

Malachi - Careless Worship and the Failure to Feel the Greatness of God.

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I. Introduction

A. A Story: Big godders and little godders.

B. Worship

1. Careless worship results from a failure to *feel* the greatness of God.
2. True worship encompasses all of life (Rom. 12:1).
3. True worship is a response to the greatness of God.
4. Malachi will speak to us concerning the kindness and the severity of God (Rom. 11:22).

II. Why the book of Malachi matters and why study it?

A. It's nature as the very word of God.

1. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
2. "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

B. Theological reasons.

1. The greatness of God and God's passion for His own glory - the sheer God-centeredness of God (Isaiah 48: 9-11).
 - a. 1:5 - "Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, 'Great is the LORD beyond the borders of Israel.'"
 - b. 1:6 - "If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts."
 - c. 1:11-12 - "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts."

d. 1:14 - "For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations."

e. 2:5 - "It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name."

f. 3:5 - "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts."

g. 3:16 - "Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name."

h. 4:2 - "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."

i. 4:5 - "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes."

j. LORD of Hosts (Heb. Yahweh Tzva'ot): the great sovereign almighty LORD of the armies of heaven and earth; used proportionately more in Malachi than any OT book.

2. The sovereign predestinating love of God.

a. 1:2 - "'I have loved you,' says the LORD. But you say, 'How have you loved us?' 'Is not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the LORD. 'Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.'

b. John Piper on a lesson learned from Malachi:

"I have thought very often about the preaching of these things.....as I've thought about this, how do you preach, or should you preach on these things? Should you preach about the doctrine of election, reprobation? Over the last 7 years my general reflection on this matter has been to say that I should go slow, patient, easy-----because these things are for well taught congregations, mature congregations. And those of you who have been around should know that in the first 5 years of my ministry here I never made one of these so-called doctrines of grace an explicit subject matter for any sermon.

I have felt rebuked this week in reading this text-----and corrected. Do you know why? I stared at this text, and I read it and read it, and it clobbered me yesterday-----that the audience to whom this text is directed is not mature, nor well taught. They are skeptical, they are careless, they are indifferent, they are disobedient, they are adulterous, they are stingy-----and to this people Malachi preaches the sovereign unconditional electing love of God, in terms more bold, more forthright than anywhere in the OT.

And I was rebuked-----with my little view that these doctrines are just for the

establishment of the mature, they are just for the deepening of the well taught. And this text said you are wrong. These doctrines are for the humiliation of the proud, these doctrines are for the humbling of the presumptuous, who dally in God's presence as though they were equal partners with Him.

So I am much emboldened this morning not to hold back on this text. Not to say----- wait a minute there are immature people in the congregation, there are sinners here, there are newcomers. Because Malachi didn't hold back. There is something about this doctrine that is tailor- made for both the mature, to take them deep in God and make them strong for tragedy, and for worldly people who need to be brought up short in their presumption before God" (John Piper, sermon on Malachi 1, 1987).

C. Spiritual reality.

1. Living coram Deo - before the face of God, in His presence, under His gaze, under His authority, for His glory.
2. Living in the fear of the Lord.

III. Historical Context

A. Post Babylonian exile prophet.

B. Contemporary of Nehemiah and Ezra.

C. Difficult circumstances.

1. Externally
2. Spiritually

D. Date: approximately mid-5th century BC (ca. 450 BC).

E. Author

1. God----- through Malachi
2. Malachi: Heb. = "my messenger"
 - a. Possibly a descriptive title.
 - b. Probably a personal name.

F. Other Biblical references (to the book, not Malachi himself)

1. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Lu. 1:7; 7:27; Rom. 9:13

IV. Message

A. Oracle or burden (Heb. massa) - weighty, heavy and substantial as the words of the Holy and Eternal One.

1. It matters how we worship God.
2. Careless worship results from a failure to feel the greatness of God.

B. Six Disputes

1. The First Dispute - Chapter 1: 2 - 5 ----- God's love questioned and vindicated: Worship of God involves our understanding of God ----- who He is in His sovereign love and majestic greatness.

a. "I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated." (1), (2)

b. Mark Dever:

".....you will not get in touch with God without approaching him as he has revealed himself. God wanted his people to know the truth about him-----that he was great and sovereign, even beyond the borders of Israel. The Lord is no village god or tribal spirit. By his own choice, he rejected even hated, Israel's next door neighbor, Edom (descendants' of Esau). Paul used this passage in his famously controversial Romans 9 to argue that God has sovereignty over all things and all people.

