

Malachi 2:10-16

Moral decay of the Christian Church

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 Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution which 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! And 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. 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. 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. "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."

Today we see two sins, the first concerns marriage, and the second deals with easy of divorce. Both sins have life consequences and often the first will lead into the second. However, as with God's Word, there is more to these two sections that meets the eye at first. It also relates to our relationship with God when we create a new religion that we think is OK, and when we fall away from our walk with Him and effectively divorce ourselves from God. This section is about the moral decay of the Christian Church, having heard last week of the spiritual decay of the Church.

I was reading a commentary on Malachi - a writer named Edward Dennet who wrote a commentary in 1888. He called the book of Malachi - '*The State Of Things At The End*', and this was from a man writing over 100 years ago! These two portions of Scripture certainly have great relevance in today's world and today's church so let us delve into what Scripture has to tell us. For a start, there is an overarching message - that of treachery, as exemplified in a wrong marriage and divorce, also the treachery against God and His commandments by Israel as the covenant nation, God's own chosen people. In this example it is also an action against God and is stated as covering *one's garment with violence*.

We see this overarching issue of treachery raised in the style we have seen since the beginning. Malachi asks a question, or in this case, two questions; (1) *Have we not all one Father?* (2) *Has not one God created us?* The sequence and content are most interesting; in fact we can spend a very long time in looking at these questions. Even more telling is the statement that follows which ties the questions together: *Why do we deal treacherously with one another...?* Malachi is asking two different variants, one from us towards God - "is not the Father the same Father for all of us?" Essentially, "is God the Father your Father, and is He not also my Father?" The second question wants to know whether the same God created each one of us. These questions have the undertone that if we have the same creator, and the same Father, what are we doing in our relationships with God and with

our marriage partners? This is giving us an indication that though our verses talk of marriage and divorce, it is also much about ourselves as the body of Christ, the unity that should be absolute amongst ourselves, and disunity is treachery towards God, and in the Church, towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

To understand this part of the book, we need to re-visit the opening words of chapter 2: *"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.* Malachi is addressing this portion of prophecy, and admonition to the priests. These are the people who were responsible for ensuring the spiritual aspects of Israel were meeting the precepts as set by God in His law. I think that it is worthwhile reminding ourselves again this week of who we are in God's eyes. Again look at 1 Peter 2:9 and read: *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light,* and Revelation 5:10 *And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."* That said we can understand that Malachi was specifically talking to the priests of the day, however the message is to all Christians - that is, us as priests as we have just read. Therefore these words we have just read are no less important to us today than to the priests of Malachi's day. They are in fact probably more important as these are the last days. Therefore, we have a job to do, in that people out there need us to proclaim the gospel according to the God not according to ourselves.

We need to briefly re-visit the following verses also from earlier in this chapter, which we read and studied last week, before continuing in the section before us:

"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. 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 (verses 5-6).

This statement shows us exactly the standards that God had expected. We can see He has 'audited' the priests and found them wanting. Malachi first addresses the relationship issue between the priests and God, their spiritual lives, how they were keeping the covenant, or not keeping it as the case was. Verse 5 and 6 tells us as to how it was, thereby presenting to the priests how it should have been but wasn't. This spiritual demise was a common repetitive theme of the Israelites - restoration for example when King Josiah brought Israel back to the Lord and they then become all for God. Furthermore, there was a renewal of sacrifice and feasts, even keeping of the Passover, with the benefits we see in these two verses - peace and equity. Israel is seen generally to turn away from iniquity under Josiah then within a few years it all falls apart, and years would go past until another champion arose who would turn Israel back to God.

Unfortunately, this was not an Old Testament activity which disappeared after the Lord Jesus came into the world with a new covenant. Not so! Humans remained humans, and despite having the entire mystery revealed to us by God we also fail quite spectacularly in the keeping of the Word. Very early into the new era - the Church started to fall apart. One of Jesus's own disciples saw it, and wrote about as directed by the Lord Himself:

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write... I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Revelation 2:1-4).

How long was this after Paul had written to them saying; *Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers?* (Ephesians 1:15-16). In Ephesians we see Paul warning them of the dangers that they face, for example: *Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* We see that when John comes to write to that Church they have lost their first love, and that not many years, maybe a decade or two after this letter of Pauls. Therefore, we see that then was no different to the priests of Malachi's day, and today's Church being even worse than the church at Ephesus, and well comparable with the state of Israel in Malachi's day, we cannot ignore the message given to the priests through Malachi.

