

GOD ANSWERS BACK – COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF MALACH

by Paul G. Apple, April 2005

GOD REBUKES THE PROUD CRIES OF THE SELF RIGHTEOUS AND CALLS THEM TO REPENTANCE

*“Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the Lord.
‘Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against Thee?’”
(Malachi 3:13)*

For each section in the Book of Malachi:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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BACKGROUND OF MALACHI

Malick:

Yahweh's repeated indictments of the postexilic people and their leaders of covenant disobedience prepare them for his future coming when they will either be blessed or cursed in accordance with their response.

Piper:

Malachi prophesied around 450 BC in Israel. He was one of the last inspired prophets before the 400-year lull in divine revelation between the Old Testament and Jesus Christ. The Israelites had returned from the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem had been rebuilt, and the temple restored.

But the people had not learned their lesson from the exile. They had grown skeptical of God's love (1:2), careless in worship (1:7), indifferent to the truth (2:6-7), disobedient to the covenant (2:10), faithless in their marriages (2:15; 3:5), and stingy in their offerings (3:8).

To this carnal and rebellious people God sent his messenger (Malachi means "my messenger"), and the first message he put on his lips was, "I have loved you, says the Lord!"

Piper:

The great temptation for Israel in the Old Testament and for the church of Christ today is to forget that we are pilgrims not natives in this world. The temptation is to let the Lord's delay make us settle into the world and become passive as we wait; to forget that we are aliens and exiles, sojourners, strangers on the earth, seeking another homeland, desiring and yearning for a better country (Heb. 11:13-16).

Stedman: This prophecy of Malachi was given by a man whose name means "my messenger." It is most suggestive that this last book of our Old Testament centers around the theme of a messenger of God and a prediction of the coming of another messenger. In this, therefore, we have a direct tie between Malachi and the New Testament. Chapter 3, for instance, begins with this prophecy:

"Behold, I send my messenger [in Hebrew that would be "Behold, I send Malachi"] to prepare the way before me, ..." {Mal 3:1a RSV}

And as you discover in the book of Matthew, that messenger was John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way of the Lord and to announce the coming of the second messenger from God. That second messenger is here in this prophecy in the next phrase:

"... and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant ..." {Mal 3:1b RSV}

It was the work of the Lord Jesus on the closing night of his ministry to take wine and bread with his disciples and holding the cup up to say, "This is my blood of the [new] covenant." (Matt. 26:28) The messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus himself. . . .

This entire book is a series of responses on the part of the people to the challenges of God. Seventimes you will find them saying, "How? How does this happen? Prove it." As we go through them you can see how they reveal the state of this people's heart. Here is an outgoing God -- and God is always this way, pouring out love -- but here is a callous people who have become so indifferent and so unresponsive to God that in perfect sincerity they can say, "We don't see this. What do you mean? Why do you say these things to us?" Throughout the book, this is the theme.

Roper: It was written sometime around 450 B.C., a very interesting and significant time in the Mediterranean world. This was the golden age of Greece, the age of Pericles. This was when men like Aristotle and Socrates and Plato lived, and historians, poets, and writers like Thucydides. This was a time when the Greeks celebrated some of their great victories over the Persian armies, when Leonidas and his 300 Spartans held off the entire army of Xerxes for a period of time. These were golden days in the history of Greece.

Yet if you had lived at this time and had been looking at the nation of Israel from the Jew's point of view, this was anything but a golden era. They were terribly discouraged, bordering on despair. They had returned from exile some sixty to seventy years before. They had been in exile first under the Babylonian empire, and then under the Persian empire for seventy years. Now they had returned and had begun to rebuild, but their efforts were not too rewarding. In fact, they were downright discouraging. They were able to rebuild the wall, but they did not have enough men of military age to protect them against any sort of siege. There were probably less than 100,000 Jews in all of Palestine. They were living in huts, ill-protected from the rains. Their farms were not producing well, they had undergone several periods of drought, they were in economic trouble. They had rebuilt the temple, but it was certainly nothing like Solomon's temple. The Chaldeans had burned Solomon's temple, and all that was left was a burned-out shell. The Jews had been able to replace some of the interior, but they could not put back the gold and silver. Someone has estimated that between ten and twenty million dollars' worth of gold was used in building Solomon's temple. Of course the Jews did not have that sort of money; they were poverty-stricken. And they did not have a king, but an appointee from the Persian government who was their governor. They had very little freedom, and certainly no national pride. They were terribly depressed and discouraged, and if you had talked to them of the love of God, I am sure they would have said that God had forgotten them. God may love the Greeks. All they had to do was look at the morning newspapers-- they were all quoting the Greek leaders. But nobody was quoting the prophets and poets of Israel. We are forgotten. God does not care. He has cast us aside in a kind of historical backwater, and history has gone off without us.

Kelley: Malachi has been called "the Hebrew Socrates," since both he and the famous Greek philosopher taught the people by engaging them in conversation or dialogue. To be sure, he did not learn his dialogical style from Socrates but from the prophets who

preceded him. The Old Testament records other instances where the people's words, spoken in a spirit of arrogance and disdain for God, were used to frame God's indictment of them. . . This was a case of the people being condemned out of their own mouths.

Malachi seized the conversation technique of preaching and developed it to perfection . . . subdivisions of each major section:

- a) the statement of a charge or proposition
- b) the people's flat denial of the charge or proposition; and
- c) the marshalling of evidence that could not be denied to support the charge or proposition.

The people's questions became more and more defiant . . . God's steadfast love for His people was in stark contrast to their indifference, cynicism, and open contempt for Him.

Kelley:

Three-quarters of a century of hardship and disillusionment produced a dangerous reaction in Israel. The faith of former days gave way to doubt and skepticism. . .

Three results of the decades of hardship and disillusionment may be noted. First, the people and the priests began to neglect the Temple and its services. They offered on the Lord's altar blemished and diseased animals (1:8, 13-14). Tithes were kept for personal use instead of being brought to the Lord's storehouse (3:8-9). Such a mockery was made of worship that the Lord called for someone to close the Temple doors and to put out the altar fires (1:10).

Second, the Jews became less concerned about maintaining their distinct identity as God's covenant people. They began to intermarry with their heathen neighbors without considering the question of religion. It was a critical moment in the nation's struggle for survival. The distinctive Jewish institutions, especially the sabbath (see Neh. 13:15-22), were being threatened; and the Jews were in danger of being absorbed by their heathen neighbors.

Third, the nation's moral and ethical standards declined seriously. Money-lenders had no scruples against enslaving their own countrymen. (See Neh. 5:1-5.) Malachi charged the people with the sins of sorcery, adultery, perjury, and oppression of the community's defenseless members. (See 3:5.) He also described a situation in which brothers dealt treacherously with brothers (2:10), and the prevailing mood was one of alienation and distrust (4:6).

Morgan: The Complaints of Jehovah--

This then was the spirit of the age. Formalism, ritual, ceremonial –everything so far as mechanical and outward observance – complete. A Divine messenger came voicing the complaint of God, and the people in astonishment and anger, and with marked impertinence, looked into the very face of high heaven and said, "We don't see this thing at all – Wherein?" And all this because God's appointed messengers have themselves, in

life, and work, and conversation corrupted the covenant, and have passed into the region of baseness and contempt in the eyes of the people.

Baxter:

This APPEAL of Malachi quite naturally falls into TWO PARTS. In chapters i. and ii. The appeal is made in view of *the present sin of the nation*. In chapters iii. and iv. it is in view of the coming "*Day of Jehovah*."