This was the first dispute the Lord raised with his people because he wanted to ensure that they understood him. He alone was sovereign over Israel and beyond. "Great is the LORD-----even beyond the borders of Israel!"

In addition to learning in this disputation that God is sovereign, we learn that God loves his people. God's blessings and faithfulness to his people were not the result of their faithfulness, they were the product of his love. And God wants the truth about his universal greatness and unending love for his people to be known so that we will approach him rightly. Speaking and understanding the truth about God is part of our worship of him."

God's people must want to know the truth about God. We as Christian believers, God's New Covenant people, must want to know the truth about God.

Dever makes this telling application concerning this great God of sovereign love:

"I don't know if this is the God you attend church to worship, but you cannot be indifferent to what God is like and, at the same time, honestly worship him. If you are indifferent to what he is like, the only god you can worship is a self-constructed, homemade, do-it-yourself god and not the real thing" (Promises Made: The Message of

the Old Testament).

2. The Second Dispute - Chapter 1:6 to 2:9 ----- Israel's blemished worship: Worship of God involves giving our best as God defines it.

a. Worship as Biblically defined and Israel's outrageous sin ----- both priest and people.

b. Mark Dever:

"The idea that some worship is correct while other worship is incorrect may seem strange to many people today.....In the Bible, God shows a great concern for how he is approached. He is real-----and so are his holiness and our sin.....it isn't enough to be sincere, because people can be sincerely wrong.....we can sincerely misunderstand this God we claim to worship and what he requires of us. Suppose you sincerely approach God, but you do so at your own convenience, or as the eighth most important thing on your list, or without bothering to repent of known sin. Under none of these circumstances will your worship be acceptable to God."

He goes on to say:

*"It is never our prerogative to ask God why he does what he does. It isn't really our business. But perhaps we can reverently ask why God cared so much about whether the sacrifices brought to him were unblemished or not. What's going on here? In part, God was interested in the priorities of the Israelite's lives. He wanted to know whether they were willing to bring God their best. I expect we can understand this much. Yet God was also interested in teaching the people that a sacrifice for their sins must be perfect. Above all else, the Levitical sacrifices were meant to point to **the** sacrifice for sin that was still to come-----Jesus Christ, the truly unblemished one, the perfect lamb of God.*

The people of Jerusalem in Malachi's day may have questioned whether God really loved them, but the Lord aggressively responded by saying that the real question was not God's love for Israel, but Israel's love for God. God promised that his name would be great among the nations. But his own people profaned it. They treated it cheaply. One day the nations would be obedient in ways his own people were not obedient now.

We must worship God according to what he has said about how he should be worshipped. He asks us for our best, and so we should give our best.

If you have believed that you can worship God and remain your own Lord, keeping your best to yourself, you are wrong. Truly worshipping God includes taking him as your heavenly Father and almighty master. And he deserves your best" (Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament).

3. The Third Dispute - Chapter 2:10 - 16 ----- Israel's idolatrous marriages and illegitimate divorces: Worship of God involves faithfulness to Him and to one another.

- a. Leadership and the spiritual health of God's people.
- b. Idolatrous marriages.
- c. Illegitimate divorces. (3)
- d. Mark Dever:

".....I hope you are beginning to see how invasive Christianity is. It spreads into every area of your life.....God will require you to be allied to him above your spouse. God will share his throne with no one, not even a spouse.....God teaches that his Lordship extends even to where you set your heart's affections. If you decide to love God, you cannot marry someone who is opposed to him or even indifferent to him. Indifference to God is opposition to God.

So, Christian, observe that Malachi speaks directly to the idea of marrying an unbeliever, and he says that it is both disobedient and religiously suicidal. The New Testament says the same (e.g. 2 Cor. 6:14). Now if someone is already married and then he or she comes to Christ, the Christian should continue to honor that marriage. But the Bible clearly teaches us not to set our heart on someone who is not allied to God in the first place. If God is your chief love, how can you?

Also, know that Malachi's condemnation of ending marriages for anything other than Biblical reasons applies not just to ancient Israelites but to Christians today.....In the Bible, divorce is allowed in very particular circumstances, such as adultery and, perhaps, desertion. Yet divorce is certainly never required. The book of Hosea shows the power of love to overcome even the greatest wrongs.