We see then in this opening background that the message being preached to the priests is applicable to us as priests, as called this by Christ Himself. We can see that their spiritual life had fallen away; they no longer were practicing as directed by the Spirit of God, but had let their own wayward spirit in. We now move to the consequence of this - moral failure. Paul wrote about this sequence in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your **whole spirit, soul, and body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This gives to us a direct look into how we fall away, as in the order of the words highlighted - first we lose sight of God, we no longer abide on His path, then we start entering into those things that are neither edifying nor likely to improve our spiritual life. The Scriptures are full of such lists - where 'preserved blameless' the attribute Paul wants us to hold onto is lost. These lists include sexual immorality, drunkenness, lies, murder, theft, anything really that occurs in the world. However, the root of all this is the loss of relationship with God. We can test this, according to John; by the love we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we lack there, we lack in the spirit, and therefore, our relationship with God. John tells us: *Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.* (1 John 3:10)

If we say we are reading our Bibles, going to church, taking communion, and have a lack of love for any brother or sister, all that doing Christian stuff is being wasted, as we are walking a different course to God, rather than one with Christ indwelling. Some though are more subtle than just hating someone in the church, there are nastier ways and means of creating discontent and havoc. Proverbs chapter 6 states in the strongest possible terms: *These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.* The latter is the one I think is most often seen within church circles - people who sow discord. These are people who have a critical spirit, never satisfied with how things are done, but never being part of the solution and they often sow discord, yet say - "who me?" These are seriously blind to it! They are not openly rebellious, rather whisper rebellion and discord amongst those that love to hear such ill, for as Proverbs 18: says: *The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body* (16-19). These are some of the most destructive means of creating cracks within the church, where the devil finds opportunity once the whisperer has finished getting a mean spirited person to act more viciously.

We have therefore, returned to the core overarching theme of our passage today, that of treachery. The person with the critical spirit as a standard, make claims of Christianity, but fail to meet the standards that God sets, fighting against those they are supposed to be

in fellowship. They forget that their character should be seen as having: *tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another.* (Colossians 3:12-13) This is where the second part of chapter two comes in, for it is all about unity of the body (the Church), we build one another up, respect the leadership, and give all glory to God, through Jesus Christ the head of the Church. Scripture puts this into its own Words, these words are what we should be holding fast to our hearts:

[W]e should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:14-16).

With this in mind, let us look closer at this question, especially since God uses the very strong term ‘treachery’. *Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?* (2:10) If God is the Father of us all, and created us, and we serve the one God and Father, then why do we deal treacherously with one another? It is a reasonable question. Nehemiah 13 tells us the sin of Judah as we saw in verse 11 of Malachi 2:

Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution which He loves. [Judah] has married the daughter of a foreign god. In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people Nehemiah 13:23-24.

We see in these verses number of aspects. First, the treachery is between Israel and her priests and God, where one of the main issues was that of marrying foreign women. Not only that, but the children were being brought up not even speaking Hebrew. But even more, we see that Judah has married the daughter of a foreign god - they worshipped the gods of their wives. They let evil into their homes through marriages outside the covenant, spoke a different language, and worshipped false gods. The covenant they had with God was being broken, discarded and trampled on. We can find the covenant in Exodus:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (19:5-6).

This covenant was a two way street - obey God, worship God, love the Lord their God with all their hearts, follow the laws and commandments and the people would be a special treasure of God. They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Nothing really has changed. The covenant though it has been changed, but has the same attributes when speaking of our responsibility towards God.

Job in chapter 31 has a lengthy list of how one may profane the covenant with the Lord, even though he was not Jew as such, and did not live under the rule of law or the commandments. Job says (and this is just a part):

What then should I do when God riseth up? and if he visited, what should I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not One fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from [their] desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or

have eaten my morsel alone, so that the fatherless ate not thereof, (For from my youth he grew up with me as with a father, and I have guided the [widow] from my mother's womb;) If I have seen any perishing for want of clothing, or any needy without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my lambs; if I have lifted up my hand against an orphan, because I saw my help in the gate: [then] let my shoulder fall from the shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone! For calamity from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his excellency I was powerless. If I have made gold my hope, or said to the fine gold, My confidence!... Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and tares instead of barley. The words of Job are ended. Job 31.

These actions are no different to marrying outside of the covenant, or having one's children only speak another language than your own, or the family worship a foreign god. By not feeding the widows, or ignoring the clothing needs of the poor, in treating vulnerable people badly, and relying on money, we are all dealing treacherously with God, and we too should be saying, let thistles grow instead of wheat.

