

## THE PROPHECY OF MALACHI COVENANT FAITHFULNESS AND UNFAITHFULNESS

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### **Introduction**

The prophecy of Malachi, the last voice of the Old Testament, is a book which has special significance for those who live at the end of the New Testament era. As a book which describes end times and looks forward to better things it retains its importance for those who live at the end of all ages and who are waiting for the better things of the everlasting and heavenly kingdom of Christ.

The book tells of covenant unfaithfulness - the unfaithfulness of God's church and of His people in the last days of the Old Testament. The Jews had been cured of the sin of idolatry by the long years of the captivity in Babylon, but had fallen into other sins and become unfaithful. This unfaithfulness was seen especially in "a spirit of proud, bigoted self-righteousness that claimed the favour of God with insolent haughtiness, at the very moment that this favour was forfeited by unbelief and neglect of duty."<sup>1</sup> Their neglect of duty involved especially the mere external performance of religious duties.

Not only does that unfaithfulness match exactly the unfaithfulness of the church in these last days, but like the church in the days of Malachi, the unfaithfulness is not recognized and all attempts to point it out are met with scorn and disbelief. Indeed, the Jews of Malachi's day, like the church today, charged God with unfaithfulness when they did not receive the blessings He had promised, instead of turning from their own wickedness. What Malachi describes is so very much like the unfaithfulness of the church today that the book can only have been inspired by the Spirit of God.

The unfaithfulness of the church is, however, the dark background against which God reveals His unchangeable faithfulness and grace. He reveals it in continuing to preserve His church then and now and in promising the coming of Christ as the one who purges the church of its sins and brings her blessing and glory. Christ's coming, therefore, is seen as the only cure for sin and the promise of His coming is the central message of the book. That promise of Christ's coming and of cleansing, given through Malachi, looks forward not only to the first coming of Christ but also to the second, and for that reason, too, the book of Malachi retains its significance and relevance.

Because of its relevance the book of Malachi is quoted or alluded to seven times in the New Testament. It is quoted in Romans 9:13, Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, 3 and Luke 7:27 and alluded to in Matthew 3:3 and Luke 1:17 and 76. In these references the New Testament echoes some of the main themes of Malachi, the coming of Jehovah's messenger and the eternal purpose of God which lies behind all His dealings with His church.

The prophecies of Malachi, therefore, are words from God which the church very much needs to hear and heed. As much as Israel needed to hear them then, so much more does the church need to heed them now. May it be so through the work of the Lord as He comes to His temple.

### **The Author**

Malachi is one of the three prophets of the restoration, that is, of the years following the return of Judah from captivity in Babylon and of the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem and of the reestablishment of the Jews in their own land. Malachi, however, is later than the other two prophets, as we shall see.

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<sup>1</sup>T. V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, p. 104.

There is some dispute about the name of the author of this book. Some believe that “Malachi” is the personal name of the author. Others believe that “Malachi” is not a personal name, but a title or description of the author’s place in the kingdom of God and of the work that God had given him to do. They believe that Malachi is not a proper name because it means literally “my messenger,” is similar to the description of Haggai in Haggai 1:13, and is the same word used in Malachi 3:1 and translated there “my messenger.”

Those who believe that the name Malachi is only a description of the office of the book’s author have made numerous guesses about his actual identity. Some, because Haggai is called the LORD’s messenger in Haggai 1:13, believe that he is the author of this book also. Calvin believed that the book’s author was actually Ezra, but such attempts to name the author, if Malachi was not his name, are pure speculation. We believe, for a number of reasons, that Malachi is actually the name of the book’s author, the main reason being that all the other Old Testament prophecies that begin with a superscription of this sort, actually record the name of the author, i.e., Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, Haggai and Zechariah.

In any case, we know next to nothing about the author of the book, for as in the case of Haggai no information about his family or history is given. This serves to underline for us that fact that the message he brings is not really his but God’s and that he is only God’s instrument or messenger in bringing God’s Word to God’s people. Who the man was did not matter then and really does not matter now. We, like the Jews, must here his prophecies as the inspired and infallible Word of God.

That Malachi means “my messenger,” is important. As a messenger of Jehovah, he prophesies of another messenger who would do the same work as himself but at the very beginning of the New Testament era. Even more importantly he prophesies of the great messenger of Jehovah, the messenger of the covenant who purifies the sons of Levi.

It should be noted, too, that “messenger” and “angel” are the same word in Hebrew, the word “malach.” This is especially important in chapter 3:1 which speaks of the messenger or angel of the covenant and of His coming. Not only does the verse itself show us that this is Christ, but it identifies Him with the *angel* of the covenant or angel of Jehovah who appears throughout the Old Testament. Of this messenger or angel of the covenant Malachi speaks.

## **The Date**

There can be little doubt that the book of Malachi, as its position in the Old Testament suggests, is the last of all the books of the Old Testament. The book itself indicates in 1:6 and 3:1, that the temple had been rebuilt, making it later than Haggai and Zechariah, and there are other indications that date it to the time of Nehemiah, though no date is given in the book.

The primary evidence for Malachi’s being a contemporary of Nehemiah is found in a comparison of the two books which shows that Nehemiah and Malachi were dealing with the same sins, the sins of mixed marriages, formalism in worship and neglect of tithes (compare Mal. 1:6-2:9 with Neh. 13:4-9, 29-30; Mal. 2:11-12 with Neh. 13:1-3, 23-27; and Mal. 3:8-12 with Neh. 10:3-39 and 13:10-13). Both Malachi and Nehemiah also mention the covenant with Levi (Mal. 2:4 and Neh. 13:29).

We should remember that Nehemiah spent two terms in Judah as governor separated by ten to twelve years. He had first come during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes, identified in history as Artaxerxes Longimanus, to help the Jews rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This was in twentieth year of Artaxerxes (approximately BC 444; Neh. 1:1). He remained in Jerusalem about

12 years (Neh. 4:14). At that time he had already opposed and corrected some of the evils into which Judah had fallen. He then returned to Babylon for a time (Neh. 13:6).

When he returned for a second time to Jerusalem around BC 424, near the end of the reign of Artaxerxes, he found many evils in Judah and it was during this time especially that he was forced to deal with the same sins against which Malachi prophesies. Malachi, is almost certainly, therefore, a contemporary of Nehemiah and of Ezra (Ezra had come to Jerusalem with a second group of returned captives about 13 years before Nehemiah came, Ezra 7:8, and was still living when Nehemiah arrived; Neh. 8:9). Malachi must have prophesied, therefore, about ninety years after Haggai and Zechariah, a little over four hundred years before Christ.

In that context his prophecy shows that need for Christ's coming and looks forward to that event as the next great event in the history of redemption.

### **The Divisions**

The book of Malachi is divided into six disputations, introduced by a superscription (1-1) and ending with a brief summary (4:4-6). In the first disputation (1:2-5) Malachi speaks in general terms of the unfaithfulness of the people, and rebukes them for refusing to love and honor God. In the second (1:6-2:9) he begins to point out specific sins of the people, speaking especially of the sins of the priests. In the third disputation he deals with the sins of mixed marriages and of divorce (2:10-16). In the fourth he prophesies the coming of Christ and of His forerunner (2:17-3:6), and in the fifth returns again to the sins of the people, this time rebuking them for their neglect of tithes and offerings (3:7-12). The sixth and last section (3:13-4:3) brings more general reproofs and warnings as well as the promise of better things to come. The book then concludes with an exhortation to remember the law of Moses, enforced by a reference to the coming day of the Lord.

The chapter divisions, therefore, do not follow the actual divisions of the book and are at times misleading. Chapter 2:1, for example, divides God's word to the priests into two parts and might leave the impression that there are two different words for them. Along the same lines, the fact that chapter 3 begins as it does, leads to our overlooking the fact that the promise of the coming of the messenger of the covenant is an answer to the question of unfaithful Judah, "Where is the God of judgment?" (2:17). It would probably be better, therefore, to read the book following its actual divisions, than by following the English chapter divisions.

### **The Superscription: Chapter 1:1**

#### *1. The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.*

There are several things that need to be noted about the superscription to the book besides its identification Malachi as its author. The first is the reference to Malachi's prophecies as the burden of the word of the Lord. That this is the word of the Lord, the inspired and infallible word of God, is beyond doubt in light of its quotation in Romans 9:13 and other passages.

Already here God speaks of Himself as Jehovah (LORD), reminding Judah and us of His covenant faithfulness. That is especially important in view of the fact that there is no further positive word from God, other than the repetition of this name until chapter 3:1. Even in rebuke and judgment He remains the faithful God of His people.

That name, Jehovah, is the most important name of God in the book of Malachi for the same reason. It is found 45 times in Malachi and most often in the form "LORD of Hosts" (23 times), a name which emphasizes God's sovereignty as the God of the covenant. In contrast, the name God is found only seven times in the book.

It is God's great and unchangeable faithfulness as Jehovah that preserves Israel and the church in spite of the sins of His people, and it is that same faithfulness that provides one who will "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (3:3). That faithfulness is expressed most clearly in Malachi 3:6, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Nevertheless, God's word through Malachi is described in 1:1 as a burden. This description of God's Word, also found in Isaiah 13:1, Nahum. 1:1, and Habakkuk. 1:1, reminds us of three things. It reminds us of the calling Malachi had to bring that Word. He had to receive it, carry it to the people and deliver it to them. It also reminds us of the seriousness or weight of the word that Malachi brings and of our own obligation to hear it, but also speaks of the fact that much of that word is a word of judgment and rebuke, a kind of word which everyone who brings God's Word experiences as burdensome and difficult (cf. Jer. 20:9 and II Cor. 2:16). It is this third thing especially that is being emphasized here and in the other passages that speak of God's word as burden.

The name Malachi, as we have already indicated, is the personal name of the prophet who was called to bring God's word to God's people in those and these troubled times. That this is his personal name does not mean, however, that the meaning of the name can be ignored. In light of the book's emphasis on *the* messenger of the covenant (3:1), it cannot be without significance that Malachi's own name means "My messenger" or "My angel" (they are the same word, the word "malach" in Hebrew).

Though Malachi looks forward to and prophesies of the coming of the great Messenger, he himself is also such a messenger. The connection between them is not just that the one (Malachi) foretold the coming of the other (Christ), but that Malachi was commissioned by Christ, spoke by the Spirit of Christ (I Peter 1:10, 11), and brought God's Word concerning Christ to the church.

That is always the relationship between the prophets and Christ in the Old Testament and between Christ and His ministers in the New. They are not only those who speak of Christ, but the ones whom Christ Himself sends speaks to His church (Jn. 10:27; Eph. 2:17). One of the words for a preacher in the New Testament reminds us of this. The word usually translated "preacher" refers to the minister of the gospel as a "herald" or messenger of Christ.

This may never be forgotten. When it is forgotten by the church as a whole, then the preaching of the gospel is despised and seen as nothing different from other forms of teaching and speaking, and is replaced, as it is today, by all sorts of frivolity and foolishness. When this is forgotten by the preachers themselves, then they, no longer seeing themselves merely as bearers of God's message to His people, begin to bring their own wisdom and to speak their own words, none of which have any saving power or value.

This Word of God is addressed to Israel, not just to Judah, for several reasons. God never recognized the division between the two kingdoms, just as He does not recognize the divisions that come between Christians today, but views and addresses His church as one. Not only that, but God continued to gather a remnant out of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. He had done that in the days of Jeroboam, in the time of Hezekiah, and continued to do it until the gospel was taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles (cf. Lk. 2:36).

