

MALACHI

prophet to an apostate nation

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Malachi: prophet to an apostate nation

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Author's Notes

- In English, there is no difference in the singular and plural forms of “you”. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the difference is obvious. So, to more accurately convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms, such as *you*, *your*, *yours*, *yourselves*.
- This translation of Malachi, as well as all other Old and New Testament scriptures, is my own. Following standard practice, whenever a word is added to the translation for clarification it is italicized.

- The Malachi text is in bold type. All other scriptures are in regular type.
- Significant parts of the following notes on Malachi are taken from Pastor John’s teaching series on Malachi. For information on obtaining your copy of this audio teaching series, write to:

Malachi Teaching Series
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MALACHI BACKGROUND

Malachi is one of the six “Minor Prophets” whose time is not given within the books they wrote. The five others are Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jonah (though Jonah’s time is suggested in 2Kings 14:25). Years ago, I assigned one of my Old Testament classes with the task of determining when Malachi lived, and we concluded, based only on the material within the book of Malachi, that Malachi was either the earliest or the latest of the Old Testament writing prophets. Good arguments, we found, can be made for both of those dates.

What we know with certainty about the prophet Malachi is that he was an Israelite who lived at some point after Israel conquered the land of Canaan and during a time when the priesthood had become very corrupt and God’s people were not living according to the law that God had given Israel by the hand of Moses.

It is worthwhile to study the prophets even if we do not know precisely when they lived, for as beneficial as it may be to know when a prophet labored for the LORD, such knowledge is not required in order to understand the overall message of all the prophets. All of them condemned wickedness and glorified God for His goodness, power, and wisdom. The true prophets gave notice of the coming Final Judgment and exhorted all people to live according to the law of God, just as all true ministers of God in this covenant exhort people now to live according to the Spirit of God.

The law was the guide that God gave Israel under the first covenant, and the holy Spirit is the guide that God gives us in this covenant:

Hebrews 8 (quoting Jer. 31:31-33)

- 8b. Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
9. not the kind of covenant that I made with their fathers in the day I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in my covenant, and so, I had no regard for them, says the LORD.
10. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will put my laws into their mind and write them on their heart, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Spiritual issues remain the same, from generation to generation. In this covenant, as in the old, God still offers a merciful response to the human problem of sin. The only difference now is that God's beloved Son has ushered in a new and better covenant by which "whosoever will", even the vilest of sinners, may receive forgiveness for his sins.

To persuade transgressors to repent and to exhort the faithful to be steadfast has been the task of God's servants throughout human history, whether they be the prophets of ancient Israel or God's ministers today. The true prophets were sent to point them all, sinners and saints alike, to the way of the law, and God's true ministers today are sent to point both sinners and saints to the way of the Spirit. But as the book of Malachi amply shows, Jesus' comment concerning the path to eternal life, "few there be who find it", applied to ancient Israel as it does to our lives today.

The following is what Malachi said to his fellow Israelites – and to us.

Malachi 1

¶1. The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi:

NOTE #1: The word of the LORD is a sweet relief to the righteous, a light for their path (as David said), and an answer to their prayers. The word of God comes to lift burdens; however, the word of God becomes a burden for God's ministers to bear when the people to whom God is sending the message do not want to hear it. And in such cases, God has to encourage and strengthen His messengers so that they are able to bear the burden of His word. Young Jeremiah and Ezekiel are two examples of receiving this help from God.

Jeremiah 1

4. And the word of the LORD came to me saying,
5. "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came out of the womb I sanctified you. I ordained you to be a prophet to the nations."
6. Then I said, "Oh no, Lord Jehovah! Behold, I don't know how to speak because I *am* a boy."
7. But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I *am* a boy', for you will go to all that I send you to and you will say whatever I command you.
8. Do not be afraid of their faces because I *am* with you to deliver you, says the LORD."
9. Then the LORD stretched out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth."

Jeremiah did not jump for joy when the word of God came to him. He was a child, but he was old enough to know that the elders to whom God would be sending him would not likely humble themselves to the voice of one so young as he. Without encouragement from God, he simply could not have done what God sent him to do.

Ezekiel was not a child when God first spoke to him; he was almost thirty years old. Still, the fierce opposition that he knew he

would face would have been a stumbling block to him, had not God encouraged his heart to believe that He would be with him.

Ezekiel 2

1. And He said to me, “Son of man, stand to your feet, and I will speak to you.”
2. And the spirit entered into me as He spoke to me and stood me up on my feet. And I heard Him speaking to me.
3. And He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to the nations, the rebels who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me, to this very day.
4. For the children are stiff-necked and hard-hearted. I am sending you to them, and you will say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord Jehovah.’
5. And whether they listen or whether they refuse (for they are a rebellious house), they will know that a prophet has been among them.
6. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them and their words. Do not be afraid though briars and thorns are with you, and you dwell among scorpions. Do not be afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their faces, though they are a rebellious house.
7. But speak my words to them whether they listen or whether they refuse for they are rebellious.
8. But you, son of man, listen to what I am saying to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and devour what I give to you.
9. And I looked, and behold, a hand was extended toward me and lo, in it was a scroll.
10. And He spread it out before me, and it was written on the front and the back, and written on it were lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Ezekiel 3

4. And He said to me, “Son of man, go! Come to the house of Israel and speak my words to them.
5. For you are not being sent to a people of an unintelligible speech and a difficult language, but to the house of Israel.
6. Not to many nations of an unintelligible speech and a difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I had sent you to them, they would have heard you.
7. But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because the whole house of Israel are hard-headed and hard-hearted.
8. Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads.
9. As an adamant harder than flint, I have made your forehead. Do not fear them. Do not be dismayed at their faces, though they are a rebellious house.”

After the resurrected Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus and stopped him from doing further damage to the body of Christ, he showed Paul what great suffering he must endure for the gospel’s sake (Acts 9:15–16). But Paul, once he became a believer, would have already expected brutal persecutions, for he himself had, to that time, lived on the other side of the fence, brutally persecuting believers. Of course, the Lord, ever merciful, would not have sent Paul out to face this world with nothing but visions of the sufferings that lay ahead. He would have also comforted and encouraged his heart with the promise of his presence. Not only in the beginning, however, but also in Paul’s latter years, we find the Lord comforting and encouraging him in dire circumstances (Acts 27:21–24).

All who are sent to bear the burden of the word of the LORD must be given encouragement by the LORD. The resistance to the

Spirit is just too great for any man to bear otherwise. The Father even had to keep His Son from being discouraged while he was laboring here in this wicked world:

Isaiah 42

4. He will not faint, nor be discouraged, until he has established justice on the earth, and the isles will wait for his law.
5. Thus says the LORD God, Creator of the heavens and He who stretched them out, He who shaped the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and a spirit to those who live in it:
6. "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness, and I will hold your hand and keep you hidden. And then, I will give you for a covenant for the people, for a light of the nations."

This, then, is the first lesson we learn from Malachi's opening statement: the word of the LORD is a very great burden to those who do not want to hear it.

NOTE #2: When Jesus told his disciples that he had truth to tell them which they could not yet bear (Jn. 16:12), there was more to it than their being unable to *hear* what he had to say. Jesus was also saying that they were not yet able *to believe and tell others* the truth he still had for them. When Jesus lent them his healing power and sent them out to call upon the Jews to repent and believe the gospel (Mt. 10:1-8), they were able to bear that word to God's people. But New Testament doctrine was, at that time, too much for them to believe and pass on; to do that requires a kind of strength they did not yet possess. This fact of their spiritual condition tells us that a greater spiritual strength is needed to preach the true gospel of Christ than is needed to do anything the disciples did before Pentecost, including healing the sick and raising the dead.

Any time you hear a man of God proclaiming the New Testament truth which Jesus could not speak to his disciples before they were born again at Pentecost, you are witnessing a man doing something that no man, in himself, can do. If he is declaring the hidden wisdom of God in Christ, he is speaking from beyond him-

self, from beyond the power of human nature. Non-sanctified humans cannot preach the true gospel; they can hardly even bear to hear it. If any unsanctified soul could have done so, it would have been Jesus' disciples, but none of them could. The gospel of Christ is completely foreign to human nature, and is so much in opposition to human nature that man has to be delivered from his nature to even want it, much less be able to declare it to others. The New Testament is a supernatural thing; it is not possible that humans could have brought it about. God had to send His Son to make it available, and to make available to us the power to be able to bear it. We humans cannot bear to receive or to pass on to others the things of the Spirit unless we partake of God's divine nature (2Pet. 1:4), and we do this only by partaking of the holy Spirit that God gives to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ.

My father, "Preacher Clark",¹ frequently reminded his congregation that everything Jesus commanded his disciples to do was impossible for them to do without a change of nature, whether it was to raise the dead or to love each other as he had loved them. His point was that nobody living "in the flesh" is pleasing God, or can please Him (Rom. 8:7), and that only those who "walk in the Spirit" will be saved in the end (Rom. 8:13-14; Mt. 24:13).

Men can, and often do, teach and prophesy falsely, but there is no such thing as preaching falsely² because preaching can only be done by the power of God, which is never false. Most false teachers and false prophets call what they do "preaching", but God never does, for He knows that no man can preach unless He sends him to do so, as Paul pointed out when he said: "How can they preach unless they be sent?" (Rom. 10:15). To a minister not sent by God, the true gospel is impossible to bear; such a man will not – because he cannot – preach it.

Every individual who enters into the kingdom of God must first be called by God into His grace; only then can the gospel seem right to anyone. And those who are faithful to their calling will find themselves continually increasing in the knowledge of God. John wrote to some faithful saints, "You have an anointing from

¹ More on his life can be found at PioneerTract.com.

² The King James Version got it right by never mentioning "false preaching" or "false preachers".

the Holy One, and you know all things” (1Jn. 2:20). Those to whom John was writing were not especially anointed saints; they were simply children of God who were living under the anointing of God that comes with the new birth. Whenever God’s children follow the leading of the Spirit, they increase in the knowledge of God, and in time, the Spirit of God will lead them into all truth (Jn. 16:13). This growth in spiritual knowledge does not leave out the love of God; on the contrary, when the love of God “is poured out within our hearts by the holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5), it leads us to the knowledge of God. When the love of God fills our soul, we are made able to understand, to believe, and to profess before others anything Jesus has to say:

1Corinthians 13

6. Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth.
7. Love passes over all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 8a. Love never fails.

The love of God has no problem with the doctrine of God; it rejoices every time it hears it. How refreshing it must have been for the apostle Paul when he first preached to the Galatians:

Galatians 4

- 14b. You embraced me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus himself.
- 15b. I bear you witness that if it were possible, you would have dug out your eyes and given them to me.

Unfortunately, that did not remain the case because false teachers came in behind Paul and persuaded his Galatian converts to add ceremonies to their faith. And at that point, the word of God for the Galatians which God had given Paul became a very heavy burden for Paul to bear. False teachers had come and persuaded them of a perverted version of the saving gospel of Christ.

Galatians 4

16. Have I now become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

- ...
19. My little children, for whom I am suffering labor pains again until Christ be formed within you,
 20. I desire to be with you now and to change my tone, for I am unsettled about you.

There is surely a good reward for God's children who continue in His love so that they remain able and willing, after their conversion, to receive the word of God gladly and do not make the word of the LORD a burden for His servants to bear. Such righteous souls help God's servants bear their burden with joy. The Galatians did not continue in God's love but were seduced away from "the simplicity that is in Christ". May we be wiser than that.