In short, we are called to be careful about whom we marry, and we are called to be faithful in those marriages.....it is important to remember that how we enter and maintain our marriages is a matter of worship. Paul tells us that we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-----which is our spiritual worship (Ro. 12:1)" (Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament).

4. The Fourth Dispute: Chapter 2:17-3:5 ----- God's justice questioned: Worship of God involves trusting and obeying a holy God.

- a. *"Carnal reasoning will tell you that God does not see or govern, but has left the earth."* Richard Sibbes
- b. Where is the God of justice?
- c. James Montgomery Boice:

"So what should we expect at this point? The people had asked for justice. Justice is what they should get. The God of justice who is also the God of judgment should come, destroy their land, obliterate their city, and confine every last one of them to hell for their wickedness."

"In spite of the people's demand for justice, when God should come to his people in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, it would not be for an immediate judgment on sin

----- however much they deserve it ----- but for God's own gracious work of redemption. He would come to seek and to save the lost, to bring healing, to purify his elect people. Only after that gracious work would the judgment come" (Minor Prophets).

d. A second coming - pure unmitigated justice for all impenitent sinners.

e. Mark Dever:

"The Lord answered with words the Gospel writer Mark would take and use to introduce John the Baptist, who in turn introduced Jesus: 'See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me.. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire will come" (Mal. 3:1; see Mark 1:2).

Where is the God of justice? He is coming! This one "whom you desire-----the desire of nations", as the prophet Haggai called him (Hag. 2:7), is coming. He would come and he would die on the cross, enduring 'the wrath of God.....revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men' (Rom. 1:18). God would satisfy the requirements of justice more than any of the disputants represented by Malachi could ever imagine.

.....God wanted his people to know that he is a God of justice. And he told his people that they should fear and worship him with all their lives.

Have you attended church for a while and, at the same time, accused God of being indifferent to what happens in the world because of pain you have seen or felt? 'How could God let this happen if he really cared about me?' Oh, friend, you must pull back and take a larger view. The problem that you feel is testimony to this larger situation you may have ignored, but God hasn't.

.....Maybe you have assumed that since you have not witnessed God judging wrong, he never will. Or maybe you have assumed he doesn't care. I assure you, neither supposition is right. God, who was never required to care, cared so deeply that he sent his only Son to take on flesh and to die on a cross for the sins of people like you and me. Sins that he never committed. Sins that deserve his just wrath against us. Sins, that he, in his amazing love, took upon himself. God calls us now to repent of those sins and to turn to him. God's action in Jesus Christ was the greatest display of love and justice that could be imagined!" (Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament).

5. The Fifth Dispute: Chapter 3:6 - 12 ----- Robbing God: Worship of God involves giving our all.

a. John Calvin:

"I am God, and I change not; and ought you not to have acknowledged that wonderful forbearance through which I have spared you? For how has it been that you have not perished and that innumerable deaths have not swallowed you up? How is it that you are yet alive? Is it because you have dealt faithfully with Me, so that it was obligatory for Me to exercise care over you? No, it is indeed a wonder that I had not exploded against you so as to destroy you long ago" (Commentary on Malachi).

b. An incredible charge: Robbing God.

c. A merciful plea: Return to Me and I will return to you.

d. A test: Full obedience in giving and the blessing of God. (4)

e. Mark Dever:

"In this passage, the Lord specifically called his people to repent of their failure to tithe. The problem was not just with the priests, it was with the whole nation. The children of Israel had been taught -----from the example of Abraham with Melchizedek, from the example of Jacob, from the explicit teaching of Deuteronomy-----to give annually one-tenth of their property or produce to support the Levites and priests who administered God's worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Here in Malachi, the Lord promised the people that if they would be obedient in this matter, he would bless them with 'so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it', or, more literally, 'until there is no more need.' The entire world belonged to God, and his people were supposed to acknowledge his ownership through their giving and their trust in his continual provision. Their sacrifices and tithes, then, were what God used to teach them to worship him with their whole selves.

Worship required more than singing songs or memorizing a Psalm on the way to the temple; it required everything.

So it is for us today. Christianity is not for people who want to select certain areas of their lives to 'subcontract' or 'outsource' to God, while they hold on to the overall direction in their life's business. God does not operate like that. That's not who he is. Either he is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. He is God. The Lord had protected his people and brought them back into the land, yet they continued to try protecting themselves by maintaining autonomous control of their wallets and bank accounts. Do you see how this reeks of mistrust? The eternal Creator God asks his followers to bring a tithe of our income to him. This is part of our worship" (Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament).