Our verses also talk specifically about marriage and how God views and has ordered marriage. In today's world, where the arguments surrounding marriage are strongly political, and centre on marriage within the homosexual community we find the devil using God's own holy institution to create disharmony, and denigrate that which God ordained - this too is treachery. A commentator Guzik tells us:

The Lord's holy institution which He loves: This tells us exactly how God feels about marriage. It is holy to Him; it is an institution to Him; and God loves marriage.

i. When we sin against our marriage or our marriage vows, we sin against something holy to God. He has set apart marriage for a special meaning, a special purpose in the life of His people.

ii. When we sin against our marriage or our marriage vows, we sin against an institution that God has established. Marriage is God's idea, not man's; He formed and established the first marriage as a pattern for every one afterwards (Genesis 2:20-25). Because it is an institution, we are not allowed to define marriage any way that pleases us; God has established it and we must conform to what He has established.

iii. When we sin against our marriage or our marriage vows, we sin against something that God loves.

- *God loves marriage for what it displays about His relationship with us*
- *God loves marriage for the good it does in society*
- *God loves marriage for the way it meets the needs of men, women, and children*
- *Most of all, God loves marriage as a tool for conforming us into the image of His Son¹*

I need to raise here a legitimate but sad question. Should we be race conscious when we marry? Is this what we are reading when we read of the breaking of the covenant with marriage by those in Judah to women in other surrounding nations? I think it fair to say that this is not so, but this is how politically it is viewed today by some elements of the

¹ Guzik Bible Commentary by David Guzik: *Malachi*

<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/malachi/2.htm> accessed 25 April 2014

world. We can refute the world in that Boaz married Ruth a Moabitess and they are found in the line of David, the line of our own Saviour Jesus Christ. The crux of this marriage is that we read Ruth declaring: *Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.* Ruth converted and she became Jewish and there worshipped the God of Israel. In Malachi's day we see the priests marrying foreign women, who were not converting, not even bothering to learn the language, and continued to worship false gods. The priests could not see a problem with this. In fact they have no repentance about it at all.

Verses 13 and 14 of our passage today says: *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. Yet you say, "For what reason?"* Hardheartedness was the bottom line. They failed to see their own treachery. The tears were not for their sin - they could not even see their sin against God and His precious treasure that He gave them as His side of the covenant - Himself and having them as His chosen people. They could not see why God was not answering them, giving them a blessing anymore. Do we say this? What is the problem with our church? For what reason are our coffers not filled to overflowing, and the widows and poor are being fed and clothed? Because we the people, the priests, are dealing treacherously towards God. We think it is because of 'them' when really it is because of 'us' all of us. He sees past our tears and weeping, for the tears and weeping are mixed with whisperings, and gossip, and we claim to be His children, yet we meet the preceding verse of our section: *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!* I am sure we are not blind to our own actions, as God was sure the priests were not blind to their actions. They knew the ground on which they were speaking. When one is malicious and talks behind another's back, we are all aware of the possible consequences, we just hope that we do not get caught out. We are also the same as the priests, when we are caught out, half the time we are not even embarrassed, or apologetic. I know that I am being a little harsh, for certainly within our flock are those that neither gossip, nor deal treacherously with God, or their brothers and sisters, as being spoken of here. I suspect though that each of us has at least a tiny part of this flaw in us, we all sin, and find ourselves at least thinking it from time to time - which is as bad as saying it - see the verse regarding lust of the eyes is the exact same sin as the act of adultery.

The phrase being awake and aware are well commented on in the commentaries. The same words have many different forms of translation, but Jamieson, Faussett and Brown state that it means: *master and... scholar-- literally, "him that watcheth and him that answereth." So "wakeneth" is used of the teacher or "master" (Isa 50:4); masters are watchful in guarding their scholars. The reference is to the priests, who ought to have taught the people piety, but who led them into evil. "Him that answereth" is the scholar who has to answer the questions of his teacher (Luke 2:47)*² As we read last week, the priests were supposed to be the keepers of the Word, they were meant to meditate on the Word, teach the Word, be keepers of Scripture, and the Word should have been forever on their lips. But their mouths were corrupt. The Lord said that they were supposed to follow His expectation that: *The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. (Malachi 2:6).* Rather, *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. (Malachi 2:8).* It cannot be that they were completely ignorant - God says that they

² Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown and published in 1871 available on line eg <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/jamieson-fausset-brown/malachi/malachi-2.html>
Accessed 4 April 2014

weren't. Yet they married the wrong women who did not put away their gods, they taught Scripture badly (if at all) and wrongly, causing many to stumble, they corrupted the covenant. Spiritually and physically they were sinning without even recognising their own sin, and worse still, did not know the love of God anymore - which is why they asked: *'In what way have You loved us?'* (Malachi 1:2).