NOTE #3: Those who make the word of God the heaviest burden to bear have always been, like the Galatians to whom Paul wrote, children of God who no longer want to hear what their heavenly Father has to say to them. Those who have abandoned the faith and are "twice dead" show the world who God's true messengers are, and they lead the world to them, just as Judas did Jesus. Sinners of the world do not know who the true servants of God are, but backslidden children of God know, and whenever those fallen saints direct the world's hatred of the true God against God's true messengers, as the Jews directed the Romans' hatred against Jesus, it results in the cruelest forms of persecution. The Romans would never have crucified Jesus if God's people, including one of Jesus' own disciples, had not pressured them into it. Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent (Mt. 27:24-25) and would have set him free, but God's own people put so much pressure on him that he gave in to their wicked demands.

1:2. I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD. Yet, I loved Jacob.

NOTE #1: When a person ceases to love, he ceases to feel loved, even if he is loved. A person can be loved only through the love that he himself possesses, and if he possesses none, he cannot

take love in, for he has no receptor for the love that others may have for him. In spite of all that God had done for Israel (see Rom. 9:4–5), Israel could not believe that God had loved them because Israel had ceased to love God. Israel no longer recognized the promises God made to their fathers as love because they no longer loved the One who gave those promises. They did not love the distinction of being God’s chosen people because they did not want to be different from all the other nations of earth. They did not see the prophets as love from God because they hated their message. They no longer considered their rescue from Egyptian slavery, or the angels’ food God gave them in the wilderness, or the gift of Canaan’s land as love because they had lost their love for the God who had freely done for them all those things, and more.

NOTE #2: Sin causes us to judge wrongly because sin changes the meaning of things in our minds. Those who live in sin do not understand what sin is because their darkened heart denies the truth about sin. Sin blinds those who live in it. Sin redefines words like “righteousness” and “salvation” and “love” so that sin no longer appears to be sin. Sinners do not repent of their sins because they do not believe the truth about what sin is. Once Israel became sinful, they redefined “love”, and with their new definition of love, they could say with confidence that God had never loved them because they knew that God had never loved them *as they defined love*.

Sin redefines every word in a person’s mental dictionary so that the words God speaks do not mean to that person what they mean to God. This is why sinners cannot understand the truth. To those who have wandered out of the path of righteousness, the wise seem foolish and the foolish seem wise, good seems evil and evil seems good, love seems like hatred, and hatred seems like love. God hates by refusing to correct, by turning someone over to his stubborn heart’s desire (see Ps. 106:15), but “whom the LORD loves, He chastens, and He scourges every child whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6). However, to the mind of sinners, chastisement seems hateful and cooperation with their evil is to show them love.

Backslidden Israel had come to think love meant that if God loved them, then He would bless and enrich and protect them even if they did not keep His commandments. Theirs became the under-

standing of love that characterizes a pampered, spoiled teenager who says to his parents, “If you really loved me, you would let me _____ (fill in the blank).” “If you really loved me, you would buy me a _____ (fill in the blank).”

Israel’s heart was so perverse by the time Malachi was sent to them that in their hearts, they were saying to God, “If you really loved me, you would let me have other gods before you,” or “you would let me steal,” or “you would let me covet my neighbor’s wife and possessions.” Israel was saying in their hearts to God, “If you really loved me, you would make me rich and protect me from foreign invaders.” Instead, God was commanding them to be holy and to love their neighbors as themselves, and He sent famine and disease and foreign armies into their land to correct them when they failed to do so. That is why they replied to Malachi, “How has God loved us?”

In Malachi’s time, Israel’s definition of love was entirely in harmony with the world’s definition of love. I pray to God that our love for Him will stay alive so that we will receive His love for us – in whatever form that love comes to us. I assure you that it will come in a form that you will not recognize if it comes when you are “in the flesh” instead of “in the Spirit”. There will never be a reconciliation between the holy Spirit and the nature of the flesh, and if you cease walking in the Spirit and turn again to the flesh from which Jesus has rescued you, you are not going to understand the word of God as well as you used to. And when God speaks, the flesh will start saying to you, “That can’t be right because it is not love” – and you will believe the flesh. In the end, you will no longer consider the things God says and the things God does to be good, and you will trade your “pearl of great price” for one of the world’s glittering trinkets and die, after “enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season” – all the while saying in your heart to God, “If you loved me, you’d let me sin in peace.”

God has loved us. And if we continue to walk humbly in His love, we will always be able to receive His love and hold on to it as the pearl of great price that it is.

NOTE #3: This is the first of Israel’s seven blatant rejections of the judgment of God through Malachi. God tells them He has loved them, but they act as though the idea is nonsense, and they

demand an explanation. The word of God seems wrong to them because their minds have been thoroughly corrupted by sin. Those who have a pure heart and a clear conscience understand the word of God when He speaks to them about their life.

1:3. And I hated Esau and have made his mountains a wasteland and his inheritance a wilderness for jackals.

NOTE: To understand this comment, we must define “hate” as God does. In saying that God “hated” Esau, Malachi was not talking about the irrational maliciousness that humans know as hate. God did not despise Esau; in fact, He blessed him (Gen. 27:38-40). God “hated” Esau by preferring Jacob over Esau and by choosing Jacob over Esau. This is the righteous kind of hatred Jesus said believers must feel for everyone, including themselves, if they hope to be saved in the end.

Luke 14

26. If any man come to me and does not hate his father and mother, and his wife and children, and his brothers, sisters, and, indeed, even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Jesus did not mean that we are to despise our fathers, mothers, and other relatives; he meant that we are to prefer God’s will to all human will (including our own) and that we are to choose His ways over all human ways (including our own). Jesus was an example of this in the garden of Gethsemane when he said to his Father “not my will, but yours be done” (Lk. 22:42).

In time, Esau’s descendants (the nation of Edom) provoked great wrath from God (read Obadiah), and they suffered the consequences of their wickedness:

1:4. Because Edom says, “We are beaten down, but we will rebuild the ruins,” thus says the LORD of hosts: They may build, but I will tear down, and people will call them, “The wicked land” and “The people against whom the LORD has everlasting indignation”.

NOTE #1: When people do not believe that God is in charge of the circumstances of their lives, they resist the chastisement of God as coming from another power. But “there is no power but of God” (Rom. 13:1); that is, God is in charge of what those powers can and cannot do. God instituted those powers, and they continue only by His determination.

If God does not afflict, then how does He chastise? If our suffering is determined for us by evil men or by Satan, then who gives it a good purpose, as in the case of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2Cor. 12:7)? Or who is working all things together, both the good and the bad, for our good (Rom. 8:28)? Edom did not believe that Israel’s God had sent destruction upon them, and so they boasted that they were going to rebuild all that had been destroyed.

NOTE #2: Just like the boastful Edomites, many in Israel did not believe that God was responsible for their sufferings, but they boasted even more arrogantly than Edom did. For when God sent destruction upon Israel, they not only boasted against God that they would rebuild their ruins, but they also boasted that they would make their buildings even better than before: “The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars” (Isa. 9:10).

Deeply wicked people are so blind to the truth that they go beyond refusing God’s correction; they boast of their rebellion against it.

1:5. Your eyes will see, and you will say, “The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!”

NOTE: When God gives His people eyes that truly see, they begin to understand that God not only chastens those whom He loves but that He is the righteous Judge of all creation. This is why Abraham called God “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25). The Psalmist also acknowledged the fact that God chastens all the nations, not just Israel (Ps. 94:10).

1:6a. A son honors *his* father, and a slave, his master. If I am a Father, where is my honor?

NOTE: This (and Malachi 2:10) shows how the fatherhood of God was understood in the Old Testament. It is like an earthly father and master, as head of his household, only on a grander scale. It is not a reference to God as actually being the Father of the Israelites. No one at the time knew that God really was a Father with a real Son with Him in heaven.

- 1:6b. And if I am a Master, where is my respect? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise my name! But you say, "How have we despised your name?"**
- 7. By offering defiled bread upon my altar! But you say, "How have we defiled you?" When you think of the table of the LORD as contemptible.**
 - 8. For when you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Try bringing it to your governor! Will he accept you or show you any favor? says the LORD of hosts.**
 - 9. (Seek now, I beg you, the favor of God, that He will be gracious to us!) But with such from your hand, will you find favor with him? says the LORD of hosts.**

NOTE #1: Verses 6 and 7 contain the second judgment from God that Israel's ministers flatly rejected. God tells them that by worshipping contrary to His commandments, they are despising His name, but they are indignant at the suggestion. They cannot understand how God feels about what they are doing because they have lost their connection with Him. Every messenger of God in the Bible proclaimed the truth that if God is not worshipped the way He says to worship Him, then the worship offered to Him is abhorrent to Him, even prayer and sacrifice if they are offered by the disobedient (Prov. 15:8; 21:27; 28:9).

NOTE #2: There can be no doubt at all that Malachi, like many other true prophets, was rejected and persecuted by his fellow Israelites. In the time he lived, Malachi was not an honored man in

Israel; he was despised just as the holy things of God's temple were despised. Israel and her priests would not have despised the *things* of God while they honored the *men* of God.

NOTE #3: Every true minister of God in the Old Testament understood that humans did not know how to worship God acceptably, that we have to receive from God instructions as to how to worship Him. Every wise and faithful child of God now also understands that human ideas about how to worship God are no good. Faithful Israelites loved the fact that God had condescended to come down out of heaven on Mount Sinai and show Moses how they were to worship Him acceptably so that their sins would be forgiven. Every faithful minister of God under the law understood that, and every faithful minister of God in this covenant understands it. No proud person can understand it because to understand it requires humility. We must humble ourselves to say, "God, I don't know how to please you. Help me!"

We are extraordinarily blessed to have had the Son of God condescend to us on earth and tell us, "True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23–24). We are blessed to know that! We are blessed to understand that the ceremonies of the law were mere figures of something else – they were not meant to last forever! We are blessed to understand that the baptism of John was a figure of a baptism that would last forever, the baptism of the holy Ghost! We are blessed to know that the circumcision of Abraham was only a figure of something that would last forever – Jesus' circumcision of the heart by the Spirit of God!

"We are the circumcision," Paul wrote, "who worship in the Spirit of God, and boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (Phip. 3:3). Paul described that circumcision in Romans 2:28–29 when he said, "For he is not a Jew who is one externally; nor is circumcision external, in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one internally, and circumcision is in the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God."

That is the circumcision which makes us – our lives and our worship – acceptable to God. What Abraham's circumcision pointed to is the baptism of the holy Ghost because when we re-

ceive the baptism of the holy Ghost, fleshly entanglements are cut out of our hearts. The holy Ghost baptism cuts out of our hearts all worldly attachments and makes us citizens of a heavenly kingdom and members of the family of God. And because we are circumcised that way, we can ask, as Jesus did, “Who is my mother, and my brother, and my sister? Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt. 12:48–50; Lk. 8:21).

Under the Old Covenant, a person had to observe ceremonies, had to walk in them, and had to worship in them or – what did God say? – “You are despising my name.” God was telling Israel that they were thinking of His table as contemptible because they were not using His table as He said to use it; they were offering something on it, unsanctified bread, that was contrary to the law.

