

***Malachi 2:10***  
***Stabbing God Through Man's Back***  
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We have been going through the book of Malachi now for the last two months or so. For the sake of getting our minds back into the flow of Malachi's thought let me remind you of what the book of Malachi is all about. Malachi is a word of warning. God was furious with Israel because of their stubborn, heard-hearted ways. In essence, God sent Malachi to the Israelites with a message. God's message to Israel was not touchy feely whatsoever. In fact, the message that God had Malachi deliver was a stern message of warning, calling for repentance and renewal. As I said before, Malachi is conveniently broken up into 6 sections. Each section is what they call a *dispute*. They call it a dispute because these sections consist of God arguing with the hard-headed Israelites, proving to them their guilt. The first dispute is found in 1:2-5. We just spent the last 8 messages on the 2<sup>nd</sup> dispute, which goes from 1:6-2:9. This dispute was directed at the priests. Now we will be looking at the next dispute, which spans from 2:10-16.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> dispute is quite difficult. There is almost no consensus among scholars in regard to how this passage flows. Because of this there is a huge variance in regard to interpretation. Through my own study of Malachi 2:10-16 I have become convinced of a view that is not all that common or popular. However, I do think that if we dig deep enough we will be able to uncover some things that will be helpful for us.

Before we dig into the nitty-gritty of the passage, I want to say a few things about the book of Malachi on the whole. Really, Malachi brings an impenetrable front against the Israelites from Malachi 1:1 all the way until Malachi 3:16. He is doing everything he can to show them their sin and their need for repentance. He is pleading with them to see the depth of their sin so that they might know their great need for repentance. And you get this feeling that Malachi just keeps going on and on and on. You read 1:6-2:9 and he keeps going, round after round after round of accusation and rebuke. You want to stop and say, "Wait... we know... we get your point." It reminds me of how a parent might deal with their wayward teenager. They give him lecture after lecture after lecture over the same things, warning him of the danger of his actions over and over and over. There comes a point in the lecture when the angry teen gets fed up and says, "Dad... I know! You aren't telling me anything I don't know. Why do you keep repeating yourself?" The Dad then responds, "Obviously you don't know. Obviously it hasn't sunken in, because you continue on the same path of destruction." This is the same sort of thing that we have in the book of Malachi.

This is oftentimes something that we struggle with in America. Often times we struggle with preachers who preach on sin and judgment from the pulpit. We generally only like our sermons to be positive, uplifting, unchallenging. Many Christian cultural commentators (such as D.A. Carson, David Wells, and James Emery White) suggest that we live in what is called a "therapeutic culture." That is, we live in a culture which thrives on therapy. We search high and low for any and every answer to our any and every problem or boo-boo. We shun anything which has a negative tone to it. Consider what David Well's has to say about the nature of our therapeutic culture in his book *The Courage to Be Protestant*:

*In a therapeutic world we are preoccupied only with ourselves, and nothing is as compelling to us as our own self. An evangelicalism that enters this world, and leaves behind the moral world that alone makes sense of life and of the gospel, has lost the means to restrain the self. In the therapeutic world, it is all about self-fulfillment. It is not about self-sacrifice and self-discipline, self-restraint, and self-abasement, which is what Christianity is about. These words, in fact, are obscenities in our world today—indeed, the only obscenities we have. The movement is all about feeling good about ourselves, not about being good. It is therapeutic, not moral. Is it a great surprise to learn, then, that the born-again experience that happens along this path makes virtually no difference in people’s lives.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the landscape of the cultural Christianity in which we find ourselves. We live in a culture that only wants good news, uplifting news, positive news. And this really is not a new problem. The people of God in both the Old and New Testaments flocked to the false prophets, and why? Because, they were preaching “Peace, Peace! God isn’t angry with you; you have nothing to worry about. Don’t listen to Isaiah or Jeremiah; they are just going to ruin your self esteem.” The people of God have always flocked to the spiritual therapists of the day. You see this reality in 2 Timothy 4:3:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their own ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.*

The false teachers are those who *tickle your ears* by telling you what you want to hear. The big difference between the false teachers and God’s true messengers is that the false teachers tell you what you want to hear while God’s true messengers tell you what you need to hear whether you want to hear it or not, whether you like it or not, whether it makes you feel good or not, whether it gives you a greater self esteem or not. God’s true messengers do not base their message on how they want it to be received, they base it on truth.

