

## God's Despised Name Malachi 1:6-14

Have you ever found yourself in an argument you knew you couldn't win, but you just didn't want to let it go? Everyone who is married has experienced this, right? It's hard to say the words, "I'm sorry, I was wrong," even when you know you were wrong. There's something in our nature that hates admitting when we are wrong. And because we are sinners, we are often wrong. Which is in a nutshell what the book of Malachi is about. Essentially, the message is God is right, and we are wrong. The whole book of Malachi can be divided into six disputations. In each disputation, God makes a statement of truth, then the people dispute the veracity of God's statement. In the book of Malachi, God is like a spurned husband, and his people are like an unfaithful wife. The book begins with God saying, "I have loved you," and His people responding, "How have you loved us?" Sounds like the kind of argument you might hear in a marriage. At the very start, God was getting right to the heart of the matter. The essence of sin is summed up in our prideful rejection of God's love, to the point that we even look upon His love with contempt.

An important, guiding principle as we study this book is, "God is always right!" It's never a good idea to argue with God. Yet hopefully we will begin to see that there is an innate tendency within us to argue with Him. Tonight, we move into the second disputation, in which God will confront the wickedness of the priests. There is a logical progression here from the first disputation to the second. As the nation rejected the love of God, they sunk into the pitfalls of false religion. As we spurn God's love, we begin to despise His name, which leads to the kind of religion that is surface-deep. It does not penetrate the heart. Like the hypocrites Jesus confronted, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." We are going to see how the Israelites began to worship God half-heartedly, which really means they weren't worshipping Him at all. Worship is all or nothing. Either we love God supremely, or we love something else more than Him, which again, is the essence of sin. Sin is inordinate affections—love that is misplaced and misguided.

Let's look at how the second disputation begins.

**<sup>6</sup> "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.**

Now, God is establishing a working definition of the peoples' relationship to Himself using the analogies of a son's relation to his father, and a servant to his master. God puts these statements in the form of questions in order to add emphasis and bring conviction. When He says, "If then I am a father" it is plain and clear that He means He is a father. God is declaring Himself to be a father and a master to His people. Both of these analogies are a constant thread throughout the whole of the Old Testament, and obviously are carried on and given even more clarity in the New Testament with the advent of Christ. So I want to explore these Scriptural themes a little further.

His fatherhood is traced all the way back to Genesis, first in the creation account. God is obviously a Father as the creator, the originator of all mankind. But there is a special, unique way in which He is a Father to the nation of Israel. The first time we hear God refer to the nation of Israel as His children is in Exodus 4, when He tells Moses what to say to Pharaoh before he goes to confront him. The Scriptures say, **“<sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, <sup>23</sup> and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’ If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.”** God calls the whole nation of Israel His firstborn son. Remember that God established this paternal relationship with the nation of Israel when He made a covenant with Abraham. God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore and the stars in the heavens. God was the cause of Israel. There would have been no nation of Israel had God not miraculously brought it into being. He is known as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. We call them the patriarchs because they were the first fathers of the nation, but ultimately, God is the Father of Israel.

What God says is due to Him as a Father is honor. I think this warrants a brief rabbit trail. This speaks loudly to the problems confronting us in our day. God has designed fathers to be honored, which also implies that fathers should be honorable. It is quite apparent in our day that one of the reasons we don't see many sons giving honor to their fathers is because we don't see very many honorable fathers. God's design for the family is that fathers would be lovingly present, lovingly involved, and lovingly in charge in their homes. As we culturally drift further and further away from this creation mandate of God, we drift further and further into societal breakdown and chaos. Fathers, we must remember that God Himself is our example. He is the good, good Father who loves perfectly and is unchanging in His holiness. Is our conduct as fathers honorable? Let's examine ourselves. Does our example command honor?

The other analogy of God as master also runs throughout the Scriptures from beginning to end. The word means that He is our Lord. In Hebrew, it is Adonai, and in Greek, it is Kurios. God is our eternal Lord and Master. In this respect, He demands our fear, reverence, and obedience. His very nature demands it. He is worthy! As Master, we fall at His feet and cry Holy! We tremble before Him, not in servile fear as though He were a cruel tyrant, but in humble reverence of His ultimate and absolute authority. He is a good Master—the only one who is truly, perfectly good. It is because He is good and righteous and just that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Wisdom comes with reverence toward the one who is perfectly holy.

