

**Reading:** Malachi 2:10-16

**Theme:** Unity broken.

We have previously considered how Malachi addressed the people of Israel, returned Israel and therefore mainly Judah who were in a low spiritual condition. The primary blame was laid at the door of the priests - those who had spiritual oversight of the people. We have noted the Lord's message to these ones and saw it is applicable for those with responsibilities of spiritual oversight in the church in particular, but also for all believers.

The lazy, apathetic priests were responsible for creating, fostering the attitude and atmosphere of cosy, easy and cheap religion. Yet the people enjoyed it being so and now the message Malachi gave, shifted from the priests and focused more upon the people and this spiritual deterioration. Yes, again it will include the priests as well as the people, but the focus is shifted squarely onto the people – their responsibilities and accountabilities are shown. NIV heads this section “Judah Unfaithful” and it is quite an involved section as it deals with broken covenant, right marriage, why prayers are not answered and the need to guard one's heart, spirit so as not to break faith.

Malachi was calling the people back to the Lord and yet some could have questioned *“What's the point? We try to pray and it is a waste of time; we pray, we weep, we are serious about seeking God and He doesn't seem to answer us. Why is that? Why bother?”* Is very easy for us to feel like that - God didn't, so I will not bother and we can ask again *“Why?”* It seems God is out of touch with us or rather we are out of contact with Him! Malachi goes on to deal with this problem in these verses and he does so with a general answer first of all and then goes on to deal with specifics. Often, that is a good approach - see the bigger picture, the principal, then to see it being worked out in the details...

Here the people were going through the motions of religion, of worship, of prayer but they recognised they were not getting the blessings, the benefits and even questioning in v13-14 why the Lord paid no attention to all they did as acts of “worship”!

Some people picture God as someone who blesses if He wants to, but does not if He does not want to and does this according to His mood, a whim or even as a reward or punishment. Yet the biblical view of unanswered prayer is that God does it for a reason. We are to remember that prayer is not an automated celestial vending machine - put the right amount of prayers in and get the product, the result we want! Prayer is pulling our self to God’s will for us, our lives, circumstances and for others. It is not us dictating to God via a celestial ordering system. The God of heaven always answers true prayer and yet we may not like the answer or it could be “No”; it could be “Wait” or “Not yet”, as well as “Yes” - but even then, it may be in ways we would not expect! Sometimes we are made to wait and it is for a number of reasons – to teach us patience, persistence, develop our prayer life, to show we are serious about that which we are praying for and we really desire His blessing e.g. in Luke 18:1-8 we have the parable of the persistent widow to teach us to keep on praying.

As with the people of Malachi’s days, it could be the same with us, that there is something which prevents God answering, even that which hinders our prayers. Sometimes we are unaware of it, or at other times we are aware of it and we could be unwilling to do anything about it. This was the case in Malachi’s day as the people were not obeying His word and ways.

Let me clarify something before we go on any further. God hearing and answering our prayers does not depend upon us being sinless, nor deserving such because we have been really, really good. No one is sinless this side of heaven and so not one of us would ever have

any prayers answered! We are certainly not to view answered prayer as a “reward” for being good and obedient people! The word of God, including Malachi here, would say that. God often hears and answers our prayers in most surprising ways and we never deserve it. What Malachi and I want us to recognise is that we need to be serious about the fight against sin and wrong in our own lives. Our God and Saviour will hear and answer prayer even though we have sin in our lives, but He does not and will not hear and answer prayer if we tolerate, cultivate or excuse sin in our lives or secretly in our hearts.

It is the toleration, the nurturing, the protecting, the keeping of sin in our lives that breaks communication with our Father in heaven - as we read in Psalm 66:18-19 *“If I had **cherished** sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.”* We need to keep short accounts with God as believers and not to allow sin to spoil, pollute our relationship with our God and hinder, if not paralyse, our prayer life and relationship with God - which is what 1 John 1:9 is about. In Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV) we read *“He who covers His sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”*

The general principle Malachi deals with is that which was affecting their fellowship and communion with the Lord. Malachi simply questions them so they would see that if they were unfaithful to the Lord, could they honestly in reality expect His blessing, His ear, His favour? They were going against that which the Lord had clearly revealed in teaching, examples and principles.

They had already been reminded of the love the Lord had for them (1:2) and some may have felt *“Huh, He may say that, but He doesn’t answer our prayers...”* They didn’t stop to think or question as to why the Lord was not answering their prayers! They didn’t consider that He really did love them and had done much for them and why were they in the condition of no answers to their prayers? To get

them to think correctly, to prepare them for the detailed specific reasons, the Lord addresses them in v10 with 3 questions. These were questions they needed to ask themselves and so the Lord asks them as if they themselves were asking the 3 questions - which concern the unity of the people. So, 3 headings to look at these 3 questions:

### **1. Unity of Origin.**

The people of Israel were distinguished as God's people, His chosen people. They were set apart from the nations round about. They were His people and were a special, particular, a "peculiar" people to Him. The Lord begins abruptly here in v10 - *Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?*" They would acknowledge that this was the case. Yes, they were God's people. In the first part of the verse, the word "Father" can be with or without a capital 'F'. It is not clear if it refers to Abraham (John 8:39) who the Jews viewed as the father of the nation, or to the Lord as He set them apart as one nation - again through Abraham.