These problems were present in the church when James wrote his book. He wrote:

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:26-27).

Paul writes to the Corinthians: *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* (2 Corinthians 6:14) James would have had no need to write this if the sin was not present then, and I say to you dear reader, we have not changed, these two sins are the most common in all the world, and to our shame, as much in the church as out of it - the sins committed by the tongue, and the sins committed usually because of lust, that of unequal yoking. Both lead the sinner to doom, to a walk separately from the Father. If yoked to a non-believer, or wrong believer, the latter worse than the first - for the believer is awake and aware when he or she enters the transaction. What follows is seen in Scripture, is played out daily in our world, in churches everywhere. First the believer stops going to church regularly, then stops reading the Bible, and stops praying, and they start to enjoy the Sunday barbecue rather than the Lord's Day fellowship, and so forth. I have been there. It was a fool's journey, I had my eyes wide open, yet I chose the pathway to destruction. God and I stopped having a relationship - apart from one of argument. He took me to the bottom of a deep deep valley, then with my repentance, God turned me around to climb back to the pathway He had for me all along, such is His grace, praise the Lord, but it was a very long and painful experience. I dealt treacherously with the Lord, and with my fellow Christians.

The tongue in the same way have caused many a church to fail. What we say, what we teach, how we teach it, how we interact with our brothers and sisters, what we say to whom - it all matters. James writes in chapter 3: *Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. see how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.* (5-6) Often an argument sets off a small but seemingly irreversible pathway of offence; people are no longer on speaking terms preferring to gossip and slander. Other people take sides and soon a full blown rift occurs. Each Lord's Day they gather, they take of communion, but as in Malachi's time they are defiling the Lord's Table, seated on opposite sides of the room. Then one party leaves the church for good and others follow. The place is a mess and the fires of hell have burned brightly. This is what happened in Israel, it has happened over the centuries, and continues today. These are sober passages we read in Malachi.

Why have I taken this commentary down this pathway, when the passage at hand talks of dealing treacherously with the wife of one's youth, and divorce? The sin is the same and the picture is the same, that of God is giving a two pronged message in Malachi. Some divorce their wives, others divorce their church. Both are sins and ungodly acts. Neither are helpful to the spirit. Unlike me, you may not have married the wrong woman, against the wisdom of Scripture, and ended in divorced as the Scripture teaches will happen so often when this occurs. However, there are few of us that have not done the act

spiritually, gone down the pathway of disobeying God in the ways discussed above, maybe not splitting a church, but leaving a bitter taste with a feud, or causing dissensions and troubles for a time, or found yourself doing activities that are not godly, holy, or edifying. God's grace is sometimes amazingly overwhelmingly huge, and He stops us before we fall to the bottom of the pit. However there is a sure solution, and one we mentioned last week - holiness - the way we should be, live, and strive to improve on.

James tells us:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18).

Here we have the answer. Here we have the solution written by God for His people. Nathan has been preaching on the Beatitudes. Last week he preached on the one that says: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Matthew 5:5. In James as above we see that the only way for a person to show good conduct is in the *meekness of wisdom*. Meekness then is a characteristic that is essential to overcome, and not need the admonition we are seeing in Malachi.

My old friend Tozer says this: *The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He rests perfectly content to allow God to place His own values. He will be patient to wait for the day when everything will get its own price tag and real worth will come into its own. Then the righteous shall shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father. He is willing to wait for that day.*

*In the meantime he will have attained a place of soul rest. As he walks on in meekness he will be happy to let God defend him. The old struggle to defend himself is over. He has found the peace which meekness brings.*³

Spurgeon writes that meekness follows the first two beatitudes "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" He noted that these first two were personal items, both of which one must have, before meekness can happen. He says: *But the meekness has to do with other people. It is true that it has a relationship to God, but a man's meekness is especially towards his fellow men. He is not simply meek within himself—his meekness is manifest in his dealings with others. You would not speak of a hermit who never saw a fellow creature as being meek. The only way in which you could prove whether he was meek*

³ Tozer, A.W. (1948) The Pursuit of God Available on line: eg http://www.theboc.com/freestuff/awtozer/books/the_pursuit_of_god/meekness_and_rest.html accessed 4 April 2014

would be to put him with those who would try his temper. So that this meekness is a virtue—larger, more expansive, working in a wider sphere than the first two characteristics which Christ has pronounced blessed. It is superior to the others, as it should be, since it grows out of them.