It ought to be noted here that in addressing Israel God makes it clear that the foolish and wicked notions of British Israelitism, which find the lost ten tribes in Britain and America, are not to be tolerated. The destiny of those lost ten tribes and of what ever remains of them has now been

merged with the destiny of Judah and is not to be found in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

### **The First Disputation: Chapter 1:2-5**

2. *I have loved you, saith the LORD, Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,*

3. *And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.*

4. *Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places: thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation forever.*

God begins the prophecy of Malachi by speaking of His eternal love for His people, but does so because His love had been called into question by the people. This love of God the people had questioned because they had not received the temporal blessings He promised them. Chapter 3:10, 11 allude to this. The people had experienced drought, enemies, poor harvests and many other troubles and had seen this as an evidence that God's love for them had failed.

The truth is, of course, that not only are temporal benefits in themselves not the equivalent of God's blessing - it is only a carnal and covetous people that can think so - but the problem was their own sins. They had no right to expect anything from God when they were hard-hearted, formal in their worship, and did not even acknowledge God's mercies in tithes and offerings. They expected the most from God for the least amount of effort or expense, and when God in anger gave them nothing, instead of questioning themselves they questioned God's love.

This is the usual way with an unredeemed heart. The ungodly world, which does not even acknowledge God or its obligation to be thankful to Him, always questions God's love and mercy when God sends His judgments on the world. It insists that He cannot possibly be a God of love and mercy when He sends hurricanes, disease and other judgments.

The apostate church does the same. Never does she question herself and her own wicked ways, but tells lies about God when she herself comes under God's judgments or when she sees those judgments in the world around her. She says, in the face of disaster and trouble, that God does not send such things, but rather the devil and that to believe that these things come from God is inconsistent with a universal love of God.

We see the same inclination in ourselves. When God sends trials, all of which are designed to purify us and deliver us from our sins, we almost always begin to question God's love and to think in our hearts that He does love us, instead of humbling ourselves before Him, acknowledging our sinfulness, examining ourselves, and repenting. We do not mean by this, of course, that every trial comes as a result of some particular sin, but only that they come because we are sinners and because God uses them to save us from our sins.

In the face of such denials of His love, God speaks of His eternal and unchangeable love for Jacob. The Jews would have understood that in referring to Jacob, God was referring not only to the man himself but to the nation which traced its ancestry to him, the nation of Israel. They would have known this from the prophecies of Isaiah who often calls the whole nation, Jacob (Is. 44:1, 8; 43:1).

God does not, however, speak through Malachi of the love He bore for Israel at the time of Malachi's prophecy, but of His past love for Jacob: "I have loved you, saith the LORD." Reformed believers have always understood the past tense in such statements to refer to eternity (compare Num. 23:21). When God says, "I *have loved* you," that refers not just to time past, but to eternity past and therefore to God's eternal love, the love that is revealed in election.

The clearest proof for this is found in Romans 9 where Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, quotes from this passage and identifies God's past love for His people as God's election of them in Christ. There the Apostle makes reference to the birth of Jacob and Esau and to the Word of God concerning them, "The elder shall serve the younger," and tells us that this was said in order that "the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth," and proves his point by quoting from Malachi 1:2, 3; "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated."

We may never forget that election is the eternal love of God for some. As difficult as that doctrine may be, the fact that it is *love* and not bare choosing makes it of great comfort for those who know themselves to be the objects of election. Such love is possible only in Christ, and therefore, though that is not stated here, election must always be "in Christ" (Eph. 1:4).

It is the eternal character of God's love which is being emphasized here. For God to say to Judah that He had loved them in time past would be no reassurance to them. It is only because He loved them from eternity that His loved is proved unchangeable and abiding in spite of what outward circumstances might make them think.

God speaks, too, of the unconditional character of His love for Jacob and Israel when He speaks of His hatred for Esau. The point here is the same as in Romans 9, that God's love for Jacob and hatred for Esau had nothing to do with what they were or would be, but was entirely according to the good pleasure of His own will (cf. Eph. 1:5). He did not love Jacob because Jacob was holier than Esau, or had any primacy as far as descent or family was concerned, but loved Jacob simply because He was pleased to do so.

Thus Malachi reminds us that Esau was Jacob's brother. In every earthly and outward respect they were equal, and God's love for Jacob can only be free and gracious and unconditional. Paul makes this same point in Romans 9:6-13. In order to prove that the difference between the true seed of Abraham and those who are only fleshly descendants of Abraham is all grace, Paul first brings up the example of Isaac and Ishmael who were both physical descendants of Abraham, but of whom only Isaac was counted as the seed of Abraham by God.

Since, however, it would be possible to object that there was a real outward difference between Isaac and Ishmael in that they were only half-brothers who had different mothers, Paul adds the example of Jacob and Esau, who were not only full brothers, but twins, and whose place in God's covenant and love was revealed before they were born. That example proves, Paul says, that salvation, that is, the calling of some and not others, is according to God's own purpose in election.

God, then, speaks not only of election but of what is sometimes called reprobation, the opposite of election and the eternal decree of God concerning the damnation of some. When God says "I hated Esau," He is saying that from eternity He hated and rejected Esau, just as from eternity He loved and chose Jacob.

There is much opposition to this doctrine and almost every commentator rejects the idea of eternal rejection here. Laetsch speaks of the "horrible doctrine of an eternal decree of reprobation" and says that God's hatred for Esau only means that He loved Esau less than Jacob.<sup>2</sup> Pusey says that God could not have hated Esau before he sinned and says that Jacob's election and Esau's rejection only have to do with temporal things.<sup>3</sup> Others here and in Romans 9:10-13 speak of a national

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<sup>2</sup>Laetsch, *Commentary on Haggai*, p.

<sup>3</sup>Pusey, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p.

election and reprobation insisting that God is only speaking here of loving and choosing Israel as a nation and hating and rejecting Edom as a nation.

All these efforts to avoid the doctrine of reprobation, probably the most hated doctrine in Scripture, must fail. They must fail because the rest of Scripture also teaches the doctrine (1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4). But they must also fail because they do not do justice to what Malachi says.

If Malachi is only speaking of nations, then why does he not use the names of the nations, rather than the names of the two brothers themselves? It cannot be denied, of course, that God is speaking through Malachi of His dealings with the two nations. That is clear from verses 4, 5, but those two nations include not only many other individuals, but the two brothers as well. One cannot choose a nation or reject a nation without choosing and rejecting certain individuals. Not only that, but God's dealings with the two nations are specifically traced back to His attitude toward Jacob and toward Esau: "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau."

To speak of a lesser love of God for Esau and for Edom is nothing but sophistry. While it is true that the word "hate" is sometimes used in Scripture to mean "love less" (Matt. 10:37), it cannot mean that here. For one thing, God not only speaks of His attitude toward Esau, but of the result of that attitude. Not only will He lay Esau waste, but will thwart every effort of Esau and Edom to prosper once again (vs. 4). Indeed, as a result of God's hatred for Edom, Edom will be called "The people against whom the LORD hath indignation forever" (vs. 4). That is strange love, even if a lesser love than God's love for Jacob.

What is more, if God is saying here that He loves Esau less than Jacob, then there is no comfort in God's love for Jacob, especially when Jacob sees how that lesser love for Esau is revealed - in laying his mountains and his heritage waste and overthrowing his every effort to rebuild and reestablish himself. Israel would have reason then to say, "That's exactly what we were getting at. That's the kind of love God shows. That's the kind of love He showed for us." Israel's words, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" would become not a wicked complaint, but the truth!

That this love and hatred involves more than temporal and earthly prosperity is also clear. It involved more than that in the original case of Jacob and Esau. Already then it involved the promise of Christ, a place in God's covenant, and all the spiritual blessings and privileges which Israel enjoyed in the Old Testament (Rom. 9:4, 5). In Romans 9 the Word of God makes it crystal clear that the calling and salvation of some and not others was at stake. Being or not being a child of God (vs. 8), being counted for the seed (vs. 8) and being graciously called (vs. 11) were and are at issue, all of which are traced back to and rooted in God's love and hatred. The very name, Jehovah, used again in verse 2 makes it clear that God's covenant love and covenant relationship to His people are at stake in God's love for some and hatred of others.

In speaking of the results of His hatred for Esau, it is easy to miss the fact that all of this has spiritual overtones and eternal consequences. It is certainly the case that this Word of God was fulfilled in the destruction of Edom as a nation. At about this time the territory of the Edomites to the south and east of the Dead Sea was conquered and taken over by the Nabateans, and the existence of Edom as an independent nation ended.

We must remember, however, that the temporal blessings and judgments of the Old Testament are always pictures of spiritual things. Temporal things in themselves do not necessarily represent the blessing or disfavor of God. If that were so, then the wicked would often have more of God's blessing than His own people, and His own people would have no comfort in their trials and troubles. Nevertheless, we can clearly see the destructive power of God's wrath in the

judgments He sends on the earth and be warned by them, whether we are believers or unbelievers, whether we are touched by them or only see them at a distance.

Here, too, the laying waste of Edom prefigures the destruction of this present world under the judgment of God and the destruction with it of all the hopes and works of the ungodly. What they have in this world will be laid waste by God, all that they build will be overthrown, and they will be left forever impoverished.

This is reflected in the names that Edom receives as a result of God's judgments. The first name, "Border of wickedness," refers to the fact that Edom is viewed as the wicked world by God Himself. Edom receives this name from those who witness its judgments, but those who give them this name will do so because they recognize that these judgments come from God who has counted them ungodly and rebellious like their father, Esau. "Border of wickedness" has the same idea as "the world" when that name is used in Scripture (Jn. 17:9) to refer to the unrepentant and unbelieving world of the ungodly.

The name "People against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever," describes God's unchangeable and everlasting wrath against Esau and Edom, the opposite of His unchangeable and everlasting love for His people. That wrath, as is always the case, is shown in all His dealings with them, even when He sends earthly prosperity and peace. Even then He is angry with them (Ps. 73:18-20).

Both that wrath and its revelation in Edom's ruin must be seen, however, as the outworking of God's eternal hatred and decree of reprobation. That in no wise absolves Edom of its guilt or makes God the author of sin, but does show that all things proceed from God's eternal decree, and that He is indeed sovereign in all His works and ways.

That this eternal and unchangeable love of God is questioned and doubted should not surprise us. It is as characteristic of a faithless church now as then to question and doubt the character of God Himself and to begin to tell lies about Him that are designed to excuse and cover her unfaithfulness and wickedness.

*5. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.*

Why does the prophet speak of this wrath of God and its eternal source? The answer lies here in verse 5. Reprobation, that is, God's eternal hatred, and its results are not an end in themselves. Reprobation and its revelation in Scripture are always subordinate and serve another purpose. Here that purpose is described in terms of Israel's seeing God's judgments on Edom, understanding that those judgments are a result of His eternal wrath, learning that His love is also eternal and unchangeable, and thus praising Him.

That is the only possible reaction to these judgments and their eternal source, other than disbelief and scorn. Seeing God's fury poured out on the heathen, realizing that the outpouring of His wrath is not a hasty reaction against the wickedness of the heathen, but the working out of an eternal and unchangeable decree, we tremble before God, and cease to speak carelessly and foolishly of Him.

Especially we do not speak as Israel did in the days of Malachi, as though His love is a temporary and changeable thing like ours. Seeing these judgments we do not say, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" but trust that like His wrath and hatred, His love also is unchangeable and abiding, even when circumstances seem to indicate otherwise.

The Lord, however, begins to speak of the fact that it would no longer be in Israel, but among the heathen nations, the Gentiles, that He would be feared and honored. "From the border of Israel"

does not mean “within the borders of Israel,” but “from the border of Israel outward.” Only in Israel would His name continue to be dishonored and His love for His people questioned. This becomes clear especially in Malachi 1:11: “For from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.” It is the result of that Word of God that we Gentiles now know of His eternal love for us.

