

VII. Covenant Love

14-Jan-07 Malachi 1:1-5

Theme: God's covenant love is demonstrated in the salvation of the elect through Jesus Christ; His covenant hatred results in judgment and reprobation.

Key Verses: Malachi 1:2-3 ²"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; ³but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."

Review

In the final chapter of Jonah, the prophet becomes exceedingly angry because God has chosen to spare Nineveh instead of destroy the city. In Jonah's worldview, God was obligated to show mercy to the covenant nation of Israel whether they were obedient or not. At the same time, Jonah felt that God should execute His justice upon the nations, regardless of whether or not they repented of their sins. Jonah apparently did not understand that the mercy God showed to himself and to the Israelites was just as gracious as that showed to pagan Nineveh. Israel did not deserve the mercy she received; in fact, she was held to a higher standard because her privileges and responsibilities were greater through the covenant that God had made with them.

So Jonah throws a hissy fit and builds a flimsy shelter outside of Nineveh to wait and see what will happen. He is hoping that God will change His mind (again!) and destroy Nineveh. But instead, God gives Jonah an object lesson to demonstrate the greatness of His mercy. First he gives Jonah a miraculous plant to shade him from the hot sun. The next day, God sends a worm to take away the plant and replaces it with a fierce east wind. Jonah's reaction to the withdrawal of God's favor highlights the inconsistency of the prophet's position. Although Jonah was concerned for his own comfort and had pity on the plant, he did not care for the souls of the Gentile Ninevites. To the contrary, God's great concern was for the extension of His kingdom and the salvation of sinners, even of Nineveh.

The book of Jonah has at least four main messages. The first message is that God is sovereign; He is in control of creation and uses it to accomplish His purposes. The second theme is that in God's sovereignty, He extends mercy to those whom He chooses. Our appropriate response to God's mercy is to thank Him and worship Him. In the third place, the book of Jonah highlights the salvation of Gentiles and thus is a preview of the New Testament age when the gospel is spread throughout the nations. Finally, the book of Jonah looks ahead to Jesus Christ, the greater Jonah, whose death on the cross is the perfect mixture of God's justice and mercy, and whose resurrection on the third day guarantees our salvation. "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9).

Introduction

Today we turn our attention for the remaining seven weeks of this quarter to Malachi, the last of the Twelve and the final book of the Old Testament. Malachi is a very different book than the last two we have studied. Although Malachi momentarily picks up Obadiah's theme in our lesson today (1:2-5), his main emphasis is on the sins of Israel, not the doom of Edom. Unlike Jonah, who preached repentance to Nineveh, Malachi preaches repentance to Israel. But this repentance is of an entirely different kind. Nineveh needed to repent of their violence and their pagan worship; Israel needs to repent of their covenant infidelity. The Ninevites of Jonah's day

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were outside of God's covenant and the LORD graciously drew them in. Meanwhile, the Israelites of Micah's day presumed upon their covenant relationship with the LORD to the point that He grew weary of them. Whereas Obadiah addresses Israel's brother – Edom – and Jonah addresses Israel's enemy – Nineveh – Malachi gets to the heart of the matter and addresses the covenant people directly. The theme of Malachi can be summed up as follows: “reforming and refining the covenant people.”

The book of Malachi is especially relevant in describing the sins of the modern church. Malachi describes how the church of his day failed in one of the most basic obligations of covenant duty: proper worship of the living God. Their sloppy sacrifices and failure to tithe regularly indicated inward spiritual infidelity even as they mouthed pious words and kept hollow, outward forms of worship. In Malachi, God demands that His people worship Him as He commands. Sabbath-keeping, tithing, faithful Bible study, covenant faithfulness – these are the things that God requires, both then and now. When we adulterate the LORD's commands on how He is to be worshiped, we offend the holy God of heaven.

Like Malachi's generation, our own generation is in need of the message of Malachi. God is continually reforming and refining His covenant people, and I pray that our study of Malachi will begin that process in all of us.

