

Malachi 2 - A Call to Love God Totally; A Call to be Faithful

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Malachi 2

- (3) God cursed the priests (2:1-9)
 - (A) Curse described (2:1-3)

1 "And now, this commandment is for you, the priests.

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1 Now this commandment is for you priests:

1 And now, O ye priests, this commandment *is* for you.

- Still dealing with the priests, and the *character* of their offerings (not their *value*—that will come later)

- Five great offerings of Leviticus: each pointed to Jesus Christ

- Each was to represent the Coming One: holy, undefiled, separate, perfect, without blemish
- God's specifications each have (at least one) purpose
- Perhaps that's why Moses was so severely chastised for not *specifically* following God's instructions for the water from the rock (1 Cor 10:4) the second time: the two events would have modeled the 1st (Ex 17:6) and 2nd (Num 20:8-12) Comings (He is not smitten the second time!)

[All believers are priests in this age. Malachi's warnings directed to the priests is for *us*. You and I must guard against misrepresenting God.]

2 If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give **honor** to My **name**," says the LORD of armies, "then I will send the **curse** upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

2 If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

2 "If you don't listen, and if you don't choose to give honor to my name," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, "then I'll curse both you and your blessings. I've even cursed them already, because none of you are taking it to heart.

2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay *it* to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay *it* to heart.

- The chief end of the priests—as it is of us as Christians today—is *to glorify God*
- "...honor" - denotes all of the weight, gravity, of God's presence; the presence that defined His importance and the respect He was owed.
- "...name" - appears for the 6th time in these first 16 verses of this book; the summation of all that He was in His person, attributes, reputation, doctrine, and ethical teaching
- God's name had been disgraced and made to appear shabby and despised by the way the priests had professed their faith, offered their gifts, entered into their service of God, and thought about the time they had invested for Him.
- "...curse" - 3x the text mentions the curse for disobedience and unbelief
- God's name is serious business, and nothing pollutes it more than the misconduct of those whose business it is to honor it.
- The curse in this verse is very close to that of Deut 28:20; Deut 28 together with Lev 26 offered the alternative prospects of blessing or judgment. All gifts, goods, production—even the promise of these (Num 6:24-26)—would fall under God's judgment.

3 Behold, I am going to rebuke your **descendants**, and I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.

3 Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.

3 Look! I'm rebuking your descendants because of you, and I'll spread waste on your faces, the waste of your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.

3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, [even] the dung of your solemn feasts; and [one] shall take you away with it.

- "...descendants" - more likely the produce of the ground rather than one's offspring, though either view is acceptable (Cf. Deut 28:18-19,21,23-24)

— To rebuke the "seed" is to stop its growth

- The maw was the assigned portion of the priests (Deut 18:3), but the dung in the maw would be cast upon their faces, and they would have to be taken away as an abhorrent thing. He's "rubbing their noses in it."

— Even more dreadful is that they would be removed from His presence, along with the dung, entrails, et al. (Lev 8:7; 16:27)

(B) Reasons for the curse (2:4-9)

(a) Covenant with Levi is the priests' standard (2:4-7)

4 Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, so that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of armies.

4 Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts.

4 "You will know that I sent this commandment to you in order to continue my covenant with Levi," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

- The phrase "*then you shall know [that I am the LORD]*" regularly occurs in texts where the judgment of God is used as a lever to help men and women face up to the challenge that God has set before them (ie., the experience of Pharaoh in Ex 7:10; 9:14,29-30; 10:2; 14:2,18; of others in Ezek 15:7; 33:29, et al.)

— God's judgment would come if the priests would not respond to His call to change

- "sons of Levi" (3:3) - denotatively, the priesthood descended from a narrower family within the tribe of Levi: the "sons of Aaron" (Lev 8:1-4) or, later, the "sons of Zadok" (Ezek 44:15).

