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I had a friend who was a self-employed designer and I recall that on one occasion a client told him that his fees were too high so he agreed to “freelance” on himself by charging a lower rate. He stole from himself.

The Old Covenant demanded free will offerings over and above the required 10% of the gross of everything. The “Blessings and curses” of Deuteronomy 28 were based on doing to get; “If you keep my commandments I will do the following but if you fail these are the consequences.” Malachi reinforces this position by stating; “You have robbed me of the tithes and offerings due me” then to drive it even deeper God undergirds the agreement He has with Israel and reminds them of the consequences of disobedience; “And so the awesome curse of God is on you.” Their failure to keep their part of the agreement concerning tithes resulted in Israel experiencing a famine but according to the contract God offered a solution to the curse; “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in my Temple. If you do, I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing so great you won’t have room to take it in.” But Israel’s obedience did not depend on their heart being right any more than my heart is rejoicing when I pay Revenue Canada. They demand; I pay, end of story but the Kingdom of God as revealed fully by Jesus goes for the real issue; what is the attitude of my heart? Israel came to this point by default. God’s intent was personal relationship with His people but you only have to read the story of Jacob to realise that man’s relationship with God was based on works; “If I do this will you do that?” But those are the terms of the old contract.

Jesus fulfillment of the law took righteousness to the next level in that God considers a man guilty of adultery by just looking at a woman lustfully; and in the case of giving, that “your left hand should not know what the right hand is doing;” in today’s society it includes those imposing false guilt on people when appealing for gifts for “the ministry” – Who will give a thousand dollars, Yes, I see that hand.”

Jesus states; “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” God is after a pure heart but that requires a new and better covenant based on the principle of God giving everything. The expression of that principle is in the total sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son so that we can enter “The Holy of Holies” in order for us to have the intimacy with God He desires.

“The old hymn states; “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” I can do nothing to receive mercy and grace, healing, deliverance, or blessing financial or otherwise by keeping any legal agreement. It is all about God’s attitude of GRACE towards us. It’s free for us but it cost God everything. But how does grace work? I avail myself of this incredible gift simply by admitting my sin, repenting of it then receiving His forgiveness by faith and I can only do that because of all that Jesus has done.

There is much more than I have listed here but the principle is that even though we didn’t care or bother with Him, our Divine Lover gave Himself totally for our sakes; “Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and gave his only Son as an atonement for our sin.” In the light of such generosity our only true response has to be, “I, in return give You my wretched life, my failures, problems, financial mess, broken body and everything else that’s damaged. Now that’s a deal any one in their right mind should not refuse!

So then “how do we steal from ourselves?” Given God’s kindness in all He has done, how can we rob ourselves of a giving attitude by being so stingy and withholding what He has given us?

God gave the “works, 100%.” This relationship, like a marriage only really works well when both give “the works.” That’s everything. If you want an indicator of the degree of this “giving the works” in your own life consider how much you’re giving financially. God says that you can’t serve “God and money” and in terms of God’s commitment to us the hymn says; “such love shall have my soul, my life, my all.” A contemporary translation

inserts the word “demands” instead of “shall have” but according to the New Agreement, I get to choose to give Him my all. If I don’t then I’m the one who loses.

I steal from myself when I fail to “surrender all to Jesus.” At one point in my Christian life I remember someone teaching me to give the tithe based on the “gross” which I did faithfully as part of “The Law” understanding at that time. Then I heard that it could be based on the “net” and I reduced my giving!!! It revealed that my heart was under law, not grace. The actual consequence was that we experienced 14 lean years. So what did that prove; was it that the law as stated in Malachi was correct or did it expose what was in my heart; perhaps a little of both.

There are principles and there are laws. The basis of the laws are sound principles but they do not get at the heart’s motives; only the Holy Spirit and Scripture can expose what’s hidden in my heart. Sadly I STOLE FROM MYSELF because my heart attitude WAS WRONG in my giving. According to the New Agreement, I own nothing. I acknowledge that God loves me and if my heart is right then I want please the One who loves with such total commitment.

Shalom.

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