. . . the two besetting evils of his day were formalism and scepticism. In these we see the beginnings of the Pharisaism (formalism) and the Sadduceeism (scepticism) which later reached their harvest-whiteness in our Lord's days. How these two things curse us today! And how they cause men to argue back against God! . . . The formalist does not like to have his formalism disturbed. The sceptic does not like to have his scepticism disproved. Both will evade the real issues of heart-religion by self-justifying counter-argument.

Levy: Outline:

- I. A People Divinely Loved (1:1-5)
- II. Priests Dishonoring the Lord (1:6-14)
- III. Priests Disciplined by the Lord (2:1-9)
- IV. People Defiling the Law (2:10-17)
- V. Purification Delivered by the Lord (3:1-6)
- VI. People Defrauding the Lord (3:7-18)
- VII. Predicted Day of the Lord (4:1-6)

Goddard: What Malachi has to say is based again and again upon the sovereignty of God. God is a father (1:6), a master (1:6), a great king (1:14). He is a heavenly governor (1:7,8). He gives covenants and commandments (2:4,5,10; 4:4). Because he is a sin-hating God, and his people are careless and indifferent and sinful – having defiled the Temple, failed in their worship responsibilities, and joined themselves in marriage to their uncircumcised neighbors – he must mete out judgment (2:2,3,12; 3:1-5; 4:1). But because he is a God of infinite grace, he will exercise loving-kindness if only his people will hear his voice and turn from their wicked ways (3:7,10-12). The dread Day of the Lord shall come (3:2; 4:1,5), but the righteous need not fear, for God cares for his own (3:16,17; 4:2,3). The prophet ever pleads, directly or indirectly, with a people who are rebels against their covenant head. In loving tones of invitation he urges them to return to the God whom they have forsaken – lest they be destroyed in the day of judgment.

Ryrie: About 100 years had passed since the return of the Jews to Palestine. The city of Jerusalem and the second Temple had been built, but initial enthusiasm had worn off. Following a period of revival under Nehemiah (Neh. 10:28-39), the people and priests had backslidden and become mechanical in their observance of the Law. Though lax in their worship (1:7) and delinquent in their tithing (3:8), they could not understand why God was dissatisfied with them.

TEXT: Malachi 1: 1-5

TITLE: *HOW HAS GOD LOVED US?*

BIG IDEA:

THE LORD'S COMPASSION GIVES HOPE AND SOFTENS THE BLOW OF HIS REBUKE OF THE PROUD CRIES OF THE SELF RIGHTEOUS

(:1) INTRODUCTION TO BOOK:

A. Authoritative Content and Source

"The oracle of the word of the Lord"

Literally: *"the burden"* – woe is the prophet who does not faithfully deliver the message which the Lord has laid on him

Kelley: Whenever *"oracle"* is used to designate a prophetic utterance, it always is an utterance that is threatening and condemnatory in character. T. V. Moore describes the threatening nature of such oracles: "Like some dark cloud, heavy with its pent-up fury, these prophecies are surcharged with the wrath of God, and hang ready to pour their dreadful contents on those against whom they are directed."

B. Target Audience = God's Chosen People

"to Israel"

C. Prophetic Messenger

"through Malachi"

Ryrie: Malachi means *"my messenger"* and could simply be a designation of an anonymous writer. More likely, however, it is a proper name. He is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT.

I. (:2-3) PROOF OF THE LORD'S COMPASSION FOR HIS PEOPLE

A. (:2a) Affirmation of Love

"I have loved you," says the Lord."

Why isn't that enough for us? 1 John 3:1

Morgan: The Hebrew tense marks continuity. It does not look back only, but around and on, and I think may be rendered for our more accurate apprehension, "I have loved, I do love, I will love you," saith the Lord . . . love that does not alter when it alteration finds.

B. (:2b) Self Righteous Question

“But you say, ‘How hast Thou loved us?’”

Implication: We deserved much better treatment than what we have received

Piper: What then is God's answer to the question, "How hast thou loved us?" His answer is, I have loved you with free, sovereign, unconditional, electing love, that is how I have loved you.

C. (:2c-3) Confirming Proof of the Lord’s Compassion:

Contrast Between Treatment of Jacob (God’s Elect) and Esau

1. Reminding them of the obvious contrast

“‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the Lord. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau’”

2. Graphically driving home his point – Complete Destruction

“and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

II. (:4) PERMANENT DISTINCTION -- IN TREATMENT OF ELECT AND NON-ELECT

A. (:4a) False Optimism on the Part of the Wicked

“Though Edom says, ‘We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins’”

The Edomites were descendants of Esau.

Ryrie: Nebuchadnezzar invaded Edom in 586 (Jer. 25:9, 21), and later the Nabataeans drove the Edomites from their territory.

B. (:4b) Final Judgment executed by the Lord -- Permanent Destruction

“thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘They may build, but I will tear down’”

The last grip on the bat belongs to the Lord

C. (:4c) Future Reputation

1. As to their Wicked Character

“and men will call them the wicked territory,”

2. As to their Final Destiny

“and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.”

Ryrie: Regarding how wicked Edom was, read Gen. 26:34; 27:41; Obad. 10-14.

III. (:5) PERSONAL TESTIMONY TO THE LORD’S COMPASSION

A. (:5a) Witnessing the Demise of the Wicked

“And your eyes will see this”

B. (:5b) Praising the God of Covenant Love

“And you will say, ‘The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!’”

Piper: In other words, part of what it means to be loved by God is to know that God reigns -- that he is great and mighty -- even beyond the people called by his name. He reigns in Edom. His purposes are not ultimately frustrated by the wickedness of any people. "Great is the Lord, beyond the border of Israel!" Yes even in Edom -- in Albania.

Laetsch: Alas, He finds no joyous appreciation of His affection, no grateful return of love for love, but coldhearted contempt of His grace and ungrateful, self-righteous, grumbling dissatisfaction with His ways.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What causes us to question God’s personal love for us? How could He love us any more than He has already demonstrated?
- 2) Why do we confuse getting our way with God’s love for us? How is this analogous to the relationship between parents and children?
- 3) Do you resent having to defend the reality of your love for your wife or for your children? How must God feel when we question His love towards us?
- 4) Is our heart passionate to see our Lord glorified beyond the borders of our current circle of Christian members?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Malick:

- I. Introduction: This book is an oracle from Yahweh to Israel through Malachi the prophet 1:1
 - A. The Oracle
 - B. From the Lord
 - C. To Israel
 - D. Through Malachi
- II. Indictment: The Lord indicts the nation of Israel and her leaders of evil before Him and the Law (out of a commitment to them) 1:1--2:16
 - A. First Oracle: Yahweh reaffirms His choice to commit to Israel over the nations through choice, historical

activity, and promise that Israel will one day tell the world 1:2-5

1. Introduction: Yahweh declares that He loves his nation 1:2a
2. People's Question: The nation responds by questioning how Yahweh has shown his love to them 1:2b
3. Conclusion--Yahweh's Love Demonstrated: Yahweh answers that He has demonstrated his love for them by choosing them over the other nations (Edom) 1:2c-5
 - a. Demonstrated from Yahweh's Choice at Birth of the Patriarchs: 1:2c
 - b. Demonstrated from Historical Activity: 1:3a
 - c. Demonstrated from Prophetic Utterances: 1:3b-5
 - 1) Statement: 1:3b
 - 2) Argument against Edom's Boast: 1:4
 - 3) Promise of Future Boasting in Yahweh: 1:5

Goddard: The questions around which the book of Malachi is built are those the prophet puts upon the lips of the apostate Israelites of his day. They may or may not have been voiced, but certainly they were to be found in the people's hearts. The very first question betrays a lack of true piety, an absence of trust. Only hearts of stone could be oblivious to the countless manifestations of God's love for his covenant people. But speaking of the God of their fathers, the Israelites say, in effect, "We have seen no evidence of your love."