### **The Second Disputation: Chapter 1:6-2:9**

*6. A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? Saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have se despised thy name?*

*7. Ye offer polluted bread upon my altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.*

*8. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.*

*9. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means; will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.*

In this longest section of the book of Malachi God addresses the priests, not only because they were the spiritual leaders of the people and were responsible for much of the apostasy of the nation, but also because they ought to have been the ones who rebuked the people for their apostasy and who tried to turn them from it.

The sins of these priests were three. They had polluted His offerings, they had despised their own position in the church and kingdom of God, and that they had been partial in judging the people. These sins are described in chapter 1:6-10, 12-14 and chapter 2:5-8.

Each mention of priestly sin is followed by a statement of the judgment of God upon the priests for their wickedness. For the sin of despising and misusing their office, God would take away their priestly office and give it to the Gentiles (1:11). For the sin of polluting His offerings, the offerings from which they themselves lived and received their sustenance, God would curse the produce of flock and field, and thus take away from them everything they had (2:2-4). For the sin of partiality in judgment, the sin of despising His law, of which they were the caretakers, God would make them contemptible in the sight of the people (2:9).

We must understand that those who are the spiritual leaders of God’s people always bear a greater responsibility for apostasy and wickedness in the church than do the members. They have this greater responsibility simply because of their position and calling. They have such responsibility not only if they actually encourage apostasy in the church by their own conduct and example, as these priests did, but also if they fail to rebuke the wickedness of the people.

That is not to say, however, that the people themselves are without fault. Not only to they often follow the example of godless leaders blindly and ignorantly, but are sometimes themselves a cause of the wickedness of their leaders in that they refuse good counsel, insist that their leaders tell them only what they want to hear (Isa. 30:10), and stubbornly go their own way.

What usually happens is this: the people themselves become worldly and carnal, as they were in the days of Nehemiah and Haggai, and when they refuse to hear rebuke and to turn from their wicked ways, their leaders, instead of continuing to rebuke them and resist them in their wickedness, begin to cater to it. Eventually, the leaders become the leaders in wickedness and lead the people deeper and deeper into it. That seems to be what happened in Israel. It certainly is what happens in the church today.

Before pointing out the sins of the priests, God speaks of the fact that in their wickedness they had failed to honor Him. The honor and fear they expected and received from their own children and servants, they refused to give to him. To emphasize that point He speaks of Himself as their father and master, which indeed He was, and not just a father and master, but the Father and the Master. Yet they despised His name and never rendered Him His due.

That he was the Father of His people was not a truth often mentioned in the Old Testament. The fact that His Fatherhood was seldom mentioned in the Old Testament is explained in Galatians 4:1-7, where Israel, though God's child, is compared to an immature child, who, under tutors and governors is treated little different than a servant. Nevertheless it was known by the people of God (Exod. 4:22, 23), and the priests, who were the teachers of the law, ought to have known it and knowing it have honored and obeyed God as a Father. Certainly they knew that He was their Master or Lord, and should have feared Him at least for that. But they did not. Indeed, they did not even recognize their own sin, but when confronted with it, insisted that they had not refused to honor Him. That was the import of their question, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" It was not an innocent question, but an expression of their doubt and distrust of God and meant: "We have not done so - there is nothing that can possibly be mentioned against us as proof of such a lack of honor."

It is here, for the first time, that God uses the name LORD of hosts. He does that in connection with what follows concerning the priestly offerings and office. That name refers to the fact that God is the sovereign owner and ruler of all things and that they are used by Him to fulfil His own purpose and good pleasure - all things are a mighty host, an army, which marches in His service, willingly or even unwillingly. Here God is emphasizing especially the fact that as the LORD of hosts the offerings and offices of the priests belonged to Him, not to the priests themselves, and that they were not to be used as the priests saw fit, for their enrichment and profit, but for His honor. In the next verse He even speaks of the altar as His own. The priests by their conduct had acted as though it were not so - as though the offerings did indeed belong to them.

God charges them first with offering polluted bread on His altar. There is some question about whether the word "bread" refers to all the offerings as it sometimes does ( ) or whether it refers just to the so-called "meat-offerings" which were primarily offerings of meal, flour or loaves, or whether it refers to the shewbread which was renewed each day on the table that stood on the north side of the holy place. Though the word seems to refer to all the offerings, the point is that the priests in the offerings despised the service of God.

We must understand that the priests received their own sustenance and support from these offerings. The shewbread, when taken from the table, was give to the priests for food. The meat offerings were also theirs, as was a part of every offering, except the whole burnt offering (?). It is this matter Malachi is addressing, since the priests were not satisfied with the offerings they received. They saw their work not as a calling in relation to God, but as poorly paying job. The contempt of which verse 7 speaks, therefore, is the contempt the priests felt for their own work as priests.

This contempt led to a corrupting of the sacrifices. The point of verse 7 is that the priests allowed the people to bring every kind of unacceptable offering to God, the blind and lame and sick. This was forbidden in the law (Ex. 22:31; Lev. 7:24; 17:15; 22:8; Ezek. 4:14; 44:31). What was imperfect was unclean and could not even be eaten by the people. Yet the priests allowed the people to bring such offerings, and themselves ate of them, in order to have more than they would otherwise have.

Such wickedness was not only the fault of the priests, but also of the people, in that they did not give willingly to the Lord and grudged every good thing that was offered to God, but their grudging covetousness and poor giving did not excuse the wickedness of the priests.

This same contempt is often found in those who have the calling to preach the gospel. It usually becomes evident, not in an open contempt for the service of God, but as with these priests, in a dissatisfaction with the wages they receive for their work and in the lack of honor they show towards God.

Dissatisfied, such men give as little honor to God as they possibly can, changing the worship of God into a sideshow and putting themselves at center stage. And like these priests, they seek to better and enrich themselves, by allowing the people to bring every kind of unacceptable offering, no longer insisting that God must be worshipped as He has commanded.

We must understand that the worship and service that went on the temple is a picture and foreshadowing of the worship we bring to God. So many Scripture passages speak of our worship also as an offering (Rom. 12:1, 2; I Cor. 5:8; Heb. 13:15). That offering must be brought according to the Word of God and in real gratitude and faith. When it is not, it is blind and lame and sick like the offerings of these Jews.

How often is not the offering that is brought to God in worship not what He has commanded, poor and lame and sick. Sometimes it is that because the act of worship itself is not what He has commanded, i.e., that all sorts of things are done in the worship of God that have no place there. Sometimes the offering that is brought, is poor and lame and sick, not because the act itself is wrong, but because the heart of the worshipper is not right with God - he comes in unbelief, superstitiously and as a mere formality.

How much more often is not such polluted offering allowed by those who are God's ministers and representatives in the church like the priests of old? And is not most often the case, that they allow the people to bring such offerings, though they themselves know better, in order that they may profit - that they may have large congregations, expensive buildings, vestments, larger collections, houses and lands of their own. Few will suffer loss and impoverishment for the sake of maintaining purity in the worship of God.

Every minister of the gospel, every elder and leader in the church, who puts himself and his own things before the worship and service of God is as guilty as these wicked priests, and is being addressed as well as them.

They allow man-made songs to be substituted for the Psalms, contrary to God's command, entertainment to take the place of the preaching of the gospel, and frivolity to take the place of reverence and serving God. They themselves, like these priests, bring such offerings to God as though they will be acceptable to Him. What Malachi says is as much for today as for his own times, though most today will say, like the priests, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" "Wherein have we polluted thee?"

Such actions, verse 8, reminds us, are evil, acts of rebellion against God, not only because they violate His command, but because they show absolutely no regard for His holiness and glory.

In order to impress upon them the seriousness of their sin, God suggests that they bring to their governor, probably Nehemiah himself (cf. Neh. ), the kind of offerings they brought to God, and God's question, "Will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" is a rhetorical question, the answer to which could not possibly be in doubt. In fact, Nehemiah took nothing from the people during his years among them (Neh. ), but that does change the fact that the kind of offerings they

were bringing were unfit and unlawful even for such uses. They could not, as we have seen, even be used for food.

Verse 9 is ironic. Malachi is telling the priests, that if the governor would not accept the kind of offerings they were bringing, then certainly God would not either. The idea is: “Go with your offerings to God and make intercession on the basis of the offerings, praying that God will be gracious to us. Do you really think He will accept your ragged offerings and hear your prayers?” The phrase, “this hath been by your means” is part of the irony and is saying: “You are the only ones who can do these things, the ones who have been called to do them. Do you think God will be pleased with you and accept you?”

Verse 10 goes even further in showing God’s disgust and displeasure with the priests. The verse is usually taken to be a further exposure of the mercenary attitude of the priests: “You will not even shut the doors of my house for nothing,” but more in line with second part of the verse is the interpretation that sees it as God’s rejection of them and their work. He is actually pleading with the priests to shut the doors of His house and to cease offering sacrifices, since that would be better than their continuing to bring the useless, polluted offerings they did. “Is there no one,” God is saying, “with sufficient zeal for Me and for my worship to put an end to this hypocrisy and wickedness?” And lest they continue deliberately to misunderstand and to stand amazed and disbelieving that God should be so upset with them, over nothing, God tells them plainly that He has no pleasure in them and will accept no offering from them.

How the church today needs to hear this. In spite of all the excitement and enthusiasm, the large crowds and huge churches in which they gather, God receives nothing from them and has no pleasure in them. Better would it be if their doors were shut and silence reigned, than that they bring to God the polluted offerings they do, “Christian” rock music, holy laughter, silly miracles, jokes and stories, and all the rest.

They, of course, never listened to this word of God and the doors of the temple remained open and their foolish formal sacrificing continued until God Himself shut it all down permanently in AD 70 when temple and altar were destroyed by the Romans. What a warning to all those who offer strange fire and polluted sacrifices on God’s altar and who pay no attention when He tells them that He would rather have no worship at all from them!

Moore sums it all up thus:

Then, as now, men sought, as for a philosopher’s stone, a cheap religion — one that would insure heaven to them on the easiest terms. Hence they made a shuffling compromise with duty, compounding for the lowest possible percentage of self-denial and effort. God assures them that a cheap religion, like most cheap things, was always dear, since it would cost more than it was worth — for it was worth just nothing. God will not despise the widow’s mite, but he will despise the miser’s mite — especially when the blinded man is dreaming that by this beggarly shift he is securing the favor of God. As he drops his pittance into the treasury of the Lord, a voice comes forth from the throne, Who is there among you that will close the doors against this insulting mockery, and tell the starveling giver that he had better keep his miserable apology for a gift, for it was worse than thrown away when presented as an offering to God. O! that this voice of indignant scorn could be rung through the laggard Churches of Christendom, who are striving to solve the same impossible

problem in the maxima and minima of spiritual calculus, with how little self-denial and active labor a man may reach heaven at last.<sup>4</sup>

Let us not forget either, that it is always God's name that is at stake. Though many do not realize it, His name does not just include the few words with which we address Him, but includes everything that is connected with His glory as God. The Westminster Larger Catechism includes in the name of God "". The misuse of any of these, therefore, dishonors and blasphemes His name. Thus it is that the priests were guilty of abusing His name by their offerings and attitude. Thus it is that we can be and often are guilty of the same sin.

All this, though not yet stated, requires a priest who will love the glory and honor of God and who will cleanse the church of its impurity and wickedness and teach God's people to "offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (3:3). The coming of such a priest, the messenger of the covenant, is prophesied in chapter 3.

