

An Autopsy of Dead Religion: Impiety & The Antidote to Dead Religion: Piety

Malachi 3:13-18

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Introduction: Imagine yourself sitting in a booth at Olive Garden Restaurant. You are eating alone & can hear what the folks on either side of your booth are saying during their meal. From one booth you hear complaint after complaint: the table was not thoroughly cleaned, the waitress never smiled, the order took too long, the food is either undercooked or overcooked, & the bill is thought to be higher than it should be – considering the service rendered & the quality of the food. The booth on the other side of you offers a different conversation. They talk kindly to the waitress, acknowledging the hard work she has been doing & asking about her family. When their food arrives, you hear them offer thanks to God. They talk about the blessing of being able to have a night out to eat together & are thankful for God’s provision of the time & money to enjoy this occasion. They complement the waitress for her attention to her customers & after looking at the bill they don’t argue over the size of the tip, but leave a Gospel tract with it. Now imagine with me our Lord listening in on 2 types of people on this earth. They are found in our text & Malachi records for us what is said & how God responds to each group. As I read Malachi 3:13-18, notice the contrast between those who serve God with impiety & those who serve Him with piety. Consider the truth that properly motivated service to God is not only recognized by Him, but rewarded by Him.

I. Improperly motivated service (:13-15) > Those “serving” God with **impiety**.

A. Their complaint (:13-14)

1. The **manner** of their complaint:

- a. “*Stout*” words – literally, “hard, severe, sharp” > speaks of arrogance & obstinacy.
- b. “*Against*” God – impudent, presumptuous, expressing violence toward God.

2. The **message** in their complaint:

- a. “Service to God is useless” (“*vain*”).
 - (1) Serving God was valueless, insubstantial.
 - (2) As if saying, “Nothing makes any difference. He doesn’t listen to us.”
- b. “Service to God is profitless.”
 - (1) “Serving God doesn’t pay – there is no personal gain.”
 - (2) “*Profit*” – weaver’s term for a piece of cloth that has been cut (“Where’s my cut?”).

Analysis: Their service to God was “heart-less.” (1) They attempted to serve God for what they could get out of it; feigning obedience (“*kept His ordinance*”) outwardly, but not from the heart. (2) They attempted to show outward humility by wearing sackcloth (& ashes?), yet did so to manipulate God.

Application: Responses toward Christian service: (1) There are those who reject Christian service because it does not “pay” enough; or, there are those in Christian service who bemoan their sacrifice, having no joy in the privilege of serving God. (2) There are those who “give” in order to “get” – expecting a return on their “investment” (“I can’t afford not to tithe.”).

Question: Why do you serve God? Is it out of love & devotion, gratefully surrendered, willing to do His will in order to glorify Him in all you say & do?

B. Their conclusion (:15)

1. The proud (arrogant) are the happy (blessed ones).
2. The wicked are the rewarded ones (always get what they want).

Summary: These proud & wicked sinners even tempt God & get away with it. They appear to be saying, “Let’s see what God will do about that!”

Analysis: “*Tempt God*” – same word as “*prove*” used by God in 3:10; means “to try to provoke a reaction” – here it implies doing something with purposed, calculated intent in order to force God to respond.

II. Properly motivated service (:16-18) > Those serving God with **piety**.

A. Consider their reverence for the Lord (:16)

1. They **feared** the Lord.
 - a. The absence of this fear; see 1:6 & see Romans 3:18.
 - b. The acknowledgment of this fear; see Psalm 19:9; Proverbs 1:7 & 9:10.
 - c. The attitude from this fear - honor & respect (indicated by one's affirmations & actions).
2. They **fellowshipped** with one another.
 - a. Defined (What?) -
 - (1) "Having things in common with others; joint participation."
 - (2) Ephesians 3:6, 'fellow-heirs', 'fellow-body members', 'fellow-partakers of Christ's promises' & I Peter 4:14, 'fellow-sufferers.'
 - b. Described (Who?) - Psalm 119:63, *"I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, & of them that keep Thy precepts."*
 - c. Demonstrated (When?) - *"often"* (not in original, but implied by the verb tense) - 'a constant habit of life' (as opposed to an occasional occurrence).
Do you enjoy the fellowship of God's people? - Hebrews 10:25
With whom do you spend most of your time? – cf. Proverbs 13:20 with 18:24

3. They **focused** (*"thought"*) upon His name (“meditate” – NKJV).

- a. A definition: *"thought"* - to take inventory.
[“In that mental activity, resulting in fellowship with others, we find the secret of loyalty in the midst of decadence” (Morgan).]
- b. An explanation: *"His name"* -- Trace the (compound) names of God:
 - (1) Jehovah-jireh (Genesis 22:13-14) - 'The Lord will provide.'
 - (2) Jehovah-rapha (Exodus 15:26) – “The Lord that healeth.”
 - (3) Jehovah-nissi (Exodus 17:8-15) – “The Lord our banner.”
 - (4) Jehovah-shalom (Judges 6:24) – “The Lord our peace.”
 - (5) Jehovah-ra-ah (Psalm 23:1) – “The Lord my Shepherd.”
 - (6) Jehovah-tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6) – “The Lord our righteousness.”
 - (7) Jehovah-shammah (Ezekiel 48:35) – “The Lord is present.”
- c. An application: Philippians 4:8 (cf. Psalm 101:3).

B. Consider the response of the Lord (:16)

1. The Lord *"hearkened."*
 - a. A word used of animals: 'to prick up the ears.'
 - b. A word picturing a horse, with ears pricked, seeking to catch any sound from driver's lips.
2. The Lord *"heard."*
 - a. A word meaning “to bend over, with close attention, so that no sound may be missed.”
 - b. A word picturing a mother bending low to catch every syllable of her infant.
3. The Lord “honored” (taken from the idea, “recorded in order to reward”).
 - a. The examples of recording in a book of remembrance:
 - (1) Exodus 17:14, *"Write this for a memorial in a book..."*
 - (2) Esther 2:23, *"...written in the book of the chronicles before the king"* - result in 6:1-3.
 - (3) Mark 9:41, *"...he shall not lose his reward."*
 - (4) Revelation 20:12-15, *"...& the books were opened..."*
 - b. The expectation of God recording about us:
 - (1) Could He be recording that we fear Him?
 - (2) Could He be recording that we fellowship often with His people?
 - (3) Could He be recording that we focus upon His name?

Conclusion: Imagine you & your family back at that Olive Garden booth. There is conversation going on among your family. What does God “over-hear” in your conversation? Are you more like that first couple, complaining & whining – or like the second, joyful & content, kind & compassionate toward others? God is recording in His book of remembrance about your life. Does He record you as one who reverently fears Him, regularly fellowships with His people, & rightly focuses upon His name? Remember, properly motivated service to God is not only recognized by Him, it is also rewarded by Him.