Piper:

Notice four aspects to God's hate of Esau.

First, it means that God opposes their prosperity and brings their land under judgment.

"I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."

Second, it means that God will continue to oppose them when they resist his judgment.

His judgment will not suffer resistance. Verse 4: "If Edom says, We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says, They may build, but I will tear down."

Third, God's hate for Esau means that they will by and large as a nation be given up to wickedness. Verse 4b: ". . . till they are called the wicked country. . ." This is the most devastating of the judgments and the one that makes all the others just. God is not bringing judgments on an innocent people. He is just in all his dealings. When he passed over Esau and chose Jacob there was no decree that an innocent Esau would be judged.

Rather what God decreed was to pass Esau by, to withhold his electing love and to give him up to wickedness.

Now there is great mystery here, and I do not claim to solve all the problems that our little minds can think up. There is much we are not yet ready to know. We see through a glass darkly. But this much we are surely to believe: God did not choose the descendants of Esau; rather he passed over them and withheld his electing love; as a result Esau gave rein to wickedness and deserved the indignation of God. Which leads to the fourth aspect of God's hate.

Fourth, at the end of verse 4 it means that the Lord is angry, or indignant with them for ever.

Levy: There are several aspects to God's love for Israel. First, His love is unconditional, for it was an act of pure grace, not dependent on anything Israel had done (Dt. 7:7-8; 10:15; 23:5). Second, God's love was sovereignly bestowed. He called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans, made a covenant with him, and confirmed it through Isaac and Jacob. Third, God's love for Israel is everlasting (Jer. 31:3) – a commitment He has not made with any other nation. His compassion for Israel is like that of a mother for her child. In fact, God has engraved them on the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:14-16). Fourth, God's love for Israel is like that of a husband and wife (2:11). Fifth, God's love for Israel is like a father's love for his son (1:6; 3:17). On two occasions He called Israel His son (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1).

Calvin: Hence he says, *I loved you*. God might indeed have made an appeal to the Jews on another ground; for had he not manifested his love to them, they were yet bound to submit to his authority. He does not indeed speak here of God's love generally, such as he shows to the whole human race; but he condemns the Jews, inasmuch as having been freely adopted by God as his holy and peculiar people, they yet forgot this honour, and despised the Giver, and regarded what he taught them as nothing. When therefore God says that he loved the Jews, we see that his object was to convict them of ingratitude for having despised the singular favour bestowed on them alone, rather than to press that authority which he possesses over all mankind in common.

TEXT: Malachi 1:6 – 2:9

TITLE: *HOW HAVE WE DISRESPECTED THE NAME OF THE LORD?*

BIG IDEA:

THE LORD REBUKES THE SELF RIGHTEOUS PRIESTS FOR OFFERING SUB-STANDARD WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

In the church we are all priests ... what is the application to us?

What is the standard today? *“Worship God in Spirit and in Truth”*

How do we violate that?

- mere lip service
- substituting entertainment that is man-focused
- not coming with a cleansed heart that is prepared to worship
- treating worship as a tiresome exercise

Let’s look at how the priests of Israel stirred up the Lord’s anger on this important issue

I. (1:6-14) INTEGRITY OF WORSHIP DEMANDS RESPECT FOR GOD’S NAME

A. (:6a) Violation of the Basic Principle of Respect for Fatherly Authority

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.”

Piper: "Reverential esteem" is not typically demanded by parents or given by children. Whether this is the cause or the result of our lopsided view of the fatherhood of God, I'm not sure. I suspect that it works both ways: the less we emphasize the need for children to reverence their human fathers, the less God's fatherhood will trigger our reverence; and the less God's fatherhood wakens our reverence and honor, the less we will make that part of the human ideal of fatherhood.

B. (:6b) Self Righteous Question

“But you say, ‘How have we despised Thy name?’”

Implication: Isn’t it enough to go through the external motions of religious activity?

C. (:7-9) Charge of Presenting Cheap Sacrifices = Stealing from God

1. (:7-8) Specific Examples of Sub-Standard Worship

a. Issue is one of Defilement

“You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.”

b. Indignant Denial

“But you say, ‘How have we defiled Thee?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is to be despised.’”

c. Shameful Reality

1) Offering God the blind

“But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?”

2) Offering God the lame and sick

“And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?”

3) Simple Litmus Test – not even adequate judged just on externals

*“Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?”
Says the Lord of hosts.”*

Piper: So the origin of careless worship is a failure to see and feel the greatness of God.

Stedman: "Will you get by with that?" God says, "You people that are content to be shoddy about your religious experience, try living that way in your business life and see if you get by with it. And yet you say you are honoring my name. You are claiming to worship me and to be my people." The God of reality always cuts right through all the excuses and all the flimflam of hypocrisy right down to the real issue.

2. (:9) Compassionate Invitation to Seek Forgiveness

“But now will you not entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?” says the Lord of hosts.”

D. (:10-14) Rejection of All Worship that Fails to Respect God’s Name and Standards

1. (:10) Worthless Worship Totally Rejected

“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord of hosts, ‘nor will I accept an offering from you.’”

Piper: The essence of careless worship is worthless religious activity. Or to be more precise: it's religious activity that illustrates how little a person values God. . . . true worship comes from a heart where God is treasured above all human property and praise, and it aims to inspire the same God-centered passion in the hearts of the congregation.

2. (:11) Worldwide Exaltation of Greatness of Lord’s Name

“For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be

offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations,' says the Lord of hosts."

3. (:12-13a) Whining About Priestly Service

"But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.' You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is! And you disdainfully sniff at it,' says the Lord of hosts."

4. (:13b) What Violates God's Standards for Worship?

"and you bring what was taken by robbery, and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?' says the Lord."

5. (:14) What Disrespects God's Name in Worship?

"But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock, and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and My name is feared among the nations.'"

II. (2:1-9) UNFAITHFULNESS IN PRIESTLY SERVICE BRINGS DOWN GOD'S CURSE

A. (:1-4) Gravity of Honoring God's Name in Worship

1. (:1) Wakeup Call to the Priests

"And now, this commandment is for you, O priests."

2. (:2) Urgency of Repentance – Curse Already Upon Them

"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.'"

3. (:3) Intensifying the Curse

"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."

4. (:4) Sanctity of the Priestly Covenant

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

B. (:5-7) Heritage of Proper Priestly Conduct

1. (:5) Establishment of the Priestly Office on Proper Foundation =
The Fear of the Lord / Respect for His Name

"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."

2. (:6) Four Essentials of Proper Priestly Ministry

a. Teaching the Truth

“True instruction was in his mouth”

b. Purity of Conduct

“and unrighteousness was not found on his lips”

c. Intimacy of Fellowship

“he walked with Me in peace and uprightness”

d. Effectiveness of Ministry = Fruit of Changed Lives

“and he turned many back from iniquity.”

3. (:7) Exalted Role of Priestly Ministry

“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.”

C. (:8) Corruption of Priestly Office (with its ungodly effect on the people)

“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.”

Spiritual leaders have tremendous influence over people’s lives and can easily cause others to stumble. That is why there is stiffer accountability. (James 3:1)

D. (:9) Curse of Corresponding Disrespect Upon the Disobedient Priests

“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.”

Showing partiality to the rich and powerful and influential is always a temptation for spiritual leaders.

Piper: So my conclusion is that Malachi 2:1-9 is very relevant for us today because the priestly failure that Malachi talks about has to do especially with their duties as teachers and moral examples for the people. The failure he warns against would be just as much failure today!

