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MALACHI

Inside Terry's Office:

The Book of Malachi - The Tithe and Small-Picture Mentality!

Select verses from the book of Malachi are the source of much of our theology concerning tithing; particularly Malachi 3:10, ***“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. ‘Test me in this’, says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.’”***

Our interpretation (due to taking the verse out of context) is, “If you will do your part, THEN I will bless you.” This interpretation is in direct conflict with the message of the book! As we read the book of Malachi as a whole we find that the clear message is, “I have blessed you and you have taken me for granted and disrespected me, so the floodgates of blessing have been closed.”

The book focuses on two of God's most unique plans for society (the covenants of social justice and gender equality) and how the Hebrews have disregarded them. The mainstay of social justice was the maintenance of the Levitical tribe. If the other eleven tribes were to support this tribe (and the properties they maintained) on an equal basis with their own income levels, it would take a tithe (a tenth). At times the priesthood would claim social and economic benefits for themselves beyond the average Hebrew and God would send the prophets to rail against the priest. And, when the other tribes failed to maintain the tribe of Levi at the same economic levels as themselves, the prophets would speak God's rebuke.

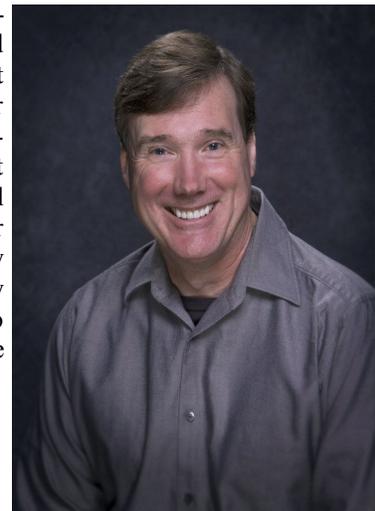
*May I point out that, as members of the new covenant, we are “a priesthood of believers” and all our giving is considered an ‘offering’ (not a ‘tithe’). While the principle of social justice remains a covenant role with God (not with our government), we are individually responsible for determining how we distribute our personal income in order to be a part of the covenant! And, whereas the local church may be a great means of enabling social justice, since the tearing of the veil in the temple signifying the end of the Aaronic priesthood, the tithe (“tenth”) is no longer any kind of objective standard in determining our commitment to this covenant God offers us.

The second of God's unique plans for society is the covenant of gender equality and is primarily expressed through God's covenant of marriage. *“Another thing you do: You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”* - Malachi 4:13-14 The ‘unfaithfulness’ referred to here is not primarily about sexual faithfulness, but about maintaining an equality of value (‘partnering’) between both genders in the marriage covenant (a witness to how a society should appropriately value women in all aspects of life).

Malachi makes it clear what leads us to betray these two covenants; small-picture thinking. In big-picture thinking it is clear that God blesses us first and MOST. In small-picture thinking we focus on what we need to do to get what we think we need from God. OHHHH, how we need to gain freedom from our small picture thinking!! May we never again misinterpret scripture as God saying, “Give your tithe, then I will bless you” or “the marriage covenant is not broken unless there is sexual unfaithfulness”. Such small-picture thinking will keep us measuring the ‘fairness’ of what we are getting from God and/or our spouse on a day-to-day basis. Such evaluations are notoriously, delusionally self-centered and ultimately destructive to our big-picture covenants. If we stay small-picture focused (as in promoting ‘the tithe’) we can lose the ability to even see the benefits of any covenant with God (since they are all big-picture blessings).

May this be a year of big-picture covenant blessings for you!

In His Grip, TWE



MALACHI: Seeing from God's Perspective

Malachi was the last of the prophets to speak before the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. At the time of this writing it is 100 years passed the rebuilding of the temple. Nothing is really known about the author, Malachi, except that his name means "my messenger." When the Jews returned from exile, "they found life back home less than promising." "They grew increasingly disheartened by the hardships and injustices they faced." (The Voice introductory commentary on Malachi) God called Malachi to deliver his last message before the arrival of his infant son which would be some 400 years later (66 Love Letters, Larry Crabb). In this thirty-ninth letter we read 7 charges that God brought against his people and their "calloused responses." I am going to post those charges and responses as paraphrased by Crabb here:

Charge 1: I have loved you. You refuse to love Me in return.

Response 1: How have You loved us? You could love us better [1:2].

Charge 2: You show contempt for My name.

Response 2: What are you talking about? [1:6].

Charge 3: Your worship of Me is deficient.

Response 3: We think it's fine [1:7].

Charge 4: You weary Me.

Response 4: We think You should be pleased with us [2:17].

Charge 5: You have turned from Me. Turn toward Me.

Response 5: We're facing You. What's Your problem? [3:6-7].

Charge 6: You've robbed Me.

Response 6: We've done no such thing [3:8].

Charge 7: You've said harsh things against Me.

Response 7: Nothing You haven't deserved. C'mon. Treat us better. We're Your kids, Your favorites [3:13-14].