Isn’t this what they say today, “Don’t listen to those who preach hell, fire, and brimstone... you aren’t under God’s judgment. You are a good person. Surely, you may make mistakes but you aren’t evil like they say you are. Just think positive thoughts and good things will come your way!” This is why God’s truth is not received well today: God’s message is not a therapeutic message—self esteem is not the main character in God’s story. In essence, these spiritual therapists are Satan’s ploy to protect people from God’s truth. Why? Satan wants to keep people from conviction; he wants them to remain ignorant of their sin, because as soon as they have to deal with their sinful, ugly hearts they feel conviction and guilt, which then leads them to seek out a Savior. (This is not to

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<sup>1</sup> David Wells, *The Courage To Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 169-170.

say that all therapists are bad, however it is to say that we have fallen into Satan's trap when therapy is a sinner's way of covering up sin and a need for repentance.)

These spiritual therapists are Satan's way of keeping sinners from seeking Jesus as their Savior. What ends up happening, however, is that these spiritual therapist ends up becoming their pseudo-savior. Unfortunately, spiritual therapists are horrible saviors because they don't really save; they just do silly putty patch-up work to prolong the life-erupting, wrath-inducing effects of sin. The way these spiritual therapists deal with the unavoidable reality of sin is by putting the band-aids of self-esteem and positive thinking over a heart spilling over with greed and malice. It is like a man attempting to hold a splitting Hoover dam together with 2 x 4's and penny nails. Would this fix the problem? Of course not!

The way that God deals with sin is through the humiliating process of exposing it, even if that means making it crystal clear by belaboring the point, and then extracting it. Ultimately, we see that the way God dealt with sin was through removing it forever through his own death on the cross. God eradicates sin while false teachers merely cover it up.

Why am I saying all of this? I am saying this because our sin nature loves the spiritual therapists, and thus we have a tendency to stay away from hard-hitting truth and sin-exposing books like Malachi. We want to come to church every week to be told, "You're good enough, you're smart enough, and you know what, people like you," and by the time we get to Malachi 2:10-16 we are ready for God to lay aside his stunning words of rebuke and once again affirm his love for his people, but he doesn't. He continues the onslaught; he continues to expose their sin; he digs deeper and deeper to show them how great their need is. He simply will not let them go, he is resolved to exhaust every attempt at calling his people back to himself. We have to understand that there is value in belaboring the point.

The problem with spiritual therapists is that since they will not talk about sin and judgment, you never know the true depth of your need for a savior. The more you know of your inability to swim, and the more you know the consequences of sinking to the bottom of the ocean the tighter you will cling to the life raft. The reason why so many Christians sitting in the pews of churches across our land are not clinging to Christ is because the spiritual therapists of the day are protecting them from the humiliation of sin and the fear of judgment. They feed them what they want to hear and what will lift them up.

At this point in their history, the Israelites did not need a feel-good message. The Israelites had need for someone who was going to come and bluntly convince them of their sin and of their need for repentance. The more you see your sin and the more you know of the judgment of God, the tighter you will cling to Christ. The Israelites were living in their sin and loving it. And God, with a broken heart and a strained voice, was calling to his people to consider the depth of their sin. He went to great lengths, spelling out every detail, turning over every moldy black stone within their hearts to show them the depth of their need. He didn't do this because he loves watching people squirm, rather he did this so that he might save their lives.

How many of you have heard the saying, "Your best friend is the one who tells you the most truth"? I would add "in love." However, the saying is so true. The one who plasters you with ear tickling words, making you feel "good enough" and "smart enough"

while your eternal destiny is in the balance, is not a true friend, nor a true lover. A true lover of your soul will tell the truth even when it hurts, even when it puts your relationship with them on the line. God pursues his people and will not let them go ignorantly to their death. He loves them too much to let them continue on their path of destruction. God's ultimate purpose for revealing their sin, for belaboring the point, is that they might be led back into a relationship with him. You have to know this as we continue through the book of Malachi. If you do not understand the purpose for God's constant, outrageous railings against Israel you will come to think of him as some sort of an angry old monarch who is just trying to throw his weight around. No! God knows that unless his people deal with their sin, he will have to come upon them in judgment.