Likewise, in this covenant, we are despising God’s name and thinking of His table as contemptible when we partake of a carnal communion ceremony. Ceremonies have nothing to do with the holy Ghost; they have nothing to do with this covenant! Jesus said, “Those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:23-24). So then, if it is God’s chosen way of worship, let us worship Him that way, and that way alone! If we add a water baptism to the spiritual baptism of Christ, then, in God’s view, we are despising His name. From God’s perspective, we are thinking of His Son’s spiritual baptism as if it were contemptible *because it is only one of the baptisms we practice*; it is not as precious to us as it is to God. If it were, the Son’s baptism would be the only baptism we trust.

What is lacking in God’s baptism of the holy Ghost or with God’s spiritual communion, that we should partake of any other kind? The communion of the holy Ghost is the table of the LORD in this covenant, and we are treating that precious, holy table with contempt whenever we add a ceremony to it. Participating in a Christian communion service is treating the LORD’s table, the table of the Spirit, as contemptible. What Christians need to do is to get drunk on the new wine of the holy Ghost, and they’ll forget about earthly wine.

Where I am pastor, we do not despise the name of the LORD. We honor the name of the LORD by not adding a ceremony to what

He's given us in Christ. When He baptizes us with the holy Ghost into the body of Christ, why would we want to join a church as if being a member of the body of Christ is insufficient? There is not a Christian church on the planet that came from God. They are all of man. That is why the holy Ghost is crying out, "Come out of her, my people! Stop despising my name! Stop treating my Spirit like it's a spare tire to be used only once in a while. The Spirit is the whole car! Without it, you're not going anywhere!"

Do not despise what came to us in the name of Jesus. The holy Ghost, which was sent to us in Jesus' name, was not an addition to the law's ceremonies; it was sent to fulfill them and finish them, to take their place and to give us something far better – eternal life! And if we get enough of that Spirit of life within us, we will not even want a ceremonial religion. God's people are in the ceremonial religion of Christianity now because they do not have enough of God's life. If they had enough of this life of God within them, they would come out of that death. Let's not quench this life in order to carry out that ceremony. Let's not consider His communion to be contemptible. Let's not quench the Spirit to practice an earthly communion ceremony. Let's love Him! Let's love His table! Let's honor His name!

These things in Malachi and in the other prophets are written for our admonition, Paul said. They're written for our learning. What, then, are we supposed to learn from them? What is the admonition that the LORD has provided for us in Malachi's words if it's not something about recognizing the name of the LORD and honoring it?

We do not honor Jesus by having a foot-washing ceremony. We despise him by doing that. That's not what he was instituting. He washed his disciples' feet, and the men whose feet he washed did not understand what he was doing. He washed their feet the same night that he broke bread and handed it to them, and they didn't understand that, either. He told them they didn't understand. Peter wasn't going to let Jesus wash his feet, and he said to Peter, "You don't know what I'm doing." Now, Peter had enough sense to know that Jesus was washing his feet. We know that because Peter asked Jesus not to wash his feet. But Peter didn't know what Jesus was really doing. Likewise, the vast majority of God's peo-

ple around this world don't know what Jesus was doing. He was acting the part of a servant when he washed the disciples' feet. And when he was passing out the bread and the wine, he was acting out the part of a servant, and he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." He did not mean, "Carry this on as a dead ceremony in remembrance of me." He meant, "Get in this spirit of humility that I live in and act toward one another the way I act toward you, and do it in remembrance of me, the greatest servant of all!"

May God open up the eyes of His people! May He open the ears of His people so that they can hear His call to come out of Christianity and walk with Him in the Spirit! And may God help us to do what we can to hasten that glad day! We are all less than we should be in Christ because so many of our brothers and sisters are blind and in bondage to the religious system called Christianity. That is why I must keep saying, "Let my people go! Let my people go!" God's people do not belong in a Christian communion service. They do not belong in Christian choir robes. They do not belong behind Christianity's stained glass. They do not belong in those Christian foot-washing ceremonies. They do not belong in that Christian baptismal pool. They do not belong there! That is why I say, "Let them go! Christianity, let my people go!" May God let it happen!

God may have to strike Christianity with plagues to make His people willing to go, but that will be a good thing for those who love God sincerely. God has done something like that before. He loved His people enough to plague the whole nation of Egypt, which helped make the Israelites willing to leave the country. It took both Moses pulling and Pharaoh pushing to get God's people out of Egypt. But whatever it takes, the benefits they received out there in the desert alone with God more than made up for all the things they enjoyed in Egypt – not to mention their deliverance from slavery. We are not created in Christ Jesus to be the slaves of men. We are created in Christ Jesus to be the servants of God.

The doctrine of Christ sets us free from the flesh's ignorance of holy things, and its lusts. It sets us free from spiritual darkness, from confusion, from misunderstanding the words of God. It creates within us God's dictionary for what His words mean. When God uses the word "baptism", what is *He* talking about? He is

talking about what His Son does to people, not to what John the Baptist did or other men can do to people with earthly water. The true doctrine puts us on the same page with Jesus. Let's honor His name by refusing to dishonor what has come to us in His name. Paul even said that we can adorn the doctrine of Christ (Tit. 2:10). Let's do that. Let's adorn the baptism of Christ and the communion of Christ by honoring his baptism alone, and by honoring his communion alone to save us. Let's adorn the gospel with righteousness and humility and love.

God is not a beggar, so eager to be praised that He accepts any kind of worship from any kind of spirit. He did not need the animals that He commanded Israel to sacrifice. He said, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you. . . . For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10-12). He did everything that He did for Israel's good, not His own! Israel needed a way to get to God. Before God gave them His law, they had no guide to His throne. But God gave it to them! Wasn't that love? Wasn't that guidance precious?

In this New Testament, God made the sacrifice instead of commanding us to make one, and He made the greatest sacrifice that He could make; He sacrificed His precious Son. And the Son, resurrected from the dead, ascended to the Father and asked Him to give us, not another set of ceremonies, but eternal life – the same kind of life that the Father shared with him when He created him. And then, when the Father accepted the Son's sacrifice in heaven and gave him his request, the holy life of God was poured out from the Father's breast onto about 120 souls gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. When it was poured out, that eternal life made a noise "like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them divided tongues like fire, and it sat upon each one of them, and they were all filled with the holy Spirit, and they began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:3-4). And they began to be able to bear to hear and declare the word of God.

Let's honor that! Let's adorn the blessings of God that His Son purchased for us with his blood! Let's make Jesus glad that he suffered and died. Let's make the Father glad that He sent His precious Son into this world to give his life for us. Let's not make

them wonder if it was all done for nothing. Let's live right, obey God, and not despise His name by polluting His pure worship by adding Christian ceremonies to it.

Like Israel's ministers, who sarcastically asked Malachi, "What are you talking about, 'despising God's name'? What are you talking about, 'contemptible'?", most of God's people react with indignation when they are told that to carry out Christian baptism in water is to despise God's baptism in spirit, the baptism that His Son died to make available to us. It's the reaction of God's people now whenever God's ministers warn them that when they celebrate Christian communion, they are despising the communion of the holy Ghost. The baptism, the communion, and the feasts that we experience now in the Spirit come in the name of Jesus because the Spirit itself came in his name (Jn. 14:26), and to add to God's spiritual worship a ceremonial baptism and a ceremonial communion is to treat Jesus' baptism and communion as contemptible.

God is not going to accept a diseased sacrifice, a blemished sacrifice, or a polluted sacrifice. Worship must be His way, or it is unclean! We who have His Spirit are going to give Him our best, or we will receive His worst, and our best is not what *we* think is best but what He says to do.

Is that too hard a saying, when God has given us His own Son's life? Let's treat the grace of God with honor! Let's bring honor to it by the way we live. Let's not pollute God's holy way of worship that He made possible by the sacrifice of His dear Son. Let's be content with Jesus. Within ourselves, we are all ignorant of how to worship God acceptably. We all need a guide to know how to worship God rightly, just as the Israelites did before God gave them the law, but if we humble ourselves to worship God as Jesus said we must worship Him, our worship will always be acceptable.

1:10. Who among you would even close the doors or kindle a fire on my altar without pay? I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not be pleased with an offering from your hand.

NOTE: Because the theme of doing things God's way plays such a large role in Malachi's book, and because the priests and Levites are a special focus in it, God's way of caring for the needs

of His ministers is emphasized, beginning here, at Malachi 1:10. God instituted a perfect system for supplying the needs for His ministers, and for a man to seek a ministerial position for pay is not it. The call of God is a call to His way of doing things, and it is not God's way for a man to rent himself out as a pastor.

Being a pastor is not a job; it is a calling, and to hire a man to act as a pastor, or to be hired to act as a pastor, is evil. That was the sin of Balaam, who gave spiritual counsel to the Moabite king, Balak, in order to earn the wages that Balak offered him (Num. 22–24; 31:15-16). It is a sin so egregious that in the last book of the Bible, Jesus was still condemning those who followed Balaam's example:

Revelation 2

14. Yet, I have a few things against you because you have there some holding the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to lay a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat food offered to idols and to commit fornication.

Balaam taught those things to Balak and the Moabites for money. He got out from under the anointing of God that was upon him and started teaching the Moabites what they wanted to hear, for money. He became a performer, playing the role for an agreed-upon price.

Many who grew up in the abomination of Christianity will remember men who came to their church to deliver what is called a "trial sermon". What these men were doing was auditioning for a part that they wanted to play. Sometimes, different ministers would come on successive Sundays to deliver their trial sermons, all of them hoping to please the audience enough to be hired as their pastor. That is the way it is within the religious institution of Christianity, but in all of human history, God has never sent anybody to do a trial anything. He has never auditioned to be God, and His ministers have never auditioned to be His ministers. With God, everything is real to start with, and that is why men who audition for the role of pastor cannot possibly be pleasing to God. The very reason their audition is called a "trial sermon" is that men have invited them to audition for a job. If God had sent them, it

would not be a trial sermon; it would be a real one. It is only where men are hired to minister that congregations put them on trial to see whether those men can sufficiently please them.

Paul saw it coming:

2Timothy 4

3. The time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up teachers for themselves according to their own desires, having itching ears.

Is there anybody who can picture Malachi auditioning to be a prophet for Israel? Is that the way of God? Has it ever been the way of God? If a congregation were wise enough to know who God wanted to be their pastor, they wouldn't even need him. Nothing demonstrates the mass confusion that exists within the religion of Christianity than congregations choosing and hiring their pastors. Any man hired by a congregation knows from the start that he had better not tell those people anything they do not want to hear. From the start, if he is sincere, he feels great pressure not to acknowledge what he hears from God if God gives him things to say that his employers – the congregation – do not want to hear. To do so may cost him his job. Such a man knows that he had better not be a Malachi, or an Ezekiel, or a Jeremiah, called by God, ordained by God, and sent by God. Instead, he must be a good employee if he wants to keep his job.

There are good, sincere men entangled in the wicked Christian system of hiring and firing ministers. I have met some of them and I loved them, but it is wrong for them to rent themselves out to please a congregation, and in their hearts, they know it.

Most of God's children can scarcely believe what God has done with men like me and with saints like those who meet at my house because they've never experienced God putting a congregation together with a pastor of His choice, not theirs. There is not a person in my congregation that I recruited. God caused us to meet over the years, one here and two there. And after we met, we discovered that God had created within our hearts a common love for the truth, and that common love of the truth knit our hearts together to serve Christ. The body of Christ is the work of God, not

a work of man, and that truth applies to the world-wide body of Christ as well as to local bodies of believers. Just like the new birth, a true body of believers is created “not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1:13). It is the work of God or it is just another worthless religious organization.