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Where are we giving God just the leftovers in our life? Leftover time, money, energy, passion, enthusiasm, etc.

- 2) Where have we promised something to God and not fulfilled our commitment?
- 3) Do we have the proper vision for the exalted nature of godly priestly service?
- 4) Do we show partiality in what portions of the Scripture we choose to overlook or in how we apply God's standards to different groups of people?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: I want to show you three of the ways that Malachi helps us feel the majesty of our heavenly Father in this passage of Scripture. He begins the paragraph in verse 6 by showing us that God is our Father, and then devotes the rest of the text to showing the utter inconsistency between having God as Father and treating him the way the priests were treating him.

But, notice: the inconsistency that Malachi points out is not that they should show more gratitude to a Father who cares for them. That is certainly true. But Malachi's point is that they should show more honor to a Father who is so majestic in authority and self-sufficiency and universality. Let's look at those three things.

The first thing Malachi does to help us feel the Majesty of our Father in this text is to use a special name for him again and again. Eight times in these nine verses (24 times in the whole book) God is called "the LORD of hosts."

Verse 6, "And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 8, "Will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 9, "Will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 10, "I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 11, "My name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 13, "'What a weariness this is,' you say, and you sniff at it, says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 13, "Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD of hosts."

Verse 14, "I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts."

"Hosts" means great numbers of armies or angels or stars. So what Malachi wants us to see and feel is that our Father in heaven has infinite authority in the universe. He can wield any and all armies on the earth to accomplish his purposes among the nations whether they know it or not. He has myriads of unstoppable angels who do his bidding flawlessly and never fail in their errands. And he has appointed every star in the universe its position. He holds them in place -- all trillion of them -- and calls them all by name.

And on the altar of this Father the priests are offering animals with mange and broken legs!!

Second, Malachi, helps us feel the majesty of our Father by showing that he does not need these mangy sacrifices, or any others! Our ancient Father is not dependent on the Social-Security payments of the priests.

This comes out in verse 10: "Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain!" In other words. Close the temple. I don't want the smell of your sacrifices. I don't need the food of your sacrifices." This is the majesty of God's universal ownership of all things and his freedom and independence from all creation. . .

Finally, Malachi helps us feel the majesty of our Father by showing us that some day his authority and his ownership will be honored among every people and in every place.

Verse 11 is one of the most amazing and exciting promises in the Old Testament. The RSV uses present tense verbs. But in the Hebrew there aren't any verbs except one participle that can be either present or future. Surely the KJV and NASB and NIV are right to see a prophecy here and to use the future tense, since God's NAME is not yet great among the nations.

From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

In other words Malachi says to the priests: the name of your Father which you dishonor with sick sheep and mangy goats -- that name is one day going to be revered and held in highest esteem by every nation of the world and in every place on the earth.

Should you not then honor your majestic Father?

Roper: The mark of God's love in your life is not your circumstances, but the hope that God has placed in your heart. That is what Paul says in Romans 5. Your circumstances may be very grim, very difficult. You may be questioning whether God loves you at all. And if you look at your circumstances you are bound to question the love of God. But the love of God is not seen in your circumstances, it is seen in your hope, the certainty that God is at work in your life to accomplish his plan, to make you more and more like Jesus Christ. That is the mark of his love. We are a people who formerly were without hope, Paul writes, but now we have hope. Paul says that he who has begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ. . . .

Whenever people lose the sense of God's love, as did the Israelites at the time this book was written, certain things begin to happen. The first thing is that they fail to respond with love and warmth to the Lord. If they feel that the Lord does not love them, then it is very difficult for them to worship God acceptably. They do not feel love, and so they cannot respond in a loving way to the Lord. That was what was occurring in Israel. Their worship was cold, for they had lost the sense of God's love for them. The second

thing that occurs whenever people lose that sense of God's love is that their family life grows cold. Beginning with verse 10 of chapter 2. Malachi speaks of the conditions in the Israelites' families. Husbands and wives were unable to respond in love toward one another, and so families were breaking up. That section continues through verse 16. In chapter 2, verse 17 through chapter 3, verse 6, he describes what was happening in society in general. This failure to recognize that God loves us eventually pervades all of society; not our families only, but every aspect of life

Kelley: In Hebrew thought, a name was far more than just a convenient way to address another person. A person's name represented the essence of his or her being. . . Furthermore, the revelation of God's name to a person was viewed as a sign of special favor. . . To know God's name was to know God, His holiness, His power, and His love. To honor His name was to honor God. To despise His name was the height of blasphemy and sacrilege.

[Illustration showing the privilege of being full-time minister of the gospel:]
A missionary was offered a position with a large firm that was doing business in the country where he was serving. The position carried a salary that was much higher than what the missionary had been receiving. When he declined the offer, the firm's officials returned with an even higher salary offer. Again, he declined. The officials, reacting in amazement, asked: "How much salary would persuade you to join our firm?" The missionary responded: "Oh, it's not a question of your salary not being big enough. It's just that your job isn't big enough!"

Morgan: Sacrilege we have always thought was the breaking into a church and stealing there-from. That is not so; it is going into Church and putting something on the plate. Do not forget that. Sacrilege is centered in offering God something which costs nothing, because you think God is worth nothing. God looks for the giving at His altar of a gift that costs something.

Levy: Malachi enumerated four charges that God had against the priests. First, they approached their ministry halfheartedly. . . Second, they "sniffed at" their service before the Lord (v. 13). They turned up their noses in belittlement at serving in God's Temple, as one who turns away from obnoxious food. They considered their priestly duties to be a burden, a dull ritualistic routine performed mechanically with no care. Such service would become wearisome. Third, the priests allowed people to bring sacrifices that were "torn . . . lame . . . sick" (v. 13), an act condemned by the Law. For the priest to offer such sacrifices was the epitome of spiritual debauchery. . . Fourth, God pronounced a curse on those who made deceptive vows. They were tricksters who played games with God. They vowed to sacrifice an unblemished male animal on the altar, then substituted a blemished male or a female animal (less valuable) in its place (v. 14). . .

In 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, Paul presented three kinds of Christian workers: Master builders lay a solid foundation of good works, shoddy workers are careless and inept at their service, and destructive workers offer service that is destructive rather than constructive.

TEXT: Malachi 2:10-16

TITLE: *WHY HAVE WE BEEN DENIED THE FAVOR OF OUR GOD?*

BIG IDEA:

THE LORD REBUKES THE SELF RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR PROFANING THE SACRED COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION:

Series of self righteous questions continues as the people wonder why God is not looking with favor on their sacrifices. They continue to go through the external religious motions, but it is obvious God is not buying it.

Easy to put together some frightening statistics about the failure rate of marriages.

I. (:10-12) MARRYING OUTSIDE OF GOD'S COVENANT FAMILY VIOLATES OUR UNIQUE SPIRITUAL IDENTITY AND DENIES US GOD'S FAVOR

A. (:10) The Root Sin = Selfishness

1. Sinning Against Our Common Father
"Do we not all have one father?"

2. Sinning Against Our Common Creator
"Has not one God created us?"

3. Sinning Against Our Fellow Brothers
"Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother?"

4. Violating the Fundamental Law of our Society
"so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?"
More is at stake than our momentary happiness

Piper takes this verse in a more general sense:

In verse 10 it's the general area of personal relationships: "Why then are we faithless to one another?" There was widespread dishonesty. People were not keeping their word. Trusts were being broken. "Why are we faithless (or treacherous) with each other?" That is, Why can we not trust each other. Why all this breaking of faith? . . .

So the sin that runs through each of these areas of life is this failure to keep a trust, the failure to keep a commitment. It is the breaking of an agreement or covenant or contract or promise.

