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"GOD LOVETH A CHEERFUL GIVER." – 2 COR. 9:7.

– *DEC. 10.* – *MAL. 1:6-11; 3:8-12.* –

MALACHI uttered the words of his prophecy during the period of Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem at the court of Persia, and the return of Nehemiah may at the time have seemed like a fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy, – "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple," etc. No doubt the testimony of the Lord given through Malachi prepared the people for their quick response to Nehemiah's energetic appeals and commands already noticed.

The International Sunday School Committee has very appropriately chosen Malachi's testimony as a basis for lessons on the grace of giving. While on the one hand we are wholly out of sympathy with the usual [R2540 : page 266] everlasting "dunning" carried on in religious circles – the passing of the collection box on every possible occasion, in season and out of season, and appeals for money for every conceivable object – nevertheless, on the other hand we fully realize that the grace of giving is indissolubly attached to all the other graces of God's spirit. Hence it is impossible for the Lord's people to grow in the other graces inculcated in his Word without growing also in the grace of benevolence. Indeed, while thoroughly disapproving the begging spirit as abominable, we are ready to concede that in all probability it has wrought some good – where doctrinal instructions in righteousness and truth were lacking and the ill-fed souls of the Lord's people were likely to die of spiritual starvation, the appeals for money have no doubt often awakened, in the hearts of many, such responsive sentiments as compensated to some extent for their ignorance of God and his Word: no matter how selfish the motives, no matter how ignoble the method adopted, if it touched the heart of the giver with a desire to *offer* something in loving appreciation and worship to his Creator, the effect was surely a blessing to the giver – *the sacrificer*.

Vs. 6 lays down as a fixed principle that a proper son will honor his father, and a proper servant honor his master, and then these principles are applied as between God and Israel. If they claimed God as their Father they should render to him the love of children; if they claimed to be his servants they should render to him servants' reverence – and such love and reverence should be the greater toward God in proportion as God is great above all others.

Phrenologists locate the organs of benevolence, reverence and spirituality in a row in the center of the top of the head. They are thus given places of prominence and nearness to God above all others: and it is certainly true that those who have these organs most largely developed are permitted, under the grace of the New Covenant, to come *nearest* to God in their hearts, in their sentiments, in all their experiences in life. But our day is not the most favorable for the development of these organs. Ours is a money-making and money-loving day, and the tendency is to concentrate thought and effort along the baser lines of acquisitiveness, combativeness, and in general the selfish propensities.

Moreover, the great increase of knowledge which the Lord has permitted in connection with the present day of preparation for his Millennial Kingdom tends to egotism rather than to favor veneration. Children have opportunities for education to-day which their parents did not enjoy, and are inclined to a feeling of self-confidence and self-satisfaction, and feelings of disrespect toward their parents instead of reverence. And this dwarfing of the organ of reverence, in its relationship to human creatures, implies also its dwarfing in respect to God; and hence we see to-day, as never before, disrespect of parents and disobedience to parents, and proportionately disrespect to God, irreverence in holy things. Realizing the source of these evils we are bound to sympathize with the rising generation in its difficulties in these respects.

As Christians taught of God through his Word and by its spirit, we are to realize for ourselves, our families, and the entire household of faith, the necessity for striving against these tendencies of our times – the necessity for curtailing our selfish, avaricious tendencies and egotism, and the necessity, on the contrary, of cultivating the higher and nobler graces of benevolence, veneration and spirituality. This the Apostle designates transformation, saying, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." – Rom. 12:2.

The prophet presupposed that those whom he addressed did not realize the true situation, and so in speaking to others to-day we should likewise presuppose that the majority do not realize how completely the spirit of selfishness dominates their hearts. "Ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" The answer is, not that they publicly and directly used profane [R2541 : page 266] and disrespectful language, but that they had *failed to properly honor God* by failing to manifest a proper reverence and devotion toward him and his holy things. They had become careless respecting the things offered unto the Lord – these were not of the *best* they had but, if not the worst, were at least inferior. Thus the Lord's table had lost its proper dignity, had become "contemptible," common.

