

SEVEN COMPLAINTS

A STUDY FROM MALACHI

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There are many lessons that can be drawn from the short book of Malachi. Malachi is the last book and prophetic voice in the Old Testament. It brings to a close the Old Testament. It would be 400 years after Malachi before the voice of God would be heard from again.

Many of the issues in Malachi are relevant to our understanding today. It had been about 100 years since the second temple had been rebuilt. The revival under Nehemiah was almost a century past. God's people had forgotten the past revival and had fallen into what some would call a “mechanical” form of worship. They had become delinquent in their tithes.

Malachi essentially lists seven complaints from God as the reasons why the Lord was dissatisfied with them. After his rebuke of the unfaithful remnant, the Lord would not speak to mankind in general for 400 very long, silent years.

The last revival that we often speak of took place in 1948. It was a time of refreshing. A time of the sovereign presence of God sweeping over the church in a transforming manner. Many from that revival time were changed in a dramatic way.

As I write this article, we are approaching 70 years from the 1948 revival. In many respects, our “hour” parallels Malachi's “hour.” I can almost hear the prophetic words of Malachi echoing through time to our day. Are the seven complaints of Malachi's generation also complaints to our generation? If the voice of God went silent for centuries after Malachi's prophecy, it is important for us today to remember where we may also be falling short.

Complaint One: Not Giving God Our Best (Malachi 1:6-14)

In this category, God's people were offering polluted sacrifices and gifts to the Lord. The best of what was available for sacrifice was always kept for themselves. Because of this, the Lord offered the stinging rebuke, “*I have no pleasure in you!*” Many from that day were going through the motions of giving, but keeping the best for themselves. There are many areas of life that we must be cautious of and to remember to always give to God our very best. That can include our time, our worship, the first fruits of our income, our devotion, and many other things.

Within this rebuke, Malachi looks ahead through the millennia of time and offers the following prophecy: “*For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the*

nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. My name will be great among the nations” (Malachi 1:11, ESV).

Complaint Two: Disobedience To God’s Commands (Malachi 2:1-9)

The Lord, through the mouth of the prophets and through the ministry of the priesthood, had taught and instilled many commands and requirements in the people. As the years passed, the people decided that many of these commands were irrelevant. The commands did not fit their generation or their times, according to the poll of public opinion.

As a result, the Lord pronounced a judgement, *“If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings”* (Malachi 2:2, ESV).

The Lord continues with His indictment, *“The lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way”* (Malachi 2:7, ESV).

In this more recent revival, there have been many scriptural traditions and kingdom truths that the Lord has placed His light upon. These have been revealed through what we call the five-fold ministry (Ephesians 4:11).

Is it really up to the individual (as it was in Malachi’s time) to simply randomly decide what we think is relevant to our hour and generation? Worldly philosophy, norms and cultures are constantly changing. The norms and values of society are a moving target. But it is not really our choice to make the Word of God fit into the mold of the present worldly system.

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”*** (Romans 12:1-2, ESV).

Complaint Three: Spiritually Mixed Marriages (Malachi 2:10-12)

God had given commands to the Jewish people not to marry non Israelites. Marriages to the heathen were forbidden (Exodus 34:14-16, Deuteronomy 7:3). A spiritually-mixed marriage would always weaken the connection that God had with them as His treasured people. Spiritually-mixed marriages polluted the dedication and commitment to God that was needed in the home.

Paul gives this same warning in the New Testament to the new believers in Jesus Christ:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty’” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18, ESV).

When a man and woman enter the dating/courting phase of life, it is important to not become unequally yoked to an unbeliever from the very beginning.

Complaint Four: Divorce (Malachi 2:13-16)

Before I go further into discussing the topic of divorce as noted in Malachi, I wish the reader to understand that this article is not intended to inflict any judgement or pain on members that have suffered through a divorce. It is recognized that divorce does happen and often may happen due to circumstances that are not always within one’s complete control.

“And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate’” (Mark 10:3-10, ESV).

The Biblical definition of marriage listed above may seem uncomfortably **“narrow”** in terms of the standards of the world, but we are called to walk a **“narrow”** way.

*“Enter by the **narrow** gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is **narrow** and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few”* (Matthew 7:13-18, ESV).

In Malachi’s day, as it is in our day, divorce had become quite common. The Lord seemed to issue a more stinging rebuke to the man that had abandoned the wife of his youth. The Lord did not take it lightly when a man abandoned his responsibilities as a husband/father and broke the holy covenant of marriage. His rebuke seemed to be more directed at the men, but I am sure it was also directed to women that have willingly abandoned their responsibilities.