6.The Sixth Dispute: Chapter 3:13-4:6 -----God's faithfulness questioned and vindicated: Worship of God involves fearing God and hoping in God.

a. Questioning God or living in the fear of God.

b. That Great and Dreadful Day!

c. In the Messiah is our hope.

d. Mark Dever:

First, concerning the fear of God:

"In this final dispute in Malachi, God rebuked the harsh words his people had used against him. In response, some of the people feared God as they should have.

Throughout the Bible-----from Genesis to Revelation-----we are instructed to fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord means having an ultimate regard for him. It means keeping our eyes on him and giving our allegiance to him, because a day will come when the Lord will divide all humanity according to whether or not they have 'revered' the

Lord.

This true reverence is an indispensable part of our worship of God, showing itself in our lives in many ways. To begin with, such fear shows itself through our repentance from sin. It also shows itself as other fears are short-circuited ----- fears that have ruled us in the past, like the fear of bad news, the fear of ill-regard from others, the fear of pain, even the fear of death. If we are Christians, we fear God. He is our Lord and Father, our Husband and Master. So we worship him with fear, not with disrespect, distrust, or arrogance."

But not only are we to fear God, but as Malachi concludes we see that we are also to put our hope in God-----a hope ultimately to be found in the person and work of Christ, the Savior and God incarnate. And so one final comment from Dever:

"In order to treat God rightly-----in order to worship him rightly-----we must not only understand him and fear him, we must put our hope in him.

.....In this concluding word, the Lord instructed his people both to look back and to look forward. They were to look back to the Law of Moses, as God has repeatedly done throughout this little prophecy. But they were also to look forward to his coming, and the preparatory work of Elijah. God employed his last prophet before John the Baptist to remind God's people of the Law and the Prophets-----Moses and Elijah, the same two who would stand with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration pointing to Jesus!

And Elijah did come. His name was John, and he came to baptize, to preach repentance, and to prepare God's people for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus then declared that Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled through this John the Baptist. After reading Malachi, we should not be surprised that the first spoken word of inspired prophecy after several centuries of silence was John the Baptist's call to "Repent!". Malachi had ended the Old Testament with the word "curse," which can also be translated as "destruction." This is the same Old Testament that began with God and his perfect creation.

Through both John the Baptist and Malachi, then, the Lord called his people to repent of their indifference and lackadaisical disregard for him, and to remember God's commands by living them out. To put their hopes in him and his Word. To put faith in his promises. To live leaning forward into the promises of God! To put their weight into the truth of what God said. That's how you and I can really worship God: by living as if we believe him, by running with joyous abandon toward him, and by trusting that he will receive us as his own through Christ" (Promises Made: The Message of the Old Testament).

V. Conclusion

A. The strong words of Malachi are always relevant even at our best-----any church is only a step away from going into a nose dive of spiritual decline. This is true of any individual Christian and this is true of any church.

B. Response - a prayer of confession and petition :

Confession -

We have not known thee as we ought,
 Nor learned thy wisdom, grace and pow'r;
 The things of earth have filled our thought,
 And trifles of the passing hour.

We have not feared thee as we ought,
 Nor bowed beneath thine awesome eye,
 Nor guarded deed, and word, and thought,
 Remembering that God was nigh.

We have not loved thee as we ought,
 Nor cared that we are loved by thee;
 Thy presence we have coldly sought,
 And feebly longed thy face to see.

We have not served thee as we ought;
 Alas! the duties left undone,
 The work with little fervor wrought,
 The battles lost, or scarcely won!

Petition -

Lord, give us light thy truth to see,
 And make us wise in knowing thee.
 Lord, give us faith to know thee near,
 And grant the grace of holy fear
 Lord, give a pure and loving heart
 To feel and own the love thou art.
 Lord, give the zeal, and give the might,
 For thee to toil, for thee to fight.

When shall we know thee as we ought,
 And fear, and love, and serve aright!
 When shall we, out of trial brought,
 Be perfect in the land of light!
*Lord, may we day by day prepare
 To see thy face, and serve thee there.*

(Based upon the hymn: We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought)

Notes:

- (1) **“Jacob I have loved”** - Both eternal individual soteriological (i.e. unto salvation) election, and temporal national election are in view in Malachi 1:2-5. “Because God loved Jacob, He sovereignly elected him to salvation and chose his descendants as His covenant people (cf. the parallel between forms of the verbs *to choose* and *to love* in Dt. 7:6-8). Because of God’s hatred for the reprobate Esau, God brought curses not only upon Esau but also upon his descendants. God’s love began in eternity (Jer. 31:3) and was manifested in His covenantal dealings with His people (Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 7:9; 1 Ki. 8:23). The Lord’s love by which He elects individuals to salvation is distinct from but related to His love for His covenant people. His electing love will never be removed; it necessarily

results in the salvation of those who are loved. His love for His covenant people is reflected in His mercy and patience toward them above all other people, but may be removed in response to their disobedience and does not necessarily result in their salvation” (Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible).