Exposition

A. Introduction (1:1)

1. Prophet

The book in front of us was written by Malachi. Who was this prophet? What do we know about him? Like many of the other prophets, the answer is – “we don't know very much.” We don't know where he came from, and we don't know anything about his family. All we can learn about him is from the meaning of his name; Malachi means “my messenger.” It is basically the same word that is translated as “angel” in Zechariah 1:9, 11, since angels were messengers of God.

The word *malachi* is used twice in the book referring to messengers. In 2:7, Malachi calls the priest “the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” In 3:1, he speaks of “My messenger,” the greater messenger or the greater priest who will appear before the coming of the LORD. Since the book deals with significant abuses by the priests, it is possible that Malachi was himself a priest, a messenger to these messengers.

Early Jewish commentators speculated that Malachi was not the prophet's given name, but rather a title. Certainly “My messenger” would be an appropriate title for a prophet of God. They further surmised that Malachi was a title for Ezra the scribe, and some Christian theologians throughout the centuries, such as Jerome and John Calvin, have adopted this viewpoint. Although the date and setting of Malachi would make it possible for Ezra to be this messenger, there is no internal or external evidence to support this conclusion. Hence, it is best to understand that Malachi was an otherwise anonymous man who received the prophetic gift from God and gave us this book for our edification.

2. Date

Although Malachi does not explicitly tell us when he was writing, we can gather a pretty good idea from internal clues within the book itself. First, in 1:8, Malachi refers to their “governor.”

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This is a post-exilic office within the Persian Empire. Both Zerubbabel (Hag. 1:1) and Nehemiah (Neh. 5:14) are referred to as governors (same word in Hebrew). Thus, we can already tell that the book of Malachi is post-exilic; it was written after the Babylonian exile and the return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel, which began in 538 BC.

The second clue comes from the repeated references within the book to sacrifices within the context of temple worship (1:13; 3:1, 10). At the time of Malachi, the temple has apparently been rebuilt. The rebuilding of the temple occurred from 536-516 BC, and was the particular focus of the ministry of Haggai (Hag. 1:3-8). By the time Malachi appeared on the scene, it seems as if the temple had not only been rebuilt but worship there had become routine, ho-hum, unexciting. The initial enthusiasm of the early remnant that returned to Jerusalem has disappeared. Thus, it seems that several generations have passed since the temple was rebuilt.

The third clue is in the list of sins that Malachi catalogues; they correspond closely to the situation Nehemiah found when he was governor of Judah. To see this we will need a quick background in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the cupbearer of King Artaxerxes of Persia. Nehemiah learned of a need to build Jerusalem's wall, prayed about it, and then approached the king for help. The king granted Nehemiah the authority as governor to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, which Nehemiah proceeded to do, despite great opposition. With the help of Ezra the scribe, Nehemiah then began to reform the worship in Jerusalem through a process of covenant renewal. All this happened in 444 BC, the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes.

However, Nehemiah was apparently called back to Persia in the thirty-second year of the king (432 BC), and the spiritual condition in Judah started to deteriorate (Neh. 13:6). After an undetermined period of time, but sometime between 432 BC and the death of Artaxerxes in 424 BC, Nehemiah received permission from the king to return to Jerusalem. There he set out to correct the abuses that were taking place in Judah.

The first sin was that of tithing (Neh. 13:4-14). The tithes that had come in were being stored up for improper use; they were not being distributed to the Levites as they were intended. So Nehemiah corrected that situation and gathered all the tithes of Judah into the storehouse and appointed faithful men to distribute them. Malachi accuses Judah of robbing God by failing to tithe properly (3:8-9), corresponding closely to the situation Nehemiah confronted.

Secondly, Nehemiah reformed the worship of God by reinstating the proper regard and respect for the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-22). Although Sabbath-breaking is not explicitly condemned by Malachi, the general sloppiness of worship described in Malachi would be consistent with a lax view of the Sabbath.