*11. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.*

What of spiritual things we do not cherish God takes away from us. That is reason for the gift of the gospel to the Gentiles and it is the reason why the gospel has moved from one Gentile nation to another (Luther) in the course of New Testament history. Here for their lack of regard for the priesthood and offerings, God promises that He will take both away from the Jews and give them to the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup>

The eleventh verse of Malachi 1 is not just a prophecy of the ingathering of the Gentiles, however, but also a prophecy of the priesthood of all believers in the New Testament and the spiritual sacrifices that are offered by that universal priesthood.

Though the gathering of the Gentiles and the preaching of the gospel to them are not specifically mentioned in the verse, it is clear that the verse has that in view. The only way God's can become great among the Gentiles is by grace, that is, that God graciously forgives the sins of the Gentiles, causes the gospel of grace to be preached to them, gives them the gift of the faith that they may believe the gospel, and through the same gift of faith, gives them not only the gift of forgiveness, but the knowledge of forgiveness, so that they understand what God has done for them and thankfully glorify His name.

That glorifying and honoring of God's name by the Gentiles is described in terms of their becoming a priesthood that replaces the corrupt and wicked priesthood of Malachi's day. The verse therefore prophesies what Luther called the priesthood of all believers. That priesthood means that every believer now priest, as well as prophet and king, through Christ and under Christ, and that apart from Christ Himself, there is no longer a special and separate priesthood.

That priesthood is mentioned and its work described in I Peter 2:5: "Ye also, as lively (living) stones, are built up a spiritual house, and holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Those spiritual sacrifices are described in Romans 12:1, 2 as the offering of our bodies in grateful service to God, in Hebrews 12:15 as the offering of our lips in

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<sup>4</sup>Commentary, pp. 120, 121.

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that the words "Gentiles" and "heathen" in verse 11, though translated differently in the KJV, are really the same word in Hebrew.

praise, and in Psalm 51:17, the sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart. These sacrifices are offered, according to I Peter 2:9, for the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Such offerings are made in worship and in the every day life of God's people. They really are sacrifices in that they requires the giving up of all pride, all self-sufficiency, all self-seeking, and all fleshing desires. They are truly spiritual sacrifices, sacrifices with which God is well-pleased and which He accepts, not as an atonement for sin - that sacrifice was offered and could be offered only by Christ - but as a thank offering, a freewill offering, that is the deepest expression of a redeemed and regenerated heart.

As a spiritual and universal priesthood, New Testament believers no longer need trust in the intercession of an earthly priesthood, but go themselves to the throne of grace, praying there for one another and for themselves. As a spiritual priesthood, they bring and offer their own sacrifices. And insofar as their priesthood is universal, their work as priests is no longer limited to one place but is done "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same."

That priesthood of all believers, one of the great doctrines of the Reformation, though seldom remembered or believed today, is an important truth for the daily life as well as for the church life of every believer. It is that priesthood which requires private prayer and worship as an integral part of the life of every believer. As a priest every believing father has the calling to be an intercessor and teacher in his own family. Holding that priestly office, every child of God, male or female, young and old alike, has the calling to be holy and in holiness to offer himself in all he or she does as a sacrifice to God. It is that same priesthood of believers that requires that believers be participants, not spectators in the public worship of God, and that makes them the source of all authority in the church. In those who fulfil these duties and do so with a true heart, the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled.

The Heidelberg Catechism identifies this priesthood of all believers with being a Christian. In answer to the question: "But why art thou called a Christian?" the Catechism answers: "Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may ... present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him...."

*12. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.*

*13. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness it is! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.*

In these verse which conclude the first chapter, but not God's word to the priests, the prophet returns to the matter of priestly sins. Insofar as it repeats what has already been said in verses 6-10 it does so by way of emphasizing the seriousness of the priests sins. God would not forget or overlook those sins though the priests would not recognize them. Nevertheless, this section is not just repetition, but elaborates on the sins of the priests and on the reason why their actions were so wicked.

Verse 12 and the first part of verse 13, elaborate on the attitude of the priest's towards their priestly duties and office. The priests excused their laxness with respect to the offerings, by saying that what they were doing really did not matter - that neither the table of the LORD, that is, the table of shewbread, and the food that was offered to God on that table and on the altar were not very important.

We do not know exactly what they were saying, but perhaps they used the excuse that neither table or altar were the originals, or that the meat of the sacrifices and the bread of the table were only types and shadows of heavenly things. Whatever they were saying it was simply an excuse for their own lack of proper regard for the things of God. Thus they found the service of God wearisome and snuffed at it, that is, treated it with disdain and contempt.

How common these sins are. Many have the same attitude toward those aspects and elements of worship that God commands. When anyone raises questions about their own practice, their excuse is always that these things do not really matter, that the only thing that matters is that God be worshipped and served - the how is of no account. And when they must endure the things God has commanded, they view them with the same contempt and sneering arrogance as did the priests whom Malachi curses.

This is their attitude not only towards matter of public worship, but towards the things that are required of the Christian in his daily life. All that matters is feeling and sincerity. The specific details of the Christian life commanded in the word of God do not matter. Blasphemous words, Sabbath-breaking, disdain for authority, fornicating, lying, cheating and stealing, speaking evil of others, coveting and hatred do not matter.

It should be noted, too, that “torn” in the description of their sacrifices does not mean “torn by wild beasts” but torn away from others by violence, i.e., stolen. That needs emphasis over against the practice of so many self-appointed priests and leaders in the church who use their influence and office to fulfill their own carnal desires and by hook and crook, by pleas and tears, by saying that the Lord will take them away if their hearts do not send them millions, tear away the living of the poor and of the widows. That is bad enough, but when they make a pretense of offering it in the service of God, surely they must hear Him say, “Should I accept this of your hand?”

*14. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.*

God is not in verse 14, simply speaking again of the way in which the priests corrupted His offerings, but implicating the people as well in their wickedness. Rarely is it the case that the church has bad leaders and good members, or that the wickedness of the leaders cannot be traced to the failings and weaknesses of the people themselves as well as the wickedness of the people to that of the leaders. Here, too, that was the case. The priests polluted the offerings of God, but did so at the behest of the people who were themselves covetous and empty of the fear of God.

God is also saying something about how evil the practice of both people and priests was in light of the fact that He required so little of them. He did not ask all their flocks and herds, only an occasional beast. He did not expect them to bring the more valuable females, but allowed them to bring the more expendable males. So little did He ask and even that they would not do. Having vowed a male, they brought one that was sick or lame. Obligated to bring a sacrifice, they brought only what they did not want anyway. As one commentator says: “How often do we keep back the firstlings of our flocks, the best of our services, and offer God the shreds of our time, the weary remnants of our thoughts and affections, and the niggardly gleanings of our means.”<sup>6</sup>

For the first time, the book of Malachi uses the name “Lord,” that is Adonai. This name, not all in capitals, as all who are acquainted with the KJV know, is a different name from the name

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<sup>6</sup>Moore, *Commentary*, p. 123.

LORD, or Jehovah. The name Lord refers to God's sovereign ownership of all things, and is a further reminder that the grudging covetousness of the Jews in giving God only their castoffs was all the worse in view of the fact that all they had belonged not to them but to Him. In bringing their offerings they were only giving Him what was already His own. For us, too, it is always the case that when we forget that God is the Owner of all, we begin to grudge everything He asks of us.

God shows them and us too that this is no small thing in His sight, for He is no beggar to be satisfied with scraps and leavings, but a great King, one whose name is worthy of awe and reverence, one who is offended and angered at their contempt for Him. Even the heathen, He says, had shown and would show more regard for His name than do His own people.

The reference to the heathen is a reminder of those heathen who had in times past acknowledged, some of them under duress, the greatness of God's name (Dan. ; Jonah). It is also a prophecy of the coming when God's name would be taken from the Jews and given to the heathen who would honor and worship it.

*2:1. And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.*

*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.*

*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.*

The chapter break here is particularly unfortunate. The first three verses especially are the God's judgment on the priests for the sin of despising and polluting His offerings, the sin just mentioned in the previous verses.

The command of which God speaks is not His law concerning the offerings. That the priests knew, though they callously disregarded it. The word "command" is used in a more general sense and refers to the word of judgment and cursing which God speaks against the priests. It is a curse that He commands against them; especially designed for them. That curse comes on them for two things, for their actual disobedience and for their refusal to hear God's rebukes, to "lay it to heart."

The word "if" does not suggest that there was any doubt about the reaction of the priests - they were so hardened and callous in their disobedient wickedness, that God does not even pause before telling them that He had cursed them already. The word "if" has more the force of a strong oath here, as it does so often in the Old Testament, so that the idea is really this: "Since ye most surely will not hear and 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."

God's curse is a terrible thing. It is the powerful and effective word that He speaks against the sinner that drives the sinner out of God's presence and into hell. This curse God speaks not only against the priests themselves: "I will even send a curse upon you," but upon their blessings, that is, upon all the good temporal gifts God had given them.

The passage makes it abundantly clear that such things are "blessings" only in a temporal and limited way, for they can be cursed and become a curse to those who have them. They do not, in other words, represent in themselves the favor or love of God for those who possess them.

That God promises to curse their blessings can only mean that He will in the end take all those things away from them so that they are left with nothing, but also that even while they still possess them He will bring them nothing but grief and trouble and wrath through them. Of this Psalm 73 speaks when it reminds us that God uses such things to set the sinner in slippery places,

and Proverbs when it tells us that under the judgment of God even the daily labors of the ungodly are sin.

Again, God reminds those to whom He speaks that He is the LORD of hosts, whom all things serve. If He commands temporal things to be a blessing and mark of His favor, then they will surely be that, but if He commands them to bring His disfavor upon those who have them, then that too will surely come to pass.

God does not just speak in general terms of His curse, however, but tells them exactly how He will curse them and judge them. His judgment will come both upon the fields and upon their work. The seed referred to in verse 3 is not their children, but the produce of the fields. In corrupting it as they had corrupted his offerings (the same word is used), God would take away their very livelihood, and leave them impoverished and hungry. Their covetousness and greed, rather than getting them what they wanted, would have the opposite effect.

Ultimately, of course, that curse would leave them forever desolate in hell. That God sometimes leaves the wicked to prosper in their wickedness does not mean that He allows them to have what they want and to enjoy it. As Asaph, we must see their end, and their end is destruction and desolation which comes upon them in moment.

That God would spread the dung of their solemn feasts upon their faces means that He would bring them to dishonor and shame in the eyes of the people just as they had dishonored Him before the people. Just as they had viewed the details of their priestly work like dung, so God would make them like dung in the sight of the people. Appearing before the people to do their priestly work, it would be as though they had dung spread on their faces, and they would be polluted and despised by the very people whose favor they curried and whose gifts they coveted and for whom they had forsaken their calling.

That the dung would be the dung of their own solemn feasts, means that the contempt with which they had treated God's ordinances would be learned by the people so that they would themselves become contemptible in the sight of the people who would no longer honor them and support them and come to them.

How often that happens. For the sake of earthly things and the favor of men, the leaders of God's people forsake their calling and treat God's commands with contempt, doing whatever they please in the worship of God. To their own surprise, the end result is not that they have the support and honor of the fickle multitude, but they are finally treated with the same contempt that they have shown and the people go their own way, no longer supporting them in the work or even coming to them as representatives of God.

This is the end result of apostasy, that the people no longer even come to worship God, to the temples in which these men have corrupted the worship of God but become wholly secular and worldly, as has our society here in the west, so that there are fewer and fewer who show any interest at all in the things these corrupt leaders tout as the worship and the service of God.