My congregation did not hire me and they cannot fire me. Such a thing does not exist in God’s kingdom. We meet in my home, which has become their home in Christ. In fact, we are so close that I cannot think of one of them who knocks when they come into my house. We have been made a family by God, a real family that knows and loves one another. We really feel like brothers and sisters. If God’s children would just believe what He has done here among us, they might begin to experience the heretofore unimagined, sweet benefits of unity in a body of believers, the unity that is in the Spirit, outside the white-washed walls of Christianity.

Jesus warned his disciples that a man who is hired to watch over God’s sheep will not stay with them when hard times come upon the flock – not necessarily because he is wicked but simply because the sheep are not his:

John 10

12. But the man who is hired, and is not a shepherd, whose sheep are not his own, sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and flees, and the wolf carries them off and scatters the sheep.
13. The hireling flees because he is a hireling, and it doesn’t matter to him about the sheep.

If the sheep belong to the shepherd, the shepherd has nowhere to go when the wolf approaches. He will stay and defend the sheep because they are his; they are his responsibility, his livelihood, and their spiritual well-being secures his reward from God in the end. Being hired to be a pastor does not give a man the anointing to care for God’s flock. A seminary degree does not give a man what God’s sheep need to be healthy spiritually. Only God does that. The Christian system of hiring and firing ministers can never produce acceptable fruit to God. Because my congregation did not

hire me, I am free to hear whatever the Master says and to teach it, and they have learned that I will do so. In fact, they love it that way because that is the way of Christ, and they love him. I am their servant in Christ, but he alone is my employer.

1:11. From the rising of the sun until its going down, my name *will be* great among the Gentiles, and in every place will incense be brought to me, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

NOTE #1: This prophecy would have been understood by no Israelite at that time to mean that God would one day turn to the Gentiles *instead of them*. They would have understood it to mean that God would one day bring the Gentiles into covenant with Him *under the law of Moses*, with Israel continuing to be His chosen people. It would have been completely unthinkable to them that God would make a new and eternal covenant, which they, as a nation, would reject and that God would then reject them and open the door of eternal life to the Gentiles.

NOTE #2: Paul said that worship is made acceptable by the holy Ghost (Rom. 15:16). This means that those who have received the holy Ghost have been given power to make acceptable offerings to God. The offering that believers are privileged now to offer to God is perfect, pure, holy, and eternal. There is nothing wrong with the holy Ghost! When saints worship God in the Spirit, it is perfectly pure and acceptable. That is the kind of worship Jesus said God wants. Before the Son came, God accepted worship that included corruptible things such as earthly water, earthly incense, earthly sacrifices, and fleshly circumcision, but now He commands every person everywhere to repent and bow before Jesus, and He will accept no worship but that which has been sanctified by the Spirit His Son purchased for us with his sacrificial death. In Christ, we have been created to be the kind of people who can worship God acceptably and render Him praise that is perfectly pure, as the Psalmist prophesied:

Psalm 102

18. This shall be written for the generation to come, and a people that shall be created shall praise the LORD.

How valuable, how precious a blessing is it to receive the Spirit of God and be numbered among this created people? It is indeed a “pearl of great price”, worth all that a man has, or is, or ever hopes to be. But how “lightly esteemed” it has seemed to the people chosen by God to receive the blessing of His calling, as did God’s priests in Malachi’s time:

1:12. But you profane it, in that you say, “The table of the LORD is polluted, it and its fruit. Its food is despicable.”

13a. And you say, “Behold, what a burden!” And you sniff at it, says the LORD of hosts.

NOTE: The “it” that Israel has profaned is the name of the LORD (verse 11). This part of Malachi’s prophecy reveals that, from God’s perspective, to alter His way of worship is to show disrespect for Him. Israel’s priests did not think so, but they were profaning the name of God by failing to honor God’s table in the Temple. To God’s own priests, God’s way of worship had become wearisome. However, the truth was that they had grown tired of God’s way of worship, not because they were tired of performing ceremonies, but because they had grown tired of Him (Isa. 43:22). Other gods interested them more. Whenever God’s people grow weary in well-doing, it is evidence that they have grown weary of God Himself.

Shortly after this covenant began, most of those who believed in Christ grew tired of him. They grew tired of being misunderstood and persecuted; they grew tired of the reproach of Christ; they grew tired of not fitting in with the world. They traded their shout of victory for status among men. They left off the communion of the holy Ghost for the dead Christian communion service; they drifted away from the baptism of Christ to the more fashionable water baptisms that men could administer. The word of God became strange to them because they embraced the doctrines of

men. The simple purity of holiness became an embarrassment to them because they had been seduced by appearances of good.

“The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy” (Rom. 14:17). Are you tired of righteousness? Are you tired of peace? Are you tired of joy? If you don’t have those spiritual qualities in your life now, child of God, it can only be that somewhere along the way you grew tired of God and traded His gifts for something of this world. And by letting them go, you “despised the name of the LORD”. If you do have them, if you have held on to those treasures through all the things you have been through in this world, you have honored the name of the LORD.

Let’s not get tired of God; let’s get tired of ourselves. One brother in the Lord, many years ago now, broke down and wept as he said to me, “I’m so tired of making messes.” About once a year, through his own carelessness, he’d get himself into some sort of spiritual trouble, and he was going through one of those times. Unfortunately, he never got tired enough of himself to cease from his own ways, and not long after the day he broke down and cried with me, he made the biggest mess he had ever made, and fell away from Christ altogether. When we get tired enough of ourselves and the messes we make, we will repent and walk in the Spirit. Let’s get tired of ourselves and the messes we make, and lay hold on eternal life!

When I was in the seminary studying church history, I noticed that the only people in that thick history book with whom I felt any fellowship were some of the people whom churchmen called heretics. One group in Europe that seemed to be filled with the Spirit called their meetings “prophesyings”. Within a couple of generations after those in the original group passed away, the meetings were no longer called prophesyings, but lecturings. May God save us from degenerating from prophesying by the Spirit to the giving of lectures! I still can feel the fear of God that I felt when I read about that little group losing its power with God and renaming its meetings accordingly. The presence of God’s glory and power is what gives the body of Christ on earth its value and its distinction. Without that glory and that power, God’s people become just another worldly religious sect, despising the name of the LORD just

like everybody else, only more guilty than the sinners who do it ignorantly.

The flesh is ashamed of the Spirit, and if you begin to walk in the flesh instead of the Spirit, you will find yourself ashamed of the power of God. But those who walk in the Spirit are ashamed of the flesh and its works. I would be ashamed to come into an assembly of saints so much in the flesh that I could not praise God. To practice water baptism or a dead communion ceremony would embarrass me. I rejoice in the works of Christ instead!

God promised that if we would keep our minds on Him, that is, on what He says and what He does, we would have perfect peace (Isa. 26:3). It is when our minds drift away from the works of God and we begin to partake of the carnal ways of man that divisions arise. That is when we begin to debate whether we should immerse or sprinkle with water; that is when divisions arise over whether we should hold communion once or twice a month, or if non-church members should partake with us. There are no such divisions in the holy Ghost. In the Spirit, Christ baptizes when he will, and he celebrates communion with faithful believers all the time. It is only in the flesh that divisions exist. There are no denominations in the holy Ghost; the word “denominations” is used by men to disguise what denominations really are: divisions contrary to the will of God.

God does not recognize denominations. He blesses His people wherever He finds them – as long as they are still humble enough to receive His blessings. And because God does not recognize denominations, His faithful servants do not recognize them. There is nothing about them that is holy; they are altogether the work of the flesh. They have no authority over the soul of any child of God, and when God’s children come to understand that, there will be an exodus out of Christianity that will make Moses jealous.

1:13b. You offer that which is torn, the lame, and the sick – that is the kind of offering you bring! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

¶14. The guileful man is cursed, who has in his flock a male and makes a vow, but then sacrifices a corrupt thing to the LORD. I am a great King, says the

LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the Gentiles!

NOTE #1: Isn't it revealing of the blindness of humankind that the Creator of heaven and earth has to tell us that He is great? God is not a braggart; it is for our sakes, not for His own benefit, that God makes it known that He is great. Jesus was "meek and lowly", and he was also the "express image" of God's person.

NOTE #2: God will never settle for a blemished sacrifice when He has commanded an unblemished one. If He did that, He would dishonor Himself, and in doing so, He would confuse us as to what kind of God He is. He loves us too much to negotiate with us about what kind of life we should be living. Because God loves us, His requirement for eternal life – obedience to His will – stands unchanged. No one will be saved in the end without a life of true holiness because no other way of living honors God (Heb. 12:14).

Malachi 2

- ¶1. **And now, this commandment is for you, O priests!**
2. **If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart to give glory to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send forth a curse against you. I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have cursed them already because you are not taking it to heart.**
3. **Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and I will smear dung, the dung of your feasts, on your faces, and one will lift up your faces to it.**
4. **You will know then that I did send this commandment to you so that my covenant might continue with Levi, says the LORD of hosts.**

NOTE #1: In this ancient carving, a king is putting out a captive's eyes. In the carving, the captive is on his knees before the king. The king is holding a spear in one hand, and in the other he

is holding a line attached to a hook that is in the captive's lower lip. With that hook, the king is pulling the captive's face up so that the king can use the spear to put out his eyes. That's what God is referring to in verse 3 above. He is telling Israel that they will not be able to escape the dung that God will rub in their faces, implying that He will force them to hold their faces up so that He can do it.



The “dung” in this parable, God declares, is Israel's holy feasts. *Those feasts were ordained by God; they were a part of His law with which He blessed Israel at Mt. Sinai.* Why, then, would God compare them to dung? The answer was revealed only when His Son was revealed.

NOTE #2: God honors us by even thinking about us. Realizing this, David and Job both asked God, “What is man, that you even think of him?” (Job 17:17–18; Ps. 8:4). It might at first seem that God is bringing too severe a punishment upon His disobedient people, but when God has honored us fallen creatures by making a way for us to be forgiven and to receive eternal life, for us then to treat the things of God with disdain is for us to deserve the worst of punishments.

The Son of God prayed that God would curse those in Israel who rejected him, and he prayed that God would turn their blessings into a trap, which included the blessings of their holy feasts. He prayed that the holy table in God's temple would become a snare for them, that God would lock them into a spiritual prison with their ceremonies that they chose instead of the Son of God. Worshipping in dead ceremonies became the prison to which unbelieving Israelites were condemned, just as the Son of God had prayed.

Psalm 69

20. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am in despair. I longed for someone to pity me, but

there was no one, and for comforters, but I found none.

21. They gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst, they made me drink vinegar.
22. Let their table become a snare for them, and their peace offerings, a trap.

Of course, neither Malachi nor the rebellious priests dreamed of how that prayer in Psalm 69 would be fulfilled. We can see it because the Son of God has come and given us an understanding (1Jn. 5:20). Paul taught that the glory of God's Son is so great that when he was revealed, the law of Moses lost all its glory.

2Corinthians 3

10. That which was made glorious [the law of Moses] has come to have no glory in comparison to the surpassing glory of *Christ*.
11. And, certainly, if that which ends [the glory of the law] *was* glorious, that which endures [the glory of Christ] is much more glorious.

