

The Holy Life

3:6-18

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“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes, and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. ‘But you say, “How shall we return?” Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, “How have we robbed Thee?” In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, . . .’” (3:6-18).

To Israel, holiness was not an option, it was mandatory! “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 14:2; cf. Leviticus 11:44). In the New Testament, this requirement became more emphatic. Holiness would result because a “new heart” would seek a stronger devotion. It is the sole objective of the new covenant’s laws. Paul said, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (Ephesians 1:4). Holiness is really the logical end. Since God is holy (Leviticus 11:44) and Christians are His children, then Christians should be holy (Ephesians 5:1).

This holy life of New Testament Christianity is a most beautiful life. It is a life without falsehood, guile, or perverseness. It has one end, one

rule, and one heart. Hypocrites are called “double-minded” because they pretend to follow God but actually follow the world, but holiness is never “double-minded.” It is sincere and single. The holy life can satisfy man’s deepest needs.

Malachi 3:6-18 is a marvelous discussion about this holy life. Israel had not guarded their holiness and had become corrupt. Though the Israelites still practiced religion, they were void of true spirituality (cf. Matthew 15:7, 8). In a series of contrasts, Malachi revealed the holy life to Israel. His portrayal of that life continues to challenge all who seek God’s favor. Some today are like ancient Israel. They have shelved holiness and practice a pretense of Christianity. But their pretense does not eliminate the objective of our holy God. All are to be “imitators of God, as beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1). Examine Malachi’s description of this holy life, and measure yourself alongside this lifestyle.

ITS PORTRAYAL

Malachi emphasized four basic traits of the holy life.

The holy life is unchanging in righteousness. This is contrasted with man’s fickleness (3:6, 7). Malachi pointed Israel to God’s immutability. God is constant in doing what is right. Because of God’s constancy, Malachi said Israel had not been destroyed (3:6). God had made a promise to Israel and even though Israel forsook her prom-

ise to God, God refused to forsake them! This constancy is in direct contrast to the typical behavior of man. Man is ever changing (cf. Numbers 23:19; James 1:17). Yet man thinks of himself as "holy."

Those who live a holy life must be as unchanging as God regarding doing what is right. God's righteousness is "everlasting," and so should man's be (cf. 2 Samuel 23:5). Christians have made a promise with God. They are obligated to keep that promise (cf. Ephesians 5:1, 8; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

The holy life is fully sanctified and consecrated. This is in contrast to those following worldly aims (3:8-10). Malachi's audience found it hard to believe they had not kept their covenant promise with God (3:7b). The prophet immediately tells them of their one great failing—materialism! His charge is blunt. They were robbing God, defrauding Him in not paying tithes! They were paying some, but they were not following God's law completely. During the lean years, it was common for them to neglect the full tithes and offerings. They felt justified in giving a part. But Malachi called for the "whole tithe" (3:10a). A part was not acceptable.

God did not require the "whole tithe" because of a greedy or arbitrary demand. Malachi's rebuke was because Israel had forgotten the purpose of the tithe. It was a tragic revelation of her unspiritual attitude. Israel's basic problem was a failure to recognize God as the true owner of all goods. God did not need Israel's tithes (cf. Psalms 50:10-12). He called for the tithe so that Israel would be aware that all they had was really God's possession.

This same point is addressed by Jesus: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The holy life realizes that all material possessions belong to God. We are stewards of what God has placed within our trust. A gift to God demonstrates our honor and love; it recognizes the Almighty as the true Owner. It is a statement that we do not "own" anything.

Those who are wedded to the world may offer gifts to God, but those gifts will turn upon them as a curse! (v. 9; cf. Acts 5:1-11). May we heed this point. Let all live a holy life that is separated from the world's allurements!

The holy life is filled with blessings which is in contrast to the emptiness and destruction of the world (3:11, 12). Malachi's hearers were to understand the promise God had made to all who lived holy lives. God will "pour out . . . a blessing" upon them (3:10b). God bestows three wonderful blessings upon all living a holy life. First, He will give divine protection: "I will rebuke. . . . (3:11; cf. Psalms 9:9; Romans 8:31). Because of this protection, the saint will be guarded against evil. Second, He will give divine favor: "And all the nations will call you blessed, . . . (3:12; cf. Zechariah 8:13; Deuteronomy 33:29). This favor will enable the believer to find many blessings. Third, He will give divine reward: ". . . for you shall be a delightful land" (3:12; cf. Matthew 25:34; Proverbs 11:20). How comforting is the thought that the Almighty will welcome His holy ones with such words of tenderness.

These blessings will be abundant. But they are found only in the lives of those who are holy.