And just as dung is carted away and disposed of, so God will dispose of this corrupt priesthood, whether it is that of the Old Testament or of the New. In Israel He did that when He brought all the types and shadows of the Old Testament, including the priesthood to an end. Finally He does that when throws all idolaters and those who love and make lies into hell.

*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.*

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

*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.*

*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.*

In this closing section of God's word to the priests, He examines their sin from the viewpoint of His covenant with Levi. God calls that covenant with Levi a covenant of life and peace and speaks of the duties of the priesthood as their covenant obligations. That covenant the priesthood had violated and broken in these last days of the kingdom by their wickedness. Their sin, in other words, was covenant unfaithfulness.

That covenant with Levi was established when the Levitical priesthood, through Phinehas the son of Aaron showed great zeal for God and for His holiness by killing in the act at Shittim, on the borders of Canaan, a man of Simeon and a woman of Midian who were openly committing fornication. God said of Phinehas and his descendants at that time: "Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:12, 13).

That this covenant with Levi is part and parcel of the same covenant mentioned elsewhere in Scripture is evident from the fact that God speaks of it as "my covenant." It is not a different covenant, nor different in nature from God's covenant with Abraham, with Israel, or with David. That this covenant is a relationship, part of the relationship between God and His people that is always at the heart of the covenant is clear from verse 6 which speaks of Levi walking with God.

God's covenant as a relationship between God and His people is described in especially three ways in Scripture. Sometimes one finds the covenant formula or a variation of it: "I will be thy God and ye shall be my people" (cf. Gen. 17: ). At other times Scripture speaks of walking with God and of fellowship with God ( ), and in a few passages of friendship between God and His people (Gen. James ).

That covenant of God is always viewed in Scripture as one and everlasting, and therefore also as an unconditional covenant which is made and preserved by God alone without man's help. That is true here also. Levi's unfaithfulness, though it can be described as covenant breaking, is not the end of the covenant, but only shows the need for a priest, a messenger of the Lord who would not break the covenant and through whom God's covenant with Levi would be kept forever.

That this covenant with Levi was part of the God's covenant with Abraham and with Israel should be immediately evident in that Levi represented Israel to God and God to Israel. Levi's unfaithfulness in the covenant was Israel's unfaithfulness and the calling that Levi had in the covenant was Israel's calling, fulfilled through Levi as their representative before God.

God's word in this passage begins, therefore, with a reminder that God had sent Malachi to call Levi and through them the whole nation back to covenant faithfulness. The command, as we have seen refers to the word of condemnation and judgment that Malachi brought, but it was sent in order that the priests might themselves repent of their wickedness and return to God and that through them the people might do the same, and that thus both God and His people might once again enjoy together the blessings of His relationship to them.

We must understand that even though God's covenant is unconditional and everlasting, a covenant that cannot be broken and destroyed, a covenant which depends only on God and His grace, that God's people have obligations and responsibilities in that covenant. The covenant does not depend for its existence on them and on their faithfulness, but those duties are nonetheless important in that they show who and what God's people are by grace, and prove the power of grace.

Indeed, though the covenant itself does not depend on the faithfulness of God's people, their own enjoyment of covenant blessings and their own assurance of their place in God's covenant does. When they are unfaithful they cannot possibly have any assurance of a place with God. When they walk in sin their own consciences testify that they are God's enemy's, not His friends. As the Canons of Dort put it:

By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until, on their returning unto the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them (V, 5).

Here God speaks of those covenant responsibilities which belonged to the priests and through them to all Israel. Those duties and responsibilities include those already mentioned: the worship of God through the sacrifices and offerings and the duty of being separate and holy to God. These duties the priests had neglected and despised. Now God speaks of a third responsibility, that of knowing and teaching the law of God, and of judging Israel according to that law.

That this was a priestly duty is clear from Deuteronomy 17:8-11 and 19:17. This does not mean, of course, that the priests were the ones who ordinarily and actually executed the law as Phinehas did. That was usually the duty of the judge or king. But the priests were the ones who interpreted it and who told all Israel what the law said and meant.

That duty had three parts, all mentioned here. First, the priests had to know the law. This is implied in what God says of Levi: "the law of truth was in his mouth." It is also implied in the fact that the priest's lips were to "keep knowledge." The idea is not just that he had the responsibility of teaching the law but had to have ready to hand as it were. Second, he had to be a teacher of the law. Seeking the law at the mouth of the priest did not just mean seeking a judgment from the priest, but learning the law from him. There is an example of this being done in I Chronicles. Last, the priest was a judge who interpreted and applied the law to the people.

In all of this the priest was the messenger of the LORD of hosts. He was bringing the word of the great king to the people of the king. He had to be sure, therefore, that he brought nothing but the word of the king and that he brought that word as the king had given it, not taking away or adding to the message. Especially he had to do this because the word of the king is the law by which the citizens of the kingdom are governed and under which they prosper.

In the Old Testament this meant that the priests were always also prophets. Even wicked Caiaphas could prophesy of Christ because he was high priest. Of this we read in John 11:49-52: "And this he spake not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation...."

In the New Testament it is a reminder of the responsibility that every teacher and minister of the Word of God has. He must bring only the word of the king and must add nothing too it nor take anything away from it. He may not do that as far as the Scriptures themselves are concerned (Rev. 22:18, 19) and he may not do that in preaching the Scriptures. It is also a reminder, however, of the priestly duties of every believer. Holding the office of a priest (Rev. 1:6), he is also a prophet and as prophet must know, teach, and judge according to the Word of God. He must do that in his own home as a married person and as a parent. He must do that in his daily calling as a witness. He must do that in the church in worship. Always and everywhere he is God's prophet.

The value of that knowledge of God which is the province of every priest-prophet cannot be overestimated. Scripture speaks of its value in Proverbs 1:4; 2:6; Jeremiah 22:16; Hosea 4:6 and

many other passages, but it is John 17:3 more than any other passage which shows us that this knowledge is indispensable, for it is eternal life. This knowledge the priests of Malachi's day had despised and withheld and so it is today.

To this covenant Levi had been faithful, but these priests, his descendants, and many others today have been unfaithful. For their unfaithfulness God will always judge them.

*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.*

That duty of the priests had also been neglected. Instead of judging the people according to and had the law of God, they judged falsely and so had caused the people to stumble at the law, that is, to do wrong by their protection of evildoers, by misinterpreting the law, and by their own bad example and refusal to keep the law of God. Verse 9 speaks of partiality in judging, which usually means the taking of bribes and the favoring of the wealthy and influential. The following verses are an example of such evil judgments. Though the people themselves are addressed and the priests not mentioned, they were implicated in the heathen marriages that the people had contracted and in their divorcing for any cause. The book of Nehemiah certainly implicates them in the matter of heathen marriages. Nehemiah 13:28 mentions especially one of the grandsons of Eliashib the high priest, who was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite, one of Israel's enemies. In the matter of divorce they were implicated in the days of Jesus, in that they allowed the people to divorce for any cause (Matt. 19:3).

In doing this they corrupted the covenant of Levi, that is, they were unfaithful to their covenant responsibilities and to the great God of the covenant and led the people astray as well, so that they too were unable to enjoy the blessings and privileges of fellowship with God. The covenant relationship between God and his people was harmed and interrupted by the evil deeds, the evil example and the evil teachings of these false priests.

Such unfaithfulness corrupted the covenant of God with His people but did not destroy it, for even though Phinehas and his descendants eventually lost their priestly office, that covenant was continued and fulfilled in Christ. Of that there are hints already in these verses, for He alone is the one in whose lips is found no iniquity (vs. 6); He only is able truly to turn many from iniquity (vs. 6); and He, as we shall see in chapter 3:1-3, is the true Messenger of the LORD of Hosts (vs. 7).

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

In the justice of God, His judgments are always fitting, as we sometimes say, the punishment fits the crime. Because they polluted the offerings of God, He would pollute them by spreading the dung of their solemn feasts on their faces and destroy their place and calling among the people (vs. 3). Because they turned away from His law and would not uphold it, He pronounces a law of judgment and cursing against them. Because they had treated their office, and thus God Himself with contempt, He would make them contemptible in the eyes of the people. And here, because they had treated not only His offerings but also His law with contempt, God promises to make them contemptible in the eyes of the people.

This is usually understood to mean that God would take away their credibility and honor in the hearts and lives of the people, so that the priests would more and more lose their influence. We see something like this happening today with the Romish priesthood, through its wickedness and corruption, and it often happens as well with other church leaders who have departed from God's ways. Sometimes this comes about when God leads them into falls and sins that destroy their

credibility. Sometimes it happens simply because they begin teaching and preaching such nonsense that even the fools realize their folly.

### **The Third Disputation: Chapter 2:10-16**

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

This verse seems at first to have little connection either with what precedes or with what follows, but is in fact an important introduction to the new and fourth section of the prophecy. It is, though one of the most difficult verses in the prophecy, the fundamental principle on which the condemnation of divorce and mixed marriage is based.

Many find in this verse proof of the universal fatherhood of God - that God is father of all men, loves them all and is gracious to all without exception, and that this universal fatherhood is the result of God's creating all. The context makes it clear, however, that this is not what Malachi means when he says: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" The point in the verses which follow is that the Jews were not allowed to marry heathen wives because those heathen girls and women were daughters of a strange god (vs. 11), not daughters of Jehovah. The passage itself states, therefore, that the heathen are not in any sense of the word God's children, nor He their Father, but strangers and foreigners.

This verse proves the same when it speaks of the "covenants of our fathers." It was not some universal covenant which was being violated by the sins of the Jews. They were not acting against the universal love and grace of God, but against His covenant with the Jews and His love for them, revealed in His covenants with them. "We" in the passage is exclusively the Jews.

Nor is there any love of God for all or any kind of universal fatherhood of God. The very first verses of the prophecy of Malachi make it clear that God's love for some and hatred of others are eternal and unchangeable. It is only when the doctrine of God's sovereignty in election and reprobation are discarded that one can even begin to speak of a universal love of God, a love which makes Him helplessly dependent on the will of the sinner in salvation and which vitiates all that Scripture says about His wrath and judgments against sin.

Instead, the verse is speaking of God's gracious covenant relationship with Israel as something that was violated and profaned by the marital sins of the Jews, that is, by the sins of marrying heathen wives and callously divorcing the wives God had given them. Thus they profaned God's covenant and dealt treacherously against their own brethren.

The sin of marrying heathen wives was an act of treachery against brethren, both because it brought heathen into a relationship which had been established with Israel, and because in bringing these heathen in it threatened the very existence of God's covenant with Israel in that these heathen would bring with them their wicked and idolatrous practices. It was a profaning of God's covenant because marriage is supposed to reflect God covenant relationship with His people, something these mixed marriages could not possibly do.

The sin of divorcing was an act of treachery against brethren because, as we shall see in what follows, it was an act of violence both against a bosom companion and a fellow member of God's covenant. It was a violation of the covenant because it broke a relationship that was a reflection of and a part of God's own covenant with His people.

It should be noted, too, that God's covenant with Israel was not with every individual Israelite. Those who were wicked and unbelieving like the heathen were not even counted as Israel (Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6-8). True Israel in Scripture is not an earthly nation with geographical

boundaries, but a spiritual nation of those who believe the promises, love God, and walk in His ways. Nor is God the Father and covenant God of every physical descendant of Abraham.

That is such an important point. It means that the Gentiles who believe are also counted as Israel by God and are among the true children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). And that means that the Old Testament is addressed to, as we have already intimated, to God's people in every age - that the promises and warnings of the Old Testament are as much for us as for those who lived then.