Apparently they had grown irreverent to the extent that, instead of bringing unblemished sacrifices to the Lord, they brought the sick, the lame, the blind: they continued to have "a form of godliness," of worship, of reverence, but they had lost the spirit or power of it. So it is with some in Spiritual Israel; they have consecrated themselves to the Lord, and in a formal manner at least desire to comply therewith; but as they have lost the *spirit* of devotion, the whole matter has become offensive in the divine sight. The Spiritual Israelite offers unto the Lord the fruit of his lips in prayer and praise, but if these are offered in a merely perfunctory manner as a "duty" and not from the heart, they are blind, sick and lame offerings, which the Lord despises. He offers unto the Lord service or money, but if these be given

grudgingly, not heartily and with a loving appreciation which wishes they might be increased a thousandfold, then the offering is blind and lame and sick, and not pleasing in the Lord's sight. [R2541 : page 267]

The Prophet inquires whether, if they were going to an earthly governor and, after the custom of that time, would entreat his favor with a gift, they would expect the favor if they took a mean gift, the sick, the lame, the blind of the flock as a present? Surely not. Then, turning the illustration, he suggests, And now I pray you that, in beseeching God for his mercies, you consider what kind of a present you have brought to him, and whether or not you have any right to expect his favor.

The tenth verse in our Common Version would give the thought that all had become so selfish that they would refuse to do anything in connection with the Lord's service unless it yielded pay of some kind; but Leeser's translation and the Revised Version give a different thought here, *viz.*: "O that there were someone among you that would lock up the door of the sanctuary, that you might not light up my altar for nought: I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept in favor an offering from your hand." The thought is, that from the Lord's standpoint it were just as well to abandon all such formalistic worship devoid of reverence and love and heart-worship: and this is true to-day in respect to us Spiritual Israelites and our "better sacrifices," devotions and offerings.

Vs. 11 in the Common Version declares that the Lord's name shall be great throughout the earth, but it will be noticed that the words "shall be" are italicized, which signifies that they are not in the original text. Some verb must be supplied to make sense, and the Revised Version supplies "*is*" instead of "*shall be*." This makes it read that God's name *is* great amongst the heathen – was great at the time of the writing of this prophecy.

Altho Israel was the only nation in the whole world with which God had up to that time made a covenant or agreement as respected an

offer of eternal life; and altho Israel alone had been favored of God with any revelation respecting his character, his plan; and altho Israel alone had received the Law of the Lord; and altho Israel had in these respects "much advantage every way: over all the other nations of the world; – nevertheless, we have evidences that the other nations, even those in idolatry, had a reverence for Jehovah, "the God of Israel." We have frequent instances of this in Scripture narratives. For instance, the Philistines revered Jehovah, the God of Israel, when they returned the Ark of Jehovah to Israel, after having taken it in battle. (1 Sam. 4:7,8 and chapter 6.) Nebuchadnezzar revered Jehovah, the God of Israel, as the great revealer of secrets through Daniel, and that there was no other god like unto him. Darius, who honored Daniel, and who was entrapped by his courtiers into the making of a law which cast Daniel into the den of lions, declared, nevertheless, his reverence for Jehovah the God of Daniel (Dan. 4:37; 6:26,27). The fame of Israel's God had reached the Medes and Persians also, and Cyrus, in reverence to God, had given liberty to the captives of Israel to return from Babylonian captivity. And there are not wanting evidences that the surrounding nations realized even more clearly than did Israel that many of the judgments which befell Israel were divine chastisements for their unfaithfulness to Jehovah. – See Ezra 1:2; Num. 24.

Our lesson skips over certain other exhortations by the prophet, and comes to chapter 3:8, where he makes the inquiry, "Will a man rob God?" The matter is put in a startling form. Who would think of robbing his God? The thought connected with the word "God" is that of mighty one, powerful one, adorable one, and to the enlightened mind of the Christian additionally, the gracious, beneficent one. We realize a responsibility to God, obligation to bring him gifts and sacrifices and services, but who would refuse all this and on the contrary would rob God? Who would be so profane, so irreverent! Surely none would do so intelligently and wilfully; and so the natural Israelite is represented as doubting the matter and saying, "Wherein have we robbed God?" It is an important matter to see ourselves in a

true light – to get a proper view of our conduct as precedent to any reform.

