

Will A Man Rob God?

Mal 3:5, 8-12

Introduction:

1. There are many passages of Scripture that commend giving freely. Covetousness and greed are always condemned.
2. The message of the Bible and its theology of grace present God as the ultimate Giver, freely sacrificing His life for us. In that message there is the clarion call that we should give like He has given.
3. And yet, when a family appears in the vestibule, often waiting until worship is over, and asks for money to continue their travels we find ourselves in a dilemma with our conscience. We have no knowledge of these people. Are they attempting to take advantage of consciences trained to be gracious? Is what they are doing equivalent to swindling? Does it border on extortion? Or are they genuinely in need and candidates for compassion? If you are like me maybe you salve your conscience by giving them some money and sending them on their way.
4. But that is not the end of our dilemma. When a preacher comes and asks for financial help in his work, similar questions arise. Can we trust this person? Will they really do what they are promising? Are they faithful to the Lord? Will they continue to be?
5. These are difficult situations. We could just do nothing, but there might be some sense in which we could be “robbing God” by not caring for His people. We could just pass it off to the elders or a preacher and let them handle it, but this hardly seems fair.
6. Consider with me some key texts in Scripture that teach us something about God’s blessings and how we should use what He has given us.

Discussion:

- I. Fearing the Lord involves caring for those who are financially vulnerable (Mal. 3:5).
 - A. Failing to care for the widow and orphan and the alien is listed alongside sorcery, adultery and false swearing as examples of not fearing (or respecting) the Lord.
 - B. Verse 7 demands repentance from having turned aside from My statutes.
 - C. Verses 8ff accuse Israel of having robbed God in tithes and offerings.
 - D. So it is a whole direction or course of life that is revealed in this text, but failing to care for the financially vulnerable marks a turning aside from following the Lord.
 - E. Another interesting feature of this text is that God promises “to open the windows of heaven,” and “rebuke the devourer” for them if they return to Him.
 1. Some have taken this to mean that if one is faithful to God then He will grant them riches and wealth in abundance.
 2. But, practically speaking, there does not seem to be any direct correlation between righteousness and wealth.
 3. Indeed, sometimes the most righteous are poor, and often oppressed by the unrighteous who are wealthy (cf. James 2:6-7).
 4. And yet, Israel was granted a land flowing with milk and honey and Abraham was said to have been desiring a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:16).

At least some of the blessings promised by God are spiritual in nature and inherited at a later time.

- F. Given this teaching of caring for the financially vulnerable we are not surprised by Jesus' teaching in the Good Samaritan story. The Good Samaritan found a man beaten and half dead and cared for him. The lawyer concluded that he proved to be a neighbor to the man. And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same" (Lk. 10:30ff).
- G. We are not surprised by Jesus' teaching about the separation of the sheep and the goats. "When did we see you a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison? they asked. "When you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me," the King replied. See Matt. 25:31ff.
- H. We should not be surprised by the teaching of Eph. 4:28: "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need."
- I. The biblical principle is clear. Fearing the Lord involves caring for those who are financially vulnerable. "Passing by on the other side," is not appropriate. But this doesn't answer all our questions, does it? We must probe further.

II. God blesses those who are gracious and lend (Psa. 112).

- A. Fearing the Lord in this text is associated with greatly delighting in His commandments (1).
- B. The results of fearing the Lord . . .
 - 1. His descendants will be mighty on the earth (2).
 - 2. He will be blessed (2).
 - 3. With wealth and riches (3).
- C. This man is "gracious and lends" (5). He "gives freely to the poor" (9).
- D. The message is not substantially different than the message in Malachi. Two things . . .
 - 1. It commends grace, compassion, lending and freely giving to the poor.
 - 2. It promises God's blessing on those who do.
- E. In 2 Cor. 9:6ff Psa. 112:9 is quoted as Paul reflects on giving to the church at Corinth.
 - 1. He describes giving as "sowing" and therefore producing a harvest.
 - a. Sowing sparingly results in a sparing harvest. Sowing bountifully results in reaping bountifully.
 - b. He goes on to say that God will supply and multiply their seed for sowing and they will be enriched in everything for all liberality. That would seem to mean that God has blessed you and will continue to do so therefore give.
 - 2. This then becomes the foundation for giving cheerfully and liberally (2 Cor. 8:2, 11; 9:5).
 - 3. The result is . . .
 - a. Thanksgiving to God.
 - b. Supplying the needs of the saints.
 - c. Glorification of God.
 - d. Yearning by those in need toward those who supplied their need.
- F. So, fearing the Lord involves caring for those who are financially vulnerable AND God blesses those who are gracious and lend. These two principles are taught throughout the revelation of God. But we already knew this didn't we? We know

that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). And while we may not know exactly how He may choose to bless that giver, whether in great wealth in this life or wealth in the next, or perhaps even poverty in this life and wealth in the next (cf. Lk. 16:19ff), or even wealth, poverty and wealth again, as in the case of Job, we do know that there is blessing from God for those who care for the vulnerable. So, we probe further.

III. God expects us to act responsibly in working (2 Thess. 3:6ff).

- A. This passage clearly establishes a work then eat arrangement. It establishes paying for one's own bread rather than using off of another.
- B. It clearly says, "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either."
- C. Underlying these principles is the right of private ownership and by implication the prohibition of stealing, inherent in the Eighth Commandment, and in Eph. 4:28.
- D. Paul is so emphatic that he defines anything else as leading an unruly undisciplined life and that the faithful should "keep away from every brother who leads" such a life. Free loaders are not to be tolerated!
- E. This principle is supported by . . .
 - 1. 1 Cor. 5:11, 13; 6:10. We are not to associate with any so-called brother who is a swindler/extortioner. Instead they are to be removed from among the faithful. Swindlers do not have a part in the kingdom of God.
 - 2. Paul's instruction in 1 Tim. 5 regarding widows "put on the list." He said, "Refuse to put younger widows on the list . . . they learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but gossips and busybodies" (11, 13).
 - 3. "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:18).
 - 4. Prov. 6:6ff: "Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—Your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man."

IV. So what is the application?

- A. We ought to care for those who are financially vulnerable. God holds us accountable. Those who fear God act with kindness and compassion just as He has acted with kindness and compassion toward us.
- B. In one way or another God blesses those who act in this way.
- C. But this in no way sanctions the actions of those who would attempt to take advantage of God's people. Living off of them, extorting money or swindling them rather than acting responsibly for themselves.
- D. Do not allow your thinking to be muddled here.
 - 1. It is appropriate to give to those in need.
 - 2. It is NOT appropriate to create, support nor perpetuate a system that encourages and supports free loading.
 - 3. It is NOT appropriate to support free loaders.
 - 4. This means accepting responsibility and doing the work necessary to investigate

circumstances and doing the best we can to stay on top of such matters.

E. There are at least three evils here.

1. There is the evil of covetousness and greed that withholds from the vulnerable.
2. There is the evil of slothfulness, laziness, swindling and extortion that takes advantage of the good willed.
3. There is the evil of compromising with the evil of slothfulness, laziness, swindling and extortion.

Conclusion:

1. These are basic and fundamental principles of Scripture.
2. They are fundamental to individual, family and societal life.
3. They need to be taught to our children, ingrained in our thinking and executed in our society.
4. And the church needs to model these principles before the world.