

SPIRITUAL DELUSION

Malachi 3:13- 18; 2 Thessalonians 2

One of the marks of the end days is delusion. The Lord Himself will send delusion among His people in the last days for two reasons. Firstly, because they do not love the truth. "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of truth..." (2 Thess 2:10). In 2 Timothy 4:3, 4 Paul says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables". If a man has itching in some part of the body, he wants to scratch it. If someone scratches they have a nice feeling. In the last days people will have itching ears. These days there are scratching preachers who leave out the truth and tell fables. They have turned their places of worship into places of entertainment because they are pleasure- loving. Secondly, God will send delusion because people do not love righteousness. Thousands of people want to go to heaven, but they love unrighteousness. God wants them to put away every unrighteousness and untruth in their lives but they are not willing. For these two reasons the Lord will send delusion.

We are living in such days where we can be easily deceived. In the days of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Pharisees were the most religious people, but they were spiritually deceived by delusion. The church at Laodicea also was in delusion. They thought they lacked nothing, but in reality they were poor, naked, blind, wretched and miserable (Rev.3: 21). This is the mark of the last days. In Matthew 7:22, 23 we read how in the last days many will come and tell the Lord how many things they did in His Name. But He will say, "I never knew you". They lived in spiritual delusion: They will realize this only on the last day. If you do not love the truth, and if you do not love righteousness, you will be caught up in that delusion. You may think that you are alright, but on the last day, you will realize that you were in delusion.

In the days of Malachi people lived in spiritual delusion. Among God's people, only a handful of them feared God, and thought about Him, as we read in Malachi 3:16. "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name". Not only were their names recorded but they were made His jewels (v.17). The Lord is coming back for such people. Those who have truly feared God and escaped delusion will be His Bride. We shall now see three things about the fear of God. (1) Marks of those who really fear God. (2) How we can have this fear, and (3) Rewards for those who really fear God.

MARKS OF THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

(1) They never doubt the love of God. Those who do not fear God doubt His love. "I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, where in hast thou loved us?"(Mal.1: 2). They never truly put their trust in the love of God. When they see other people prospering and they themselves having many problems, they begin to doubt God's love. Many young people doubt the love of God, if they do not get their desired seat in colleges or universities. When they see people getting jobs by giving bribes and themselves not having a job, they say, where is God? When their friends get married by giving dowry, and they are left out because they do not give dowry,

they doubt God's love and care. The children of Israel also said like that. "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" God showed His love on the cross of Calvary. The Lord Jesus Christ shed His blood for us to redeem us. He made us members of His body, which is the temple of God. There is no need to feel jealous about worldly people.

In Psalm 73, the Psalmist also made the same mistake. He began with a clean heart and also said, "Truly God is good" (v.1). After some- time his heart was filled with envy, by seeing the prosperity of worldly people. He forgot that they had only temporal things. In verse 13 he said, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence". That is how some believers also think. Attending meetings is in vain, prayer is in vain, everything is in vain, so they stop going to God's House. But the Psalmist, instead of doing that went to the sanctuary of God (vs.16, 17). When he went there he understood the future of worldly people and his own future. What is the future of worldly people? Their end is "destruction" (v.18). What is his own future? "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (v.24). If you really fear God, no matter what He allows in your life, however severe your trials may be, you will never doubt God or His love. If you are not secure in His love, you can never truly love Him. Rather, for small things also you will begin to murmur. In 1 John 4:19 we read. "We love him, because he first loved us". Those who fear God are secure in His love.

(2) Those who fear God truly, honor Him. The children of Israel thought that they feared God and honored Him, but the Lord said, "...if then I be a father. Where is mine honor?" (Mal.1: 6). They brought offerings to God, which were blind, lame and sick. They offered God something, which cost them nothing. So God said, "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick. Is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? Saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal.1: 8). Our God is great and His Name is great, as we read in verse 11. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles~ and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts". To honor God we should bring pure offerings, and offerings in righteousness (Mal. 3:3). If our offering is not righteous, He will not accept it. He will treat it as dung and spread it upon our faces (Mal.2: 3).

Secondly, God wants spiritual sacrifices. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God. Thou wilt not despise"(Psalm 51:17). If our offering has to be acceptable to God, it must come from a broken heart. How can you know you have a contrite heart? David wrote this Psalm after he repented of his sin. Very often we ask forgiveness from God, but we commit the same sin again. If you have a broken and contrite heart like David. You will never again do the same sin. God wants from us the sacrifices of a broken heart.