Israel was bemoaning its impoverished condition, its lack of divine favor and blessing, and the Lord's testimony through the Prophet was designed to show them that their leanness and poverty were the result of losing God's favor, and that they had lost divine favor by reason of their irreverence and failure to show hearty appreciation and to render true worship. Applying the same lesson to Spiritual Israelites who find themselves lean of soul and starving spiritually, we find that the difficulty has been either **(1)** that they have been worshiping in a wrong direction, or **(2)**, if worshiping in the right direction, they have failed to present unto the Lord their very best.

Under the first of these errors many are worshiping and sacrificing to human institutions and not to God – they are offering their devotions and sacrifices perhaps to build up "churchianity" in some of its forms, – Presbyterianism, Methodism, Lutheranism, Adventism, etc. This is worshiping idols and sacrificing to idols and not to God. How can spiritual blessings be expected from God, when the reverence and service are rendered to men and to human institutions?

Under the second error, others who are not thus **[R2541 : page 268]** deluded by human institutions, but who recognize the true God, and who know of their responsibilities toward him, are lean of soul because they have not sufficient love and reverence for the Lord whom they do know. They serve him much more meanly and sacrifice to him in a much more niggardly manner than do the devotees at the shrines of human isms. Knowing the true God, they have the larger responsibilities and should be the more careful to present to him the best offerings possible of their time, influence, means, talents. If they give to the Lord but the fag ends of time, but the offals of influence, but a dribble of their talents, such sacrifices cannot be acceptable in his sight, nor could any reasonable person expect them to be so.

"Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Being one people, many of their interests were common, and their general poverty and leanness of soul was but a recompense for their course. And so it is and has all along been with the Lord's spiritual people, the one Church, the holy nation, the peculiar people, the sanctified in Christ Jesus. But now that we have reached the "harvest" time we find that a separating work is in progress – not merely a separating of "wheat" from "tares" and of suitable fish from unsuitable fish, as represented in the parables (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43,47-49), but also another separation amongst the Lord's true people, amongst the consecrated ones, as represented in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins – all virgins, yet not all worthy to go in to the marriage and to constitute the Bride, Christ's joint heir. – Matt. 25:1-13.

The present separation from amongst the consecrated will not only "gather out of the Kingdom those that do iniquity," and that have neither part nor lot in the matter, the "tares," but it will also gather out "those that offend" – those who fail to come up to the requirements of their covenant in fulness of consecration to the Lord, those who must therefore pass through the great tribulation and be brought through severe tests by trials and disciplines.

Verses 10-12 give the gist of the entire lesson. When the Lord reproves, it is not for the purpose of discouraging his people, but for their reformation. When he chides, it is not to dishearten but to stimulate and to revive: and as here with natural Israel he exhorted to reformation and to thus prove his love and his bounty and his willingness to bless them, so we may apply a similar exhortation to a similar class in Spiritual Israel. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse...and prove me now herewith,...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" – an overflow blessing.

We exhort all Spiritual Israelites to thus prove the Lord, to awaken to a fresh realization of his goodness and bounty and of their own obligation to spend and be spent in his service, according to their covenant of self-sacrifice, – walking in the footsteps of Jesus. To such it will mean a revival of spiritual health, energy, vigor, joy. Looking unto Jesus, their eyes will see [R2542 : page 268] him the more clearly, and see also the heavenly crown in reservation for them, and all the exceeding great and precious things which God hath in reservation for them that *love* him, and whose love is manifested to be of the genuine kind, which loves to sacrifice to him and to his cause the very best of all that they possess.

With the Jews there were two tithes obligatory. (A tithe signifies a tenth.) One tithe or one tenth of all their increase of flocks, herds, grain, etc., went for taxes, for the support of their government, and was rendered to the governor. The other tithe or tenth of their increase was a tax for religious purposes; it was rendered to the priests. Under the present Gospel age "high call" God has left Spiritual Israel without any specific instructions of this kind. The governments of this world generally take good care to look out for the tax part, while the obligation for religious and spiritual things represented by the holy tithe of the Jews is now left at the option of the Spiritual Israelite without even so much as a command respecting it or a stipulation as to the amount.