NOTE #3: When God moves out of a thing, it is sin to stay in it. God accepted the sacrifices and prayers of Abraham when he offered them to God on the high places of Canaan (Gen. 12:8). Later, however, God forbade His people to worship on Canaan's high places but to worship Him in the one place He would choose (Dt. 12:1–7). Eventually, this lone acceptable place of worship was at His temple in Jerusalem (Ps. 78:67–69; 132:13). Later still, God moved out of the temple worship in Jerusalem just as He had moved out of the high places of Canaan (Jn. 4:21), and the only acceptable worship was changed to be “in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:23–24).

As long as God approved of worship on the high places of Canaan, worship on the high places could be “holy, just, and good”, and as long as He approved of worship at the temple, temple worship could be “holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). And as long as God accepted those ways of worship, people who worshipped in those ways were blessed by God. Paul freely admitted that he benefitted from observing the law's rites and obeying its moral commandments. But when Christ appeared to him and filled Paul

with the Spirit of God, Paul came to consider that blessing to be of such glory that the law held no more attraction for him. In comparison to God's grace, Paul saw even the law that God gave Moses as worthless – as worthless as dung. Paul listed some of the law's glory in which he formerly boasted:

Philippians 3

- 5b. Circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;
6. concerning zeal, persecuting the *Assembly of God*; being blameless according to the righteousness that is in the law.
7. However, things that were gain to me, these I have counted as loss for Christ.
8. But more than that, I consider everything but loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have accepted the loss of everything; and I consider it all dung, that I might gain Christ.

Basking in “the surpassing glory” of Christ Jesus, Paul now considered to be worthless as dung the holy, physical circumcision that God commanded Abraham and his descendants to perform. Paul considered the glory of baptism in earthly water to have been done away with when Jesus' baptism of the holy Spirit was poured out from heaven. He considered the glory of the law's handwritten rules to have been done away with by the coming of the holy Spirit, which would guide men from within. He considered the holy days of the law to have become nothing; every day was alike to Paul because the glory of Christ was alive in Paul's heart every day, and he was distressed when his Gentile converts began adding such things as physical circumcision, water baptism, lists of rules, and holy days to their worship in the Spirit.

Colossians 2

8. Beware, lest someone carry you away with philosophy, or empty deceit, following human tradition, based on the elements of the world and not based on Christ,

9. for in him dwells all the fullness of God's nature bodily,
10. and you are complete in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.
11. In whom you are also circumcised with a circumcision performed without hands, by the removal of the nature of fleshly sins by the circumcision of Christ,
12. buried with him in baptism, by which you also are raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.
13. And you, being dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive with him, forgiving us all *our* transgressions.
14. He did away with the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary to us, and He removed it from between *us*, nailing it to the cross.
- ...
16. So, do not let anyone condemn you in *matters of eating and drinking*, or in regard to a feast, or new moon, or sabbath days,
17. which are a shadow of things to come, but the reality is of Christ.

It grieved true prophets such as Malachi when they saw God's people despise the way of worship revealed in the law. Today, it grieves true men of God, as it did Paul, to see God's people despise worship that is "in spirit and in truth" by adding ceremonies to their worship. It is their calling in Christ to live a life that is beyond those fleshly things and to walk with their heavenly Father in "the newness of life".

- 2:5. My covenant was with him [the priest], life and peace, and I gave them to him *for the fear with which he feared me; he was terrified at my name.***
- 6. The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in**

peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.

- 7. The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge. They should seek the law from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.**

NOTE: There was a time in Israel's history when God's ministers (the Levitical priests) were in better spiritual condition than they were in Malachi's time. They once feared God; they spoke the truth; they judged righteously; they turned souls away from sin and toward God's law; and they had fellowship with God. They were true messengers of God to the people, and He was pleased with them.

- 2:8a. But you [priests]! You have turned from the way! You have caused many to stumble at the law!**

NOTE: Israel's priests robbed from the hearts of God's people their confidence in the law God gave them by the hand of Moses. The sin of undermining the confidence in the Bible is still committed by God's ministers whenever they follow modern theologians who labor under the spell of evolution when it comes to the origins of the scriptures. Hearts are robbed of saving faith by theories of biblical origins such as the oral tradition/Q-source theory for the origin of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the JEDP theory for the origin of Old Testament books. Ministers of Christ who are led by the Spirit instead of by the flesh understand that. The Scriptures are inspired by God; they are not the product of man's imagination, and they are, as Paul said, able to make us wise concerning salvation (2Tim. 3:15).

- 2:8b. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts.**

- 9. Therefore, I have made you contemptible and abased before all the people, since none of you keep my ways, but have respect of persons in applying the law.**

NOTE #1: God did not excuse His priests for turning away from His law or for turning others away from it. The priests during Malachi's time were no longer applying the law's judgments impartially because they no longer esteemed God's revealed judgments to be sacred. Instead, they began using the law to their own benefit and the benefit of their friends.

NOTE #2: Because God's ministers came to think of the things of God as contemptible, God made His ministers contemptible to His people. This is the eventual fate of every servant of God who forsakes the right way; the people they mislead and the people whose favor they curry will come to despise them. Solomon said that "a lying tongue hates those who are afflicted by it" (Prov. 26:28). In other words, it is love of self, not love of others, that inspires false teachers. But the opposite also is true; in time, those who are afflicted by a lying tongue will come to hate the liar who afflicted them.

On a broader scale, this principle holds true concerning the children of God who forsake the right way in order to be "like all the nations"; the ungodly people whom they admire and whose favor they curry will come to despise them. The spirits of this world whom unwise children of God follow instead of following the Spirit will, at some point, turn on them and plunder them. This is what happened to Israel after she forsook her heavenly Husband to take foreign gods as her "lovers":

Jeremiah 30

14. All your lovers have forgotten you. They do not seek after you, for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, the chastisement of a cruel foe, because of the greatness of your iniquity. Your sins are many.
15. Why do you cry out over your affliction? Your pain is incurable. I have done these things to you because of the greatness of your iniquity *and because of your many sins.*

Ezekiel 16

37. Therefore, watch me as I assemble all of your lovers with whom you have taken pleasure, all

whom you have loved with all whom you have hated. I will gather them against you from every side, and I will expose your nakedness to them, and they will see all your nakedness.

38. And I will judge you with the judgments of women who commit adultery and murder; and I will bring on you the blood of fury and jealousy.
39. And I will give you into their hand, and they will tear down your eminent place, and they will pull down your high place, and they will strip you of your clothes, and take away your lovely things, and they will cast you to the side, naked and bare.
40. And they will bring up a company against you, and stone you with stones, and cut you down with their swords.

The very nations whose customs and gods Israel turned to and loved instead of her God, turned on her and destroyed her.

NOTE #3: From the beginning of His gracious work with man, God has struggled to persuade those whom He has chosen as His own to be content with the distinction of His grace. In the Old Testament, Israel was ashamed of the distinction of God's grace but wanted to be "like all the nations"; in fact, they insisted upon being like all the nations (1Sam. 8:19-20). God gave in and let them try to be like the Gentile nations, and they tried very hard, but they could not hide the glory of the calling of God that was upon them. The heathen whom they admired always sensed the difference that God's calling made in Israel, and they hated Israel because of it, no matter how hard Israel tried to be like them.

After God touches any person or group of people, those blessed souls can never again be like those whom God has never touched, no matter how hard they may try to be. And those whom they strive to be like can sense the invisible difference that is there. Solomon said that whatever God does is eternal (Eccl. 3:14), and that includes God's touch on a man's soul. The difference made by

God's touch is an eternal difference that cannot be removed; even death does not remove it.

In Christ, we have the power to do what sinners cannot do; that is, we have the power to walk uprightly before God. At the same time, that power enables us to be worse than the sinners around us if we forsake the right way and "return to our vomit", to live again as sinners. Israel did this. The nation became so wicked when it turned from the law that they were "worse than the heathen" (2Chron. 33:9). Sometimes, even the heathen were embarrassed at Israel's perverseness (Ezek. 16:27). But whenever God's children forsake His ways, all they ever do is disgrace themselves. Once God has delivered us from sin and washed away our past, we cannot simply return to sin and be only as sinful as we once were; we must be worse. Much worse. Jesus taught this (Lk. 11:24-26), and so did Peter:

2Peter 2

20. For if after escaping the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they become involved in them again, and are overcome, their last state is worse than the first.
21. It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing *it*, to turn from the holy commandment that was delivered to them.
22. But it is happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to his own vomit, and a washed sow to wallowing in the mud."

If a believer turns from righteousness to an ungodly lifestyle, it is a testimony against Christ, just as a righteous life is a testimony for him. Those who see a child of God living a righteous life will think more highly of God (Mt. 5:16), and those who see a child of God doing evil will think less of Him. Whenever those who belong to God turn away from righteousness and begin to live an ungodly lifestyle, they bring the name of God into disrepute. In Malachi's time, the wickedness of God's chosen people included, as apostasy always does, two things that are closely related: (1) worshipping

God the wrong way and (2) ungodly relationships with those who were not in covenant with God. These two sins the prophets were never able to persuade Israel as a whole to renounce.

¶2:10. Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why, then, do each of us deal treacherously with his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers?

11. Judah has been unfaithful, and an abomination is done in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD which he loved, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

NOTE #1: Malachi points out to his fellow Israelites that by mistreating one another, they were profaning the covenant God made with their fathers. This is a warning to us. When God makes us one with Him, His Son, and each other, He expects us to act like it. The commandment to love God with all our heart and strength is the greatest commandment (Mt. 22:37–38), but the second greatest commandment is that we should love one another as ourselves (Mt. 22:39). Malachi’s message for us is that if we are not loving one another as we love ourselves, if we are not treating each other rightly, then we are profaning this New Covenant, as the Israelites profaned the Old.

NOTE #2: Sinners who are crafty and are set on doing evil will use the failures of God’s people as justification to refuse Him and despise His ways. When King David sinned with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan told him, “You have given the enemies of the LORD great occasion to blaspheme” (2Sam. 12:14). God’s enemies were already blaspheming the name of the LORD, but David’s sin made them feel justified in doing so. God justly held David accountable for boosting the Gentiles’ zeal in blaspheming God.

2:12. The LORD will cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this and then gets up and testifies and makes an offering to the LORD of hosts!

NOTE: Both James and Paul warned New Testament saints of this cunning evil. This crafty, “demonic wisdom” will lead a soul to worship among the saints as if his relationship with God is right, while living an ungodly life. Such worship of evildoers is something God especially hates (Prov. 28:9; 15:8).

Proverbs 28

9. He who turns his ear away from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Proverbs 15

8. The sacrifice of wicked men is an abomination to Jehovah, but the prayer of the righteous is His delight.

When Solomon said that the prayers and sacrifices of wicked people are abhorrent to God, he was telling us that, first of all, wicked people do sometimes pray and worship God. We need to ponder that, lest we find ourselves among them, walking in wicked wisdom in order to maintain an appearance that is contrary to the condition of our hearts. James warned the saints not to come into the presence of God’s glory with secret sins (Jas. 3:14), and in 1Corinthians, Paul described some of the sad results of not heeding this wise warning:

1Corinthians 11

27. Whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in a manner unworthy of the Lord sins against the body and blood of the Lord.
28. Let a man examine himself; only then is he to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.
29. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.
30. Because of this, many are feeble and sick among you, and quite a few have fallen asleep.

