

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

There once appeared an article in the press telling about two masked gunmen who entered a church building in south Chicago just as the collection plates had been passed. Pointing the barrels of guns in the faces of the deacons, they demanded that the entire collection be dumped into a bag. Within two minutes the robbers were on their way, taking all the collection with them. Assuming that this money had been given for the Lord's work, I think all would agree that here was a glaring case of "men robbing God."

Robbing God, however, is not limited to some bizarre incident such as the one just described. This sin has taken place millions of times by millions of people – the majority of whom have probably never held a gun in their hands and who would never think of doing what those two gunmen in Chicago did.

Let's consider a number of ways whereby people "rob God", probably without ever thinking of it in those terms.

Many parents today are "robbing God" by failing to obey the New Testament command to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). In Psalm 127:3 the scriptures tell us that *"children are an heritage of the Lord."* In other words, God has given to the husband and his wife the natural ability to bring children into the world. Since they are an heritage or blessing from God, they should be taught of God – taught His Word, taught how to honor and glorify Him in their lives, and nurtured in the word of righteousness.

When mothers and fathers fail in this great responsibility, they are not only guilty of failing their children in the worst possible way, but they are also "robbing God." How sad it will be for multitudes of parents in the day of judgment to see a son or daughter placed among those on the Lord's left hand and turned into eternal destruction. How doubly sad it will be if they have to face the fact that their child's failure to prepare for eternity was due, in part at least, to their own failure to teach them God's will and set before them a true Christian example.

There comes a time, of course, when every normal child reaches an age of personal accountability for his choices and decisions in life. Even dedicated Christian parents can only go so far – and then, a young person must make his own decision as to how he

will conduct his life...whether he will go the way of the world and reject God's Word or whether he will choose righteousness and commit his life in obedience to God's Word.

Joshua said to the Israelites, *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve"* (Josh. 24:15). This is ultimately a choice that each of us must make personally, and neither our parents nor anyone else can make it for us.

Each one must bear his own burden of responsibility, as we are taught in Galatians 6:4,5: *"But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden."* And each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12).

In view of this fact, I would also point out how that young people are also often guilty of "robbing God." Young people are "robbing God" when they fail to *"remember their creator in the days of their youth"*, when they fail to give the best of their lives to the Master's service.

"Youth" is synonymous with energy, vitality, and keen intellectual and physical performance. The first 30 years of our lives are, in many respects, the most vigorous and productive years. In our teens and twenties most of us are at the very height of our energetic capabilities. How we spend our energies during this period not only determines, to a great extent, our future course; but it is during this time that we often exert the greatest influence upon others.

No wonder, then, that Paul admonished the young man Timothy: *"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* (1 Tim. 4:12)

A good Christian example on the part of a single young Christian has the potential of leading other young people to Christ and causing adults to "stop and think". Conversely, a bad example likewise has a powerful potential to contribute to the lowering of moral standards in our already troubled world. It is high time for young people who know God to "stand up and be counted". If you don't, you are not only failing those who do not know God, but you are "robbing God" of the best portion of your life and influence!

In the words of one of our Christian hymns, "Give of your best to the Master; give Him the strength of your youth!" Or, as the words of an unknown poet reminds us:

Christ has no hands but our hands
to do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
to lead men on His way.
He has no tongue but our tongue
to tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
to bring them to His side.

Let me challenge you young people whether you have the advantage of a strong Christian home or not – don't rob God of your example and influence for truth and righteousness! Not only the future, but the present, is largely in your hands.

Members of the church today are often guilty of "robbing God" in their attendance and giving.

In Ephesians 3:21 the apostle Paul writes: *"unto Him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."* This passage teaches us two great lessons. First, as Christians we are to glorify God in the church which Christ established. And second, the glory we render unto God as members of Christ's church will continue throughout all eternity even after we have left this world and entered the eternal Home. If you are a member of the Lord's church, you should prove your love and loyalty by being faithful in all things.

Let me cite a couple of examples which point out the importance of faithful attendance. First, a leader who will not attend evening service is a bad influence. Other members seem to think it is fine to miss the evening service if they see a leader doing the same. Second, here is a story that I heard: A visitor came to hear a preacher on Sunday morning. He liked what he heard and returned for the afternoon service. There were about 60 people at the morning service, however, only about 20 returned for the evening service. The visitor told the speaker sadly as he left that evening, "This morning I was so sure I had found Christ's church; but seeing what I have tonight, I am afraid that my first impression was a mistake." Needless to say, this man never returned.

The lessons we can see in these examples ought to be plain and clear. When we are faithful in attendance, we not only glorify God by our presence and worship, but we demonstrate that we are serious in our profession of faith. When we are not present, we not only rob God of the glory He is due, but our indifference speaks to the lost and tells them we are not really serious about the gospel of Christ.

Finally, let's consider how that many are guilty of "robbing God" by failing to give as they have been prospered. Malachi 3:7-10 shows how God's people, back in the days of Malachi the prophet, had become guilty of this sin and stood in danger of being cut off.

