

A Call to Repentance

Malachi 2

Malachi 2 - *"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. ² If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name," says the Lord of hosts, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. ³ "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts; and one will take you away with it.*

⁴ Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant with Levi may continue," says the Lord of hosts. ⁵ "My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me. So he feared Me and was reverent before 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 equity, and turned many away from iniquity.

⁷ "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

⁸ But you have departed from the way. You have caused many to stumble at the law.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts. ⁹ "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law."

Background Notes

Malachi is the book that closes the Old Testament period. 400 years of "silence" passed between the writing of Malachi and the birth of Jesus Christ.

When Nehemiah came from Persia in 445BC, he motivated the people of Judah to rebuild Jerusalem's ruined city wall. The completion of the wall prompted a great revival (Nehemiah 8-11). After some time, Nehemiah returned to Persia for a couple of years, and during this time the people fell into the backslidden state described in Malachi and Nehemiah 13. God raised up Malachi to rebuke the people for their backsliding.

The theme of Malachi is "Rebuke for Backsliding." A number of areas where they had fallen away from the Lord are mentioned in the book. In each area the people were rebuked, and then exhorted to get their lives straightened out before the Lord. In chapter 1, the people were rebuked for bringing defective sacrifices to the Lord and despising God's way of worship. In chapter 2 there are three more areas requiring rebuke:

- a. The failure of the priests to instruct the people in the Law of the Lord.
- b. The sin of intermarriage with the surrounding pagan peoples.
- c. The problem of divorce, which the Lord hated.

We'll look at one doctrinal point in each of these areas of rebuke.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is not pleased when His people are ignorant of His Word.

In verses 1-9, the priests were rebuked for failing to teach and instruct God's people in the Law. *"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts*" (v7-8).

The *"covenant of Levi"* was the covenant God made with the tribe of Levi for the priesthood and service of the Tabernacle. (See Number 18,) One of the responsibilities of the Levites was to instruct the people in the Law of God: *"They shall teach Jacob your judgments and Israel your law"* (Deuteronomy 33:10).

Malachi 2:5-6 indicates that the priests and Levites had done their job of instructing the people when the covenant was first made. Phineas stood for the Lord in Numbers 25. But by Malachi's time, the priests and Levites had dishonored God by not fulfilling their responsibilities, so they would not be blessed. In fact, they would actually experience the curses that were pronounced in the Law (v2). Just as the refuse of a sacrifice was unclean and thrown out (v3), so the priests were unclean and would be thrown out. **And there is no practicing priesthood in Israel or in Judaism today.**

Just as the priests and Levites of Malachi's day were responsible to teach and instruct the people in the Word of God and the ways of the Lord, so preachers and church leaders today have a responsibility to teach the Word and instruct God's people in the ways of the Lord. But many ministers and pastors are not doing their job. In fact, some are even tearing down the authority of the Word of God by saying that it contains errors, and it's out of date, and it's not politically correct. As a result, the people of God don't know what God's Word really says, or what God asks of them.

In Hosea 4:6 God said, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* God is not pleased when spiritual leaders fail to honor God and His Word, and as a result His sheep wander and are not fed. God is displeased when His people are ignorant of His Word.

2. God is not pleased when His people are not separate from this world.

Malachi 2:10-12 - *"Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Jerusalem and in Israel, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution that He loves. He has married the daughter*

of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!

The people of Israel were intermarrying with the surrounding foreign nations. This was expressly forbidden in God's Law. *"Nor shall you make marriages with them... for they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods"* (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

The Jews of Malachi's day had sinned in this area. *"Judah has dealt treacherously. An abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution that He loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign god"* (v11). As a result, the Lord would have to cut off those who are guilty. The phrase "cut off" (v12) either means that they would be excommunicated from the covenant community of Israel, or they would have no descendants in Israel, or they would die.

Intermarriage with the pagans was a serious sin because God's people were no longer separate from this world – and the same is true today. Whether it's literal intermarriage with an unbeliever, or living a worldly and sinful lifestyle, God is not pleased with believers who are not separate from this world. *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers... And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty"* (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17& 18).

James 4:4 says, *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend with the world makes himself an enemy of God."* Whether it is marriage to an unbeliever, or friendship with this world that is opposed to God, God is not pleased when His people are not separate from this world.

3. God is not pleased when His people are unfaithful in their marriages.

Malachi 2:13-16 - *"This is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying, so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. ¹⁴ Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*

¹⁵ But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the Lord of hosts.

"Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

The men of Malachi's day were divorcing their wives so that they could marry younger women, or so that they could marry non-Jewish, pagan women. This was serious sin. God said He **hates** divorce (v16)!

Let me ask you - has God changed His mind now that we're in modern day and more tolerant time? No! Not according to Scripture. But, you may say, isn't unfaithfulness in marriage a biblical reason for divorce? Listen, even when there are biblical grounds for divorce, it doesn't mean God likes divorce. God still hates divorce! God is much more pleased with repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation.

God sees divorce as treachery and violence, because a covenant that was made before God is broken by divorce. Verse 14: *"Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant."* And verse 16: *"For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the Lord of hosts.* *"Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

It's true that God is a God of grace, and He picks up the pieces when we fail in this area - but He is not pleased. God loves to see intact Christian families, where the parents love and cherish each other, and children are raised to love and serve the Lord. God seeks godly offspring (v15). Divorce makes it difficult to raise godly offspring. Remember, God is not pleased when His people are unfaithful in their marriages.

Practical Application

How blind can you be?

Malachi 2:17 - *"You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you ask, 'In what way have we wearied Him?' By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord, and He is pleased with them.' Or, 'Where is the God of justice?'"*

The people of Malachi's day were saying, "God is not just, because He allows evil people to get away with wrongdoing." God was weary of this kind of talk.

How blind could they be? **They** were the guilty ones, and **they** deserved to be judged. And yet they thought that they were not so bad, and that they were doing well because they were still going through their religious rituals. They were still bringing sacrifices to the Temple (v13), and upset - weeping and crying - when God was displeased with their offerings. They were desensitized to their sin. They were blind.

Is it possible that you're a Christian, but you're questioning God, and you're wondering why God is not blessing your life? Is it possible that there is sin in your life, but you're blind to your own sin? Have you examined your life in the searching light of Scripture?

Are you committed in your marriage and family life? What about your personal life? Has the world desensitized you to your sin? Are you going through the motions at church, and think you're doing okay? **How blind can you be?**