The third sin Nehemiah dealt with was the sin of mixed marriages (Neh. 13:23-27). The danger with mixed marriages was that foreign wives could potentially lead Israel spiritually astray, as in the case of Solomon (Neh. 13:26). Malachi condemns this practice strongly in 2:10-16, linking marital infidelity with spiritual infidelity and apostasy.

Finally, Nehemiah reforms the priesthood (Neh. 13:28-31). Malachi describes a priesthood that is corrupt, failing in their basic obligations to worship God appropriately (1:6-14) and to lead holy and blameless lives (2:1-9). In fact, both Nehemiah and Malachi refer to the covenant of Levi (Neh. 13:29; Mal. 2:4; *cp.* Jer. 33:21), a subject we will explore in more detail later.

Thus, from the spiritual condition of the people described by Malachi, it seems entirely consistent that he was prophesying during the second administration of Nehemiah the governor,

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dating the book between 432 and 424 BC. In fact, God may have sent him to work with Nehemiah to exhort the people to reform their practices in much the same way that other prophets had been sent to work with civil leaders for reform: *e.g.*, Isaiah with Hezekiah; Jeremiah with Josiah; and Haggai and Zechariah with Zerubbabel.

3. Setting

The situation in the land of Judah at the time of Malachi was very different than before the exile. Previously, they had been an independent nation ruled by their own king. Now they were a province of Persia, administered by an appointed governor. Jerusalem, its wall, and its temple had been rebuilt, but the glory of the current temple was nowhere near as great as the temple of Solomon (Hag. 2:3). Life had settled down into a normal pattern. There was peace and stability, albeit under foreign rule. No one had too much, but everyone had enough to get by.

Although the social, political, and economic conditions of post-exilic Judah had stabilized into normalcy, the biggest difference in Judah was religious. The exile had cured God's people once and for all of the sin of idolatry. Before the exile, Israel was always tempted to worship other gods, to commit spiritual adultery with the idols of the nations. The pre-exilic prophets are constantly warning Israel to forsake idolatry and return to the living God. That tendency toward idolatry is wiped out by the exile. God's disciplinary action had at least one positive effect: it removed idolatry from the list of the nation's sins.

Of course, other sins crept in to replace idolatry. The main sins that began to manifest themselves in Malachi's day and were certainly present 450 years later in Jesus' day were the sins of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. These sins go together – an overly inflated estimate of one's own self worth and importance leads to all sorts of abuses. The Jews began to expect God's blessings to flow to them because they were the covenant people. God owed them and was expected to deliver. It didn't matter how they responded or behaved in return. And so, when we come to Malachi, the people are offended because God does not seem to be blessing them as much as they feel they deserve. In their mind, God has failed to deliver on His promises.

Of course, God is the really the One who is offended. It is not He who is failing to live up to the terms of the covenant – it is His people. In their self-righteous posturing, they have become hypocrites. They claim to worship God with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him (*cp.* Is. 29:13). They put little attention into the appropriate worship of God. They worshipped God in a sloppy manner and expected Him to be satisfied with their feeble efforts. True, they are no longer idolaters; instead they have become spiritual hypocrites.

This is the situation that we find in Malachi. The people of God have again grown complacent and self-centered, pushing God out to the fringes of their lives. They need a course correction, and God gives them one in Malachi. God's messenger comes, like the burning heat of the smelter's fire, to reform and refine the people of God, to burn away their self-righteousness and hypocrisy, to expose their corrupt and sinful practices, and to call them to return to the true and living God, the Sun of Righteousness who rises with healing in His wings (4:2).

4. Underlying Themes

The concept of "covenant" is prevalent in the book of Malachi. In the opening verses (1:2-5), God describes His covenant love for Israel. Yahweh has entered into a personal relationship with His people and He expects them to fulfill their end of the relationship – to obey His law (4:4). However, the people have not been faithful; indeed they have been covenant-breakers

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(2:8; 2:10). Their infidelity of practicing mixed marriages is just a reflection of their greater spiritual infidelity toward God. They constantly profane their relationship with God by offering inferior sacrifices (1:12-13), withholding tithes (3:8), speaking evil of the LORD (2:17; 3:13-14), and breaking God's laws (2:11; 3:7).

