

THE BOOK OF MALACHI - When Spiritual Intimacy Feels Elusive - Pt 4
Sunday, November 20th, 2022, 5:30 p.m.
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SINNING AGAINST THE BODY OF CHRIST

Malachi 2:10 - "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

There are basic Scriptural laws that make relationship with God possible. Some are very well known and studied. Some have been looked at already in this book of Malachi. God's Word must be honored **first**, before anything else in my life. Given any choice in any circumstances, God's will must always carry the day. It must smash whatever else I'm tempted to ultimately honor. The priests to whom God spoke in Malachi's day tried to pay lip service to God while giving ultimate consideration to the tastes and desires of the people.

Of course, the lesson here is even worship itself must be carried out on God's terms, not ours. Obedience is the key, not sincerity. Obedience **trumps** sincerity. That principle carries over into the New Testament age as well. True, worship, in **our** day just like in **Malachi's**, must come from the heart. But that doesn't mean we are now free to **choose** how we will worship our God.

You've probably heard the familiar saying, "***Each one worship God from his own heart in his own way.***" It's the way that sentence ends that's all wrong. "***From his own heart***" in no way links up with "***in his own way.***" Worship must arise from a sincere heart, true enough. But after my heart is engaged my worship must still be in **God's** way, not **mine**. God's way is the only way a sincere heart would even **want** to worship. Worshipping **my** way is proof positive that I have a **selfish** heart, not a **Godly** one.

There are **two** terrible ideas corrupting genuine worship in that sentence:

- a) That ***I'm free to worship in whatever way makes me feel comfortable.*** In other words, God is more concerned that I'm happy with my worship than that He's happy with my worship. It is the most common form of making God over into my image. And this kind of idolatry usually takes place among evangelical Christians when they attend their local churches.
- b) That ***worship is only a matter of the heart.*** Now, worship must come from a pure heart, true enough. I can't put on an outward front while my heart isn't right with God. But where does the New Testament say worship is **only** a matter of heart? Where does it say that if my heart is sincere, there is nothing else I need to consider when I come before God in worship?

A quick glance in our Bibles would clear up this confusion. Here are just a few things I'm **commanded** to remember **along with** my sincere heart. I'm commanded to attend church frequently and consistently. I'm commanded to give sacrificially and regularly. I'm commanded to be baptized and to partake regularly of the Lord's Table. I'm strongly exhorted to lift my voice in worship. I'm commanded to pray together with others and bear their burdens when I worship.

Now, all of those things must be done from the heart. I suppose an **atheist** could outwardly perform all those things with no spiritual benefit whatsoever. I get that. But it is equally true that all those things are also **outward actions** that involve more than the heart. They involve my body, my time, my finances. Worship is not, and never has been only a matter of my heart.

This shouldn't surprise us one bit. If God had created us just as spirit beings, or just as big walking hearts who just oozed around like slippery blobs then worshipping Him with our hearts would be all we'd need to know. But He didn't make us that way. He made us with physical bodies. And, even more, He **commanded** that these physical bodies actually be presented - **involved** - in our worship - **Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."**

The people could have been as sincere as they wanted in Malachi's time. But those lame and blemished sacrifices weren't what God was after. No amount of good intention could compensate for their lack of obedience. This relates to my opening point. If their hearts *had* been sincere, they would have never even contemplated making their own offerings to God. They would have been *obedient* in their worship if their hearts were sincere.

Now we come to a *second* principle of keeping relationship with God through worship. And it has to do with my relationship with *you*. In just a few verses Malachi will tell of how the people cover the altar with tears but get no answers to their prayers - **Malachi 2:13** - **“And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.”**

We need to pay close attention here. The understanding of the average Christian today is if we could just have great prayer meetings our spiritual problems would be solved. And no doubt we *need* more prayer meetings. But here's a situation that wasn't helped one bit in spite of the fact that the people were pooling their tears around the altar as they waited on God.