So what Malachi does with this key word is to show that community life is supposed to be ordered by the faithful fulfillment of promises and contracts and oaths and covenants

and commitments. But this order has given way to the disorder that comes when people give in to the power of self-centered emotional impulses.

B. (:11) The Ultimate Offense = Directed Against Holy God

“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.”
Marrying an unbeliever is equated with the most serious religious offense

Nail down your convictions in this area at a very young age.

C. (:12) The Fatal Judgment = Cut off from the Land of the Living

“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.”

Hypocritical religious exercises will not save such an individual.

II. (:13-16) DIVORCE VIOLATES OUR UNIQUE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP AND DENIES US GOD’S FAVOR

Another in list of offenses

“And this is another thing you do”

A. (:13) Wallowing in Unjustified Self Pity (instead of repenting and turning to the Lord)

“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.”

B. (:14a) Self Righteous Question

“Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’”

C. (:14b) Charge of Divorcing Your Covenant Wife

“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.”

Bad deal when the Lord is testifying against you

Piper: The reason that divorce has kindled God's wrath is that marriage is a covenant. The life together is rooted not in the sand of emotional satisfaction but in the rock of covenant commitment. And two things in this text clarify what sort of covenant that is.

D. (:15-16) Solemn Warning Against Divorce

“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 off-spring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 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.’”

Element of Hope – Power of the Spirit available; vision for a godly offspring

God’s final word on Divorce: *“I hate divorce”*

Treat your spouse honorably, not treacherously

Key = Act Faithfully toward your spouse – what type of character would that involve?

- Forgiveness and Acceptance
- Unwavering Commitment – a one woman man
- Communication
- Tenderness

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is the sanctity of marriage being attacked in our society today? How has the situation in our churches deteriorated in this regard over the past 50 years?
- 2) What are the consequences of divorce on our children? On our spouse? On our extended family? On the structure of society as a whole? On our relationship with God?
- 3) Can it be any clearer how God feels about divorce? Do we get the message?
- 4) How seriously do we take the sanctity of the covenant relationship of marriage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kelley: Besides marrying pagan women, the men of Judah were divorcing their Jewish wives. One possible motive for their action was lust, the desire for younger and more sensual wives. A second possible motive was prestige. Since the non-Jewish nations held the reins of power, to have a non-Jewish wife would have been an economic and political advantage. . . . Marriage should be regarded as a solemn covenant into which persons enter before God, the obligations of which may not be disregarded without serious consequences.

D. Greg Ebie: Divorce tears apart the union that God brings to a marriage. God's purpose is for a husband and wife to be joined together as one being separated only by death. God hates divorce because it destroys the creative work of unity God brings into a marriage.

+ Malachi 2:16 "I hate divorce," says the God of Israel. . ."I hate the violent dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage." (MsgB)

God hates divorce:

1. Disobedience to God's Word,
2. Dishonors our worship,
3. Defrauds us of God's blessing, and
4. Destroys God's creative work.

One more reason remains why God hates divorce which may be the greatest reason of all.

+ Ephesians 5:32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. (NIV)

The creative power of God takes two and makes them one; "this is a profound mystery." However, the mystery is greater than you can imagine. The union of a husband and wife is also a reflection of Christ and His Church.

5. Distorts the gospel—God's message.

God hates divorce because it misrepresents His love for you and me. The love of Christ is not fickle; His love will not grow cold. God will never divorce Himself from those He loves; His love will be faithful until the very end.

Malachi asks in verse 15, "And why one? [Why is the husband and wife united together?] BECAUSE HE WAS SEEKING GODLY OFFSPRING."

God's desire is to pass on the message of His love from generation to generation. The faithful love of a mother and father towards each other is a living testimony of the eternal love of God. When mom and dad love each other it gives their children an assurance of God's unfailing love for them.

Divorce is NEVER good for children. Divorce brings fear, heartbreak, misery, mistrust, uncertainty, and so much more into the lives of children. Painful emotions which God never intended for children to have to carry are thrust upon children often leaving an open wound filled with infection affecting relationships of future generations.

God has a simple prescription for healthy children and healthy relationships. Husbands and wives (a.k.a. moms and dads) who are faithful to God and each other.

Calvin: We then see the purpose of this passage, which is to show that the Jews were ungrateful to God, because they mingled with heathen nations, and knowingly and wilfully cast aside that glory by which God had adorned them by choosing them, as Moses says, to be to him a royal priesthood. . .

He therefore condemns them for this ingratitude, because they had not only departed from the covenant which the Lord had made with their fathers, but had also neglected and despised that gratuitous love, which ought to have softened even their iron hearts. For if God had found anything in them as a reason why he preferred them to other nations, they might have been more excusable, at least they might have extenuated their fault; but since God had adopted them as his peculiar people, though they were unworthy and wholly undeserving, they must surely have been extremely brutish, to have thus despised the gratuitous favour of God. Their baseness then is increased, as I have said, by this circumstance, -- that so great a kindness of God did not turn their hearts to obedience.

Feinberg: Polygamy and divorce are not conducive to nurturing children in the fear of God. And ultimately these practices were not helpful to obtain the godly seed in the stock of the promised Messiah. The purpose of God in a godly seed was being counteracted and set aside by their intermarriage and divorce. In view of all this, Malachi warns them to take heed diligently to themselves that they refrain from such godless deeds.

In short, God declares unequivocally that He hates divorce, the putting away of wives. This verse is not at variance with Deuteronomy 24:1, where divorce is allowed. This was countenanced because of the hardness of their hearts. (See Mt 19:3-8)

The hatred of God is also expressed against the one who covers his garment with violence. The reference is to the old custom of putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife. (Note particularly Deu 22:30; Ruth 3:9; and Eze 16:8.) Instead of spreading their garment to protect their wives, they covered their garment with violence toward their wives. The garment symbolized wedded trust and protection. Again they are warned to take heed to themselves in this vital matter.

TEXT: Malachi 2:17 – 3:6

TITLE: *HOW HAVE WE QUESTIONED THE INTEGRITY OF GOD'S JUSTICE?*

BIG IDEA:

GOD PROMISES TO DEMONSTRATE HIS JUSTICE AND PURIFY HIS PEOPLE WHEN HE SENDS HIS SPECIAL MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT TO ESTABLISH RIGHTEOUS WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

“That’s not fair” = one of the first cries to come out of children’s faulty reasoning.

I. (2:17) QUESTIONING GOD’S JUSTICE IS ABSURD

A. (2:17a) Charge of Challenging the Integrity of God’s Justice

“You have wearied the Lord with your words.”

Always complaining; always whining; always questioning

B. (2:17b) Self Righteous Questions

“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?’”

Very short term, limited perspective.

II. (3:1-4) GOD WILL SEND HIS MESSENGER TO PURIFY HIS PEOPLE FOR RIGHTEOUS WORSHIP

A. (:1) Promise of His Coming (Preceded by Forerunner) = the Agent

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts.”

Near and Far fulfillment in the Two Comings of the Messiah and the forerunners

B. (:2-3a) Purifying and Cleansing = the Means

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when he appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver”

Ryrie: a *refiner's fire* purifies, and *fullers' (laundrymen's) soap* cleanses

C. (:3b-4) Presenting Righteous Worship = the Goal

“so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.”