In Revelation 3:15–16, Jesus described such believers as “lukewarm” and said he would vomit them out of his mouth; that is, he would cast them out of the body of Christ. He told those saints that he wished they would be either hot or cold. His first

choice would be that we love him and his Father and enjoy the benefits of fellowship with them. But if we will not do that, he would rather we openly hate him. That is preferable to hating him in our hearts, and yet, worshipping with his people as though we loved him sincerely.

¶2:13. And this second thing you do. You cover the altar of the LORD with tears and weeping and groaning. He no longer regards or takes pleasure in the offering from your hand!

14a. But you say, “Why?”

NOTE: This is the third judgment from God that God’s people rejected. Malachi tells them that God is not accepting their sacrifices, but they cannot believe such a thing. Like Samson, they had drifted so far from a right relationship with God that they did not even realize that He was no longer involved in their worship.

Judges 16

19. And [Delilah] made him sleep upon her knees. Then she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of [Samson’s] head, . . . and his strength went from him.
20. Then she said, “The Philistines be upon thee, Samson!” And he woke out of his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself.” But he did not know that the LORD was departed from him.

Samson did “go out as at other times before”, but the results of his going out to fight the Philistines were far from what they had been before because God had departed from him. God was gone and Samson’s strength was gone, but Samson did not know it!

Once, my late Uncle Joe walked into his godly mother’s home and found her weeping. When he asked her what was wrong, she told him that she could not pray for his father and oldest brother any more. Then she looked at the young Uncle Joe and added, “But I can still pray for you.” Her connection with God was so

real that she knew when there was no more use in praying.³ Of course, she could have mouthed some words, and to onlookers, it would have sounded like she was praying, but the mere appearance of prayer is not prayer!

Would we know it if God stopped hearing our prayers for someone? Is our fellowship with God that real to us?

The priests to whom Malachi was speaking did not believe that Malachi was a true prophet sent by God to them. They did not believe that Malachi was speaking for God when he told them that God was not accepting their sacrifices. The smoke of their sacrifices went up into the sky just as it had always done; the altar was the same; the fire behaved as it had always behaved as it consumed their offerings. Therefore, based on all observable criteria, God was still accepting their sacrifices. They would have thought there was no basis for the outrageous criticism of Malachi. What evidence could he present in support of his theory? But Malachi had no theory, and the criticism of the priests was not his.

In the book of Numbers, Israel was given a way to determine if a woman had been unfaithful. In this ritual, the priest gave the accused woman holy water to drink, mixed with dust from the floor of the temple. If she was innocent, nothing would happen to her (and her accusing husband would be put to shame), but if she was guilty, her reproductive organs would be cursed, and she would become barren (Num. 5:11–31). In this ritual, all observable criteria were the same. The people involved were always husband and wife; the water was the same; the dust from the temple floor was the same; the earthen vessel from which the woman drank was the same. But the results were different; the guilty were exposed and condemned, and the innocent were proved publicly to be so. And the different results were brought about by invisible realities; they were dependent upon the condition of the woman's heart, whether it was guilty or pure. Invisible realities are not invisible to God. Their invisibility to mortals does not make realities less real.

It was a strange experience for me as a young man in the Lord to hear an elderly lady worship God in a heavenly language and to

³ That God will reach a point in dealing with souls that He will no longer hear prayers for them is confirmed by a number of passages in Scripture, such as Isaiah 22:13-14; Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; and 1John 5:16.

discern in the Spirit that God was not accepting her worship. Her praise sounded like the praise that arose to God from hearts that I knew were pure, and she acted the way righteous people acted when they were praising the Lord. But there was something invisible about her that was displeasing to God. I was very young in the Lord, but I had matured enough by that time to sense what God was feeling about her praise, although she was oblivious to it and probably would have been insulted if I had told her what I felt. On another occasion, years later in a meeting of happy saints, I looked toward one brother dancing among them, and I suddenly felt a strong displeasure from the Spirit. He looked like someone happy in Jesus; he even smiled like the others there; but there was something else about him, just as real, that could not be seen: hidden sin (which not long after came to light). But he was blind as to how God felt about his hypocritical dancing.

Blind to the truth that the moral condition of the hearts is the determining factor in worship being accepted, the priests of Malachi's time, to their own damnation, fooled themselves and misled others. They put on the same holy garments that righteous priests had done before them, and they thought that was good enough. It certainly appeared to be good enough. What else was there to consider? Why would Malachi even think to say such things to them? God's answer was given immediately.

- 2:14b. Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, that you have dealt treacherously with her, yet she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant.**
- 15. But did He not make one? And the rest of the spirit was His. And why one? He was seeking a godly seed.⁴ Take heed to your spirit, and let**

⁴ This section is one of the many messages in the prophets with a dual meaning. On the surface, it is Malachi's explanation as to why God insisted on the priests being faithful to their Hebrew wives, but it is also a not-so-obvious message from God concerning His hidden Son. This portion of 2:15 could be rendered, "Did He not create one in whom is the fullness of the spirit? And why that one? Because He wanted a divine child." A related New Testament scripture is Ephesians 5:31–32.

none of you be unfaithful to the wife of your youth!

- 16. The LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce and the man who covers up wrong with his garment, says the LORD of hosts. Take heed to your spirit, and be not unfaithful!**

NOTE #1: In God's eyes, when His people marry those who are not His people, the offspring of that marriage are unclean. In preparing a people for the coming of His Son, God wanted Israelites to marry fellow Israelites, or marry foreigners who had come to Israel and embraced God and His law, as in the cases of Ruth the Moabitess and Uriah the Hittite. It was a horrible crime in God's sight for Israel to mingle their holy seed with the seed of the heathen, as in the days of Ezra:

Ezra 9

1. Now after these things had been done, the rulers came to me, saying, "The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the *surrounding* lands with their abominations: the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites.
2. Rather, they have taken their daughters for themselves and their sons so that the holy seed has been mingled with the peoples of the lands, and the hand of the rulers and governors has been foremost in this unfaithfulness."
3. And when I heard this report, I tore my garment and my robe, and I pulled hair out of my head and my beard, and sat down, appalled.

This was not just an Old Testament attitude toward marriage between saints and sinners. When dealing with the issue of marriage between believers and non-believers, Paul made it clear that God still felt as He did during Ezra's time. Paul warned believers not to marry unbelievers, adding that the children of such a union

are unclean unless the unbeliever follows the believing spouse to Christ and is sanctified (1Cor. 7:12–14).

NOTE #2: God condemns these priests for allowing themselves to be seduced by ungodly, foreign women. It is self-evident that women of the world concentrate on knowing how to promote themselves with seductive appearances. Consequently, in the main, they are better at that deviousness than are the innocent daughters of God. Jesus touched on this when he said, “The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light” (Lk. 16:8). In other words, sinners are better at methods of self-promotion and self-aggrandizement than are the saints who keep their minds on the things of God. Worldly women are consumed with how they may best adorn themselves, but God’s daughters are consumed with how they may best adorn the gospel. And *that* is beautiful – to those who have eyes to see. God’s daughters understand that “favor is deceitful, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

When servants of God fail to control their fleshly appetites, cunning women of the world become to them like the Sirens of ancient mythology who lured passing seamen onto deadly rocks with their irresistibly seductive songs. In other words, the sons of God become foolish and begin to pursue the daughters of men. And to cover their sin, they often invent doctrines to justify their treachery against their God-given wives, such as the following two doctrines, which God hates.

¶2:17. **You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied Him?” When you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them!” Or when you say, “Where is the God of judgment?”**

NOTE #1: This fourth judgment from God that God’s people found completely unbelievable has to do with these two perverse teachings invented by their ministers in order to excuse their sin. The first was the doctrine that God considers those who do evil to be good, and the second doctrine held that God is a God of love

only, never of judgment. These two doctrines are still held by many who profess to belong to God. In Christian garb now, these two false doctrines allure the foolish into paths fraught with spiritual danger.

The first of these errors is the Christian doctrine that holds that God delights in those who are His even when they are rebellious and sinful. Those who teach this say that once people are washed from their sins by the blood of Christ and enter into the family of God, God no longer sees them as sinners even though they continue sinning. As some say, “God can’t see through the blood [of Christ].” They base this comment on the notion that God is so holy that He cannot look at sin, perhaps because of one prophet’s comment, “Your eyes are too pure to see evil, and cannot look upon trouble” (Hab. 1:13a). But the same prophet goes on to say in the same verse, “Why do you look at the faithless, and remain silent when the wicked swallows the man more righteous than he?” (Hab. 1:13b). Also, they note that while dying on the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”, claiming that this was the very moment that Jesus became sin for us, and, so, God turned His head away from His Son. But that cry of desperation was made only because Jesus was in such agony that he felt forsaken, not because God had actually forsaken him. God “bowed the heavens” to be near His suffering Son (Ps. 18:6–9); He was closer, physically, to Jesus during Jesus’ agony on the cross than He was at any other time during Jesus’ life on earth.

God sees everything all the time, as Solomon said, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Do not be fooled by crafty sermons. God does not delight in His children who are living in sin, and they are not good in His sight. And He will hold every one of them accountable for their transgressions. In fact, because they are His children, He will hold them more accountable than anyone else (Amos 3:2).

NOTE #2: The second error has to do with understanding the God we serve. Israel had “wearied” God with the notion that “God is love” – and nothing else. But God is a God of love only when it is time to love. When it is time to hate, God is a God of hate. When it is time to fight, God is a God of war. When it is time to heal, God is a God of healing. When it is time to afflict, God is a

God of affliction. God is whatever it is time for Him to be. He is always whatever He wants to be. God is the God of whatever we need. He is all things to His people. Perhaps that is why the best name He could have is simply, "I Am", as He said to Moses:

Exodus 3

13. And Moses said to God, "Behold, when I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they will say to me, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?"
14. And God said to Moses, "I will be who I will be." Then He said, "You will say this to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

If God were love and nothing else, then what was Jesus talking about when he strictly warned his disciples to fear God (Lk. 12:5)? If God were love and nothing else, then it was nonsense for the man of God to say, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). If God were love and nothing else, then Paul was being foolish to be terrified at the thought of God's wrath (2Cor. 5:11). What kind of terror can a God of love and nothing else inspire?

Since God never changes (as Malachi says in 3:6), then God has always been love. And if God has always been love, then when He cursed the human race with death, He was love, and when He destroyed the earth with a flood, He was love. And if God does not change, then in the Final Judgment, when God consigns untold millions to eternal death, He will still be love.

Where is the God of judgment? Find the God of love, and you will find Him.

Malachi 3

¶1a. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

NOTE: The first part of this verse is a prophecy of John the Baptist. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this portion of Malachi 3:1 is quoted as though the Father is speaking to the Son. All three of them have it this way: "Behold, I am sending my messenger before

your face, who will prepare your way before you.” Sometimes, when New Testament writers seem to misquote the Old Testament, we find that they were using the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, instead of the Hebrew text that we now have. But in this case, the Septuagint is the same as the Hebrew text. So, we do not know how Matthew, Mark, and Luke all came to quote Malachi 3:1 in a way that differs from the Hebrew Old Testament that we have today. Either way, though, the prophecy of Malachi is still about John the Baptist being sent to Israel before Jesus began his ministry, and that is the important – and amazing – point of what Malachi said.