While the responses we read may represent a majority, in verse 16 of chapter 3 we see that amongst the *deceived* a remnant of those who "feared" the Lord and took to heart God's charges. Because they knew and trusted God's heart and because they "**valued His name and the good reputation,**" they were able to benefit from God's mercy, "I will have pity on them as a man has pity on his son who serves Him." [3:17] This small group was also able to benefit from waiting in hope, trusting God to carry out his plan.

Preparing for this article led me to see things in Malachi I had not seen before. In particular the verse quoted above, 3:16. We learn that the small remnant who valued the name of the Lord, his character and his reputation were in a better position to receive the charges, the message from the Lord. They knew that God first loved them. That can make a world of difference in our perspective.

It's interesting, probably the most popular quoted portion of a verse from Malachi is found in 2:16, "God hates divorce." These three words in context are wrapped in a lament that God's design for marriage, faithfulness to the union, has been deceitfully disrespected—*you have dealt deceitfully with the wife of your youth [v. 14, The Voice.]* These three words are often reacted to as harsh or with fear. In the harsh camp are those who would respond in like kind as we see the Jews responding to the above charges---unfair--Doesn't God want me to be happy? In the fear camp are those who fear that God is saying he hates those who divorce. Both camps are wrapped up in their own deceit that God owes them happiness or that God is wishy washy in his love for his people. The letter begins with "I have loved you as someone who loves his dear family," and it is **because of that love** that God has had all he can stand of the arrogant responses. [3: 13-15]

What the remnant was able to do was see things from God's perspective. They may have asked, is how this *feels* lining up with what I know to be true about God? When a counselee asks me about those three words, *God hates divorce*, and questions if it means that God will hate her/him if she/he divorces, we can take that question back to God's reputation---does it match? The answer is **NO**. The truth is He loves you with an everlasting love!!

Another value I glean is a relational principle that can be applied. Recently a dear friend paid me a huge compliment. She said, "Carol Anne, you have an insightful ability to see things from both perspectives." The truth is that ability has grown through counseling others and helping them to regard the other perspective before drawing conclusions. It also came from receiving my own "charge" through another good friend who pointed out that I was reacting to feelings expressed to me as AT me and I became defensive of MY position just like the Jewish people. She gently encouraged me to consider the other perspective. I didn't have to agree that it was true to minister to the feeling of the other. From this I have been encouraged to go back to what I know before drawing conclusions on what I don't know.

What a way to end our journey through the Old Testament! I am ready to move into the New! See you there!!

Carol Anne

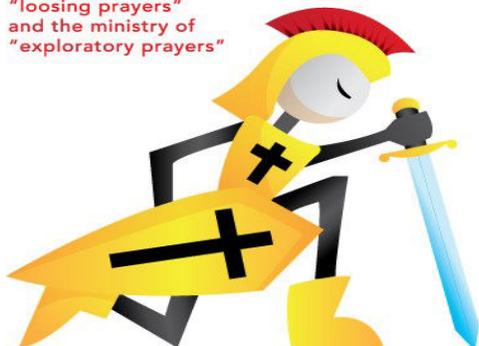


Stickman's Prayers

Plumblin's newest book, *Stickman's Prayers* has been published and is now available at Plumblin!

stickman's prayers

the everyday practice of
"loosing prayers"
and the ministry of
"exploratory prayers"



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Would you be surprised to know that the "Prayer of Jabez" was a joke?

Would you be happy to know what kind of prayers are appropriate for you to pray for yourself and what kinds are meant for you to pray for others and others for you?

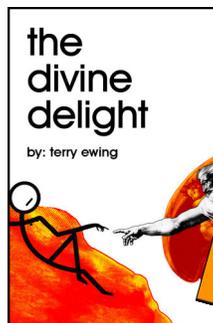
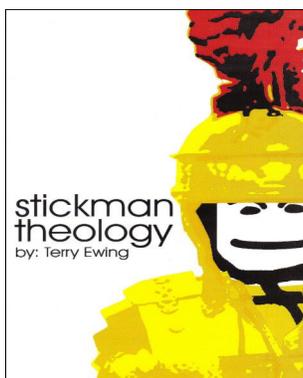
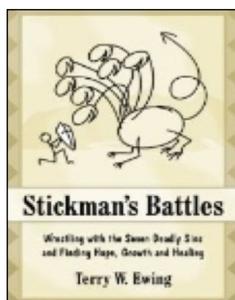
Would you like confidence and freedom to simply enjoy your personal and ministry prayers?

Praying is the most natural thing in the world for Christians; an on going conversation with our best friend, counselor, and confidant; gratitude to our Savior and provider; intercession on behalf of our friends; requests to our Creator. In this regard, a book on prayer may seem presumptuous. When you write a book on Prayer aren't you suggesting that some are praying wrongly, or, at least could be praying better?

That really is not the kind of message we look to promote. So...why the book?

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