Of course, we can understand how they wouldn't receive answers when they were self-centered and disobedient in their worship of God. But the point of the text is there was something **else** wrong. There were other sins less obvious but just as cancerous - perhaps even **more** cancerous because they grew silently, unnoticed, like a tumor in the body of Christ.

And **undetected** sins are the most deadly. Sins that aren't **perceived** as sinful, are deadened to arouse repentance because they end up being broadly accepted among the people of God.

That's what we're going to study now in this tenth verse of Malachi chapter two: **Malachi 2:10** - "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

1) **THE VERSE ASKS THREE SEARCHING, RHETORICAL QUESTIONS**

These are the three questions we're going to consider in this first teaching on this verse. We'll look at three additional issues next week as we continue this teaching.

- a) **"Have we all not one Father?"** - Most translations (like the ESV) capitalize **"Father"**. The NIV shows in the notes that it can be left in small case as well. That's because in Hebrew there is no distinction between large and small case letters. They're all the same.

Most of the time, it's easy to tell from the context which **"Father"** is being referred to. Here it's not so easy. It could mean **"one father - Abraham"** or it could mean **"one Father - God"**. Both are true. And the meaning of the passage is the same in either case. After all, God chose Abraham as the father of the Jewish nation.

Either way, the prophet is saying these chosen people are all **family**. They come from common stock - a common source. They are truly members one of another.

- b) **"Has not one God created us?"** - This is very obvious and straight forward. Everything they are and have is from God. They are what they are because of God. They hadn't earned any of it. They didn't deserve any of these blessings.

In other words, both of these questions are designed to heighten their awareness of living under God's **grace**. The fact that they were forgetting this becomes evident from the next question:

- c) **"Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"** Other translations say, **"by dealing treacherously with one another?"** (NKJV) - or - **"by dealing treacherously each against his brother?"** (RSV). The central idea in each case being that **I damage something of my relationship with God when I am careless in my relationship with you.**

Here's what had happened. The people of God had committed hidden sins - possessed hidden agendas - glossed over with kind words to be sure - but their hearts were turned against each other.

That phrase "**faithless to one another**" or "**dealing treacherously**" actually comes from a single word in Hebrew. And it's the word for "**garment**" or "**cloak**" or "**wrap**". And when you think about it a little, you begin to see what the prophet is getting at.

We still use the phrase "**cloak and dagger**" to describe something covert and cruel. The person doesn't just **brandish** the dagger. He **conceals** it under his outer **cloak**. We talk about "**keeping something under wraps**" when there's a plot that is never made visible to the masses. A scheme is being brewed in secret. People are left wounded but nobody knows where the damage comes from.

Our own era heightens the intensity and hide-ability of these interpersonal sins. Cruel texts and posts. Faceless attacks of gossip. Unforgiving hearts. Justified personal vengeance. We no longer have to be physically visible to do damage to others. And that kind of invisible breaking of covenant with the body of Christ makes these sins **feel** more acceptable.

That's exactly the kind of stuff Malachi is talking about. And he will deal **visibly** - **exposing** some specific ways they were **"being faithless"** and **"dealing treacherously"** in the following verses. But the principle sin underlying those problems is spelled out in this one verse.

The point the people are missing is destroying them. Because the people of God are one, because they've all been called from sin by grace, because they are all bound by one common goal and purpose, what they do to **each other**, they do to **God Himself**.

And their actions to each other are bringing their spiritual lives to a screeching halt. But they obviously aren't making this connection. This we know because they're still crying their eyes out, calling on God for help and blessing. So we know they are simply blind to how far they are from receiving anything from God's hand.

God, in firm, yet still loving words, is trying hard to remove their blind-spots. He's bringing understanding to remove the mystery of their frustrated, fruitless worship. Because the biggest mistakes we can make spiritually are the mistakes we allow to continue unchallenged.

So let the light of this principle into your soul. If you don't need it right now, you certainly will one day. Store up this principle from God's Word. Listen to it. Take the mystery out of so much nameless spiritual decay and numbness. Walk in the light.