How is God going to deal with His people, covenant-breakers that they are? Malachi says that He is going to come and purify them (3:1-3). Like a fuller's soap, like a refiner's fire, God will come and purge His people and make them pure and acceptable in His sight. God accomplishes this through the first advent of His Son, Jesus Christ—the Messenger of the covenant. Jesus comes as the Messenger of a new and better covenant, a covenant that is written on our hearts instead of tablets of stone (Jer. 31:33).

James Jordan points out that another significant concept underlying the book of Malachi is the “jealousy” of God. God's jealousy is not a sinful over-protective emotion like we normally associate with that word. Rather, God's jealousy is a zealous, active love for His people, a desire to protect them and to have their complete allegiance, obedience, and love in return. God's jealousy does not allow His people room to love and serve other gods. Why does God demand in the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6) that His people are to worship Him and serve Him alone? Because “I am a jealous God.” God will not timeshare with idols.

The zealous love of God for His people is symbolized in the law of the ordeal of jealousy (Num. 5:11-31). Although written about a man jealous for his wife's faithfulness, the law really is a picture of God's jealousy for the faithfulness of His bride, the covenant people. God puts His people through this ordeal of jealousy several times. The first time is in Exodus 32. While Moses is on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, Israel worships the golden calf. When Moses returns, he calls the zealous to his side. The tribe of Levi comes to his aid and puts an end to the spiritual infidelity by killing three thousand people. This is an ordeal of jealousy – God will not suffer unfaithfulness on the part of the covenant people.

As they approach the Promised Land, the people of Israel once again fall into sin, committing both physical and spiritual adultery at Baal Peor with the daughters and gods of Moab (Num. 25:1-18). This time, Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron rose with great zeal and killed an adulterous couple, ending the plague that God had sent among the camp, killing 24,000. Phinehas is commended highly by God for his zeal or jealousy to guard the purity of God's people. In fact, we will pick up the story of Phinehas' zeal for the LORD in Malachi 2:4-5.

Elijah is another figure in the Old Testament history who displays zeal and jealousy for the LORD. His ministry is spent fighting against the wickedness of King Ahab, whose mixed marriage to the daughter of a foreign god, Jezebel, brought the evil of Baal worship into Israel. Elijah is a prominent figure in the book of Malachi, which is appropriate since the book concerns the jealousy of God for the proper worship of His people. Malachi promises that God will send Elijah again to Israel (4:5), fulfilled in John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10-15; Mt. 17:10-12). John the Baptist himself is another zealous, jealous figure, who is not afraid to confront the adultery of Herod with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife (Mt. 14:1-12). Thus, Malachi is looking backward toward Elijah and looking forward to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.

In a sense, the book of Malachi is all about this ordeal of jealousy, the steps that God will go to in order to protect His bride and make her pure and acceptable. Thus, the book of Malachi focuses on reforming and refining the covenant people. This is not an outdated message; it speaks to every generation of God's people. Malachi addressed the spiritual problems in his day,

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but they were the same spiritual problems that Jesus addressed, and that we experience today. Benton describes the problem in a slightly different, although helpful way:

The book of Malachi addresses itself to a certain kind of spiritual problem to which long-established evangelical churches and people who have been Christians for quite a long time are particularly susceptible. Time has gone on since that first commitment to Christ and, almost imperceptibly, there has been a steady erosion of living faith and spiritual urgency. The steady round of everyday life, with its stress and temptations, has somehow cooled the spiritual temperature. What is the gist of the book of Malachi? It addresses this problem of spiritual degeneration, this fossilizing of faith. It is a book where God's people Israel are in the dock and God is charging them and accusing them concerning their spiritual decline. Malachi's book is a call to repentance from lax and hollow religion and, even more important, it shows the way back to genuine enduring faith in the Lord who does not change (3:6). It is the antidote to spiritual degeneration.