The tithe obligation was commanded to fleshly Israel, Moses and the house of servants, of which he was the head, – Israel after the flesh; but in dealing with the house of sons, of which Christ Jesus is the Head, a Son "over his own house" of sons (Heb. 3:5,6), the Lord has placed no restriction. Why? Because in this household of *sons* he recognizes only those who have been *begotten again by his holy spirit*: the thought is that whoever has become a partaker of the spirit of the Lord, whoever has the mind of Christ, has a mind not merely to give a tenth of all his possessions and income to the Lord, but to

consecrate it *all* – without the reservation of a single item – mind and body, influence and talents, time and means.

But while the foregoing proposition of *entire consecration* will not be questioned by any who belong to the house of sons, nevertheless, the fact that they have the treasure of the new nature in earthen vessels frequently causes some to act very inconsistently – very much out of harmony with the real spirit of their consecration. The new mind is beset and continually fought by the mind of the flesh; as the Apostle declares, there is a warfare here continually, for the two minds are contrary. The new mind says,

"All for Jesus! All for Jesus!
All my being's ransomed powers;
All my thoughts and words and doings;
All my days and all my hours."

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But the mind of the flesh combats this and fights against such a full consecration, urging that it would be an extreme, that it is contrary to the general course of the world and its wisest men and women – urging that we must not thus make of ourselves "peculiar people," but must in general do as the world does, using all of time and talent, influence and means, selfishly – if not personally, then at least for our families.

Here is the great battlefield on which so many surrender before the evil influences, the forces of the world, the flesh and the devil – the place where so many fail to come off conquerors, victors, through obedience to the Word of the Lord and the spirit of their consecration to follow in his footsteps.

A few, but not very many, may need caution lest they should carry the matter of consecration to an extreme. An occasional one out of a thousand might perhaps act too literally upon the instruction that whosoever would be the Lord's disciple must forsake all to follow him,

– might understand this too literally to mean an abandonment of houses, lands, families, etc. There can be no doubt, however, respecting the real import of the Scripture teachings along these lines: the Lord's followers are to forsake houses, lands, parents, children, etc., in the sense of not permitting any of these things to henceforth take his chief affection or to absorb his interest, his love, his devotion in the supreme sense. This supreme devotion by right and by covenant belongs to the Lord, and must be preserved inviolate. Family, home, the beauties of nature, should all be appreciated, but in a secondary sense as compared to the Lord. What would please the Lord must be supreme.

If we were dealing with an unreasonable and irascible Master, such a covenant and such an obligation might mean unreasonable requirements of us, and might inflict injustice upon others; but we are dealing with one whose requirement is a "reasonable service." Altho we have covenanted our *all* to him – time, money, influence, name, earthly hopes and pleasures, family and friends, "even unto death," we find that the Lord, after accepting our full consecration, makes us personally "stewards" of these things which we sacrifice to him and his cause. And as his stewards he permits and commissions us to use our consecrated *all* reasonably and moderately and according to our best judgment of what would honor his name and forward his cause. He permits us to use *some* of our consecrated means for our own sustenance and the sustenance and care of our families, merely enjoining moderation in all things. He permits us to use, therefore, *a portion* of our time, energy and talent in providing for these necessities and, if properly and reasonably used, he does not reckon this a selfish use, but merely a necessary expenditure.

Indeed, he leaves matters entirely in our hands, saying to us, so to speak: You have consecrated your *all* to me, and I have now returned it *all* to you to use in my name and to my glory and to the forwarding of my will in the earth as you shall understand my will from my Word. Go, occupy, use; I will inspect your work later and

will judge of your *love* and your *devotion* by the carefulness with which you shall seek to use your hours, your moments, your dollars, your dimes, etc. If you have much love and devotion to me, it will manifest itself, or if you have little that also will be manifested, and my reward shall be accordingly. Only those who love me supremely and who rejoice to follow my Word and example shall be joint-heirs in my Kingdom – for only they will have the reverential and benevolent and spiritual dispositions of heart essential to the great work of the Kingdom which will be instituted as soon as the elect little flock has been completed and glorified.