These are characteristics that we should be not only searching out, but praying earnestly for, to overcome ourselves, and allow God to take complete control. For then we can reach the wisdom that James writes of, which is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* Here we see the tongue is tamed, it is godly in its speech, for without godliness we cannot sow peace. We see that wisdom will allow us to be full of mercy and good fruits - which are the fruits of the Spirit. Again, it is a case of allowing Christ to take over our lives and dwell within so we become truly the temple of the Holy Spirit.

As Tozer notes, meekness is not a weakness, meekness can be considered strength under control. *Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30) Here we are yoked to Jesus, working next to Him, in control, using the talents He has for us, in the work He wants of us. We know this, because we are yoked to Him, therefore, are walking exactly on the pathway He has for us. No longer are we struggling, no longer are we allowing our tongue to take control. We will marry appropriately and to the person whom God provides. We will not be divorcing her. We will be cherishing her, as Christ Himself loves the church. We will be within a congregation, in unity with one another, building each other up, not creating division and strife. God says through Malachi - *He seeks godly offspring*, and with the meekness of wisdom that James speaks, this is what God will get. Not only will we ourselves be godly, holy, full of the fruits of the Spirit, but so will those we meet with and fellowship with be, and our children, and those we mentor, encourage and walk alongside. I can understand those who say wait a minute that is not what happens! Not every child will become one with God, nor every unbeliever we walk with. Sure, that is true, we cannot make our children or other people Christian, however, they are far more likely to walk with God if we are an example of that; our job is to plant the seed and water that seed We do this by living as we saw in the last James' passage, than if we are like the priests of the Malachi passage. Our neighbours are more likely to want to know about our God if we reflect the meekness, love and grace of God and that we walk according to Scripture, and not be hypocrites. The world can discern a hypocrite far quicker than the Christian walking badly.

The final point that is needed in this passage is that of unity of the body of Christ. We need to take all that we have learned through this passage and return to the first lines: *Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another...* (Malachi 2:10) The contents of our passage leads us to understand that there is a deep problem here, one that led to marriages that should not have happened, divorce from ones *wife of [ones] youth*, and those that should have taught piety, godliness and holiness leading the people into wickedness.

If we have the same Father, and the same Creator, why are we not walking in unity at all times? Unity in the church means the body of Christ is working according to Scriptural purposes, as we can find in Ephesians 4:16 - *from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* A church

that works together prays together, and out of this comes very effective ministry. We know this because we read in Ephesians further (6:18-19) *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.*

All the saints are the united body of believers, and prayer in these verses enabled Paul to preach the gospel effectively. Our pastors and teachers cannot be preach if the congregation are not praying for them - to enable the utterance needed from the Holy Spirit. I have said this previously, that if we do not present to God united fervent prayer each day, then how do we expect those that are working as Paul was, to be able to do the job God wants of them? If we are united, and are praying together in Spirit then we will not fall into the trap that the priests in Malachi fell into, that of not preaching the gospel, and that of preaching badly, or even falsely, and living sin filled lives. As we all have the same Father and the same creator, we should have the same mind - that of Christ dwelling within us. This state will never bring discontent, nor feuding, nor gossip, slander, or bickering amongst His people. We will strive for meekness and humbleness before God, we will allow God to take over our entire lives, we will be yoked to Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, and walk with Him, working on what He wants us to do. Unity in the church will bring fruit, will allow the light of the Gospel to shine brightly and touch hearts, saving the unsaved from hell and the lake of fire, eternal damnation. It is a worthwhile state to be in as a church.

In conclusion we see that this passage brings a number of points home to us, the priests of the one true God. We have been warned. We have been given the examples and we have been told emphatically with strong language exactly what God's complaint was and what was causing His anger. The priests were being traitors to God, by living lives that did not meet His standards and had broken His covenant with them. They had effectively discarded all that God had provided to them including having them as His treasure - that is what treachery is. So, our take home message is simple - in whatever ways we are treating God treacherously, for that is how God sees it - remember that in today's passage God uses that word five times, we are to desist. We are to remember that within the Church - that is: the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, we are to be a united people, for we have the same Father and the same Creator. We take communion of the same loaf, and drink the wine of remembrance of the one sacrifice that has given us redemption through the blood shed by our Saviour Jesus Christ our Lord. By sinning in whatever way we sin, be it in thought, word or deed, we are dishonouring God, and dealing treacherously with Him, and with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, for Scripture tells us: *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?* (1 Corinthians 5:6). *Therefore let us: Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.* Romans 12:9-13