5. Organization

Malachi is unified by a disputation style used throughout the book. He uses a series of questions and answers to expose the corruption of the people and to demonstrate the truth of God's position. The basic formula has God asserting a statement, and then the people interrupting with a question that denies the statement that God has made: "Yet you say, 'In what way ...?'" (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13). It is unlikely that the people of Judah voiced these exact questions out loud, but Malachi is capturing the essence of the attitudes that were prevalent at that time.

Organizationally, the book is arranged chiastically in seven sections. James Jordan does a good job of describing this organization, although others, such as Dorsey, also see a 7-part chiastic structure in Malachi. In this structure, Jordan uses the words "protological" and "eschatological." The second term, "eschatological" is perhaps more familiar. It refers to future events or to the end times. Conversely, "protological" refers to earlier days or past times. Thus, the book of Malachi moves back and forth between what God has done in the past (protological) and what He will do in the future (eschatological).

- A. Protological Separation: Covenant Election (1:2-5)
- B. Contempt of Privilege: Worship: Sacramental (1:6-14)
- C. Protological Messengers of the Covenant (2:1-9)
- D. Covenant Bond in the Spirit: Marriage (2:10-16)
- C'. Eschatological Messenger of the Covenant (2:17-3:6)
- B'. Contempt of Privilege: Worship: Tithes and Words (3:7-18)
- A'. Eschatological Separation: Judgment (4:1-6)

The central section (D) of Malachi is 2:10-16, which describes the sin of mixed marriages. The sin of marital infidelity in Israel is a picture of the greater sin of spiritual infidelity to their covenant husband, the LORD God. On either side of this central section are two sections which discuss messengers of the covenant. Section C (2:1-9) describes the priests of the tribe of Levi as protological messengers sent by God. Balancing this, Section C' (2:17-3:6) looks forward to the eschatological Messenger of the covenant, the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Working our way outward from the center, Malachi then describes the sins of worship that plague the current nation of Judah. In Section B (1:6-14), Malachi describes their contempt for the privilege of worship and their failure to offer acceptable sacrifices. In Section B' (3:7-18),

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Malachi condemns their worship, as they rob Him of tithes and also of reverent and respectful worship. Finally, in the outermost two sections, we see how God separates the righteous from the wicked. In Section A (1:2-5), God accomplishes protological separation through election. In Section A' (4:1-6), He accomplishes eschatological separation through judgment.

An overview of this chiasmic structure helps us see the bigger picture in the book of Malachi. God has called His people out of the nations, out of the world, in order to be separated for the purpose of worship (“Let My people go that they may serve Me” – Ex. 7:16). However, the people have sinned in that they do not worship God as He has commanded. The priests and the Levites had been sent to instruct the people and lead them in true worship, but they had failed. The failure of Israel to worship God properly was tantamount to spiritual infidelity, a grievous sin that God addresses by sending Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes, He reforms and refines the covenant people, establishes them in true worship, and saves them from the eschatological judgment to come.

6. Heading (1:1)

The book opens with the words “the burden of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (1:1). A burden or “oracle” is a heavy load placed on someone. It is an ominous word, full of ill portent and dark clouds on the horizon. This is not a happy message that Malachi bears. Instead, he has been given a heavy burden by God, and he has no choice but to declare that oracle to God’s people.

Notice that the people of God are called by the name of “Israel.” The name of the post-exilic nation was Judah, which is what the prophets Haggai and Zechariah use to describe God’s people. However, Malachi is using the name of Israel to remind us that God’s special Old Testament nation was descended from the patriarch Jacob, also known as Israel. This reference thus sets up the contrast in the next verses between Jacob and Esau.

B. Love and Hate (1:2-5)

1. Jacob and Esau (1:2-3)

²“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved; ³but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness” (Malachi 1:2-3).