— Malachi deliberately uses the broader term "Levi" to include all who served around the Temple, not just at the altar

- Need not be limited to Phinehas (Cf. Num 25:12-13), who was stirred to action by the evil done by the Simeonite Zimri and the Midianite woman Cozbi
- While the entire congregation was assembled in repentance before God, Zimri and Cozbi walked brazenly across the encampment to commit fornication in the name of religious prostitution and worship of the dead (Num 25:6-8; Ps 106:28-31)
- Phinehas “stood up and intervened” (Ps 106:30), being “zealous with My zeal” (Num 25:11).
- Also, at Sinai, being faithful in spite of the sin of Israel with the golden calf (Ex 32:25-29; Deut 33:8-11)

5 “My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and was in awe of My name.

5 “My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

5 “My covenant with him was for life and peace, and I gave the commandments to him so he would fear me. He did fear me as he stood in my presence.

5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him *for* the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

- God’s covenant with Levi included “life and peace,” God’s gifts to obedient persons

— Deuteronomy and Proverbs taught that these blessings were the result of a total commitment to the commandments of God (Deut 4:40; 6:2; 30:15-30; Prov 3:1-2; 4:10,22; 6:23)

— Blessings of peace withheld from *them* because they denied Him their obedience.

6 True instruction was in his mouth and injustice was not found on his lips; he **walked with** Me in peace and justice, and he turned many back from wrongdoing.

6 True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity.

6 True teachings were in his mouth, and falsehood was not found on his lips. He walked with me peacefully and righteously, and he turned many from sin.

6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

- The real task of the servant of God: he boldly expounds the Law of God as it is found in His Word—all of it—whether or not it is popular or relevant

— Faithful proclamation of God’s Word will “turn many to righteousness” (Dan 12:3)

— “...walked with” - implies a more intimate fellowship with the Lord than is implied in “walk after” (Deut 8:19; 13:4; 2 Kings 23:3; Jer 7:9; Hosea 11:10; Cf. Enoch: Gen 5:22,24; Noah: Gen 6:9)

- This expression is used sparingly to refer only to those who had an unusually close communion or fellowship (*koinonia*) with God.
- The priests were also called to exercise a judicial function (Deut 17:9-11 and 19:17). Thus, they were to exercise justice and impartiality.

7 For the lips of a priest should maintain knowledge, and *people* should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of armies.

7 For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

7 For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he's the messenger of the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he *is* the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

- The Levite was the *teacher* of the people (Deut 33:8-11)
- Paul appears to draw an analogy between the functions of evangelists and pastor-teachers in Eph 4:7-10ff, and the functions of the Levites in Numbers 8 and 18
- The Levites were "taken" (Num 8:6; 18:6); hence, the figure of leading captives, and "given" back to God for service (Num 8:19; 12:17), just as God had "led captivity captive" (Ps 68:18, quoting Num 8; 18).

[Gary V. Smith, "Paul's Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1975) 18:181-189 (q.v. Kaiser)]

(b) Priests' violation of the Levitical standard (2:8-9)

8 But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have ruined the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of armies.

8 But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts.

8 "But you priests turned aside from the way, and by your teaching you caused many to stumble. You have violated the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

- God Himself was to be the priests' portion and inheritance (Num 18:20)
- What a contrast with the early history of the Levites and those of Malachi's day

9 "So I also have made you despised and of low reputation in the view of all the people, since you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction."

9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

9 "So I also made you despised, humiliating you before all of the people, because you aren't following my ways and are showing partiality when you teach."

9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

- The priests had become so corrupt that they had lost all respect in the eyes of the people and the eyes of God. They had courted popularity by modifying God's requirements.

— When we do not seek first God's glory and totally love and respond to His Word, then our culture is in desperate trouble.

III. God corrects the people of Judah for mixed marriages and divorce (Mal 2:10-16)

(1) Mixed marriage (2:10-12)

(A) Rebuke (2:10-11)

10 Do we not all have one Father? Is it not one God *who* has created us? Why do we deal treacherously, each against his **brother** so as to profane the covenant of our **fathers**?

