

Text: Malachi 2

Those That Teach Must Be Faithful

1"And now this commandment is for you, O priests. 2"If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. 3"Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. 4"Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 5"My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. 6"True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. 7"For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8"But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9"So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. (Malachi 2:1-9)

Under the Old Covenant, the priests and Levites were responsible for carrying on worship at the Temple, and also for instructing the people in the ways of God. The Lord here sharply rebukes them for not only turning away from Him, but also for leading the people under their instruction to do the same. Jesus rebuked the religious teachers of His day also for turning from righteous worship of God to their own man-made religious traditions. The rhetorical question that ends the following passage indicates the serious punishment that this sin (and indeed all sin) merits.

13"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.] 15"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 16"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17"You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18"And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 19"You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20"Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21"And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22"And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. 23"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24"You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26"You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. 27"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28"So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 29"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31"So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32"Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matthew 23:13-33)

These sharp warnings for those that teach God's Word are summed up in the following verse from the Book of James.

1Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

In spite of this, Paul rightly predicted that teachers would arise within the Church that would teach falsehood in the name of Jesus. We certainly have such teachers in our own day, though we are not unique in this regard. Throughout the Christian era, and even during Old Testament times, there has been no shortage of individuals that gladly preach falsehoods because these are what sinful people want to hear. Their ultimate motive for this is selfish gain—indeed, many such preachers lived and live lives of luxury, wealth, and prominence. However, just as Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees of the wrath that awaited them, so also these teachers will receive the same punishment.

3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

17Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Philippians 3:17-19)

15"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20"So then, you will know them by their fruits. 21"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:15-23)

11"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

Intermarriage with Unbelievers Disrupts Our Worship of God

10"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? 11"Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12"As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 2:10-12)

God warned the nations of Israel and Judah throughout their history of the danger of intermarrying with the nations surrounding them. This was not so much a racial and ethnic bias as it was a religious one. Certainly the Old Testament contains examples of foreigners that were accepted of God for their righteousness—indeed, not only were Rahab and Ruth accepted, but they became ancestors of David and of Jesus Christ. The danger came when these foreigners led God's people astray into the worship of false gods. Even Solomon in his great wisdom was led astray in this manner! In the Law, God prescribed a severe punishment for this sin of idolatry.

1"When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, 2and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

3"Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. 4"For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. (Deuteronomy 7:1-4)

The Lord visited His wrath upon the people for this and other sins by sending them into captivity in Babylon.

11Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. 13He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. 14Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. 15The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; 16but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

17Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. (2 Chronicles 36:11-17)

Referring back to Malachi 2, even after God mercifully returned His people to their land they began committing the same sins that led to their captivity in the first place. As stated in verse 12, He was not afraid to destroy those that mocked and defied Him by worshiping other gods. Even worse, these individuals actually presumed to continue in the outward trappings of God's worship when their hearts were turned after other gods!

Under the New Covenant, we likewise have an admonition to avoid entering into marriage or other binding relationships with nonbelievers.

14Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

16Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;

AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.

"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;

And I will welcome you.

18"And I will be a father to you,

And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"

Says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

As was the case with the Israelites, so it is with professing Christians—when we enter into such relationships with nonbelievers it is more likely that we will be led astray by them than that we will influence them positively and lead them to Christ. For example, how many times have you heard a woman say (Ladies, no offense is meant here, but I have heard this more often from women than men) regarding a non-believing man that they plan to marry, “I can change him.” This very rarely works. Rather than the husband being converted through the wife’s influence, often the wife is mired in an unhappy and possibly abusive relationship that is unhealthy for her and disrupts her walk with Christ. The danger of this is indeed quite serious, as Jesus warned that worldly cares can cause the “seed” of God’s Word to become unfruitful, leading to the abandonment of one’s profession of Christ.

22"And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

Please don’t think I’m disputing the doctrine of Eternal Security; those that are truly converted cannot lose that salvation. However, the Bible identifies but one final proof of the truth of one’s salvation:

13"But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Matthew 24:13)

The lesson for us is simple: Be “picky” when choosing a husband or wife. Don’t become frustrated or give up and marry the first willing person that comes along if that person is a non-believer. Not only does God identify this as sin in and of itself, but also the consequences to your walk with Christ can be severe.

Divorce is Sin!

13"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14"Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15"But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 16"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." (Malachi 2:13-16)

Again in this passage, God states that He does not regard the outward worship of those that defy His commands. We might give every appearance of piety and reverence, but if our hearts are not right, our “religion” is not accepted.

**8'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.**

9'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,

TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" (Matthew 15:8-9)

Continuing the discussion of marriage, the Lord identifies not only intermarriage with unbelievers as sin, but also the breaking of the marriage covenant. Jesus expounded upon this even further, identifying divorce and remarriage (unless one’s spouse has broken the marriage covenant) as adultery.

3Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

4And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO

HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" 8He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:3-9)

Adultery is sin. That statement seems obvious, but the world increasingly ridicules this assertion. I debated for months by email with a young man that insisted, despite the Scriptures being right in front of his face, that the Bible did not teach against adultery and fornication. Ultimately, he did not accept the Bible as true and authoritative, and went on in his sin. The sexually immoral, unless they repent and confess Christ, will be cast into Hell.

9Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Furthermore, our passage in Malachi mentions that by approaching God while mired in sin the Jews profaned the sanctuary of the Lord. The New Testament teaches that, when we commit sexual sin, we do the same, as our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! 16Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." 17But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)

Sexual sin is serious not only because it defies God's Law, but also because, for the Christian, it profanes His temple. We are called to be pure, and He deserves no less from us.

"Practical Atheism"

17You have wearied the LORD with your words Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17)

This verse, to me, captures the essence of a heart that is enslaved to sin. Standing in the midst of their sin, when confronted with it the people say "*How have we wearied Him?*" Matthew Henry stated the following about such people"

"Corrupt practices are the genuine fruit and product of corrupt principles; and the badness of men's hearts and lives is owing to some loose atheistical notions which they have got and which they govern themselves by. Now, in these verses, we have an instance of this; we here find men dealing falsely with one another, and it is because they think falsely of their God."

In other words—and this is a serious charge—when we defy God we are acting as practical Atheists, as if we do not truly believe that God is, or that he will one day reward righteousness and punish sin. Jesus warned that such an attitude is deadly!

26"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; 29but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. 30"It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)

One day, Jesus will return. We don't know when that will be, and we are warned against trying to predict it. However, when He comes, our lives will be examined and sin will be punished.

11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were

in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

EVERYONE is a sinner; make no mistake about that. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will escape the just punishment for sin, which is eternal torment. The Good News of God's Word is that everyone that repents of sin and confesses Christ as Lord and Savior will have their names written in this Book, exchanging an eternity of torture for an eternity of life, comfort, and peace.

9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:9-13)