I feel convinced that we need to keep trudging through the book of Malachi, as difficult as it may be. Why, because we need to see God's passionate pursuit of his people. We need to dig into the depths of his love. We need to hear the passionate, loving plea of God as he broken-heartedly calls his people away from sin, death, and destruction. If you are beginning to feel weighed down by the harsh tone of Malachi, remember why God speaks to his people in such a tone—it is because of his love for them. Sometimes we need someone to stick our nose in our sin, to belabor the point. Not to condemn us, but to show us our need for Christ and to show us our need for repentance.

### ***An Overview of Malachi 2:10-16***

Although we are going to primarily be looking at vs. 10, I want to first get a bird's eye view of Malachi 2:10-16. What we see in *Malachi 2:10-16* is that God is dealing primarily with one issue: namely, *Israel's rebellion against God in marrying foreign, idol-worshipping women and the consequent divorces that came about because of it.*

The key to understanding and following the flow of this section is the word "faithless." Other translations translate this word as "dealing treacherously." This phrase is used five times throughout these 7 verses (vss. 10, 11, 14, 15, 16). This word acts as bookends for this section. The section begins in vs. 10 which centers on the lack of the Israelites faithfulness to one another and ends in vs. 16 which centers on the Israelite men and their lack of faithfulness to their wives. What this should lead us to see is that God's primary concern with the Israelites in these seven verses is their lack of faithfulness in their covenantal relationships, primarily in their marital relationships.

The reason why so many people have a difficult time following Malachi's thought flow in 2:10-16 is because they do not stand back and get the bigger picture. Ultimately, what we see is that Malachi is working from general to specific. In vs. 10 Malachi, in a general way, accuses the Israelites of their lack of faithfulness to each other in the covenant community. Then what we see in vss. 11-16 is the meat of his accusation. In vss. 11-16 we see the specific area(s) in their lives in which they lack faithfulness. Thus if in vs. 10 we see Malachi addressing his topic (Israel's lack of faithfulness to each other in their covenantal relationships), in vss. 11-16 we see Malachi pinpointing which covenantal relationships he primarily has in mind (the relationship between a husband and his wife).

Let me illustrate for you how I could possibly argue from general to specific. Imagine if Kevin were to call you up on the phone and say, "I have something I want to talk to you about. I hope this won't offend you, but... you know how rude it is for young

people to disrespect their elders (general principle). The other day I saw your daughter, Shaniqua, in the grocery store and she didn't even say a word to me. She just grabbed some potatoes, looked at me, and then split!" (specific accusation). Kevin's purpose in this conversation is not to highlight the importance of teenagers respecting their elders. His purpose is not to lay forth some sort of basic instruction on the importance of teenagers respecting their elders. Rather, Kevin's purpose is to highlight the specific occasion where Shaniqua failed to respect him. He moved from general to specific, and that is what Malachi is doing here. He addresses the Israelites sin in a general way by speaking of their failure to be faithful to one another (vs. 10), and then he moves to the specific accusation which flows out of the general principle, their failure to be faithful to their wives (vss. 11-16).

### ***Malachi 2:10***

Now that we get the bigger picture, let's take a look at vs. 10. As you can see, the title of this sermon is *Stabbing God Through Man's Back*. What we are going to see in vs. 10 is that Israel's lack of faithfulness to each other is first and foremost not an offense against each other; rather their lack of faithfulness to each other is ultimately an offense and a sin against God himself. This will become quite clear as we move along.

As just said, what we see here in Malachi 2:10 is that Malachi is speaking in general terms. His primary concern with the Israelites is their lack of faithfulness to each other. In the first part of vs. 10 we see that Malachi is using Israel's common or shared origin as the ground for his rebuke.

***Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?***

In essence, what he is saying is, "Are we not all made of the same stuff (Have we not all one Father?), do we not all come from the same place (Has not one God created us?), do we not all generate from the one God? Well, if we have so much in common on such a foundational level, how could we care so little about each other (Why then are we faithless to one another)."

One of the most disturbing realities of our fallen world is war. It is almost as if humans cannot help but kill their own species off. Isn't this truth highlighted in an even greater way when you think about civil war, when fellow countrymen can no longer live with each other? I like to watch sports and one of the most embarrassing things is when two members of an athletic team, whether it be a football team or a basketball team, get into a fight with each other on the sidelines in the middle of the game. You know that a team is destined to fail when you see their own teammates throwing punches at each other. You could probably bet some good money that the disunified team is losing the game. This is in essence what God is saying here. You guys should be harmonious; after all, you all have one father and you all share a common origin. You guys are on the same team.