III. (3:5) BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU ASK FOR – JUSTICE WILL BE TERRIFYING

A. (:5a) Judgment Will Come Swiftly

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment”

B. (:5b) Judgment Will Accurately Target Smug Transgressors

“and I will be a swift witness:

- against the sorcerers

- and against the adulterers

- and against those who swear falsely

- and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages

- the widow and the orphan

- and those who turn aside the alien”

C. (:5c) Root Problem: Failure to Properly Fear the Lord

“and do not fear me,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

IV. (3:6) GOD'S IMMUTABILITY VALIDATES HIS JUSTICE BY DEMONSTRATING HIS COVENANT MERCY

A. (:6a) Assertion of Immutability

“For I, the Lord, do not change”

B. (:6b) Appeal to Covenant Faithfulness

“therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) God is certainly patient with us when we sin ... but where are we testing the limits of that patience and wearying God by our persistence in self righteousness? Do we ever feel that God is getting sick and tired of our protestations?

2) What two different messengers are in view in 3:1? What are other examples of OT prophecies about the coming of the Messiah that have a near and far fulfillment?

3) How are we seeking the Lord to cleanse and purify us right now?

4) What are some of the practical implications to us from the doctrine of the Lord's immutability ("*I, the Lord, do not change*")?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kelley: The great and terrible day of the Lord was about to break on the people's heads. After a forerunner had been sent to prepare the way, the Lord would come suddenly to His Temple, (See 3:1) His appearing would answer critics and would silence complainers once and for all. . . .

At the heart of their complaint against the justice of God was a denial that God was involved actively in the affairs of history. He was regarded as being outside history and indifferent to what went on within it.

Paul George: The Lord's immutability asserted by Himself, no word that He has spoken shall fall to the ground. He is a just revenger of those that rebel against him. He is the rewarder of those that diligently seek him. In both these He is unchangeable. Though the sentence passed against evil works (v. 5) is not executed speedily, yet it will be executed, for He is "the Lord" and He does not change. He is an enemy to sin and impenitent sinners will find him so. His judgment is never antiquated, or out of date, but against those that go on still in their trespasses the curse of his law still remains in full force, power, and virtue.

The Israelites had reason to say that the Lord is unchangeable because of His faithfulness. If the Lord had not been faithful His covenant with them and their fathers they would have been consumed long ago and cut off from being a people. They had been unfaithful and the Lord would have been just if He abandoned them, and then they would have been consumed and ruined, but because the Lord remembered His covenant and would not violate His covenant or alter it they were preserved from ruin. It was purely because he would be as good as his word (Deuteronomy 7:8; Leviticus 26:46).

Joe Harding: God's Holiness will demand our Purification and Service --

ILLUSTRATION: Why is silver mentioned in the refining process? The process of refining silver is more delicate and anxious than the process of refining Gold. "When the silver becomes molten it gives off some twenty times its own volume of oxygen with a noticeable hissing and bubbling. This phenomenon is known as 'spitting'. But the task is not yet finished. Unless the molten silver is treated with carbon (charcoal was used by the ancients), the silver re-absorbs oxygen from the air and loses its sheen and purity." The refiner knows that his metal is pure when he can see his own reflection in the mirror-like surface of the metal. In the same way, God will know that His work has been completed when He sees reflected in the Christian soul HIS own image.

D. Greg Ebie:

The people in Malachi's day did not see their need for God. With prideful hearts they would bring their offerings to God fulfilling their religious duty, but they didn't want God to change them. Instead they wrongly accused God of not loving them of not being fair or just. . .

Offerings don't make the worshiper acceptable to God; the worshiper makes the offering acceptable through humility and brokenness. We need the power of God to transform our lives!

God has achieved His purpose when we reflect His image. The beauty of Jesus is seen in all we do and say. Occasionally reflecting the image of Jesus is not enough; God wants to purify our lives so we reflect Him in everything.

Piper:

This is another messenger, different from the first. Who is this person? Three things point to the divine Son of God and Messiah.

- He is called "Lord" -- a term that Malachi would not apply to Elijah or John the Baptist. This person is someone greater.
- The temple is said to belong to him: He will suddenly come to "HIS temple." Of whom could you say that he is the owner of the temple of God?
- This person seems to be almost identical with Jehovah, not only because Jehovah's temple is his temple, but also because he seems to take the place of the word "me" in the first half of the verse. It says, "Behold, I send my messenger (Elijah = John the Baptist) to prepare the way before ME . . ." But then he switches without any difficulty and instead of saying, "And I will suddenly come to my temple . . ." he says, "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." It looks as though "me" -- Jehovah -- is virtually interchangeable with this other person called the Lord, who owns the temple of God. . .

What is life like in the refiner's fire?

More than anything else it is the unshakable trust that all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness.

And on the path to purity and heaven the other truth is this: no pain no gain.

Both things are true: the Lord is like a refiner's fire; and a refiner's fire is a fire.

TEXT: Malachi 3:7-12

TITLE: *HOW CAN WE REPENT IF WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE HAVE GONE WRONG?*

BIG IDEA:

GOD REBUKES THE SELF RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR ROBBING HIM OF HIS DUE TITHES AND OFFERINGS

I. (:7-9) PERSISTENCE IN ROBBING GOD INVOKES GOD'S JUDGMENT

A. Repentance Remains the Only Cure for Transgression

1. History of Transgression

"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes, and have not kept them."

2. Offer of Restoration

"Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts."

B. Self Righteous Questions

1. Where have we gone wrong?

"But you say, 'How shall we return?'"

2. How have we robbed God?

"But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?'"

C. Curse for Robbing God

1. Absurdity of Robbing God

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!"

2. Accounting of What is Owed

"In tithes and offerings."

3. National Scope of the Penalty Matched to National Scope of the Crime

"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!"

II. (:10-12) PERVASIVE OBEDIENCE IN GIVING GOD HIS DUE WILL BRING ABUNDANT BLESSING AND PROVE GOD'S GRACIOUSNESS

A. (:10a) Challenge of Obedience

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house,"

B. (:10b) Corresponding Test of God's Faithfulness and Abundant Graciousness

“and test Me now in this, ’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”

C. (:11) Promise of Prosperity

1. Protection Against External Enemies

“Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground”

2. Assurance of Internal Health

“nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes, ’ says the Lord of hosts.”

D. (:12) Reputation of Having Been God-Favored

“And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land, ’ says the Lord of hosts.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When we analyze our own giving to the Lord, what should be the broader context of our inquiry? What does our giving ultimately reflect about our heart condition?
- 2) If everything belongs to God, how is it even possible to rob God?
- 3) What is the standard for giving today in the NT church?
- 4) Should unbelievers have some sense of God’s abundant blessing in our lives?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kelley: Malachi set tithing in the larger context of repentance. What made the Israelites’ withholding their tithes of such consequence was that it was a symptom of a far more serious wrong: their unwillingness to repent and to return to God. Faithfulness in stewardship always must be seen as one of the fruits of repentance and as an indication of the depth of a person’s commitment to God.

Piper: Why then did Paul not use the command to tithe when encouraging this kind of giving in the church?

Three reasons!

1. He didn't command a tithe because he wanted to emphasize willingness rather than constraint.

2 Corinthians 9:7 says, "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Another example of the principle here is when Paul writes to Philemon. He says, "Though I am bold enough to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you." And he says in 2 Corinthians 8:8, "I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine."

So Paul downplays the possibility of commanding a certain level of giving because he wants to emphasize loving willingness rather than constraint.

2. He didn't use the command to tithe because he wanted to emphasize liberality rather than limitation.

He wanted to urge people beyond the old constraints of simple proportionate giving. For

example, in 2 Corinthians 8:3 he commends the poverty stricken Macedonians like this: "They gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints."

And in 2 Corinthians 9:6 he says, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." In other words the issue isn't meeting a minimum limit. The issue for Paul is how to unleash the maximum liberality. The command to tithe just doesn't suit this approach.