- (2) **“Esau I have hated”** – God hates idolaters (Jer. 44:4-5; Hos. 9:15), evildoers (Ps. 5:5), the wicked and those who love violence (Ps. 11:5). See also Proverbs 6:16-19. Scripture sometimes uses the verb *hate* in a sense meaning “to love less” (see Ge 29:30-31; Dt 21:15-17; Lk 14:26). The context immediately following (vv. 3-4), however, suggests that here *hate* involves active rejection, displeasure and disfavor that is manifested in retributive justice. It is not merely that Esau (Edom) had lesser or fewer blessings than Jacob but that he suffered under God’s wrathful judgment. See Paul’s use of this verse in Romans 9:13. For other instances of this usage of *hate*, see, in addition to the texts cited above, 2:16, Isaiah 61:8 and Amos 5:21” (Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible).
- (3) **Mal. 2:16** The Hebrew text of this verse is one of the most difficult passages in the OT to translate, with the result that the two main alternative translations proposed for this verse are strongly disputed. The esv translation team has included in a footnote the other most common translation. Given the complexity of the linguistic issues involved, both alternatives are simply summarized briefly as follows, rather than presenting comprehensive arguments for each.

1. The esv text reads, **the man who does not love his wife but divorces her**. This rendering understands the Hebrew (and the Gk. of the Septuagint) in the sense of, “For he hates (or “does not love”) [and] he divorces.” The action of “hating” and thus “divorcing” is seen also in [Deut. 24:3](#); further, the idea of a man “hating” his wife appears in [Gen. 29:31](#); [Deut. 21:15–17](#); [22:13](#); each case in the sense of “loving less” or “ceasing to love.” The expression **covers his garment with violence** is probably a figure of speech referring to the defiling of one’s character with violent wrongdoing (see the similar image in [Ps. 73:6](#); [109:18](#); [Rev. 3:4](#); and see the opposite in [Job 29:14](#); [Ps. 132:9](#); [Isa. 59:17](#); [61:10](#)). Although divorce based on loss of affection was recognized under the OT civic law, it is nowhere morally approved (unlike divorce based on a spouse’s sexual infidelity or desertion). This is so, as Malachi stresses, because divorce based merely on the loss of affection breaks the marriage covenant and defiles one’s character, since it is untrue to the creation ideal of faithfulness ([Gen. 2:24](#); see note on [Deut. 24:1–4](#)).

2. The esv footnote reads, “The Lord, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce, and him who covers [his garment with violence].” This is similar to the rendering that originally appeared in English in the King James Version of 1611. If this alternative rendering is followed, the focus is on *God’s hatred of the practice of divorce*, rather than on *the hatred of the divorcing man toward his wife*. Also following this alternative rendering, the phrase “covers his garment with violence” is understood either: (a) with reference to a second thing that God hates in addition to divorce, namely, the person “who covers his garment with violence”; or, as some hold, (b) that God hates divorce because the act of divorce itself “covers [one’s] garment with violence.”

In either case, this passage is clear in its recognition that the biblical standard for marriage derives from the creation account (see notes on [Gen. 2:23–24](#)), which establishes the covenantal nature of marriage. (Jesus, when discussing a question about divorce, began with creation; [Matt. 19:3–9](#).) Malachi starts from this creational base: he refers to creation ([Mal. 2:10](#)), calls marriage a covenant ([v. 14](#)), refers to the oneness of [Gen. 2:24](#) (“union,” [Mal. 2:15](#)), and reminds the community of the purpose of marriage (“godly offspring,” [v. 15](#)). The man who would divorce the Israelite wife of his youth (perhaps even for the purpose of taking a pagan girl as his wife) thus commits a grievous offense: he violates the creation order, he breaks his covenantal relationship with his wife—and, in so doing, he deeply damages his character (“covers his garment with violence”). But the impact of divorce reaches far beyond the individual, for divorce has a ruinous effect on the vitality of the whole community ([vv. 13–15](#)) and on its ability to fulfill its calling as God’s holy people.