Is this not true: the more we have in common with each other on a foundational level (the more we commonly share), the greater the call for unity. Think about this, what would you say is one of the most revealing aspects of Cain's murder of Abel; what made Abel's death so disastrous? Without a doubt, the unjust death of any man is grotesque no

matter how you dice it. However, wouldn't it have been different if Cain's murderous hatred would have been directed to some terrorist from a far off land; or to an unfamiliar man from a neighboring city who rubbed him the wrong way? One of the things that made Cain's actions so awful and horrifying was that his greed and anger drove him to kill his own brother—his closest blood relative. It is one thing to lie and rip the IRS off (as sinful as lying is), it is another to lie and rip your brother off; it is one thing to slash your ex-girlfriend's boyfriend's tires (as sinful as being vindictive is), it is another to slash your mother's tires; it is one thing to selfishly keep an extra set of clothes from your naked neighbor (as sinful as selfishness is); it is quite another to withhold such necessities from your own flesh and blood.

***What we have seen from this is that our call to unity is in many ways based on what we have in common. The more we have in common (the more we commonly share) on a foundational level the greater the call to unity and faithfulness.*** Think about how this should affect our relationships with each other in the church. Think about what we have in common with each other. Not only do we have a common physical origin with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we also have common spiritual origin, we were all born from above (John 3:3-6); we all share a common salvation with each other in the body of Christ (Romans 4); we all boast in the same cross (Galatians 6:15-16); we all call Heaven our true home (Hebrews 11); we all are indwelt by the same Spirit (John 14-16 and 1 Corinthians 12).

It is no wonder, then, why Paul, in Galatians 6:10, says,

*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Why does he single this out; why are we to do good *especially* to our brothers and sisters in Christ? Well, we have become one, we have all been adopted into the same family, and thus we are to treat each other as brothers. Our common salvation necessitates a greater level of faithfulness and service. ***The more we have in common (the more we commonly share) on a foundational level the greater the call to unity and faithfulness.*** This is a concept that Paul speaks about in Ephesians 2:13-16, where he talks about how the Jews and Gentiles, who naturally hate each other, have become one in Christ.

*<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

In this passage Paul is talking about conflict which had risen in the church at Ephesus. The conflict that arose in the church at Ephesus was racial in nature. Simply put, the Jews and Gentiles couldn't get along. Paul is here saying that Jesus Christ made those who were hostile to each other, Jews and Gentiles, one through his death on the cross. He has "broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (vs. 14). "The

dividing wall of hostility” is a reference to the racial tension and animosity that the Jews and the Gentiles had for one another. Jesus tore this dividing wall down so that those Jews and Gentiles who come to Christ can actually be one. Paul then talks about Jesus creating “in himself one new man in the place of the two” (vs. 15). These Jews and Gentiles are now part of the same family, and with this understanding Paul calls this multiracial congregation to unity in chapters 4 and 5. Paul bases his commands to unity and faithfulness on their common origin in the Spirit and their common faith in Christ (see Ephesians 4:1-6; notice the communal nature of the commands given in this passage).

In essence, what Paul is saying is this (in the words of Malachi), “Have we not all been adopted into the same family; Do we not all have one Father; Do we not all have one Savior, Jesus Christ; Do we not all have one Comforter, the Spirit; Do we not all boast in a common salvation; Do we not all have the same spiritual origin, born from above; Do we not all call the same place our true home, Heaven? Well, if we share so much, if we have so much in common, on such a foundational level why is it that we let petty little things like race, status, doctrinal differences, and other issues come between us?”