“But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ‘For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘covers his garment with violence,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless’” (Malachi 2:14-16, ESV).

The Lord asks that we respect “marriage.” It is a solemn arrangement and should not be disrespected by two people simply

“living together.” Marriage is far more than that. I don’t think it was a coincidence that the first miracle Jesus performed was at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). It was a “seal of approval” on marriage.

Complaint Five: Disrespect And Lack Of Reverence (Malachi 2:17)

“You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.’ Or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’” (Malachi 2:17, ESV).

There was a big problem of disrespecting God’s word and a lack of reverence of His ways.

Dr. Ryrie, in his study notes, captures this thought very clearly: *“Not only had they tried to make evil ... good, but they implied that God delighted in evil because He did not dispense immediate justice.”*

This same complaint was echoed prophetically against our generation as well when Isaiah said: *“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20, KJV)!*

There is a tendency for man to change his interpretation of God’s words and commands to fit into the present worldly system. This is a lack of respect for God’s Word. It is a lack of reverence for God. There are many things that we have been asked to do by the Lord. It is not really necessary for us to fully understand and agree with all truth. He simply asks us to respectfully and reverently obey. *“If you love Me (Jesus speaking), keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV).*

It is equally important that we respect the authority that God has placed in the home (Ephesians 5: 22-33), in our government (Romans 13:1-2), and in the church (Hebrews 13: 17). It is equally important that we love, and respect every member of the church.

- **Scriptures On Respect In The Home**

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband”

(Ephesians 5:28-33, ESV).

- **Scriptures On Respecting The Authority In Human Government**

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval” (Romans 13:1-4, ESV).

- **Scripture On Respecting The Authority In The Church**

“Obey your leaders (spiritual shepherds) and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17, ESV).

- **Scriptures On Respecting One Another In The Church**

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:9-10, ESV).

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:16-18, ESV).

Complaint Six: Robbery! By Withholding Their Tithes (Malachi 3:7-12)

The children of God were accused of robbery because they did not return to God that which was lawfully His (their tithes).

A tithe is a tenth of our income. It is not ours to keep. It belongs to the Lord. An offering is what is beyond a tenth of our income (tithe), and is ours to keep or give. A tithe, however, is something we “owe.”

When I get my mail, I often find “bills” for various services. I have a utility bill, a water bill, and other bills that come every month! I owe payment on these bills. It is not my choice to decide if I want or feel like paying these bills. I never “feel” like paying bills, but the point is, I owe payment on these bills.

The difference with our tithing is that God will not send you a bill for your tithes. It is a required payment however, and God has connected a blessing for payment and a curse for non payment of His tithes.

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, (Ryrie notes: ‘From the time of King Hezekiah on (2 Chronicles 31:11), special storehouses held grain brought in payment of tithes. These may have been special rooms in the Temple or a kind of lean-to against a side of the Temple. The blessing was such an abundance of crops that the storehouses would overflow.’) that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:8-12, ESV).

Complaint Seven: Pride And Arrogance (Malachi 3:13-15)

“Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape” (Malachi 3:13-15, ESV).

God hates arrogance. *“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”* (James 4:6, ESV).

Arrogance and pride cause the Lord’s ears to be deaf to our prayers and brings us into opposition with God. This is a place that we do not want to be. We must be cautious that pride and arrogance do not find a place in our hearts.

Chapter 3 ends with a wonderful statement:

“Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. ‘They shall be mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him’” (Malachi 3:16-18, ESV).

As we move into chapter four, we find that Malachi’s prophecy stretches forward in time to the days of John the Baptist (Verse 5), and into the thousand-year kingdom age. What a great blessing it is that much of the blessed fruit, life, and privileges of the coming kingdom age may be appropriated by us (to a measure) in the here and now!

For the sake of brevity, we will only touch on the the truths of the coming kingdom from chapter four, The Day of the Lord:

The Lord will come with healing

- *“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall”* (Malachi 4:2, ESV).

The Day of the Lord speaks of completely overcoming the works of darkness

- *“And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts”* (Malachi 4:3, ESV).

The Day of the Lord speaks of setting the house in order and not neglecting to put into place what has been taught

- *“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel”* (Malachi 4:4, ESV).

The Day of the Lord references the coming of John the Baptist, but also speaks of restoring and strengthening the family

- *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction”* (Malachi 4:5-6, ESV).

Where do we fit relative to these past complaints concerning Israel in our current day? Let us allow the Lord to search our hearts.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24, ESV).

I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Ryrie’s study notes as inspiration for some of the categories. †

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