10 "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?

10 Do we not have one father? Has not one God created us? Why does each of us act deceitfully, each man against his own brother, to profane the covenant of our ancestors?

10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother [one another], by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

- "...brother" - includes (injured) wives

— Israel is being taught that men *and* women stand in the same relation before God as Father and Creator

— He not only created them physically, but had made them His covenant people (Is 43:1; 60:21)

— Every form of the people's sins was an act of treachery against the whole body—as well as against God

- "...fathers" - that is intended here is not Abraham (as some scholars have suggested, including Jerome and Calvin) but YHWH, the father of Israel, the One who created her (Is 43:1)

— We do not find God referring to any *individual* Israelite as His son—only the corporate body of the nation as His son (Ex 4:22)

11 Judah has **dealt treacherously**, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves, and has married **the daughter** of a foreign god.

11 Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has

married the daughter of a foreign god.

11 Judah has become unfaithful, and a detestable thing was committed in Israel and Jerusalem. Indeed, Judah profaned the Holy Place of the LORD, which he loves, and married a daughter of a foreign god.

11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

— "...dealt treacherously" - *bagad*, related to the word *beged*, "garment"

— It is interesting how this word is linked to a "cover-up" of sin(s)

[Note: distinctions between Judah (tribe), Israel (nation), and Jerusalem (capital)]

— "...the daughter" - a worshiper is regarded in Scripture as a child to a father (Jer 2:27)

— The Law of Moses had called them to be separate (Ex 19:5; Lev 20:24,26; Deut 7:1-4)

— This was a safeguard against importing idolatry into Israel (Cf. Balaam's counsel, Num 25:1-3; 31:16; Ahab and Jezebel, the Daughter of Ethbaal, king of Zidonians, 1 Kings 16:31)

— Mixed marriages had been clearly forbidden in Ex 34:11-16; Deut 7:3; 1 Kings 11:1-2

— These mixed marriages were also mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9:1-6; 10:1-4,18-19; Neh 10:30; 13:23-27)

— Nehemiah, finding that Tobiah, an Ammonite, an enemy of God, since his daughter married the son of the high priest, was living in a "father-in-law apartment" in the temple, threw him out, furniture and all and ran him out of town!

— Politeness and tact was sacrificed for purity! He was just as rough with those who had intermarried with pagans of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab (Neh 13:25).

— Israel had thus profaned herself; Ezra likewise brought such charges (Ezra 9:1-3)

— Paul also warned against being "unequally yoked" (2 Cor 6:15-16; Cf. Matt 10:34-40)

(B) Threat (2:12)

12 As for the man who does this, may the LORD eliminate from the tents of Jacob everyone who is awake and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of armies.

12 As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts.

12 May the LORD exclude from the community of Jacob any man who does this, whoever he may be, even though he brings offerings to the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

12 The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.

— The true child of God will not continue to live in sin

— The prodigal son could not endure the pigpen (Luke 15:18)

(2) Divorce (2:13-16)

(A) God declares that He will no longer receive Judah's offerings (2:13)

13 And this is another thing you do: you **cover the altar** of the LORD with tears, with weeping and sighing, because He no longer gives attention to the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.

13 "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.

13 "This is another thing you do: you flood the altar of the LORD with tears, weeping and wailing because he no longer pays attention to your offering nor takes pleasure in it from your hand.

13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it with* good will at your hand.

- "...cover the altar" - figuratively—only priests had actual access to the altar

— Hypocrisy is a barrier to service. Their sacrifices were not accepted. They were blocked by the tears of their abandoned wives (v14b).

(B) Judah's response (2:14a)

(C) Divorce (2:14b-16)

(a) Sin of divorce (2:14b)

14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your marriage companion and your wife by covenant.

