

Will a Man Rob God?

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2-15-09

Introduction.

- A. As all of us who live in the state of Illinois know, corruption has all sorts of side effects. When governments award contracts on the basis of patronage rather than an honest bidding process, the contractors selected will try to get theirs in two different ways. On the one hand, they charge the state more than the construction is actually worth. On the other, they will use cheap, substandard materials and labor to squeeze even more profit out of the contract. Then, whatever it is that they built will start crumbling years or decades before its time. It's not hard to see evidence of this. Every time I drive over the pothole-infested wasteland that is Larkin Rd., I wonder whose nephew it was that got the bid for that sterling example of public works.
- B. Not surprisingly, this same margin-shaving attitude often shows up in man's dealings with God. People know what God expects, they commit to obeying Him, but they think that following through completely will cost more than they want to spend, so they cheat. Of course, God is more vigilant about this sort of thing than the Illinois state government, and He has made His objections known in more than one place. We see a good example of this in Malachi 3:8-9. He asks if the Jews really think they can get away with robbing Him.
- C. In context, the subject of this verse is literal robbery of literal money, but financially cheating God isn't the only nor even the most important way that men try to rob Him. Instead, the biggest problems arise when people try to withhold from God the parts of themselves that belong to Him. They think they can get by with giving less than 100 percent. This can be a problem for all of us, and if we leave it unchecked, it will have disastrous consequences. Let's learn how to deal with this as we answer the question, "Will a man rob God?"

I. God's Due.

- A. To understand just what it means to rob God, we must begin by understanding what God's due is. In other words, what are we supposed to be giving to God in the first place? The most immediate answer to that question is **LOVE**. Jesus tells us both what and how much in Matthew 22:37-38. To hear people talk, at least, this is the most unnecessary commandment in the Bible. If we were to take an informal survey of our non-Christian friends and neighbors, and we asked them "Do you love God?", I suspect that nine out of ten of them would reply indignantly, "Of course I love God!" Even if they haven't set foot inside a church building in five years, most people are only going to be too happy to express their love and devotion to the Almighty.
- B. The problem there is that loving God doesn't actually mean what most people think it means. The love that God expects from us isn't just a warm fuzzy feeling whenever somebody says His name. Instead, loving God is as much a life purpose as it is an emotion. Loving God is saying, "God is the most important thing in my life, and pleasing Him is the object of my life." Loving God is thinking of Him in every situation, taking counsel of His will before every decision that we make, and never putting Him behind anything else.
- C. In fact, we need to think of each day of our lives as a gift that we are offering to God, which is why **SACRIFICE** is also part of God's due. Paul brings this idea up in Romans 12:1. This can be a hard idea to grasp sometimes. Just as our cultural baggage about love can trip us up, so too our baggage about sacrifice can be a problem. When we think of sacrifice, we think of giving things up and suffering pain for some greater cause, like the monks who go barefoot through the snow and beat themselves with whips because they think it pleases God. In reality, the Biblical idea of sacrifice is merely that of offering something to God. It doesn't have to hurt. We may even enjoy it, as with the sacrifice of praise mentioned in Hebrews 13.
- D. In this context, Paul is talking about the sacrifice of our lives. That doesn't necessarily mean dying, although it could. It simply means that we are to devote our bodies to the service of God. This follows quite naturally from the idea of love. It's taking the determination that we've already made and putting it into action. Just like a flower arranger will take a bunch of flowers and order it so that it is most beautiful and appealing from a certain perspective, we are to take our minutes, our hours, and our days and arrange them so that they will be most beautiful from God's perspective. It's putting ourselves into complete obedience to His will.
- E. This search for sacrifice, this devotion of our lives to God's purposes, will inevitably lead us to the **IMITATION** of Christ. Jesus discusses what is required here in Matthew 16:24-25. Of course, the imitation of Jesus doesn't mean that we're supposed to drag literal crosses made of literal wood up literal hills. It means that we have to do what God wants us to do, even when that is precisely the opposite of what WE want. Remember, folks, Jesus didn't want to die. He wasn't looking forward to the agonies of crucifixion. What it meant for Him to carry His cross was that He actively worked to bring about that which He most feared, for God's sake. We carry our crosses likewise when we're naturally as introverted as can be, yet we look for opportunities to teach others about the gospel because that's what God wants. We carry our crosses when we know that serving Him will unleash terrible strife in our earthly families, but we do it anyway because our earthly families are less important to us than our heavenly one. We carry our crosses when everybody at school wants us to dress a

certain way, and talk a certain way, and live a certain way, but we reject all that pressure and strike out on our own, because we know how Jesus wants us to dress and talk and live. That's hard, but it's what God wants.

