

## Studies in Malachi #3: Judgment will Come; Serving God is Not in Vain

As a review, the previous messages looked at various offenses the people were committing against God.

Offense #1 – They denied that God really loved them (1:2-5)

Offense #2 – They despised God's name by offering unworthy sacrifices (1:6-8, 11-14)

Offense #3 – Their priests were unfaithful, hypocritical, and half-hearted (2:1-9, 17)

Offense #4 – They profaned the covenant by intermarrying with the heathen (2:10-13)

Offense #5 – They were divorcing their wives (2:14-16)

**Offense #6 – They deny evil, and that God will judge it (2:17), and say that to serve God is pointless and without profit (3:13-15)**

**Mal. 2:17 - "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?"**

Modern man commonly believes that all people are basically good, and so the stress is not on repentance and redemption, but on counselling, self-improvement, programs to fight addiction, drugs to modify behavior, etc. In short, the solution to every personal, physical, sociological, or even spiritual problem is to be found in man himself, not God.

What the Bible presents is quite the opposite, that man is fundamentally corrupt and depraved in all parts of his sinful nature. This does not mean that anyone is as bad as they could possibly be, or that they practice every kind of sin, or that they are not better than someone else, but that the nature of man is corrupted both by the sinful state inherited from Adam, and by sins personally committed. This sin affects the desires, the mind, and the will, and is all the result of our being spiritually dead because of Adam's Fall. Unregenerate (and often religious) men would rather see themselves as merely sick, not dead.

Many of us used to secretly congratulate ourselves that we were "generally pretty decent folks". But Isa. 64:6 shows what God thinks of the best of human effort – "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

**Mal. 3:13-15 – "Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."**

Here are the twin questions of "Why do the wicked prosper?" (Ps. 73), and "Why do the righteous suffer?" (the book of Job). The next question is "Why serve God in the light of these apparent contradictions?"

**Lessons:** Unregenerate men, and those who are falsely religious, have several errors:

1. They have a wrong conception of evil itself. "Hitler was evil, mass murderers are evil, but most of us just have a few problems that we can justify, or work out on our own." (wrong!)
2. They think that men are born good and remain "basically good", but with "weaknesses".
3. They believe that God accepts their own view of their goodness, and that he is pleased with their religious efforts; that he will reward them for their goodness and ignore the rest.
4. They think he somehow owes them a life free of serious trouble, because they are "not so bad". e.g., "Whatever did I do to deserve this?"
5. They think that life should be "fair". "I will not worship a God who would allow this to happen!"
6. God does not always promptly punish sin or reward righteousness in this life, and in a way that satisfies men's own conception of justice. So they come to deny God's existence, or at least his concern, or knowledge of what is going on down here. They think "Why bother trying to do good? It won't help us. It is vain (empty) to serve God. Why resist evil? Nothing bad will happen to us, so let's just live as we wish."

The error is in thinking that sins or righteousness are "water over the dam", not realizing that God sees and remembers all, and that he will "sort it all out in the end". We naturally want to see good and evil rewarded promptly in this life, but we are not the Judge of the earth. If God's perfect wisdom is to allow evil to

temporarily triumph, and the good temporarily to be afflicted, it is not for us to question God. We must know that in the day of judgment, “the meek will inherit the earth”, and the wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Ultimate reward and punishment is in the future, and what seems to be in the present is no true indicator of what that final judgment will be.

Ps. 37:34-39 – “Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in the time of trouble.”

Mt. 12:36-37 – We will give account for every idle word in the day of judgment.

Mt. 16:27 – “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

Rom. 2:4-9 – “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil”

Eccl. 12:14 – “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.”

#### **Offence #7 – Various specific sins (3:5)**

**“And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.”**

As with many of the Bible’s “catalogs” of sins, these are obviously the types of sins that God particularly hates, and fall in general categories:

1. Occult sins – he is a witness against their sorcerers
2. Sexual sins – against the adulterers
3. Lies and untruthfulness – against the false swearers
4. Injustice – against those who cheat their employees, or who do not pay their bills
5. No compassion or generosity – they oppress widows and orphans (take advantage of people who are unable to resist, or cannot afford to defend themselves)
6. Bigotry – against those who cheat strangers (“It’s OK, they’re not one of us.”)
7. No fear of God

God is against all sins, in any of these categories. For example, just because you have no “hirelings” does not mean you are free to commit other injustices. Just because you are not a sorcerer does not mean you cannot be guilty of similar sins, like astrology or fortune telling.

**Lesson:** We must take care to keep ourselves free (by God’s gracious enabling) from all sins. We should pay especial attention to the various catalogs of sin in the Bible, and examine ourselves as to whether we are in some way guilty of these types of things. If so, we must sincerely repent and renounce those things, put them under the blood of Christ by faith, and then studiously avoid them in the future.

For example, Prov. 6:16-19, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 4:31 – 5:4, Rev. 21:8, etc.