¶3:1b. The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Behold, he is coming! says the LORD of hosts.

NOTE #1: The temple of the Lord was not Mary; it was Jesus.⁵ He was the temple, newly baptized by John the Baptist, into which the Son of God “suddenly” came, and remained (Jn. 1:33). In John 2, God’s Son referred to Jesus’ physical body as his temple:

John 2

18. The Jews then answered and said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”
19. Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I’ll raise it up.”
20. Then said the Jews, “For forty-six years this temple was under construction, and you will raise it up in three days?”
21. But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

NOTE #2: The Father (“the LORD”) is the one speaking in this second half of Malachi 3:1. Here, the Father refers to the Son as “Lord” (without small capital letters), as is often the case in Old Testament prophecies.

⁵ See Chapter 1 of my book, *God Had a Son before Mary Did*, available for on-line reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

- 3:2. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who will stand when he appears? He is like a refiner's fire and like the fullers' lye.**
- 3. And he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them as gold and silver, and they will bring an offering in righteousness to the LORD.**

NOTE #1: No one could escape the judgment of the Son when he came. The light of his Spirit exposed the condition of every heart, and those who submitted to him were purged of their sins and made acceptable to God. Then their worship pleased God, while the worship of all others remained polluted, being of the flesh instead of in the Spirit.

NOTE #2: To "sit as a refiner" is a reference to how refiners of silver used to sit by the silver as it was heated. The heat of the fire that burned beneath the silver caused the dross in the silver to rise to the surface, and then the refiner would rake it off. The refiner knew that the silver was purified, that the fire had done its job, when the heat could bring no more dross to the surface and he could see his reflection in the liquid silver.

God's parable of the refiner is a parable of the hot persecution and trials that His children face in this world. Jesus also referred to persecution as heat that must be endured (Mt. 13:3–6, 20–21). Suffering perfects God's children, as it did Jesus himself (Heb. 5:8–9), and Jesus, who "sits as a refiner" at the right hand of God, knows when each believer's perfecting process is complete. He is very patient, as a refiner must be, waiting for the fire to complete its work so that he might see his reflection in the life of those who follow him.

- 3:4. Then will the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be sweet to the LORD, as in days of old and as in years past.**
- 5a. And I will draw near you for judgment,**

NOTE: Judgment comes when God comes. But that is the great hope of every believer, that God will come and judge us. When we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” we are saying, “Come judge us, Lord Jesus!” because that is the principal thing Jesus is coming to do.

3:5b. and I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, and against adulterers, and against false witnesses, and against those who oppress the worker in his wages *and* the widow and the orphan, and *against* those who turn the stranger away and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

NOTE: The more powerful the presence of God becomes among His people, the more swiftly His judgment comes among them. The swiftest and most severe punishments that befell men in the Old Testament fell upon them when they sinned in God’s very presence. Aaron’s two oldest sons were slain by God at the incense altar inside the tabernacle (Lev. 10:1–2); 250 princes of Israel who rebelled against Moses were slain by God at the door of His holy tabernacle (Num. 16:35); and King Uzziah was stricken with leprosy when he dared to enter into God’s temple to burn incense on the golden altar (2Chron. 26:16–20).

In the New Testament, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter, the power of God was so strong in Peter and among the saints that both Ananias and his wife immediately dropped dead (Acts 5:1–10). Referring to that sobering event in Acts, my father once told a congregation, “It’s a good thing for some of us that the rest of us are not any closer to God than we are.” He was stressing the point already made; to wit, the greater the power of God among His people, the more swiftly and severely His judgments come upon the ungodly among them.

No wickedness can escape discovery and punishment in the presence of God’s power and glory. And no righteousness is overlooked! Every man will receive his perfect reward from God. May God grant us grace to be wise, and to remember that the God of love is “the Judge of all the earth.”

3:6. I, the LORD, do not change; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed.

7a. For from the days of your fathers, you have turned aside from my statutes and have not observed them.

NOTE: God was not merciful to Israel because they had been so faithful to Him. God was merciful to Israel and preserved them because He loved their faithful fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He had given them a promise (e.g., Dt. 10:10-15). But more than that, He preserved Israel because He loved His Son, and to Israel He had given the law and the prophecies that spoke of him.

3:7b. Return to me and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, “What do you mean, ‘return’?”

NOTE: By “return”, God meant “repent”, and they knew this. This fifth rejected judgment of God provides us with another example of how sin blinds sinners to their sin. These people saw no need to repent, and they most likely did not believe that Malachi was speaking for God. But Malachi was speaking for God, and through Malachi, God went on to explain in what way Israel needed to repent:

3:8. Will man rob God? Yet, you have robbed me. But you say, “How have we robbed you?” In the tithe and offering.

9. You are cursed with a curse. You – the entire nation – have robbed me!

10. Bring all the tithe into the storehouse so that there will be food in my house! Put me to the test with this, says the LORD of hosts! *I will damn myself*⁶ if I do not open the windows of heaven to you

⁶ The Hebrew construction here is part of a well-known form for a curse of the greatest magnitude. It is the ultimate oath that could be expected of anyone because the one making the oath is swearing on his own soul. It was so dreaded a curse that the curse itself was left unspoken. Anyone who broke such an oath had betrayed a most sacred trust and was worthy of damnation. With this kind of oath, God is giving supreme assurance that He will do what He promises. He is swearing on His own soul that He will do as He says.

and pour out such a blessing upon you that there will not be enough room to receive it.

- 11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he will not destroy the fruit of your ground. Neither will your vine in the field lose its fruit, says the LORD of hosts.**
- 12. All nations will call you blessed, for you will become a delightful land, says the LORD of hosts.**

NOTE #1: This sixth rejected judgment from God deals with the care of His ministers. God's people were not honoring Him with faithfulness in bringing their tithes and offerings for the needs of His servants, and God was offended by it. Since God called upon them to bring Him all the tithes and offerings, we must assume that they were dishonoring Him by bringing only a portion of them. In a world like this one, it takes faith to believe the promises of God so that we will bring Him all the tithes and offerings that He demands.

For those who are faithful in their tithes and offerings, God's promises are expressly stated. God will bless them by:

- (1) giving them more blessing than they can contain (v. 10).
- (2) keeping every creature from robbing them of their blessings (v. 11).
- (3) blessing the work of their hands (v. 11).
- (4) blessing them so much that sinners are forced to admit that they are blessed (v. 12).

God's promise to "rebuke the devourer for your sakes" brings to mind another sweet story about Uncle Joe. Uncle Joe had a garden from which many of us benefitted. He loved his garden and cared for it well. Once, his collards got so big that news of them spread around town. When the editor of the local newspaper heard of Uncle Joe's collards, he sent a photographer to Uncle Joe's house to take a picture of him and Aunt Myrtle standing out by the collard patch.

One spring, in that same little plot of ground in his backyard, Uncle Joe planted corn. Early one morning when the ears were nearly ripe, he went out to walk among the stalks, and he noticed a



black fungus had begun to spread on the young ears. Uncle Joe was troubled by this unexpected event, and he walked through the stalks reminding God of what He had said through the prophet Malachi. "God," he prayed, "you said that if we were faithful to bring all the tithe to the storehouse, you would rebuke the devourer for our sakes." He believed God when he prayed, and within days, the fungus was gone! The fungus did not eat his crop; he

(and we) did! God is pleased when His children remind Him of His promises, not because He forgets but because it is good exercise for our faith!

Uncle Joe could not have prayed that prayer with the faith he needed if he had not been faithful to do his part, according to the commandment of God. It was his clear conscience and pure heart that made his prayer effective. He and his wife were very poor, but they always brought their tithes and offerings to the LORD. In fact, Uncle Joe not only brought his tithe of ten percent, but he also made his offerings equal to his tithes. Every payday, he brought twenty percent of his gross income to the LORD. And the LORD did as He promised He would do for them. They never, to my knowledge, lacked for anything. What they did with their offerings, making them equal to their tithes, may not be for everybody, but they had the faith to do it, and God rewarded them greatly. They were two of the most giving people you could ever hope to meet, though they had less in the way of earthly wealth than most. They proved the truth of Proverbs 11:24: "There is one who scatters, and

yet increases all the more; but another keeps back what is right, only to want.”

God is inviting us today to put Him to the test, to see if He will really do what He, through His servant Malachi, promised He would do. Every soul that I have known who took God up on that promise has reaped the benefits of having the faith to do so. I have seen God work miracles in the lives of those who trusted Him in tithes and offerings, and it is a beautiful thing to watch.⁷

NOTE #2: Whenever God’s blessings come upon His people, many in this world envy them and try to seduce the saints in order to obtain a portion of those blessings. This has been the case throughout history, and the Bible shows how successful the world has been in robbing the saints of their riches – and how often the saints have foolishly traded their eternal riches for earthly gain. But those who are faithful to God and continue to honor Him at all times will be richly blessed – most importantly, with the riches of the kingdom of God.

3:13. Your words have been stout against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, “What have we said against you?”

14. You have said, “It is vain to serve God and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?”

NOTE: This seventh rejected judgment from God reveals to us again (not to those Israelites, however,) how personally God takes it when His people walk contrary to His commandments. To refuse God’s commandments is to refuse Him. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). That being the case, it follows that if we do not keep his commandments, we do not love him.

It may be that the words which God says these Israelites spoke never actually came out of their mouths. It is difficult to imagine a

⁷ My book, *Tithes and Offerings*, is available for online reading at GoingtoJesus.com.

situation in which they would have actually said, “It is vain to serve God. And what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?” But whether they actually uttered those words or not is not the issue; those words reflected the attitude of their heart toward the way Jehovah commanded them to worship Him. They “spoke” their attitude by their deeds, and their deeds declared very loudly that they considered God’s way of worship to be worthless.

“As a man thinks in his heart,” wrote Solomon, “so is he,” and God judges us according to what we really are. Ministers in this covenant who lead God’s people to worship God in the flesh instead of in the Spirit are saying to them, “It is vain to serve God [as He says to worship], and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?” – even if they are flattering God with their lips from the pulpit. And this is nothing new; many of God’s ministers in Old Testament time did the same. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus condemned them:

Matthew 15

7. Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied well concerning you, saying,
8. “This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips they honor me, but their heart is far from me.”

When David wrote, “The fool says in his heart, There is no God,” he could have been referring to priests who stood before God’s people, speaking highly of God. But if at the same time those ministers were influencing Israel away from God’s way of worship, then *in their hearts*, they were saying, “There is no God! Just worship and live as you think best.”

The same is true today. God’s way of worship in this covenant is exclusively in spirit and in truth. All other ways of worship, however impressive they appear, are unacceptable to Him. The law of Moses was so simple, and it required so little of the Israelites, that they considered it to be insufficient. They did not have enough faith to believe that keeping God’s simple law would secure their blessings, and so, they added to their faith the worship of other gods in order to make sure that all their needs would be met.

But doing so cost them their independence as a nation, and in the end, their souls.