Let us not forget that this name, Lord, is the name given to Jesus Christ. There is not nearly enough fear of the Lord Jesus Christ even in our churches today. He is gentle, meek, and lowly, but He is also at the same time the Lord of Hosts, awesome in power. The darkness trembles before Him. His holiness is a consuming fire through which no sin or impurity will pass unscathed. The Lord is His name, and while we approach Him intimately as our Savior and Friend, we also approach Him reverently as our Lord and King.

So the Truth God proclaims here is that He is worthy of honor and fear as Father and Master, but the problem is that the priests are not giving Him honor or fear. He says they despise His name. What is God's name? God's name is His revealed character. Remember the covenant name which God gave to Himself all the way back at the burning bush with Moses. Yahweh, The Great I AM. His name is connected with His attributes because He is unchanging and eternal. What He has been, He is, and what He is, He will always be. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the revelation of God's character connected with His covenant name.

For instance, in Exodus 15, just after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, they went into the wilderness of Shur and found no water. The only water they were able to find was bitter, so they had nothing to drink. As the thirsty people began to grumble against Moses, He cried to the Lord and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. Then we read this,

*There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, <sup>26</sup> saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."*

There we have God revealing Himself as Jehovah Rapha, The Lord who heals—I AM your healer. He was the Lord who heals, He is the Lord who heals, He will be the Lord who heals. Do you see how that self-revelation of God through the covenant name He gave Himself works? The name itself indicates that whatever attribute or action is connected with His name is an eternal and unchanging part of His character. Some of the other names He ascribes to Himself are

**Yahweh Mekoddishkem - The LORD who Sanctifies or makes holy**

**Yahweh Tsidkenu - The Lord your Righteousness**

**Yahweh Shalom - The Lord is Peace**

**Yahweh Shammah - The Lord is There** (Speaking of His presence in the Temple)

**Yahweh Sabaoth - The Lord of Hosts**

All of these names reveal something unique about God's character and sovereign will. So you can see how despising God's name means despising God Himself. To despise His name is to want nothing to do with Him. It is to turn away from Him. This is obviously a serious charge to be brought against the priests of all people.

Interestingly, in verse 6 the name God uses for Himself is Lord of hosts (Yahweh Sabaoth). It reveals God to us as the great military general of Heaven and Earth. There is no power outside of His authority. It's no coincidence that God uses this name in speaking to these priests who were despising His name. It is a name that should strike fear into them. But instead, they respond by arguing with God.

**But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'**

They dispute God's charge. Denial ain't just a river, you know. What's frightening about this is that it's possible to be guilty of despising God's name at the very same moment as you think you are the ones upholding His honor. It is in ignorance that they ask this question. It is likely that, as the priests, they felt pretty good about their standing with God. After all, they were the ones who got to serve in the Temple, they got to offer sacrifices and go into the Holy Place. Once again, just like we saw last week, we see the danger of self-deception in the peoples' response to the Truth. God says they despised His name, and guess what that means. It means they despised His name. God cannot lie. But they don't even realize they've been despising His name. They are self-righteous and thus they are self-deceived. So God answers their disputation in a very pointed and lengthy explanation of their errors.

Let me just say as we prepare to read the rest of this passage, buckle up. When God gets really blunt and honest with us, it's time brace yourself for impact. This is not easy to hear, but we know that it's good for us because God said it. God doesn't speak anything that is false, nor does He speak anything that is harmful. Remember Paul's encouragement to Timothy, that these sacred writings "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) The words we are about to read are for reproof and correction, and we all need to hear them. Remember also, that we are at the very end of the Old Testament. God has been very patient with His people. He is long-suffering with us. He is slow to anger. But there come times when our sin has so increased that He has to speak in clear terms with us.

<sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. <sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts. <sup>9</sup> And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts. <sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. <sup>11</sup> For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>12</sup> But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup> But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. <sup>14</sup> Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

The priests were offering polluted food on the altar, which God refers to as His table. Remember that the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law was the means of atonement for God's people. Animals were slain on the altar in place of the sinful people. The just penalty that was

due to the nation was graciously removed from them as substitutes were offered in their place. All of this was a shadow pointing forward to the perfect sacrifice for sin, God's own Son. There were very clear and strict laws about what animals could be offered in sacrifice to God. Because they represented the future sacrifice of the Holy Son of God, they had to be unblemished and pure.

What is underneath this offering of polluted food is ultimately an inaccurate estimation of the depths of sin. We are very quick to excuse sin. We like to treat it as something small. But in the eyes of the Lord, our sin is an offense which only the blood of His holy Son can remove. He does not deal lightly with sin. We must not either.