Thirdly, according to Rom12: 1. we have to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Holy and acceptable to God. If we have truly offered our bodies to God, no lie or angry words will come out of our mouth. In the same way all other members also will be used for God only. If that is not true, our singing of songs unto God and putting our offerings in the offering box will not be acceptable to God. It will be like dung to Him. When we offer something to a big officer, we carefully examine everything and give the very best. Those who are in spiritual delusion and do not fear God. Do not offer righteous offerings. Contrite hearts and living sacrifice of their bodies.

In our previous issue we saw two marks of those who fear God; they do not doubt God's love, and they honor God by offering sacrifices which are pure and righteous, sacrifices of contrite hearts, and living sacrifices of bodies offered to Him.

They also offer the sacrifices of praise. To God continually, that is, the fruit of their lips giving thanks to God (Heb.13: 15). We should bring such offerings to the Lord day after day and week after week. But many people despise the time of worship on the Lord's Day, and come late saying they do not have time. They have time for everything; they work over-time in their offices, but have no time for the House of God. Our Lord is a great King. Those who offer Him blind and lame offerings and that, which cost them nothing, are in spiritual delusion.

In Matt.5:23, 24 the Lord Jesus said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar. And go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift". If you are not in talking terms with your brother, if you have hatred in your heart for him and yet you offer worship with your lips, it will be only like dung. The Lord will not accept it because God wants offerings, which are offered with pure hearts. The Lord did not say, "If you bring your offering and remember that your brother has something against you, just claim My blood and go and offer". No, He said, "First go and make peace and then you come and offer sacrifices". God will not accept an offering, which comes out of a defiled heart.

The third mark of those who fear God is, they are faithful to their marriage vows. "Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion and the wife of thy covenant" (Mal.2:14). Such people are in spiritual delusion. These days many men put away their wives and want to marry some one else, and yet they cover the altar with tears. They have no proper fellowship at home. Yet they come to God's House and bring their offering. God will never accept such worship. In God's sight husband and wife are one. What God has joined man should not put asunder. Many homes are breaking these days because fathers - in - law and mothers -in -law live under the same roof and cause much confusion. If you do not have the right relationship with your wife or husband you are in delusion.

Fourthly, those who fear God, give God His portion regularly. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, where in have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Mal.3:8). They never realized that by not giving the Lord's portion, they had become robbers. If you do not give your tithe to the Lord, you are not going to make God pauper, you yourself will become poor.

HOW WE CAN HAVE THE FEAR OF GOD

The key to get back the fear of God is found in Mal.3: 7. "...Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts". When we return to the Lord, He will put His fear in our hearts as we read in Jer.32: 40, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me". Our personal revival starts when we turn to God whole -heartedly, not rending our garments but our hearts (Joel 2:12, 13). True repentance means we see our sins and turn away from them whole - heartedly; then the Lord will turn to us.

When Paul saw sin among the Corinthians, he wrote a letter to them. When they read that letter, they were filled with sorrow and turned towards God. Such repentance brought several things in their lives. "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter"(2 Cor. 7:11). In true repentance these seven things are seen. Firstly, it brought about carefulness in their lives. Then there was clearing of themselves. They did not want to continue in that sin. Thirdly, they had indignation, that means they had holy anger, and they wanted to do away with that sin. Fourthly, they had fear, because of which they trembled at God's Word. Fifthly, with vehement desire, they wanted to possess what God wanted to give them. Previously they had a desire for sin, but now a desire for righteousness. Sixthly, they had great zeal for holiness. Seventhly, God put His fire in their hearts for righteous revenge. When we turn to the Lord with such a repentance, He writes His laws in our hearts, so that we may fear Him and escape spiritual delusion.

REWARDS FOR THOSE WHO FEAR GOD

"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Mal.3:16}. The Lord delights to hear what such people talk. From other people He hears only blasphemy, foolish and evil words. When those who fear the Lord speak one to another, it is delightful to Him. So He says, "Let me hear their words". That is the meaning of the word hearken. Then He writes their names in the book of remembrance. Not only that, He makes them His jewels (v.17).

The Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Mal.4:2). When He first came to this world, He loved us and shed His blood to redeem us. Now He is going to come again for His jewels, that is, His Bride. Then they will b~ with Him for ever and ever.

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