In the New Testament, too, those who have the name and who are born into the families of these true Israelites are not all Israel, but only those to whom God gives grace and who believe by grace. That is why the Word of God in a passage like this is so sharp. It must begin to make separation between true Israel and that which has only the name, between those who belong to God's covenant and those who do not, between those whom God the Father loves and those He does not love.

*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.*

Before we look at this verse and what follows, let us notice that the two great examples of covenant unfaithfulness mentioned in Malachi, are faithlessness in office and in the worship of God by the church's leaders and faithlessness in marriage on the part of the ordinary people. When we see that, it is difficult to miss the similarity between Malachi's days and our. If one had to pick two areas in which the church today is unfaithful it would be exactly these two - on the part of the leaders, great unfaithfulness in knowing, teaching, and worshipping according to the Word of God and of using offices in the church for personal advantage and profit, and on the part of the people a complete abandonment of all that the Bible teaches concerning marriage.

The first sin which Malachi condemns, then, is the sin of intermarriage with the heathen. That God speaks of Judah, Israel and Jerusalem is intended to show how widespread this sin was, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah confirm it, showing that it was not only the common people who had committed this sin, but also their priests and leaders, and that this was widespread. Nehemiah mentions the grandson of the high priest and Ezra gives a long list of names, including 27 priests and Levites and 86 others (Ezra 10:18-44).

The sin did not lie in the fact that these women were foreigners and from other nations, but that they were unbelieving and idolatrous. That it was not wrong in itself to marry a woman from outside Israel is seen in the many Old Testament marriages of that kind that God blessed, Joseph and Asenath, Salmon and Rahab, Boaz and Ruth. The difference was, however, that these women had learned to fear and worship Jehovah and had renounced their idolatry and the idolatrous nations in which they had been born: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

When these women were still idol worshippers, then their sin became Israel's sin. Through marriage to Jezebel, Baal worship was introduced into the Northern Kingdom and eventually also into Judah. Nehemiah mentions Solomon's sin and its evil fruits for all Israel: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin."

This sin is condemned also in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 7:39, the rule for Christian marriage is: "only in the Lord." It is as wrong for a Christian to marry an unbeliever as it was for the Jews to marry Moabites, Philistines and Ammonites (Neh. 13:23). Such marriages, contracted deliberately and against the express command of God cannot have His blessing. Nor may

young Christian men and women ever think that in marrying an unbeliever they have the opportunity to convert them and be a good influence on them. The passages in Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi make it clear that the opposite is always true.

The greatness of this evil is seen in the words that Malachi uses to describe it, abomination, treachery, and a profaning of the Lord's holiness. The word "abomination" is the word commonly used in the Old Testament to describe idolatry and reminds us that such marriages are not the way in which idolatry is introduced into the church, but that it is itself a form of idolatry in that it involves departing from the worship and service of God.

The treachery is committed both against God in forsaking His friendship for union and friendship with those who do not love Him, and against God's people in bringing into the church those who will surely lead the church astray. For this reason, too, it is a profaning of His holiness, for it will always be cause of apostasy and failure in the church.

It should be emphasized that marriage, especially Christian marriage is a covenant - a relationship of friendship and fellowship that is part of God's relationship with us. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 5, when speaking of Christian marriage, he adds, "But I speak concerning Christ and the church" (vs. 32). He means that marriage does not just reflect the blessed and wonderful relationship that we have with Christ, but that it is part of that relationship, so that the two cannot really be separated. In marriage man and woman experience something of God's relationship to us and enjoy something of that relationship.

Nor may it ever be thought that the sin of idolatry, which is the danger faced by God's people when such marriages are sanctioned, is a danger that no longer exists. Idolatry is committed not only by bowing down to a stick or a stone, but is the sin of loving, fearing, wanting, serving anything or anyone as much or more than God, a sin which is constantly committed by every person living.

That these heathen women are described as daughter's a strange God, is a reminder of the hold that unbelief and idoltary have in the hearts of men. People love and honor and serve their gods, whether they be statues of Baal and Buddha, unbelieving philosophies, wealth and honor, possessions, or persons of influence. They really become the children of these false gods.

*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.*

In Israel this sin was worthy of being cut off, that is, of death or banishment. In the New Testament it is worthy of excommunication. Nor ought the elders of the church hesitate to censure and if necessary put of the church those who are guilty of these sins. The principle set out in I Corinthians 5:6 applies here also: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Such punishment is simply a recognition of the fact that a person, by such sins, has shown himself to be one who despises God covenant and friendship. The tabernacles of Jacob are a reference to God's promise to live with and among His people and be their God (cf. Rev. 21:1, 2).

God speaks here of master and scholar because it was not only the common people who were guilty of this sin, but the leaders also. Perhaps He even means to point out that those who held such positions in Israel used their influence and study (in the case of scholars) to justify their actions by misinterpreting and misapplying the Word of God, as is usually the case. God speaks also of those who offered an offering, because these Jews were doubly guilty, not only of forsaking God's covenant in intermingling with the heathen, but of maintaining a hypocritical pretense of loving God and fearing Him by continuing to bring their offerings to the temple. None of them, however prominent, would escape God's judgment.

*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.*

With these words the prophet begins to deal with the other sin of which the Jews were guilty, the sin of divorcing. “This ye have done, refers not to what has just been said, but to what follows.

There are those who take this verse as referring to heathen and idolatrous worship and who take the verses that follow as a reference not to actual divorcing and a condemnation of that sin, but as a reference to pagan worship. In other words, the Jews committed the sin of divorce only by forsaking God and worshipping idols. Now it is true that idolatry and intermarriage with the heathen are a kind of spiritual fornication (Ezek. 16), but there is no reason at all to take this passage in other way than as being a literal and explicit condemnation of divorce. Those who take it otherwise usually have a hidden agenda, not accepting the teaching of the Word of God about divorce and remarriage.

The tears referred to, therefore, are the tears and weeping of the Jewish wives who had been injured by this sin, tears that are often shed today as well as then, not only by wives who have been forsaken, but also by husbands and children who have suffered as a result of this sin and whose tears are a testimony against those who continue to commit the sin of divorcing.

The warning is especially forceful since God refuses to receive the worship of those who commit this sin or to show them any good will or favor in their attempts to placate Him.

*14. Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom though hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*

As always the Jews refused to see their sins and to hear the Word of God through Malachi, and so God elaborates on their sins and speaks of the treachery of the Jews against their wives. Each of these mistreated wives is referred to as “the wife of thy youth” not only because the Jews married young, but as a reminder of the fact that they were divorcing the wives to whom they have been married for many years, who had born their children and who now they were forsaking. No less common and no less treacherous are such deeds today.

God emphasizes the seriousness of this sin also by describing each of these wives as “thy companion” and “the wife of thy covenant.” He is referring by the first to the intimacy and fellowship and love that ought to characterize a marriage and usually does in the beginning, but which often, through sin, wanes and even disappears. By describing her as “the wife of thy covenant” he not only reminds the people that marriage is a covenant, but that it is part of God’s covenant. The intimacies of marriage picture the intimacies of God’s relationship to us, the bond of marriage the bond between God and His people.

This is an exceedingly important reminder for then and now. When we are dealing with marriage we are not just dealing with a temporary and human relationship that is of no real spiritual significance, but are dealing with God’s covenant and an aspect of the that covenant. To put it differently, it is gross hypocrisy for anyone to say that he or she loves God and is a friend of God and not do all that can be done to preserve and protect and live in marriage as an institution of God.

God describes Himself as a witness between the Jews and their divorced wives because He alone was able to see and know the real motives behind their actions. There can be no doubt that the Jews excused themselves by saying that they had married young when they did not really know what they were doing and therefore could not be responsible for their actions and could not be expected to live any more with their wives; that they no longer loved their wives and that they were

sure God that God wanted them to be happy; that circumstances had changed and though they had done all they could to maintain their marriages, there was nothing left but to divorce - the same vapid excuses that are heard today.

God knew better. He knew, as the one who searches the heart that their real motives were selfish and wicked - that they were moved only by lust - and that all their excuses were just that and nothing more. He had seen not only their actions, but their hearts and was witness against them, a witness who would make sure that they suffered just punishment for their crimes.

*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.*

Verse 15 is by all accounts the most difficult verse in the whole prophecy. One commentator even gives up and says that “the worst thing that could be done would be to assume that it *can* be understood.”<sup>7</sup> The questions are many: What does it mean that made one? What is the residue of the spirit and who had it? Who was seeking a godly seed and how?, and the verse is indeed difficult, but it is not impossible. In fact, the questions must be answered and the verse interpreted for it lies at the heart of what God is saying in this part of the prophecy.

Perhaps the most common interpretation is that God is holding up to the Jews the negative example of Abraham, their first father, who was married to Sarah, one flesh with her, but took Hagar as his concubine, seeking a godly seed in doing so. The problem with this interpretation is first that Abraham did not divorce Sarah or deal treacherously with her. In fact, it was Sarah’s idea that Abraham marry Hagar. That example, would have had no force with the Jews, therefore.

Another common interpretation, Calvin’s also, refers it to the creation of Adam and Eve and to the fact that God made them, one man and one woman, one flesh in marriage. The example would then be positive and an implicit condemnation of the Jews who were acting against God’s original marriage ordinance in divorcing and remarrying, and separating what God had joined together. That interpretation has little against it exegetically and would parallel what Jesus says in Matthew 19:1-9.

Better, though, is the interpretation which understands the verse in the context of what God has just said about His own relationship to the Jews. The making one, then, is God’s establishing His covenant with the Jews and taking them as His own peculiar people. The seeking of a godly seed, His reason for doing so, that is, that they from among all the heathen nations might be His dear children.

The reference to the residue of the spirit, then, is to the fact that God by His Holy Spirit dwelt among the Jews, but that the riches of His Spirit had not been poured out even on them. The passage would then mean something like this:

Did not God make us one? Did he not separate us from other nations into an isolated unity? Yet this was not done because the blessing was too narrow to be spread over the other nations, or because infinite fulness was exhausted; for the residue of the Spirit was with him. There remained an inexhaustible fulness of spiritual blessing that might have been given to other nations. Why then did he choose by one? It was in order that he might make a seed of God, a nation which he should train to be the repository of his covenant and the stock of his Messiah, a

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<sup>7</sup>Stuart, *Malachi*, in McComiskey, *An Exegetical and Expository Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, vol. 3, p. 1340.

people in which the true doctrine of the unity of God should be cherished amid surrounding polytheism and idolatry, until the fulness of time should come.<sup>8</sup>

The verse then picks up on some of the themes already introduced and develops them.

There is then good application of the verse to the church and to believers today. The verse then reminds us that God has separated us as Christians from the wicked world in which we live in order that we might be holy to Him also in marriage, and that any violation of what God has commanded for marriage is a contradiction of what God has done for us in Christ. It would be a reminder also of the fact that God has made us separate in order to fulfil His own promise to be our God and the God of our children - has separated us, in other words, in order that the seed of the covenant might be brought forth and preserved among us and that in that way God's promise might not fail, His purpose be accomplished and His name glorified and honored.

All this leads to the conclusion: "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth." The warning is a warning not only treachery toward other persons but toward God. That is also the reason why God speaks of taking heed to our "spirits." The spirit of man is that aspect of man's creation that enables him to know God and to live in fellowship with God. It is not only a man's relationship to others that is damaged by marital treachery, but also his relationship to God. May we hear and heed that warning!