The holy life is recorded in the Book of Life which is in direct contrast to those who are doers of evil (3:13-18). These verses contain a great contrast between the holy life and the life guided by sin. Recorded first are the words from those who have refused to follow God's call for sanctification. These live only for self (3:13-15). Their words are "arrogant." They are arrogant and obstinate (cf. Jude 15). These claim that there is no special advantage to serving God (3:14). Their compromised religion had not brought them any profit, so they were ready to let it go.

In answer to the skeptics of 3:13-15, Malachi presented a description of those who had developed holy lives (3:16-18). The practice and rewards of this group answered the skeptics. These are described first as "fearing" God (3:16). This reveals the great respect they held for Him and His will. They were ready to do His will with an eager attitude (cf. Psalms 125:4, 5; 126:5). A second trait of this group is found in the word "possession" (3:17). Literally, it is "treasures." It refers to private property that possessed great value. As such, these living the holy life belonged to God and were regarded as the Almighty's "prized possessions." This is true of Christians today who live the holy life (cf. Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; Psalms 135:4).

The greatest contrast between these two groups is portrayed in those included in the “book of remembrance” (3:16). This spoke of an ancient custom where all important people and events were written down so they would not be forgotten. The God of heaven has such a book where the names of His holy saints are found (cf. Psalms 56:8; Daniel 7:10; Exodus 32:32; Ezekiel 13:9; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 20:12). Those who are found in this book will be spared God’s wrath. But only those who live the holy life can be found in the Book of Life. Therefore, the prophet’s point is emphatic. One must live this holy life if he is to avoid God’s anger.

ITS PRIORITY

One lesson emerges from the text. There is no substitute for, or alternative better than, the holy life! Living and maintaining this lifestyle ought to be the top priority for God’s people (Ephesians 1:4).

The heathen people believed that they were not to come to any of their religious services unless they were prepared. “Aeneas” thus wrote these words to his father as he was traveling home from war, “Father, do ye meddle with the sacrifices; but as for me it is a sinful thing to touch them, till I have washed myself in the fountain.” This was an external rite for cleansing that the pagans used before entering their temples. Thus, the pagans understood that they should not mingle the holy of devotion until they were pure. To impress this upon those in the temple, one would cry out, “All you who are unclean and profane, go far away from these sacrifices.” Reason taught them this fact. Let us take heed how we come to worship. May we prepare ourselves to meddle with holy things! Let us learn from the heathen’s admonition, “Prepare thyself, be not hasty, lest thine be counted as the sacrifices of a fool!”

CONCLUSION

Malachi’s admonition closes with these words, “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (3:18). He told Israel to make a difference in how they lived. They were to live lives devoted to God. In doing this, the nation would realize that it is always profitable to serve God. This profit

would be seen in the four contrasts just presented. It could also be seen at the judgment when everyone’s opinion would agree about the profit of living the holy life.

Let us resolve to live the holy life and enjoy its rewards at Judgment Day. But such a resolve requires strong determination. One man in history well illustrates this determination. In his own meditations, he had reached the conviction that a new world existed far across the sea. No disappointment or delay could take that conviction from his mind. Neither the frowns nor the neglect of monarchs, neither hope deferred nor the terrors of the deep nor mutiny nor tempest nor death could turn Columbus from his resolute purpose. On he pressed in spite of them all, full of hope when all around seemed to tell only of despair. At last he stood on the shores of a lovely island, the discoverer of lands that changed the history of the world. All because of his determination!

God commands us to live a holy life. He challenges us to test that lifestyle and see that it is the best: “Test Me now in this!” God’s promises are always true, and those who live the holy life will find abundant blessings! Let us insure these blessings by being unchanging in righteousness and sanctified, and filled with God’s blessings, and having our names in the Book of Life!

—John Kachelman

God’s Immutability (Malachi 3:6)

The statement, “I, the Lord, do not change,” is full of comfort and also distress.

1. It is filled with comfort because: God is unlike man who is ever changing (3:7); He is constant in His desire to forgive sin (3:7); His promised blessings will never fail (3:10; cf. Hebrews 6:18).
2. It is filled with distress because: God’s immutability presents the darkest doom of sin (3:9); His constancy will judge man’s fickleness (3:7a).
3. An invitation is included in God’s immutable character. All erring souls are urged to “return” before it is too late! (3:7b).

God Does Not Change
(Malachi 3:6)

1. . . . in regard to His love toward us (1:2a).
2. . . . in expecting man to honor his name (1:6).
3. . . . in requiring a proper response to His will (2:1, 2).
4. . . . in regard to marriage (2:14-16).
5. . . . in His plans to return for judgment (3:1ff.).

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