II. Man's Theft.

- A. That's what God deserves, but it's rarely what He sees, because of all the ways we try to steal His due from Him. One of the first ways we do this is through **IDOLATRY**. This, of course, isn't just about bowing down to images of wood and stone. It's about elevating anything else in our hearts to the level where God is, or even above it. Paul mentions one example of this kind of conduct in Colossians 3:5. What Paul is telling us is that when our daily thoughts are bent toward making money, when we have resolved that the purpose of our existence is to get rich, we have become money-worshippers instead of God-worshippers. Nor is money the only idol that Satan presents to us. Our lusts, our jobs, or even our families can become our idols too. This heart problem is often all the more damaging because it is so subtle. Just like the Israelites of old, we try to have God and Baal at the same time. We claim, and may even believe, that God is the most important thing in our lives, but the record of our lives denies our claim to godliness. We need to pay attention, then, not just to what we know we should be, but to what we are, to make sure that we aren't robbing God through idolatry.
- B. Another popular mode of robbery is **HYPOCRISY**. Typically, hypocrisy isn't the problem for Christians who are outwardly falling away. This is the problem for us when we show up at church and act as godly as can be, but throughout the rest of the week, we live just like the world. Jesus reveals how God feels about this in Matthew 23:25. Just like love and sacrifice are connected, so too are idolatry and hypocrisy. When we become hypocrites, it's because we've decided that we want to serve the flesh, but we also want to maintain the illusion of spirituality by preserving our reputation. It's like we think that our sin is somehow less evil because we can look the brethren in the eye when we greet them after services on Sunday morning. We can be hypocritical about all sorts of things. Christians who practice sexual sin are often quite hypocritical about it, but that's far from the only option. For instance, we can make ourselves hypocrites when we unleash ungodly anger on our spouses all week long, but come into church services holding hands with them and smiling like we just stepped out of a 1950s sitcom. We think we're fooling everybody, but we're really robbing God.
- C. Likewise, we also rob God through **SELFISHNESS**. Paul begins a selfishness-oriented barrage in 2 Timothy 3:1-2. Those are some pretty awful things to say about anybody, but the truly horrifying thing about this verse is that in it, Paul is prophesying about the way that CHRISTIANS will behave. Rather than serving God first, they will serve themselves first. This can be a lot harder to spot in ourselves than we might think. After all, for most of us most of the time, our will and God's will aren't necessarily going to conflict. Even if I were an atheist, I wouldn't become a bank robber. The fear of earthly punishment is enough to keep even my flesh from wanting to rob banks. The true test, then, of whether we are self-serving or God-serving is when God commands us to do something that we really don't want to do, or when He expects us to give up something that is dear to us. The true test of selfishness is when we see the cross in front of us. Do we take it up, or do we say, "Nu-uh!" and head in the other direction? That's when our priorities are most evident. If we walk away, we may comfort ourselves with the thought of the other 90% of the time when we do what God wants us to, but the truth is that 100% of the time, we're doing what we want to do. We're robbing God.

III. The Result.

- A. As popular as idolatry, hypocrisy, and selfishness are, we might think that they are the spiritual equivalent of the perfect crime, that they let us rob God and get away with it. In reality, the results are very different. First, this kind of robbery of God leads to **DISTANCE FROM HIM**. I'd be the first to tell you, friends, there is nothing like being a Christian. As children of God, we have joy and hope and comfort in this life that no stranger to God's family can ever know. However, we only get out of our faith what we put into it. Look at James 4:8. James' point is plain. If we want all the good things that come from the presence of God in our lives, we have to invite Him in first. The more we give Him what He wants, the more we get what only He can give. Of course, the opposite is true too. When we try to cheat God, we lose out on the blessings of the fully committed Christian. In exchange for all the worthless trash of sin, we surrender the riches of the glory of Christ. As we stop drawing near to Him, He stops drawing near to us, and we're the big losers in that.
- B. Finally, though, when we try to rob God, we trade meaning for **EMPTINESS**. In this context, look at Ecclesiastes 8:10. This is kind of a strange verse, isn't it? I think the point is that the grave is the true determiner of value. Whenever we consider any course of action, we need to ask ourselves what the point will be after we're gone. After we pass on, we won't care anymore about all those glittering idols that competed with God for our love. After we pass on, nobody will be impressed with how righteous we looked when really we weren't. After we pass on, all of those goals opposed to serving God that seemed so important will fade away into insignificance. And that means, friends, that if we chose a course of idolatry and hypocrisy and selfishness, in the final analysis, we will end up with exactly nothing. Back in the day, we thought we were getting away with it. We thought we were robbing God, but really, we were just robbing ourselves.

Conclusion. If you want to stop robbing God today, now is the time to repent.