Again, in either case, God is opposed to the kind of divorce that is in view because of the destructiveness and pain that inevitably results when “faithless” husbands send away their wives, as mentioned in [Mal. 2:13, 15](#). (See also the notes on [Matt. 5:31–32](#); [19:3–9](#); [Mark 10:10–12](#); [1 Cor. 7:15](#); and [Divorce and Remarriage](#).) --- ESV Study Bible.

- (4) **Tithing** - A tithe is a tenth part, or portion, given to God. Although this giving of a tenth part was incorporated into and codified in the Law of Moses (e.g. Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:28; Deut. 12:4-19; 14:22-29; 26:12), it did not originate with the Mosaic Covenant, but predates it and is referred to in both the life of Abraham (Gen. 14:20), and in the life of Jacob (Gen. 28:22). It was also practiced among other ancient peoples.

The issue of the practice of tithing for Christians today living under the New Covenant is one over which there are different perspectives by equally committed and Godly interpreters of the Biblical text. How one understands the degree of continuity or discontinuity between Old Covenant and the New Covenant plays an important factor in one’s ultimate conclusions on this matter. Some would regard the practice of tithing as a ceremonial law of the Mosaic Covenant that has been fulfilled in Christ, and therefore no longer applicable. Others would see it as a moral law of God transcending the covenants. Others, still, would see it as purely an obligation of the Old/Mosaic Covenant that itself in its entirety has been fulfilled and rendered obsolete, with giving in the NT based on other principles.

The following observations by R.C. Sproul reflects my own general perspective on the subject of tithing as it relates to New Testament believer:

"How is it possible that somebody who has given his life to Christ can withhold their financial gifts from Him? I have heard many excuses or explanations for this. The most common is the assertion that the tithe is part of the Old Testament law that has passed away with the coming of the New Testament. This statement is made routinely in spite of the complete lack of New Testament evidence for it. Nowhere in the New Testament does it teach us that the principle of the tithe has been abrogated. The New Testament does teach us, however, that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant. It is a covenant that gives more blessings to us than the old covenant did. It is a covenant that with its manifold blessings imposes greater responsibilities than the Old Testament did. If anything, the structure of the new covenant requires a greater commitment to financial stewardship before God than that which was required in the old covenant. That is to say, the starting point of Christian giving is the tithe. The tithe is not an ideal that only a few people reach but rather should be the base minimum from which we progress."

To underscore further the tithe under the New Covenant as a starting point, John Piper has expressed the following in his characteristic heart piercing way:

"The question that Jesus drives us to ask again and again is not, "How much should I give?" but rather, "How much dare I keep?" One of the differences between the Old Testament and New Testament is the Great Commission. By and large the Old Testament people of God were not a missionary people. But the New Testament church is fundamentally a missionary people. The spiritual hope and the physical and emotional sustenance that Jesus brought to earth is to be extended by his church to the whole world. The task he gave us is so immense and requires such a stupendous investment of commitment and money that the thought of settling the issue of what we give by a fixed percentage (like a tenth) is simply out of the question. My own conviction is that most middle and upper class Americans who merely tithe are robbing God. In a world where 10,000 people a day starve to death and many more than that are perishing in unbelief the question is not, "What percentage must I give?" but, "How much dare I spend on myself?"

It is a biblical truth beyond all dispute: that all your money is God's (Psalm 24:1) and has been loaned to you as a steward to use in ways that maximize the glorification of God's mercy in the world (Matthew 25:14–30). And it is irrational to think that giving ten percent of that money to the church settles the issue of good stewardship. In a world of such immense need, and in a country of such immense luxury, and under the commission of such a powerful Lord, the issue of stewardship is not: Shall I tithe? but rather, How much of God's trust fund dare I use to surround myself with comforts?

..... The best way that I know how to capture the spirit of the New Testament generosity is simply to say: the issue is not, How much must I give? but, How much dare I keep? Not: Shall I tithe? But: How much of the money that I hold in trust for Christ can I take for my private use? The financial issue in the church today is not tithing, but exorbitance of life-style. The question is not can I afford to tithe, but can I justify the life-style that consumes 90% of my income? And behind that is the question: Do I love to use God's money to spread justice and mercy and spiritual hope in the world, or do I prefer to embezzle his money to purchase more and more personal comfort?"