The burden of Malachi begins with a statement of God’s unrequited love. Although God plainly loved His people, they complained that He did not love them because they misunderstood the entire concept of God’s covenant love. They expected to “feel” God’s love through physical benefits or blessings because they were in a covenant relationship. True their lives were okay, but they could have been better. They had enough to get by, but they weren’t abundantly blessed. But that wasn’t because God didn’t love them, for He did. The sparseness in their lives was because *they* didn’t love Him or keep His covenant properly. They didn’t experience more tangible spiritual blessings because their love for God was cold.

“Love” and “hate” here are not emotion-laden words. “Hate” does not mean “despise” anymore than “love” means “adore.” Rather, they imply choice or election. Israel presumed that God had to love them, and that meant showering them with blessings. However, they had forgotten that God had chosen to love them even though He didn’t have to. Love is an action; it is God’s choice of an undeserving people. They didn’t deserve to be chosen, didn’t deserve to be loved; and the way they were acting demonstrated that. Nonetheless, God had chosen them anyway.

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There is a passive and active aspect to the “hate” of God. Passively, it means He does not choose for election; He passes over; He does not intervene to save. However, there is also an active aspect of God’s hate. God not only chooses not to save, but He also chooses to punish. Those whom He hates are chosen for reprobation or damnation. The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes this truth of God’s electing love and damning hate as follows:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death (WCF 3.3).... Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace (WCF 3.5).... The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice (WCF 3.7).

Malachi goes back to the patriarchs to give them an object lesson on God’s electing love. God chose Jacob and loved Jacob, even though there was nothing lovable about him. He was a schemer, a supplanter, a devious man. But God selected him anyway, and in time Jacob the supplanter became Israel – prince with God. Meanwhile, God did not choose Esau. Esau was no less deserving than Jacob, but in God’s sovereign choice, it was Jacob who was loved, and Esau who was hated. It is this principle of God’s election in the twin brothers that is carried forward in the destiny of their national descendents: Israel and Edom. God has showered His electing love upon Israel, while choosing to Edom for damnation.

How did God demonstrate His love to Israel? First He chose them, even though they were not worthy, because He loved them (Dt. 7:7-8). Secondly, He entered into a covenant relationship with Israel and became their father (Ex.4:22). Within this covenantal bond, He showered many blessings upon them—promises, seed, land, blessing, law, sonship, and so on. All these privileges were part of being in covenant with God and were not experienced by the nations around Israel.

Third, He held them up to higher expectations. He expected them to keep the covenant, and He disciplined them when they failed to do so. That is what a father does with a son (Pr. 3:11-12). Israel was God’s son. Ultimately, the Babylonian exile was about God chastising His son for failure to obey the covenant. But God never stopped loving Israel. That’s why there was restoration, that’s why there was a remnant that returned. God kept His love on Israel the whole time they were in exile, and brought them back and reestablished them in the land. The exile cured the Israelites of a major sin – idolatry. They were never tempted to worship foreign gods again. So the exile was beneficial to Israel – God’s discipline had results.

2. *The Doom of Edom (1:4-5)*

⁴Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,” thus says the LORD of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever. ⁵Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, ‘The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel’” (Malachi 1:4-5).

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Compare God's treatment of Israel with that of Edom. Did God ever shower His love on Edom? Did He ever give them any special attention or blessings? Did He hold them accountable to high standards? Did He enter into covenant with them? Did He ever call them His son? No. They never received any privileges that Israel had received in God's love. But Israel failed to see that. All they saw was the discipline they received. Edom didn't receive discipline and exile, because they weren't God's son. Instead, when the time came, instead of fatherly chastisement, the full wrath of a righteous and just God fell on them. They were destroyed, and they had no opportunity for restoration. The doom of Edom occurred just as Obadiah prophesied.

That's the difference. Israel felt the rod of God's discipline; but Edom felt the wrath of God's judgment. By the time of Malachi, Edom probably had already been driven from her land by the Nabataean Arabs and forced to relocate in southern Judah in the Negev Desert. Edom was being judged and destroyed forever; Israel was being reformed and refined into closer conformity to God's will. And both were done for the glory of God, so that "the LORD is magnified."