To add anything to the way of the Spirit is to declare that God's way is insufficient and unprofitable. When we say that Jesus' baptism of the Spirit is good instead of confessing that it is the only baptism that is any good for salvation, we are declaring that although Jesus is good, he alone is not good enough. Again, when we say that Jesus' communion of the Spirit is good instead of confessing that it is the only communion that is any good for salvation, we are saying that although Jesus is good, he alone is not good enough. When we are baptized by Jesus into his body (1Cor. 12:3) we are saying that the body of Christ is good, but if we then join a Christian church, we are saying that although the body of Christ is good, it is not good enough. To do such deeds, is in a very real way, to proclaim the message that to live and worship in God's way and to keep His ordinances is vain. It is to proclaim before all, "What profit is there in living and worshipping only in the way God has said to live and worship?" And to talk like that is to "speak stout things against God", just as the Israelites did.

Jesus Christ is sufficient! He is good enough. He is "able to save to the uttermost" those who come to him – without the aid of anything of man, his ceremonies, his religious organizations, his lofty-sounding doctrines, or his good ideas. Jesus *alone* is sufficient for our salvation! Our words are "stout against God" when our lives do not bear witness to the sufficiency of His Son – alone – to save. When we partake of a ceremonial communion instead of enjoying the sweet communion of the Spirit, we are openly speaking great things against God. Furthermore, our judgment of all things becomes clouded when our estimation of the work of Christ is lowered to the point that we allow fleshly works (ceremonies) to enter into our worship. Evil people begin to seem not so evil after all, as was the case in Israel during the time of Malachi:

3:15. And now, we call the proud blessed; evildoers are exalted, and those who tempt God are delivered.

NOTE: When saints wander away from God's way of living and worship, sound judgment is dismissed as outmoded, and evildoers are admired and enriched. Because the body of Christ has in our

time wandered out of the way of spirit and truth, its “salt”, that is, its preserving influence on society, is being lost. Often now, in this modern culture, those looked up to are immoral wretches and killers, while those who trust in God are frequently ridiculed.

3:16. Then those who feared the LORD spoke, each one with his neighbor, and the LORD gave ear and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the LORD and thought on His name.

17. And they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day that I make up *my* peculiar treasure, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.

NOTE: Jesus is coming again, and those who grieve for the wickedness around us and who are faithful to Jesus will be glad when he appears. God is faithful to us, and He will greatly reward those who are faithful to Him. He is mindful of what we do and say, moment by moment, in this world of darkness, and He is keeping a record of our deeds.

3:18. Then will *you* return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who does not serve Him.

NOTE #1: The Psalmist said that God is known by the judgments that He executes (Ps. 9:6). Therefore, if God is not a God of judgment, then He will always be an unknown God. That is why they will never come to know God who deny that the judgments of God are, in fact, His judgments. When God struck down Aaron’s two sons, Aaron was instructed in the knowledge of God – but only because he knew that what had happened to his sons was the judgment of God. If Aaron had blamed Baal, he would have remained as ignorant of God as he had been before his sons were slain. King Uzziah, too, had more knowledge of God after God struck him with leprosy than he did before that curse came upon him. And the saints in Acts knew God better after He took the life of Ananias and his wife than they did before He slew them.

This is also true with God's rewards for righteousness, His deliverance from trouble and His healing of our diseases. Every time God rewards the righteous for their love of His Son, His mind is more clearly revealed concerning good and evil. Those who see the hand of God in their blessings can come to know Him in a way that those who deny His works never can. Whether it be when He blesses or when He curses, if God will open our eyes to recognize it when He works, we will increase in His knowledge.

NOTE #2: This verse being placed after God "makes up His peculiar treasure" in the Final Judgment leaves the impression that God's revelation of who is truly serving Him and who is not will come to His people only after the Final Judgment. But that would be too late to be useful for them. What good would it do anyone to realize, after the Final Judgment, the difference between good and evil, and the difference between who serves God acceptably and who does not? It seems more reasonable to understand this verse as applying to any time in history, so that Malachi is saying that whenever God's people see His judgments, they learn from those judgments to distinguish between good and evil and be able to discern between those who serve God acceptably and those who are serving Him in vain.

Malachi 4

[Hebrew text continues as 3:19, etc.]

¶1/3:19. Behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and He will set them on fire. The day is coming, says the LORD of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.

NOTE: My father used to say that we will know when we are saved when we look around us and see no one who is wicked. He based that comment on a scripture found in Psalm 37:10: "Yet a little while, and the wicked man will not be. And you will diligently consider his place, and it will not be *there*." On the new earth that God has prepared for His faithful children, there will be no wicked people. According to the apostle Peter, there will be nothing on that new earth but what is good:

2Peter 3

10. The day of the LORD will come like a thief at night, in which the heavens, with a rushing noise, will pass away, and the elements, being on fire, will be destroyed, and earth and the works that are in it will be consumed by fire.

...

13. But we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

As long as we can look around and see anybody who is sinful, then, we may know that we have not yet attained to our promised land, the new earth.

4:2/3:20. To you who fear my name will the Sun of righteousness rise with healing in his wings, and you will go out and gambol about like fattened calves.⁸

3/21. And you will tread down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I am preparing, says the LORD of hosts.

NOTE: This is another reference to the end times, when Jesus will return to earth and, with those who love him and are faithful, will reign over the earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4–7).

¶4:4/3:22. Remember the law of Moses my servant, the statutes and judgments which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

NOTE #1: This is a plea from God for Israel to be faithful and walk in the light of God's law. The people who took Malachi's words to heart, if any did, were wise, and to this day they are glad they listened to him. The rest will spend eternity "weeping and gnashing their teeth", forever eaten within by the bitter worm of regret. Those in ancient Israel who "remembered Moses", that is,

⁸ Literally, "calves of the stall".

those who loved and kept the law which Moses gave them, recognized Jesus as Israel's Messiah and were prepared to receive him. Jesus said so:

John 5

46. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.
47. But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

It is obvious that one cannot remember the law of Moses if he has never learned it. God was exhorting His people not only to become acquainted with Moses' law, but also to hold on to the instructions that are in it. Those who did that are in Paradise today, resting from their labors here on earth. God has never failed a soul who did not fail Him.

NOTE #2: In this covenant, true men of God are exhorting God's people to remember, not Moses' law, but the law that God wrote in their hearts when He gave them His Spirit. The Spirit now is what we must give heed to if we hope to be prepared for the coming of the Son, for the Spirit is now God's law. Every soul since the day of Pentecost who has received and been mindful of the Spirit will spend eternity on the new earth "where righteousness dwells". Those without the Spirit, but even more certainly, those who have received the Spirit but do not obey it, will spend eternity in great pain and gnawing regret.

4:5/3:23. Behold, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes.

6/24. And he will turn the heart of the fathers to the sons and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse.

NOTE: This is another prophecy with a double fulfillment. John the Baptist was Elijah, spiritually speaking (Mt. 11:13-14; Lk. 1:13-17), sent to introduce the Messiah to Israel (Jn. 1:21-31). But before Jesus returns to this world, Elijah himself, with Moses,

will come to preach Christ to Israel and to lead Israel back to the God of their fathers (Rev. 11:3–13; Mt. 17:10–11).

John the Baptist was sent to turn the hearts of Israel back to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and turn the fathers' hearts to them. In other words, John was sent to bring the Israelites of his day into agreement with the faith of their righteous forebears. He baptized those who believed and obeyed him, but those who refused his message received from God the utmost curse.

Jesus said that men did whatever they wanted to do to John the Baptist (the Elijah of that generation – Mt. 17:12–13), and in the book of Revelation, the apostle John saw wicked men do the same to Elijah himself. In those days, Elijah and Moses will be hated by the whole world, and then murdered by the Beast after they preach in Jerusalem for three and a half years. Their dead bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem three days before God raises them up and takes them into heaven. Those in Israel at that time who refuse their preaching will be cursed and will suffer terribly, thus giving Malachi's last prophetic words their second fulfillment.

Conclusion

The reaction of Israel and her ministers in Malachi's time to the word of God shows that they had drifted so far from the law of Moses that truth was a stranger to them. The light of God was, in their judgment, darkness. They were so confident of being right that they could not conceive of a man truly being of God if he told them that they were wrong.

Prophecies such as Malachi's were written down, according to Paul, "for our learning". They exist to warn us to stay humble before God:

1 Corinthians 10

1. I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,
2. and all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
3. and all ate the same spiritual food,

4. and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock was Christ.
5. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, and they were struck down in the desert.
6. Now, these things happened as examples for us, that we should not desire evil things, as those people did;
7. neither be idolators, as were some of them, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."
8. Nor let us commit fornication, as some of them did, and there fell, in one day, twenty-three thousand.
9. Nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them tempted, and were destroyed by the snakes.
10. And do not grumble, as some of them grumbled and were destroyed by the Destroyer.
11. All these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have met.
12. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall.

We know that we have been taught the truth. We have a good understanding of the doctrine, and we believe that we are serving God the right way. But does believing that make us acceptable to God? We have now finished reading a prophetic book that contained repeated instances of people, including ministers of God, who believed they were serving God the right way. Did believing that make them acceptable to God? Paul warned us against trusting our own judgment of ourselves:

1Corinthians 4

4. I am conscious of nothing against myself; however, I am not justified by that; the Lord is the one who judges me.

5. So, judge nothing before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and expose the intentions of hearts; and then from God will praise be given to each one.

Paul knew nothing against himself when he was helping to kill righteous, humble souls such as Stephen, who truly loved God and His Son. Paul's judgment of himself was not worth much, was it? We must always remember that it is God's judgment alone that is always true.

When we first saw ourselves as being in darkness, we felt needy before God and repented, and He forgave and cleansed us. But are we still humble enough to hear Him and believe? How does God see us? Does He see us as still humble enough to receive the word of God, should He send a messenger to us? Would we say to Malachi, "What do you mean, 'Repent'?" We pray to hear from God, but what if He sends us an answer to our prayer that we do not expect?

Let us sincerely ask ourselves, "Is there something in our lives that seems normal to us, but with which God is not pleased?" "Is there something in our lives that we have grown accustomed to, that He hates?" May God help us "awake to righteousness" and break old habits that He would rather we not have. May He grant us the grace to live as sincere children of God in the midst of this wicked generation. May He save us from our own ways and keep us from becoming honored hypocrites, like the leaders of Israel in Malachi's time.

We humbly rejoice in all that God has done for us. We are thankful for His love and goodness toward us and toward all His children everywhere. Fools become proud of what God has done for them, as if they had done it for themselves, but the wise walk with God in meekness, as loving children. As is the case with many of God's children, my congregation and I have suffered through some difficult experiences for the sake of Christ, and by God's grace, we survived them. At the same time, we have learned from the Bible and from history books what great suffering some other believers have gone through for righteousness' sake. May we be counted worthy to spend eternity with them!

Malachi was a prophet who labored in a very dark time in Israel's history, and his answer to the darkness was the law of Moses – God's law. He pleaded with Israel to repent and live by that holy law, but they would not. The Israelites and their leaders were indignant at Malachi's warning that they were not living and worshipping rightly, and in the end, God resigned Himself to the fact that just a few of His chosen people would be faithful and be spared the coming wrath.

Ours is just such a dark time. The true word of God is rarely spoken, and when it is, it is often scorned. Too many people, trusting in their own long-standing traditions, judge the truth to be false, and the darkness seems right. But God still has His seven thousand, so to speak, as He did in the days of Elijah (1Kgs. 19:18), and to them shall "the Sun of righteousness" appear a second time, with healing still in his wings, not just a healing for their sicknesses but an eternal healing for every burden they have borne in this wicked world.