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

They had failed to return to God the first fruits of their harvests. By so doing, God said, "Ye have robbed me." How can we, living under a superior covenant, possibly justify ourselves in giving God less than the Jews did under the Law of Moses? Please do not misunderstand. We are not saying that tithing (or 10% giving) is a requirement for us today under the New Testament. As Christians, we are simply commanded to give as we have been prospered and as each one purposes in his own heart (1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

God's law of giving for today is according to the principle of love and not a fixed percentage of one's income. This is evident from what Paul told the Corinthians. After holding up the liberality of the Macedonian Christians as an example, Paul said: "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love" (2 Cor. 8:7-8).

The way that we give proves the sincerity of our love. Whatever amount we may purpose and lay aside each week for the support of the Lord's work, we are saying in effect, "Lord, I love you THIS MUCH."

It should never be a question of "How much must I give?" nor even "How much should I give?" but rather, "How much can I give?", a matter of privilege, or thanksgiving, and of love rather than mere duty.

We each need to examine ourselves in this regard and honestly

ask, "Am I giving liberally as I have been prospered? Or, have I been guilty of 'robbing God' by squandering the vast majority of my income on myself?" Ten percent with many may not be liberal giving at all; with a few, it might be a real sacrifice.

Will a man rob God? Many parents are, by failing to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord — one of the most serious and tragic possible forms of "robbing God". Likewise, there are many young people who are "robbing God" by failing to give of their best to the Master. And, there are untold thousands of indifferent and unfaithful members of the church who are guilty of "robbing God" by failing to be present each time the church meets and by failing to really give as they have been prospered. If you are robbing God in any of the above mentioned ways and stand in need of bringing your life into harmony with the will of God, I pray you will do so without letting another precious day of opportunity slip.

Adapted from a sermon by KENT DICKINSON
(Deceased)

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: 1 Corinthians 14:33 says that God is not the author of confusion. Does this mean that the Devil is the author of confusion? I just assumed that anything that was confusing came from the Devil. But what about the tower of Babel, where God confused their languages?

ANSWER: While 1 Corinthians 14:33 does use the word "confusion" and states that God is not the author of such, Genesis 11:7 and 9 use the word "confound" and state that God was responsible for the conflict in languages.

*"Go to, let us go down, and there **confound** their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there **confound** the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."* (Gen. 11:7-9)

There is a difference in the meaning of these two words. Paul employs use of the Greek "akatastasia" (Strong 181) which is defined as confusion, disorder, and tumult.

Moses in Genesis uses the Hebrew "balal" (Strong 1101) which means confound, mingle, mix. In James 3:15-16 we note that

confusion (akatastasia) is "devilish" and related to "every evil work," thus pointing to the devil as its author. God's confounding (balal) of the languages did have the consequence of confusion, but this was the result of the peoples' sin. They suffered the consequence of their actions even as a disobedient child might suffer from a spanking received from his parents due to his misconduct.

HARRY COBB
P.O. Box 75
Wedowee, AL 36278

**THEY THAT SEEK GOD IN EVERYTHING
WILL FIND GOD IN EVERYTHING**

[Editor's note: As we publish the 300th issue and as the new year approaches, there are many people to whom we would like to express our gratitude for their contribution in publishing The Harvester: congregations and individuals who have donated financially to this work, those who prepare this paper for mailing each month, Ken Cobb who faithfully sends address updates to the mailing list, and West Georgia Printing for working with us to get each issue printed. We would also like to thank those who have authored articles this year: Harry Cobb, Sam Dick, Ron Scott, Tony Whiddon, and Bill Yarbrough. To those who have offered words of encouragement to us, we sincerely thank you.

If anyone has an edifying article to submit to the paper, we would greatly appreciate it. Also, do not forget to send your gospel meeting announcements at least two months in advance in order for it to be published in time. Please pray for us and our efforts, and may God bless each of you.]

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. If a priest or the general community was guilty of unintentional sin, what was the required sacrifice?
2. At Solomon's peak, how many wives and concubines did he have?
3. According to the book of Isaiah, what would the daughters of Moab be compared to after Moab fell?
4. To whom did Jesus say, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth"?

5. According to First Corinthians, how did Paul refer to himself and the apostles?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What was Moses' father-in-law's name and occupation? HIS NAME WAS JETHRO, AND HE WAS A PRIEST (Exo. 3:1)
2. David extended grace toward Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. What was Mephibosheth's handicap? HE WAS "LAME ON HIS FEET" (2 Sam. 9:3)
3. What had Job lost at the end of Satan's first attack? MANY SERVANTS, HIS SONS AND DAUGHTERS, OXEN AND ASSES, SHEEP, AND CAMELS (Job 1:14-19)
4. When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra, Paul healed a lame man. Because of this, by what names did the people of the city call the two men? JUPITER AND MERCURIUS (Acts 14:11-13)
5. According to the book of James, someone who turns a sinner from the error of his ways does what two things? SAVES A SOUL FROM DEATH AND COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS (Jas. 5:19-20)