This leads into the next question "*Did not one God create us?*" This is not only generally as God gives life to all - in Him we all move, live and have our being, but God gave them life, created them as a nation, as a people. He took them from out of the mass of humanity and made them His people, especially there in Sinai. They were created, constituted His covenant people, created as a nation. Even in their recent history, the people of Malachi's day could see how the Lord had brought them back from exile, captivity and they were now again the recognisable people of God and would, outwardly at least, would have to acknowledge that. Yet there was also another unity -

### **2. Unity of Covenant.**

God didn't just make the people as a nation and that was it. He then entered into a covenant with them - through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and especially there at Mount Sinai. It is mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup>

question as “*the covenant of our fathers*”. We learn of it in Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-9 along with many other references in OT. God made the people to be His people, to live as He wanted them to, as He showed them by His loving and wise commands.

They were to be distinct and separate from the other nations; were not to be contaminated by false gods, false worship and practices. They were to be united as a people to God, to His ways and His covenant. As God’s people they were to be united one to the other also. In their history that is what we see so often and yet sadly, we also see that when God was not the centre of their lives they were disunited, went to war with and resented one another. Something of that was going on in Malachi’s day as we see:

### **3. Unity of Treachery.**

Instead of being united as God’s people in caring for one another, the people profaned the unity of covenant, the unity of origin by dealing treacherously, breaking faith with one another and going against their fellow Israelites. These ones, with no true heart for God, were quite content to turn on and against the Jews. They didn’t recognise that in sinning against their brother or sister i.e. other Jews, they were sinning against God!

They did not consider that God’s people were exactly that - the people God had called, chosen, set apart and loved in a special way. They failed to realise that to treat them treacherously, to deal falsely, was to sin against them and to also sin against their God. Their low views of the people of God, showed, expressed, revealed their views of their God and the purposes of God in, for and through His people.

Malachi set out this general principle that the ones of His days had lost contact and communion with God and showed it by dealing falsely, treacherously with others who are God’s people. There was a failure to recognise, own and honour the unity of the people of God.

It was despised, ignored and trodden underfoot. They are starting to do what and as they wanted - everyone doing what was right in their own eyes...

That is something of the situation in Malachi's day and the specific profaning of the covenant was then dealt with - especially the marrying of those who worshipped false gods - we will look specifically at these things next time. For now, let's turn our attention to what these matters have to say to us today:

I will start by quoting Matthew Henry "*The considerations of the unity of the church in Christ, its founder and Father, should engage us carefully to preserve the purity of the church and to guard against all corruptions.*" The NT gives us many glorious pictures, types of the Church of God which help us to understand the unity of the church - the picture is used of the Church as a body. Each believer has a part to play in the body. We know that in some diseases, the cells of the body turn and attack other cells of the body and a variety of serious diseases occur - cancers most notably. Sadly, some believers can turn on other believers and disease occurs in a local fellowship. Just as sad is a believer who unnaturally isolates themselves off from their local body of believers. Imagine that with your own body - if your toe or eye or another part of your anatomy felt that the body was not as good, as nice, as perfect as it wanted and so it isolated itself away from that body! It is ridiculous, but there are regrettably ridiculous believers and they feel they can be fine on their own and isolate themselves. I, from the clear evidence and authority of Scripture, have to question that...

We need to have biblical views of the Church - both the universal and the local church. I am definitely not saying that any church will be perfect, for I know that is only reserved for heaven, but now on earth we have the honour, privilege and duty to be part of the local church - attend it yes, but if attending regularly, be united in a

formal membership with the believers you worship with and so openly show your unity with them by being as active in its life as we can be. We touched on this question of having fellowship with one another some time ago when we looked at 1 John 1 and saw how we as individual believers need to walk in the light as God is the light and fellowship will be maintained.

To live carelessly, live unconcerned about sin as a professing believer means we need to ask ourselves some serious questions, the first of which is “*Am I really a Christian at all?*” We also need to recognise that even true believers can fail to deal with sin, especially regarding resentment against other believers for a variety of reasons, but if we see that is so, then we need to confess and forsake it or else our prayers and spiritual life will be affected.

Even as believers we can have sinful attitudes, thoughts, actions about other believers it could be a critical spirit we may excuse it by saying that we are not critical, merely discerning! (*This is the usual justification for such!*) We are not to have malice, resentment, hatred, or hang on a long time to such as they can become ingrained in us and part of our character! In fact, we are to rid ourselves of such - as Peter says in 1 Peter 2:1-3 “*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*” We need to love one another as we see in 1 John 2 & John 13:34. We are to love our fellow believers and it is a positive, active love which imitates God’s love to them and us.

This is the general principle with which Malachi challenges us all as individuals and as a church. Are we maintaining the unity of the body of Christ? Are we dismissing other believers, even writing them off? Perhaps cutting ourselves off from them? What is our attitude to the church here or where we are members? Is as God wants? We can

evangelise, plan outreach events, continue to run Christianity Explored courses, we can pray, witness, preach the gospel and it will all be in vain if we fall in this area. To have low dismissive attitudes to God will show in our low and dismissive attitudes to His people, His church, the local church. If it spreads, is not repented of, then we waste our breath, prayers and efforts because we are as guilty as the people of Malachi's day if we do these things.

I pray you and I will be serious with God and one another. That we would not be afraid, reluctant to show our love and unity, being one together and that it will not be a sham as we do so, but we will rightly and justly do so and be approved by God.

Sadly, there were specific out-workings of this disunity as we will see in our future studies, but the principal is for us to keep true unity in the local body of Christ and so to keep the covenant of our God.