Look at verse 8 again, **"<sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts."** Again, the Lord argues from the lesser to the greater to enforce His point. We understand this in terms of our human relationships. If we were to bring an offering to our governor, we would want to bring a worthy and noble gift. But what we understand on a human plane, we often fail to understand about our relationship with God. We cast contempt upon His name when we think He is not worthy of our first and best offerings.

God shows His displeasure with their religion when He says, **<sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.** He would rather that we not offer Him anything at all than that we bring Him something impure. Think about this in terms of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Christ has been offered for us, so we do not need to offer any more bulls or goats. But we are commanded to offer our whole selves, our bodies, as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. The standard today is not any lower than it was in the Old Testament. In some ways it is higher. It should be clearer what God requires of us. He wants our whole lives, every moment of every day to be lived for His glory because we have been forgiven, cleansed, and justified.

Paul dealt with this issue of despising the Lord's table with the church in Corinth. **<sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not."** This was the same problem in the New Testament that Malachi was confronting in the Old Testament. When we share in the Lord's Supper, we are participating in something holy. We are remembering the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for us. We eat the bread and drink the cup as symbols of our faith in His body and blood given for us. This is not a light, frivolous matter. Paul goes on to warn the Corinthians in this way, **<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of**

**you are weak and ill, and some have died.”** Make no mistake, God takes His table very seriously. We are blood-bought and we ourselves belong to the Lord. If we go on living in deliberate sin while claiming to have been bought by the blood of Jesus, we are deceiving ourselves.

The standard of fearing God’s name as we remember the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf has not changed today. We must remember the cross in the fear of the Lord. We must examine ourselves and seek to bring God a holy offering, a life laid down, surrendered, crucified with Christ, and now walking in the new and living way that has been opened for us by Jesus Christ.

There is actually a prophecy of the death of Jesus Christ and of the effects that it would have in bringing the church into being in our passage. Did you notice it? **<sup>11</sup> For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.** How is this being fulfilled? It began to be fulfilled in the book of Acts when the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers on Pentecost and they were endowed with power from on high to be Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, and to the end of the earth. It is still being fulfilled today. As believers fulfill the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations, the promise of God that His name will be great among the nations is being fulfilled. It is as the Gentiles are brought to faith in Christ through the preaching of the gospel that God’s name becomes greater and greater among the nations.

In connection with the promise that in every place incense will be offered to my name, remember Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, **<sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.** He also says a pure offering will be offered in every place. What is that? That is us. Now that Christ has died for us, we are to be the living sacrifices, daily dying to the flesh and offering ourselves in obedience to the will of God. The Church, the corporate body of Christ, should be a pure offering to the Lord. Are we? If not, we are to blame. God has provided all we need to be pure.

Look at verse 12, **<sup>12</sup> But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup> But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord.** What vivid language. You snort at it! Have you ever snorted at something? This is an impulsive response that we sometimes have to something we feel is unfair or too much of a burden. Parents, you’ve probably heard your children snort at something you’ve asked them to do. “Go clean your room.” *Snort*. “What a weariness this is.” You made the mess. *Snort*. There is no logic behind such responses.

The Lord’s table is His greatest gift to us. It is the provision He has made for us, and He is the one who has taken the action to offer Himself for us. Yet when it comes time for us to respond by giving ourselves to Him, we often snort at it. Maybe we like our sin too much. Maybe we

think it shouldn't matter so much to God that we are self-centered. God has made it possible for us to be holy, yet without even realizing it, we can often look upon that incredible privilege with disdain.

Then, when we thought the Truth of God's Word couldn't hit any harder, look at verse 14, **"<sup>14</sup> Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations."** Even though we don't offer God a blemished male from our flock, we can still be guilty of bringing God a blemished sacrifice. Does this mean that we have to be perfect to come to the Lord's Table? No. But it does mean that we have to be surrendered. We have to be honest with ourselves. We have to be honest with the Lord. It's when we come to the table defiantly in our sins, excusing ourselves, that we are guilty of offering a blemished sacrifice to God. We should feel the same anger towards our own sin that God feels against it. Our own sin. Not other's sin. It's easy to be angry at other peoples' sin, but not as easy to be angry at your own. It's my sin that I disdain as I come to the Lord's Table. I must pour contempt on *my* pride. That's true repentance and faith.

The cross displays what God feels about sin. He hates it. He will not allow it in His presence. It must be washed away and forgiven. So we must not be guilty of abusing the grace of God by pretending to give ourselves to Him while we deliberately walk in disobedience. God's Word to such an attitude is, "Cursed be the cheat." Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Worship is all or nothing. You give God everything, or you have given Him nothing. He doesn't want a part of your life. He wants the whole offering. He is a great King! Is He your King? That's the question.