

Mark 12:13-17

Jesus acknowledges Rome's government, so Christians should honor civic authority (*Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; 1 Peter 2:13-17*). **How does this pertain to present day?** Submit to government by paying taxes and obeying laws as long as they do not deny one's greater commitment to God. **What do we give to God?** Everything is from God to be used for His glory in love (see below study on *Malachi 3*). This is the Great Commandment (*Matthew 22:37-38*). This includes giving financially to the Church which fulfills the Second Greatest and New Commandments (*Matthew 22:39; John 13:34-35*). Financial giving provides for pastors, fellowship, and brethren in need (*1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37*). Israelites gave more than 10% annually (*Numbers 18:21-24 – Levitical Tithe; Deuteronomy 14:22-27 – Festival Tithe; Deuteronomy 14:28-29 – Poor Tithe*). It is not about the amount you give but about what you keep for yourself and why (*Mark 12:41-44; Matthew 6:19-34; Acts 5:1-11*).

Malachi 3 Study

A. Overview: Malachi is addressing God's People and the appointed religious leaders (Levites and priests) responsible for instructing them. The primary concern is everyone's spiritual indifference, apathy, and cold-heartedness demonstrated in a lack of love for God by refusing to give to the LORD their very best. Rather, God's People had become complacent, lacked trust in His promised provision for them, and served God and one another merely out of individual convenience.

1. Example: Sacrifices being offered were unfit animals of the lowest quality; keeping one's best for themselves and offering to God their leftovers.

a. Instead of their lives being centered around God and serving Him, serving God and one another was something that centered around their personal lives out of convenience and greed.

i. The false presumption was that, as long as God's People and His appointed leaders were going through the external motions of serving and worshipping, that was enough. They failed to recognize God's call for complete heart-commitment to Him; loving Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; giving Him the best, the 'first fruits', of what we have in recognition that all is from God as a gracious gift to be used in serving and glorifying Him and for the good of His People.

* Importantly, when being faced with this command to love, we must neither assert that we can achieve this by working harder, nor should we give up in despair, but we must pray for God's gracious circumcision of our hearts and trust in the Good News that Jesus, alone, loved in such a manner FOR us that His Spirit may now grow such love IN us.

B. Breaking Malachi 3 Down: Wrong heart-intentions and misunderstandings behind what we give to God leads to blemished and unacceptable offerings to the LORD. He requires a contrite and humble heart that loves Him and other Brethren with the self-denying and sacrificial love of Christ Who died on the Cross, for us, that we may have such loving hearts demonstrated in our service and offerings. Those with such hearts do not see serving God with their very best as an inconvenience but as their joyful duty and desire; because, their lives are centered upon that for

which we are created; to serve and glorify God with that with which He has blessed us (talents, money, Spiritual gifts, time, etc.).

1. Malachi 3:7 concludes with a question asked by the people being confronted with their cold-hearted indifference that is answered in verses 8-12 revealing their blindness in understanding that all of their possessions are from God and to be used for His glory; not for their own greed and convenience

a. Verse 10 , within the context of verses 9-11, is a reference to God's covenantal cursing articulated in Deuteronomy 28:47 upon those who fail to honor Him with such a heart-commitment revealed in refusing to give the fullness of their tithes and offerings. Contrarily, if the People give as God requires with such a heart-commitment and trust in the LORD, He will provide for them and their needs as He has promised within the context of God's National Covenant with Israel.

i. Verse 8 alludes to tithes and offerings used to support the Levites and priests who were charged to properly teach God's People His Word (Malachi 2:7), which was something they were failing to do (Malachi 2:8-9).

2. Upon returning to the LORD by His grace through Malachi's prophetic exhortation with the evidence of serving God and offering Him their 'first fruits', their very best, God's People renewed their covenantal commitment to God and each other in verses 16-18.

a. Note a Book of Remembrance in verse 16 that reinforces the importance of Membership in a local congregation by highlighting the renewal of the community's covenantal commitments to one another and the LORD.

3. Without a clear understanding of these things, a local congregation runs the risk of developing a half-hearted attitude characteristic of the people and teachers Malachi addressed. Apart from God's grace and the Bible's teaching, a congregation with Members uncommitted to giving financially could die off in complacency with no zeal for God's Word, no love for others, and no evangelistic motivation. Without committed Bible-teachers and willing disciples, such a congregation could fall into the trap of the Ephesian Church (Revelation 2:1-7); losing sight of their first love for God's Word made-flesh and revealed in the Bible.