*Once again, what we see is that our call to unity is in many ways based on what makes us common. The more we commonly share on a foundational level the greater the call to unity and faithfulness. Can't you see how this principle ultimately applies to our marriages? If it is true that the Israelites should pursue faithfulness to each other because of their common nature (Have we not all one Father?) and common origin (Has not one God created us?), how much more should a husband be faithful to his wife, the one with whom he has become *one flesh*? It is one thing to share a common nature and a common origin with someone; it is another to be one flesh with them. Do you remember God's word to Adam in the Garden regarding marriage?*

<sup>21</sup>*The LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.*

<sup>22</sup>*And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.*

<sup>23</sup>*Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*

<sup>24</sup>*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

When a man marries a woman he becomes united to her in a much deeper and more profound way than he is with his entire nation or family. Although a child is a man's flesh and blood, a man is not *one flesh* with his son. A child is certainly made up of his parents flesh and bones, however the child does not become one with his parents. The one-flesh relationship created in marriage so unites two people that Paul can even suggest that when a man mistreats his wife he is actually mistreating himself—that is how united a man has become with a woman when he covenants with her before God through marriage. The two have become one. See Ephesians 5:28-33,

*<sup>28</sup>In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup>because we are members of his body. <sup>31</sup>"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." <sup>32</sup>This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup>However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Marriage is one of God's most deep and profound institutions. When a man covenants with a woman they become one new man. We are not going to be looking at the practical implications of this truth this morning. However, we will be getting back to this verse in the weeks to come.

What we see from the last part of vs. 10 (*profaning the covenant of our fathers*) is that our lack of faithfulness against each other is ultimately an offense against God. The thing that makes Israel's lack of faithfulness to each other so bad is that it is a direct action against the covenant that God established with them.

Generally, when a man lacks faithfulness to his wife he thinks that his actions are primarily against his wife, however they are not. Without a doubt, a man's breach of the covenant he made with his wife is an offense against her, but the offense is first and foremost against God. Here Malachi suggests that Israel's lack of faithfulness toward each other is ultimately a rejection of the covenant that God made with their fathers. We are not ultimately accountable to each other, we are accountable to God. Think about it, when you, against your parent's instruction, steal your brother's or sister's favorite toy, although your action was against your sibling, your ultimate offense was in rejecting your parent's authority. Mom and dad will tell you, "Go to your brother, apologize, and give the toy back, and then come back here and we are going to swat your backside to teach you that you are to obey us." Notice what David said in Psalm 51:4. Here we see David's prayer after coming to terms with his sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband, Uriah the Hittite, slain on the battle field so that he might take her as his wife.

*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.*

You would have thought that David would have said, "Against Bathsheba and Uriah have I sinned!" but he doesn't. He understood that his sin is first and foremost against the Lord. He understood that it wasn't Bathsheba's standard of righteousness that he broke; it was the Lord's standard that he broke. His sin was ultimately against the Lord because his sin went against the standard of righteousness that God set forth in the covenant that he made with David. He understood that his primary sin was ignoring God's covenant stipulations.

Thus you can see why I titled this sermon *Stabbing God Through Man's Back*. Ultimately, our lack of faithfulness to each other in our covenant relationships, whether we speaking of marital relationships, relationships with our immediate family or extended family, relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, or even our business

relationships in the world, is ultimately a sin against the Lord, a transgression against his law, an offense against his standard of righteousness.

Thus, the biblical key to having healthy relationships is through fearing and loving God. If you love God you will joyfully love your wife. If you fear God's word you will be careful to forgive your brothers in Christ as Christ has forgiven you (Col 3). If you have a passion for the name of God you will passionately love your wife. If you take your faithfulness to his covenant seriously, you will love your enemies. Your faithfulness in your relationships is determined not by will power, but by your foundational love and fear for God. As many told me before marrying Kristal; "The deepest way to love your wife is to love Jesus more than you love your wife. If your marriage relationship with Kristal is the overflow of your deep love of God, you will not disappoint her."

What we see here is that Israel is evidencing the true hardness of their hearts, they are rejecting God's standard of righteousness by dealing faithlessly, contemptuously with those on their own team. Really, we can say this; the greatest evidence of your love for God is how much you love one another. The litmus test for a passion for God is the depth of our love for those who are difficult to love. After all, what was the commandment that all of the law and prophets hung upon? Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). Love sums up God's covenantal charge to his people. If you love you will be faithful to the covenant. If you faithfully love all of God's creatures and especially those of the household of the faith and your spouses, you will be a law keeper *par excellence*. You will have fulfilled the entire covenant. Israel received a railing accusation by God for profaning, defiling the covenant that he made with them. What was their transgression? A lack of faithfulness in their dealings with one another. God would not have railed against them if you they had been faithfully loving and serving each other, but they weren't. They failed to keep the heart of the covenant that God made with them—to love their God and to love each other. Love is the highest law.