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

The attempts to deny the plain teaching of this verse are legion. One commentator lists four basic interpretations three of which turn the passage on its head: (1) that it concerns only pagan worship and has nothing to do with divorce; (2) that it permits or even requires divorce; (3) that it prohibits only "aversion" divorce, that is, divorce for no other reason than that the husband hates his wife and no longer loves her; and (4) that it actually does prohibit divorce. There can be little doubt that the fourth interpretation is the only correct interpretation since the words "putting away" always refer in Scripture to divorce (Matthew 19:3, 8, 9; ).

That the Jews were given to divorce is evident from the question of the Pharisees in Matthew 19 and from Jesus' response. Many of them believed in putting away "for every cause" and Jesus in answering their questions about this speaks of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites going all the way back to the time of Moses: "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives." Things are no different now. The same hardness of heart which Jesus condemns allows for, practices and even blesses divorce.

The truth is, Malachi says, that God hates divorce. He hates it not only because it is a violation of His original marriage ordinance, when he brought together one man and one woman in marriage, but also because it is He Himself who joins them: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Especially, however, He hates it because marriage, as we have seen is both picture and part of His relationship to us. Divorce is not only a violation of the covenant of marriage, but of God's covenant of grace with His people.

It ought to be noted, too, that God is not just condemning what one commentator calls "aversion" divorce. It is not just putting away out of lack of love that is condemned here, but all putting away, and it is condemned exactly because the very act of putting away is something God

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<sup>8</sup>Moore, *Commentary*, p. 137.

never does. As we will learn in chapter 3:6, God never puts away or forsakes, never divorces His people, but is forever faithful to them, even though they are often unfaithful to Him.

It is an act of violence against those who are put away, but an act of violence against God Himself, an act of violence, however, which is usually covered up with a cloak of hypocrisy and piety: God wants me to be happy. God cannot expect me to live singly. It is impossible for me to get along with this woman or this man. I no longer love her (or him). If I no longer love her, God Himself does not expect to maintain a marriage that is only a sham. Your marriage has broken down irretrievably and therefore I, as your minister and counsellor advise you to get a divorce. You are not able to serve God as you should under the present circumstances and if you separate and divorce you will be able to do so once again happily and thankfully.

The question needs to be asked in connection with this condemnation of divorce: “What about Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Does not the Word of God there approve of divorce?” Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reads: “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

It should be noted first of all, that the Deuteronomy passage is not approving of divorce but only laying down certain rules for divorcing in the face of Israel's insistence on divorcing contrary to God's ordinance. This is clear from what Jesus says in Matthew 19:7-9. There He makes it clear that divorce was only “suffered” and that because of the hardness of heart that the Jews had shown. They had hard-heartedly insisted on divorcing, even though the Word of God was against it. And so Jesus also makes it clear that God's original ordinance established marriage as a permanent bond between man and woman, a bond that is broken only by death.

Jesus says: “From the beginning it was not so;” and lays down the law for all time: “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (vs. 6). Deuteronomy 24, therefore, does not contradict Malachi, but rather confirms it, especially when interpreted in light of Jesus' own commentary in Matthew.

Against all this nonsense and hypocrisy God tells the church both of the Old Testament and of the New and its members: “take heed to your spirit.” Your relationship with God Himself is at issue in all this. Don't deal treacherously with your spouses and don't deal treacherously with me. What I have joined don't you dare put asunder. The wife (or husband) you have is the wife (or husband) I have given you. Instead of divorcing, take heed to you spirit, repent of your sins, seek My grace and help, for only in that way can you be blessed.

How this needs to be heard today - that divorce is an act of violence and treachery and that putting away is displeasing to God. “He hateth putting away ought to be written over the door of every church in Christendom today, though it is doubtful that it would be heeded even then, for most will do their own will and fulfil their own lusts, no matter what admonishments, warnings and even threatenings God speaks.

#### **The Fourth Disputation: Chapter 2:17-3:6**

*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?*

Though this last verse of chapter 2 is not unconnected with what precedes, it really belong more to the next discourse than to the previous. What God through Malachi says about the messenger of the covenant is in answer to Israel's question: "Where is the God of judgment?" The chapter division is not, therefore, very happy.

Once again Judah and Israel refuse to hear what God says about their sins. The question, "Wherein..." is not a question that arises from a regenerated heart that knows its own sinfulness, but from the prides and blindness of unbelief. When God speaks of the sins of His people in His Word, those whose hearts are softened by grace to know their own depravity always say, That is me the Word of God is describing. Those who know their sins do not try to excuse them and hide them - do not see only the sins of others instead of their own, but always acknowledge their sins before God.

Here God accuses them, though in vain, of calling evil good and of saying that God delights in evil. We must understand that very few have ever had the courage to do this in so many words, but it happens all the time, nevertheless. In Israel it was happening in various ways.

In relation to the sacrifices the people were saying such things as: "Since God has not kept His Word to us in blessing us, He has no reason to be dissatisfied with the sacrifices we are bringing." "The priests have approved of what we are doing, so it must be right."

In the whole matter of marriage they were also calling evil good by approving both of mixed marriages and of divorcing and by practicing these evils. In some cases they called evil good, simply by not condemning evil. In others by saying that a particular sin, such as that of divorcing, is not displeasing to God or a violation of His commands. In others, as so often happens today, they called evil good by actually arguing that a particular sin is demanded by God.

There is a good example of the latter in the interpretation of those who say that Malachi 2:16, instead of forbidding divorce is actually approving it and even requiring it in certain circumstances. Those who interpret the passage this way translate it: "If he hates, let him divorce!" an interpretation that neither fits the context, nor the grammar of the passage, but is simply an attempt to call evil good.

That sin of calling evil good is committed today when the church says that homosexuality, and and women serving in church office are not sin and especially when she says that these things are pleasing to God - that He loves homosexuals because they "love" one another and loves women in teaching positions and positions of authority in the church because they are doing good work. Others approve of forms of worship that are not commanded in God's Word and argue that they bring in members, please the people, and arouse people's emotions, even though they are contrary to all that Scripture reveals about God.

More often this sin is committed when sins are not dealt with in the church, but overlooked and allowed to prosper - when elders and ministers and members allow even gross sins to remain unrebuked, cursing and swearing and gossip and fornication and theft and Sabbath breaking and gambling, and disobedience to authority, and hatred and drunkenness and dabbling in the occult and a thousand other sins. Seldom are such sins disciplined. Rarely are those who commit them admonished and so, by default the church and its members call evil good.

Not only did Israel commit this sin, however, but they also argued that the sins of which they were guilty could not be sins because God, the God of judgment did not punish them. They said, in other words, "Where is the God of judgment?" They were like the people of whom God speaks in Psalm 50, first condemning them for adultery, theft, lying and slander and then adding: "These things

hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (vs. 21).

This sin, too, is not gone in the church. Everyone of us commits it when we go on in sin, thinking that because we prosper in sin and because God keeps silence and does not uncover our sin, that therefore we can sin with impunity. We commit it when we think that because sinners are not punished, God is no longer a righteous Judge. We commit it when we put all thoughts of the coming judgment out of our minds and do not live as those who must soon stand before His judgment seat and give an account of every deed and word.

*3:1. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

In this first part of chapter 3 we come to the heart of Malachi’s prophecy. Here the Word of God through Malachi becomes not just a word of rebuke and judgment but the gospel of God’s grace. Here is the prophecy of Christ’s coming that lies at the heart of all that Malachi says, for it is His coming that will deliver Israel, both priests and people from their sins and provide both redemption and cleansing.

All this is in answer to Israel’s question: “Where is the God of judgment?” In sending Christ as the messenger of the covenant God reveals Himself as the God of judgment, but also brings salvation through judgment as He had earlier promised to do through Isaiah: “Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness.”

This is always the way that salvation comes. Salvation comes through judgment first of all because God’s judgments against sin must be executed, and the salvation of God’s people is possible only because those judgments are executed on Christ as the representative of His own, rather than on them, that they are saved. But salvation also comes through judgment because the cross brings God’s judgments on the unbelieving and unrepentant world. Jesus Himself announced this in John 12:31: “Now is the judgment of this world.” Because God pours out His wrath against sin at the cross in all its fury, those who are not in Christ and protected by Him come under the wrath and judgment of God and are condemned and destroyed by it.

In this passage which speaks of salvation through Christ, it must be understood that He is the Messenger of the covenant of whom the text speaks. But the text speaks not only of Him but of another messenger who prepares His way, whom we know from the New Testament to be John the Baptist. In fact, verse 1 is quoted in the New Testament primarily in reference to John the Baptist.

Let us note that John, like Malachi (1:1) bears the same name and office as Christ. They are each God’s messenger. That is true because every priest and prophet is sent by God, brings the same divine message concerning salvation in Christ, but is true especially because every messenger of God speaks by the Spirit of Christ. We read of this in I Peter 1:10, 11: “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”

John, as the first messenger of which the text speaks, prepares the way of the messenger of the covenant. John did this by preaching repentance and by speaking of Him who would follow - by announcing Him as the Lamb of God. He preached repentance also by his appearance and by the fact that he did his work in the wilderness, all of which was a testimony against the formalism and disobedience that characterized Israel. He preached of Christ also by his baptizing, all of which point to the work that Christ would do to cleanse God’s people from their sins.

The verse shows us, too, that the one whose way he prepared would be able to save because He would be God Himself come in the flesh. The messenger of the covenant is also called here the Lord. The name, of course is not the same as the name LORD. The first name means "Sovereign Owner and Master" while the second is the name Jehovah. Nevertheless, even the use of the name Lord here identifies Christ as God, for this Lord is called "the Lord whom ye seek." He is, in other words, the God of judgment, whose coming the Jews had doubted and questioned.

Only as the God of judgment, the one who is equal to the Father, fully and completely God, is He able to do what no mere man can do; suffer the judgments of God and finish them, and so bring in everlasting righteousness. Only He can cleanse the sons of Levi, whom even the Word of God through Malachi did not turn from their wickedness.

When Malachi predicts that He would come to His temple, he is not so much speaking of the building, usually referred to as Herod's temple, to which Jesus did come and which He cleansed twice, but is rather speaking of the true temple, His own body, the church, for whom and to whom He would come in order that it might be redeemed and delivered. Jesus Himself made that clear at the time of the first cleansing of the temple. When He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19), He was, verse 21 says, speaking "of the temple of his body."

That He is identified not just as God's messenger, but as *the* messenger of the *covenant*, identifies Him both as the fulfilment of all the promises, the one of whom every other messenger was only a type and forerunner, but also as the one who would by His work bring God's people into the full enjoyment of their covenant relationship with God and who would establish that covenant on everlasting foundations so that the relationship between God and His people could never again be interrupted.

But Christ is the messenger of the covenant not only because He takes away that which separates God and His people, that is, their sin; not only because He, by His Spirit, actually receives them into fellowship with God, but also because He is in His own person the one who unites us to God. He is in one person the one in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily and the one whose bone and whose flesh we are, so that in Him we live and walk with God and are joined to God.

That He is the one in whom we delight stands in stark contrast to the unbelieving question of 2:17. When He does come, unbelief will be cured, doubt is turned to faith, and disbelief to delight, but because He is the revelation of the grace of God.

This is all promised by Jehovah of hosts, the one whom all things serve and in whose army they march. Nothing, therefore, can prevent the coming of the Messenger of the covenant. Nothing can stand in the way of His work. Nothing can spoil or interrupt His work, not the rise of the Roman empire, not the apostasy of Judah in the days following Matthew prophecy, not the rise of Pharisees who would be His bitter enemies, not even the temptations of Satan. All things would serve Him.