14 Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

14 Yet you ask, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD acts as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you were unfaithful to her, your partner, the wife of your covenant.

14 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.

- Many ministers and teachers are intimidated to the point of silence on issues regarding the sexual practices of single people, the extramarital "affairs" of believers and unbelievers, and divorce.

— God was a witness to a legally contracted marriage where God was called to witness the covenant

— Marriage is indeed a covenant: Prov 2:17; Ezek 16:8; et al

— Solomon similarly enjoined couples to "rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Prov 5:15-21)

One Puritan commentator summarizes:

She whom you thus wronged was the companion of those earlier and brighter days, when in the bloom of her young beauty she left her father's house and shared your early struggles, and rejoiced in your later success; who walked arm in arm with you along the pilgrimage of life, cheering you in its trials by her gentle ministry; and now, when the bloom of her youth has faded and the friends of her youth have gone, when her father and mother whom she left for you are in the grave, then you cruelly cast her off as a worn-out, worthless thing, and insult her holiest affections by putting an idolater and a heathen in her place.

[T.V. Moore, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: A New Translation with Notes*, Robert Carter & Bros., New York, 1856, pp. 362-63.]

(b) God warns against divorce (2:15)

15 But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And why the one? He was seeking a godly offspring. Be careful then about your spirit, and see *that* none of you deals treacherously against the wife of your youth.

15 But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that* one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

15 Did he not make them one? And the vestige of the spirit remains in him. And why did he make them one? He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and don't be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

- Most difficult verse in the book; problem to both Jewish and Christian interpreters
— One alternate rendering: "And not one hath done so who had a residue of the spirit." ie., no one had contracted such marriages with foreign women and divorced their former wives, if he had anything of the Spirit of God. Fine, but it does not go smoothly with the remainder of the passage.

More likely a reference to the original institution of marriage by God Himself—"one" flesh (Gen 2:24). God *could* have made more than one wife for Adam. However, Adam and Eve, *ish* and *ishah*, are presented as composite whole, incomplete without the other. Each is only half complete. [Note: each cell of our body contains 23 pairs of chromosomes—one from each parent. We, indeed, are of "one" flesh.]

Gen 2:23-24: This excommunicates mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law! There's a concept of *leaving* as well as *cleaving*! It was God who brought the woman to man. Sex is not to be despised. Its misuse and abuse is the death rattle of a fading nation. One of the troubles with this world is that people mistake sex for love, money for brains, microcircuits for civilization, and now there is no linkage between character and destiny in our society.

(c) God's hatred of divorce (2:16)

16 "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with violence," says the LORD of armies. "So be careful about your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

16 For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

16 "Indeed, the LORD God of Israel says that he hates divorce, along with the one who conceals his violence by outward appearances," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies. "So guard yourselves carefully, and don't be unfaithful."

16 For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for [one] covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

- This verse is one of the strongest protests anywhere in Scripture against divorce
- Reference is to the old custom of putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife (Deut 22:30; Ruth 3:9; Ezek 16:8)
- Instead of spreading their garment to protect their wives, they covered their garment with violence toward them

IV. God corrects Judah for questioning His justice (Mal 2:17—3:7)

- (1) God's weariness with Judah (2:17a)
- (2) Judah's denial (2:17b)
- (3) God explains that Judah has questioned God's justice (2:17c)

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied *Him*?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied *Him*?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"

17 "You have wearied the LORD with your words. You ask, 'How have we wearied you?' By your saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD and he's pleased with them,' or 'Where is the God of justice?'"

17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied [him]? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil [is] good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where *is* the God of judgment?

- Wearying God? With evil skepticism. Can one exhaust His patience?
- They raised the old argument against the providence of God from the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous (Cf. Ps 73, Job, et al.)
- Mal 2:17 is answered in 3:1).
- We—as Israel did—forget that the blessings of God are conditioned upon faith and obedience
- God will withhold these blessings if we walk in self-will