Conclusion

The greatest example of covenant love comes at the cross when Jesus voluntarily bears our sins and our punishment in our place. The cross is the supreme example of unmerited favor, of grace and mercy. It is the place where the justice of God that hates sin meets the love of God for undeserving sinners. We did not deserve that love and we could not earn it. Instead, the covenant love of Christ is freely given to those whom He chooses by election:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:3-6).

The doctrine of God's electing love (and damning hate) is a difficult one to understand and to accept. It was difficult for the church of Malachi's day to accept. It was difficult for the Roman church too; thus Paul uses this passage in Malachi to explain the doctrine to them and to us:

¹³As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." ¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." ¹⁶So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy (Romans 9:13-16).

Ultimately, the doctrines of election and reprobation demonstrate the greatness of our God. It is not for the vessel to presume upon the potter and demand what type of pot it will be (Rom. 9:20-24). Remember, God is sovereign; He is not unjust. When He chooses to hate Edom, or hate unbelievers, it is in His perfect justice. When He chooses to love Israel or love believers, it is in His perfect mercy. How great and unsearchable are the ways of our God! (Ps. 145:3). Whenever we consider these difficult doctrines, we can be assured that "the LORD is magnified" through them, "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

Next week: Lesson 8 – Covenant Hypocrisy – Malachi 1:6-14

Close in Prayer.

Expanded Chiastic Structure of Malachi (per James Jordan)

- A. Protological Separation: Covenant Election (1:2-5)
 - 1. Destruction of the wicked
 - 2. Fear of God among the nation

- B. Contempt of Privilege: Worship: Sacramental (1:6-14)
 - 1. You don't show fear (1:6)
 - 2. You present defiled sacrifices (1:7-9)
 - 3. You are not accepted; God is not pleased with you (1:10)
 - 3'. The nations will be accepted (1:11)
 - 2'. You present defiled sacrifices (1:12-14a)
 - 1'. The nations fear God (1:14b)

- C. Protological Messengers of the Covenant (2:1-9)
 - 1. Curse coming on priests (2:1-3)
 - 2. The covenant with Levi (2:4-5)
 - 3. Instruction from Levi (2:6)
 - 3'. Levi's descendants should instruct (2:7)
 - 2'. They have corrupted the covenant with Levi (2:8)
 - 1'. Present curses are only a foretaste (2:9)

- D. Covenant Bond in the Spirit: Marriage (2:10-16)
 - 1. Treachery to the covenant (2:10-11)
 - 2. Punishment: cut off from Seed to come (2:12)
 - 3. Tears of the abused deafen the Lord's ears (2: 13)
 - 3'. The Lord as Witness to marriage covenant (2:14)
 - 2'. The coming Seed and covenant faithfulness (2:15)
 - 1'. Treachery and God's hatred of it (2:16)

- C'. Eschatological Messenger of the Covenant (2:17-3:6)
 - 1. The justice of God (2:17)
 - 2. The coming Messenger (3:1)
 - 3. Refinement of the priests (3:2-3)
 - 3'. Refined sacrifices; God will be pleased (3:4)
 - 2'. God's drawing near (3:5)
 - 1'. Unchanging justice of God (3:6)

- B'. Contempt of Privilege: Worship: Tithes and Words (3:7-18)
 - 1. Return to Me (3:7)
 - a. Stop robbing Me (3:8)
 - b. Curse and blessing: put Me to a true test (3:9-12)
 - 2. Speak properly of Me (3:13)
 - a. Speaking against God (3:14)
 - b. Curse and blessing reversed; false testing of God (3:15)
 - 2'. Faithful speak truly concerning God (3:16a)
 - 1'. Faithful return (remember) God (show fear) (3:16b-18)

- A'. Eschatological Separation: Judgment (4:1-6)
 - 1. Destruction of the wicked
 - 2. Salvation of the faithful