*2. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:*

Christ's work is presented here under two similar figures. He is compared to a refiner's fire and to fuller's soap. A refiner's fire is the very hot fire of the man who purifies precious metals by burning away the dross and impurity. Fuller's soap is the soap that is used to bleach and whiten linen and other cloth, and a fuller the man who does that work. The emphasis therefore is on purifying and cleansing.

Christ does the work of fuller's soap and of fire by His death on the cross, for in dying He removes the guilt of those who were given Him by His Father and legally purifies them. He does

the work also through His Spirit when He sanctifies them for then He through the work of the Spirit removes the dross and corruption of sin in them and delivers them from the power of sin. He does that work finally in the judgment day when He through death and the resurrection removes even the presence of sin in His people and welcomes them into everlasting habitations.

In that work not only are His people purified and delivered from the dross of sin, but the wicked world and its ungodliness is also burned up and destroyed by the coming of Christ. In that sense, too, the people of God are purified and cleansed, for they are then delivered from all temptation and from the possibility of sin. This is finished in the judgment day when fire destroys both the world and the wicked, but it begins already at the cross, for as Jesus says: "Now (at the cross) is the judgment of the world" (Jn. 12:31).

The question that is asked in connection with His coming is heard at the end of the world when the final judgment begins to come on the ungodly: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17). Indeed, Revelation 6:17 is quoting Malachi 3:2.

Nonetheless, no one of himself is able to abide the day of Christ's coming or to stand when He appears. All are sinners and are worthy of being destroyed by the judgment of God. Through the coming of Christ that judgment always comes on the wicked world, whether it be the false church or the secular world. It came on Bethlehem. It came on the whole Jewish nation in the rending of the vail at the time of Christ's death. It came on Jerusalem through the Romans when the city was destroyed and the nation scattered. It comes today through the preaching of the gospel when under the gospel men and women are hardened in unbelief. It comes finally and forever when this old world is destroyed and the new kingdom of Christ brought in.

That some do stand, is not because they are different in themselves, but because they are given to Christ and are hidden in Him when these judgment come. They are in Him by faith and therein lies the urgency of the gospel. All who hear must believe, for who shall abide the day of His coming otherwise? All who hear must come to Him, for not otherwise can they stand when He appears, whether it be now through the gospel or once more at the end of all things.

*3. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*

Here Malachi speaks in further detail of Christ's work as Savior under the figure of a refiner of gold and silver, but adds something about the ultimate purpose of this work and states too that it will be "the sons of Levi" who are purified by Him.

Who are these sons of Levi. In the Old Testament, of course, they were the Aaronitic priesthood and the rest of the tribe of Levi including the temple singers, porters and others who assisted the priests in their work. Even in the Old Testament, however, Malachi did not have them in mind exclusively when he spoke these words, but the whole nation which was in great need of purifying. He speaks of the priests, therefore as the leaders and representatives of the people and through them of the whole nation.

But insofar as this looks ahead to the New Testament it is not only a prophecy of their cleansing in every nation, but of the fact that they would all be "sons of Levi," priests and prophets in the New Testament. We have here, then, another prophecy of the priesthood of all believers of which we have already spoken.

The great result of this purifying of the sons of Levi would be, God says, that His offerings are no longer polluted and defiled and despised, but an “offering in righteousness” would be brought to Him by these previously disobedient sons of Levi. Whether or not there was a true and complete purifying of the Old Testament priesthood, following these prophecies of Malachi, we do not know from the sacred record. Nehemiah and Ezra speak of their efforts in this direction, but there is not indication of the extent to which these efforts were successful (cf. Ezra 10:18-24 and Neh. 13:1-31).

In the New Testament, Christ has paid for the sins of His people and having given them His Spirit forms them into a holy and uncorrupted priesthood, a Peter testifies: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5). This holy priesthood is called and ordained by Christ that they may offer a pleasing sacrifice to God, Peter says, echoing the voice of Malachi some 500 years previous.

Of that sacrifice we have already spoken. It is not an offering of beasts to be slain and burnt, but the sacrifice of ourselves to God in worship and holy obedience, a sacrifice which is designed to “show for the praises of Him who calls His people out of darkness into light,” and which proves the power and efficacy of His grace. This sacrifice is offered in the offering of the heart to God, as Calvin’s own motto suggested, “Cor meum tibi offere Domine, prompte et sincere” (“My heart I offer to thee, Lord, promptly and sincerely”), but also of the lips, the hands, and the mind in His service and in thankfulness to Him.

That offering is called an offering in righteousness because it is acceptable to Him, being offered by righteous hands, hearts and lips. That righteousness is not, however, inherent in those who bring this offering, but is the free gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, a righteousness which is theirs not by works, but by faith only. It is a righteousness which results from the refining and purifying work of the Messenger of the covenant.

*4. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.*

That the offering brought to God by a cleansed and renewed priesthood is acceptable to Him the prophet now states more plainly, speaking of God’s delight in their offerings. He would delight in them, Malachi says, as in the days of old and as in former years, referring both to the early history of the nation when the priesthood and sacrifices were first instituted, and to more recent times, those immediately following the return to Canaan, when the offerings of the people were brought with a willing heart and without hypocrisy.

That their offerings were and would be pleasant to Him does not mean that there is anything of value in the blood of calves and goats, but that the sacrifices of the people would be offered in obedience to God and not carelessly as before, and that they would be offered in faith, looking to the coming of Christ as the one who fulfil all sacrifices by the offering of His own body on the tree of the cross. This the people had not done, but would by the grace of God do once again.

We now bring that pleasing offering in the true sense of the word, no longer bringing the types and shadows of Christ at all, but through Him offering ourselves to God. We do that not as an atonement for sin, for atonement has been made and no other sacrifice may now be offered, but we do it in grateful acknowledgment of that perfect sacrifice of Christ.

*5. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Though Christ will come and purify the sons of Levi, His work is limited in its extent. Not all will be purified by Him, but only those who have been given to Him by God. The rest will perish through the judgment which He brings. Indeed, He Himself will be the dividing line between those who are purified and those who perish. It is in Him and through Him that God comes as a swift witness against the sinners mentioned in this verse.

That He comes as a swift witness refers to the fact that He always comes quickly. That may not have seemed to be true in the days following Malachi's prophecy when four hundred years of spiritual darkness came to separate Malachi's prophecy from its fulfilment. It does not always seem so now as we wait through the ages of the New Testament for Christ's return. Nevertheless, He comes quickly.

He comes quickly, first, because He comes not according to our clocks and reckoning of time, but according to the reckoning of God Himself, to whom a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. He also comes quickly in that He does not delay a moment beyond the fulfilment of all that God's has planned - He comes as soon as He can. He also comes quickly in that when the time is ripe He appears suddenly and without warning, the joy of His people and the terror of His enemies.

The sins which He judges are sins not previously mentioned in the book of Malachi, but Malachi shows here that the wickedness of the people was not just in a few matters, but was very widespread, as it always is. Though his main concerns, since he is speaking of covenant unfaithfulness, were the corrupting of the sacrifices and the matter of marriage, he does not overlook the fact that the people were guilty of many other sins.

Nor are these sins uncommon today in the church. There are many who dabble in the occult, in fortunetelling, astrology and in demonology, the sins which Malachi is speaking of when he mentions sorcerers. Indeed, many who practice what they call "spiritual warfare," exorcism, healing, are dealing in an unbiblical way with things that are dangerous and wicked.

The sin of adultery is committed not only by married persons within the church who no longer regard God's hatred of such sins, and often with the tacit approval of their leaders, but is committed especially in the remarrying of those who have been divorced (cf. Matt. 5:31, 32; Matt. 19:9; Rom. 7:3). This especially has not only the approval of the leaders of the churches, but it often suggested and encouraged by them. How hateful the church must then appear to God!

False swearers are not only those who lie under oath but all those who do not keep their pledged word - those whose word cannot be trusted in business, in the church, whether officebearers who do not keep the promises they made when ordained to office, or members who have a reputation for untruth, or even in their own families. God hates such sins because He is the Truth and so is our Lord Jesus Christ. For a Christian to speak anything less than the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is a slap in the face of God and of our Savior.

Those who oppress and steal from the hireling, the widow, the orphans and the strangers, are not only found in society at large, but are those "Christian" employers who do not pay their employees a decent wage, those who take advantage of others especially when those they cheat are easy prey because they do not speak the language or know the customs of the country to which they have come. They are those televangelists who use every opportunity to enrich themselves with the pennies of the widows, who even claim revelation from God in order to bilk the people.

Such are as common today as they were in the days of Malachi, and the Word of God through Malachi makes it clear that God hates all sin. Just because we do not engage in outright theft and

murder, sodomy and blasphemy does not mean we are guiltless in God's sight and need not fear His judgments.

The fear of which Malachi speaks is that holy fear and reverence of God which is the true source of obedience. It cares to please God more than it cares to please men, because it knows how great He is. It counts God's favor of more value than all the pleasures and treasures of this world. It knows that life with Him is the only guarantee of blessing and prosperity, for it knows Him as the LORD of hosts, and it knows too that the only prosperity that matters is spiritual and heavenly.

*6. For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

God concludes this part of the prophecy with a reminder of His own immutability. This may seem out of place at first, but most certainly is not. It is important both for those who stand in jeopardy before God's judgments and those to whom He promises salvation through the coming of Christ to know that He is unchangeable.

Those who continue to live wickedly and show no fear of His judgments must know that He is unchangeable especially because His judgments do not always come immediately. When they do not see those judgments then they begin to think that God is not going to judge them at all and become hardened in their rebellion and disobedience.

Those to whom God promises salvation must also know that He does not change because the revelation of their salvation does not always come immediately either. The believing Jews in these last days of the Old Testament had to wait another four hundred years for the fulfilment of God's word, and we too, who have seen the beginning of that fulfilment are still waiting for its completion. In the face of those who doubt, we must know that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness" (II Pet. 3:9); that "the day of the Lord will come" (II Pet. 3:10).

The emphasis here, however, is on the fact that it is God's own unchangeableness that brings salvation to His people. They deserve to be consumed for they are in themselves no different from the ungodly among whom they live. They also are guilty of the sins mentioned in the previous verse. But they are not consumed because God is unchangeable. He is unchangeable as the God of election who has chosen His people as His own from eternity and whose eternal love for them cannot fail. He reveals His unchangeableness in the sending of the Messenger of the covenant when He does not allow the sins of His people to separate them from Himself, but redeems and delivers them by His Messenger. He shows His unchangeableness in giving them His Spirit and causing the gospel to be preached to them, so that through faith the righteousness of Christ becomes theirs and they stand justified before Him.

Though Israel and Judah thought that God had changed because they were not enjoying His promised blessings, it was not He but they who had changed and departed from Him. Nevertheless, He would save from among them the remnant according to election which He had eternally loved and which He would not cast away; would save them for the glory of His own name and to show that He is Jehovah, the God of the covenant, the one who does not change.

Everyone who knows what it is to stand under the judgment of God and not be consumed, knows the gospel in this verse - knows the reason why he or she is not consumed and why he or she is not an enemy but a friend of God. The name "sons of Jacob" reminds us of God's eternal love for Jacob, a love which was free and unconditional and did not have its origin in what Jacob was or would be but in the good pleasure of God. It reminds us, too, of God's covenant with Jacob, and of the fact that to be a son of Jacob is to be a son of God.

And it must be emphasized once again, that those who are true sons of Jacob are not all His physical descendants, but those only who by election and the cross are children of God, nor are they only His physical descendants, but includes all those who are chosen as he was, loved by God as he was, and who receive from God the same faith in the coming Savior that he had.

### **The Fifth Disputation: Chapter 3:7-12**

*7. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*

*8. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*

*9. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

*10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

*11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

*12. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.*