3. He didn't use the command to tithe because he wanted to emphasize that all our getting should be designed for giving.

He says in Ephesians 4:28, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need."

In other words the alternative to stealing in Paul's mind is not working in order to get and have, but working in order to get and give. Everything we spend on ourselves should be to build a platform for giving, that is, for loving. Or, as Jesus taught, he is the Owner of all we have. We are just stewards commissioned to invest his money for his glory. And what glorifies him most is loving liberality from a simple base, not tithing from a palace.

So the reason that Paul did not use the command to tithe in order to enforce his teaching about giving was that he wanted to emphasize 1) willingness over constraint, and 2) liberality over limitation, and a sense that all our money is God's not just a tenth.

Holwick: Who received the tithes.

1) Levites. Num 18:21ff.

- a) Made up for their lack of income and inheritance.
- b) Only cereal and fruit tithe is mentioned. Num 18:27

2) Priests. Heb 7:5

- a) The Levites gave them a tithe of their tithe.
- b) "Tithes and offerings"

1> Priests got offerings of left-over sacrifice.

3) Poor people. Deut 14:29

- a) Just as religious as giving it to church.
- b) Shows God's concern for the down-and-out.

Wolf: The “*devourer*” may be the worm that eats up the grapes (Deu 28:39) or the locust that consumes everything in its path (Joel 1:4). In Judges 6:4 the Midianites swarmed over Palestine like locusts, ruining all the crops. During the famine, the vine was literally “miscarrying,” as the unripe grapes fell to the ground. The only other passage that refers to the land “miscarrying” is 2 Kings 2:19 and 21, which describes a city with an impure water supply, causing animals and plants to “miscarry.” A drought apparently resulted in the same “dropping” of the grapes. The fruit must “set” or “be formed” properly, or else it will drop off the branches (see Song 2:13). With the end of the dry spell and the absence of destroying insects, the people were assured of excellent crops and a steady income.

TEXT: Malachi 3:13-15

TITLE: *HOW HAVE WE SPOKEN ARROGANTLY AGAINST GOD?*

BIG IDEA:

GOD REBUKES THE SELF RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR DENYING THE VALUE OF OBEYING AND SERVING GOD

INTRODUCTION:

I. (:13-14) SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS LEADS TO DISILLUSIONMENT

A. (:13a) Arrogant Tone Easily Detected by the Lord

“Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the Lord.”

Hailey: The adjective “*stout*” means hard, harsh, violent. In their conversations one with another they had said strong things against the Lord.

Why do we respond in pride, deception, denial, and bitterness?

- our hearts are deceitfully wicked
- sometimes we get wrong input from those who love us who are not spiritually sensitive to the situation
 - just because your Mom tells you you're doing great -- carries more weight when you're 7 than when you're 40
- it hurts too much to let the truth sink in; defensive mechanism

No wonder people are scared to approach us and to offer help and point out our blind spots. Fortunately God is not scared to confront us. Since we know that this is how we tend to respond, we should develop some practical guidelines to provide us with a structure that will give us a better chance at responding correctly.

For example, let's make it a habit not to respond immediately to some criticism but to bring it before God, ask Him to search our hearts, help us to think thru the validity of the charge and to respond correctly. Just say simply: "I appreciate your taking the time to share that. Let me consider what you said and pray about it and I will get back to you." Let's try to put ourselves in the shoes of the other person and even if what they say makes no sense to us, can we understand and appreciate how it might make sense to them?

B. (:13b) Self Righteous Question – Continuing in State of Denial

“Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against Thee?’”

Pride in maintaining their own innocence:

When we are confronted with a problem, our first response tends to be:
"It's not my fault. I didn't do anything wrong. Anything I did do or say was certainly justified given the circumstances."

We are quick to include ourselves in the general confession: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" -- but slow to confess to the specifics.

C. (:14) Denying the Value of Obeying and Serving God

1. Bitterness in denying God's justice:

"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God'"

God's harvest principle has always been: You reap what you sow.

In the OT a lot of God's promises centered on the material prosperity of the nation of Israel. God's promises to His people today focus more on our spiritual growth (the fruit of the Holy Spirit) and our future reward.

The Israelites looked around and could not see how they were enjoying God's blessing any more than their enemies. So they turned against God and accused Him of being unfair.

Sometimes as we look around at others we can think that God has not given us a fair shake. Roots of bitterness can crop up and trip us up.

Their conclusion: It is vain to serve God; there is no profit in it for us. word "profit" has mainly a negative sense of gain made by violence or from a selfish motivation

They were serving God not to glorify Him, but for their own selfish interests and personal advantage

Christ is our perfect example in never doubting the goodness or justice of God. Despite the fact that He was truly innocent and without sin and yet meek and humble in heart; despite the fact that He knew exactly what God the Father requires and fulfilled all righteousness without calling God's command burdensome; even in willingly taking all of our sin upon Himself, He never was bitter or complained against God's goodness or justice.

2. Deception regarding what God requires:

"and what profit is it that we have kept

His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts?"

Hailey: They had put their confidence in the outward fasting which was of no worth before Jehovah. This question had been clearly settled by Zechariah (chs. 7-8).

They thought they knew what sin was -- but they concentrated only on the externals -- and even there they were nowhere near as conscientious as the Pharisees of Christ's day. They thought

they were mourning for their sin by their regular fasting and wearing of sackcloth and ashes, but God said they didn't have a clue about what true repentance is.

Sure they avoided idolatry and did some fasting and busied themselves with religious activities surrounding the temple and the sacrifices (when it was convenient and it didn't cost them too much), but they neglected the weightier matters of the law = mercy, truth, righteousness. They were satisfied with going through the motions of whatever works they chose to do--they ignored God's true standard of inward righteousness. That is the essence of self righteousness: perverting God's standards by substituting some type of external legalistic system that gives us satisfaction because we can measure up to it through self effort without depending on the Holy Spirit to accomplish inward righteousness. The result in Malachi's day was disillusionment--they were bitterly disappointed and charged God with failing to keep His end of the bargain in terms of blessing and prosperity.

Wolf: Their perspective is essentially selfish: What is our “*cut*” for serving the Lord? The word *profit* normally has a strong hint of evil (Gen 37:26), showing that they were insincere in their worship of the Lord. Their desire was for personal glory rather than the glorification of God.

II. (:15) TOO GOOD TO SEE STRAIGHT -- ARROGANT CYNICISM CLOUDS OUR VALUES AND OUR PERCEPTION OF REALITY

A. (:15a) Mistaken Values – Sin (Self Righteousness) Dulls the Conscience
“So now we call the arrogant blessed;”

B. (:15b) Mistaken Perception of Reality – Sin (Self Righteousness) Blurs the Vision
“not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape.”

CONCLUSION:

The future will prove that it has been worth it to serve God – the distinction between the righteous and the wicked will be evident and will be final:

1 Cor. 15:58 *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) When do you approach God with this same type of victim mentality as if God has somehow done you wrong?

- 2) What causes you discouragement in serving the Lord? Where do you wrongly evaluate either the sincerity of your service or the value of the promised rewards?
- 3) What types of conclusions do we draw when we compare our lives to those of the rich and powerful unsaved?
- 4) Do we have a deep-seated conviction that God will call everybody to account for all of their actions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wolf: Hebrew Bibles divide Malachi into three chapters rather than four; 4:1-6 appears as 3:19-24. The advantage of this division is that it allows 3:13 to 4:6 to remain intact, as it surely was intended to be. The division of the book into four chapters was patterned after the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. . .

The moment we start complaining to God about His failure to take account of the “sacrifices” that we make for Him, we have taken the wrong path. God’s true servants do not complain about the sacrifices they make; instead, they rejoice in the spiritual rewards that are theirs.

