will find it desirable, yea, necessary, to seek supplies at the throne of grace and the family altar daily, as well as to lift up his heart frequently in private to the Lord, in thankfulness, or in prayer for help *in time of need*. And likewise, at the close of every day, those who have been desirous of pleasing and serving the Lord will desire to render their report at the close of the day, and to inspect themselves and the efforts which they have made, that thus they may stimulate themselves in the heavenly race, and renew their vows of consecration. Moreover, those who are thus wholly consecrated to the Lord, and seek first or chiefly his righteousness and a share in his Kingdom, will very generally find opportunities for meeting together

with others of like precious faith, to encourage one another, and to build one another up in the most holy faith, and so much the more as we see the day drawing on.

-----