Levy: Often Christians think the way Judah did. They watch family members and friends verbally deny God, live wicked lives, and receive greater blessing than believers. To them, denying God seems to pay big dividends as they watch these people accumulate wealth, receive promotions, and buy bigger houses in better neighborhoods. Although they may not verbalize it, they cynically think, *What profit is there in serving God?* We must remember that God keeps the records, and payday will come in His good time. Ultimately, blessing will come to all who faithfully serve God.

Ryrie: Some wrongly maintained that if material prosperity did not result, there was no point in serving the Lord.

Feinberg: They esteemed the proud anywhere as the favorites of the Lord. They made much of the prosperity and flourishing of the wicked, who tempted God by presumptuous words and deeds and yet escaped all judgment.

Calvin: But hypocrites seem to themselves to be of all men the most perfect, though they have only the guise or mask of religion. They indeed say that they have kept the Law, but when we come to the test, their emptiness is found out; for the main thing in the Law is wanting, that is, integrity of heart; nay, in the outward life they are found to be transgressors.

TEXT: Malachi 3:16 – 4:6

TITLE: HOW WILL THE RIGHTEOUS BE CLEARLY DISTINGUISHED FROM THE WICKED?

BIG IDEA:

GOD WILL REMOVE THE BLURRING OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

I. (3:16-17) THE CURE FOR PRIDEFUL DISILLUSIONMENT IS THE FEAR OF THE LORD

A. The Response of the People – Repentance, Renewed Obedience, and Worship

1. Rooted in the Fear of the Lord

“Then those who feared the Lord”

THE FEAR OF GOD must be present for there to be any cure.

The Fear of the Lord is the proper response to:

- 1) Who the Lord is and who we are and the infinite difference between the two
- 2) God's hatred and judgment of sin

It produces:

- 1) Worship of the Lord for His majesty
- 2) Hatred (turning from) of sin
 - because of its awesome consequences from a holy God

When God played back to the people a recording of the arrogant words they had been speaking against Him, it rekindled the fear of the Lord in the hearts of the faithful.

2. Expressed in Repentance and Renewed Dedication to God's Standards

“spoke to one another”

No longer maintaining their innocence or watering down God's law;

What did they speak to one another about?

- appreciating the love of God
- respecting his name
- preserving the holiness and unity of marriage
- preparing for God's coming judgment
- obeying God's commands with respect to their tithes and offerings

3. Celebrated in Corporate Worship and Praise -- Glorifying His name together

“esteem His name together”

That's true worship! That's why we come together every Sunday.
Now their focus is not on defending themselves but on upholding
God's character:

- His love for them
- His faithfulness to them as a nation
- His patience with them
- His majesty and holiness -- the fact that He is a God of justice and does what is right

B. The Response of the Lord -- Faithful to Remember and Reward

1. (:16b) Faithful to Remember

“and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him”

The Lord keeps good records -- won't forget any faithful service done in obedience to Him; (cf. book kept in time of Mordecai and Esther where the king read of Mordecai's efforts at heading off a coup attempt and decided to reward him at a most propitious time ; cf. Book of Life)

2. (:17) Faithful to Reward

a. Treated as the Lord's Precious Possession

“‘And they will be Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession’”

b. Treated as Faithful Sons of the Lord

“and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

II. (3:18) THEME OF BOOK: GOD WILL REMOVE THE BLURRING OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED

“So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”

III. (4:1-3) THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD WILL BRING EXTREME BLESSING OR CURSING

A. (:1) Extreme Cursing for the Wicked

1. Certainty of the Coming Day of the Lord

“For behold, the day is coming”

Make no mistake – 2 Peter 3

2. Terrible Manifestation of God's Wrath

“burning like a furnace”

Most theologians shy away from fire and brimstone preaching today

3. Extreme Cursing and Devastation

a. Reduced to Insignificance

“and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff”

b. Obliterated from the Land of the Living

“and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

B. (:2-3) Extreme Blessing for the Righteous

1. Identified as those who Fear the Lord

“But for you who fear My name”

2. Blessed with Pervasive Righteousness

“the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings”

Ryrie: An impersonal reference to the display of righteousness throughout the entire earth (as the sun sends its rays everywhere) in the coming millennial kingdom.

3. Energized with the Joy of Freedom

“and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.”

4. Vindicated as Overcomers

“And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet”

5. Staged on the Day of the Lord

“on the day which I am preparing,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

III. (4:4-6) LAST CHANCE TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD

A. (:4) Mission of Moses – Looking Back – Remember the Law

“Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.”

B. (:5-6) Mission of Elijah – Looking Forward – Anticipate the Day of the Lord

1. (:5) Forerunner of the Day of the Lord

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

2. (:6) Restoration vs. Cursing

“And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we encourage one another to be prepared for the coming of the Lord?
- 2) Do we view ourselves as the Lord's precious possession with full rights as His sons?
- 3) How does self righteousness blur the distinction between the righteous and the wicked?
- 4) Why is the coming day of the Lord described as "*great and terrible*?"

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: To fear the Lord is to tremble at the thought of offending him by unbelief and disobedience. It is the feeling that God is not to be trifled with. It is the very opposite of the attitude of the people in verses 13-15 who speak with an incredible swagger: "It doesn't pay to serve God." Those who fear God shudder at the thought of speaking that way about their Majestic Father. Anything that dishonors God is anathema to those who fear God.

Roper: Malachi begins this section with the distinction between those who truly belong to God and those who do not. There are some people who do not fear the Lord, and they support one another in their conversation; and there is another group of people who do fear the Lord. That is the basic distinction-unobservable, but fundamental. There is no way you can look at a person and tell which group he belongs to. We do not wear fish stickers on our foreheads. But God makes the distinction. He sees the heart. He knows, and he writes the book. You cannot look at a person's circumstances and say, "My, that person must know God because he's blessed." Or, "Obviously this other person does not know God because he's not blessed."

D. Greg Ebie: The three main teachings about the timing of the rapture center around its relationship to the tribulation, a seven year period of time when the Anti-Christ comes to power. Thus the rapture is thought to take place "pre-trib," mid-trib, or "post-trib." So which is it? Could it be none of the above?

Malachi alludes to the rapture giving us one clue as to when it will happen. " *'They will be mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him'* " (Malachi 3:17 NIV).

The rapture will take place “pre-wrath” or before God begins to pour out His judgment. In God’s compassion and mercy God will spare the righteous from His anger.

Wolf: The identification of John the Baptist with Elijah is thus very convincing, but the possibility remains that it does not exhaust the full meaning of this prophecy. After all, John did not come immediately before “*the great and terrible day of the Lord*” mentioned in Malachi. Previous passages have also blended references to the first and second coming of Christ (3:1-4; 4:1-3).

Prior to the second coming, Revelation speaks of two witnesses (11:3) who will minister with great authority for 1260 days. Some interpreters have identified these two men with Moses and Elijah and view their ministry as a fulfillment of Malachi 4:4-6, which does mention Moses and Elijah in successive verses. The men are called “*prophets*” in Revelation 11:10, and they are capable of preventing rain, turning water into blood, and smiting the earth with plagues (Rev 11:6).

During their careers, Elijah and Moses were enabled to perform these very miracles. Moses and Elijah also appeared together on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17:3; Mk 9:4), perhaps an indication of their future ministry. Jewish tradition certainly favored a literal return of Elijah (Jn 1:21), and Christ said not only that Elijah has come but, “*Elijah is coming and will restore all things*” (Mt 17:11). This may be looking beyond John the Baptist. The terminology of Matthew 11:14 also hints that John was “Elijah” in a limited way: “*And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah.*”

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