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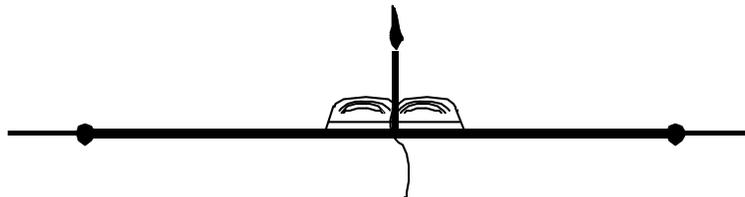
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Old Testament Study: Malachi 2:10-16

Marital Sins

¹⁰Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

¹¹Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. ¹²As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

¹³Another thing you do: You flood the LORD'S altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. ¹⁴You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

¹⁵Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

¹⁶"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

In the previous couple of sections of the book of Malachi, we have seen the priests rebuked by the Lord (through Malachi), for their improper methods of worship. Because of their improprieties, the priests were unable to be holy examples for the people. Instead, they were **"despised and humiliated before all the people, because [they] have not followed [the Lord's] ways"** (Mal. 2:9). Now, whenever spiritual leadership is not following the ways of the Lord, you can be sure that their followers are also not following the ways of the Lord. This was the case in Malachi's time. In this section, the people are taken to task for breaking the Lord's laws concerning marriage and divorce. Specifically, the people are admon-

ished for two particular sins: marrying out of the faith; divorcing the wives of their youth.

Malachi introduces his admonition of the people by pointing out the seriousness of the sins they were committing: **“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?”** (vs. 10). The marital sins they were committing were a profanation of **“the covenant of their fathers”**, because they were **“breaking faith with one another.”** We must not treat marital sins lightly. Make no mistake, they are sins. And they are sins that are not fitting of God’s people. Malachi asks: **“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?”** They are sins against our brothers and sisters. They are sins of breaking faith with our brothers and sisters. God, our **“Father”**, is faithful to His words, faithful to His covenants. So also, as His children, we should be faithful to our covenants with one another.

Moreover, marital sins are not just sins between two individuals. They are sins against society, as well. Marriage outside the faith weakens the faith of society as a whole. Divorce weakens the institution of the family, which is so important to society. Furthermore, divorce often has side effects that place burdens on society. For instance, the children of divorced parents naturally receive less attention and instruction from their parents. This deficit of parental attention often results in discipline problems, which society must bear.

Malachi specifically admonishes the people for their sin: **“Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty”** (vss. 11–12). Malachi’s first admonition concerning marriage and divorce is against the sin of marrying out of the faith. Both the Old and New Testaments speak against marrying out of the faith. Concerning the unbelievers living around the children of Israel, the Lord commanded: **“Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you”** (Deut. 7:3–4). In the New Testament, Paul commanded Christians: **“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”** (II Cor. 6: 14–15). The argument Paul uses in that verse is surprisingly modern. These days, when looking for a marriage partner, people look for common interests and compatibility. Paul points out that a believer and unbeliever cannot

be seen as being compatible. Our spiritual standing before God is the most important aspect of our lives, and so, given this, **“what does a believer have in common with and unbeliever?”** You may protest: “If I marry an unbeliever, will not I be in a good position to turn them to God?” But God’s commandments are based on wisdom. God knows that, far more often, the unbelieving spouse causes the believing spouse to drift away from God.

Next, Malachi speaks against divorce. To do so, Malachi first relates the effect that the divorces have had on the divorcee’s relationship with God: **“Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’S altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant”** (vss. 13–14). Here, the Lord takes the side of the deserted partner. In that culture, it was nearly always the wife who was the wronged one in the divorce. As a punishment for the wife’s suffering, the Lord cut off His relationship with the husband. The husband came to regret what he did: **“You flood the LORD’S altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.”**

For the believer, a marriage is more than just a civil union between two people. It is a solemn covenant, with God Himself **“acting as the witness.”** Such a covenant should not be broken lightly. Indeed, such a covenant should never be broken.

A divorce is not a private matter between two people. It is a rending of the fusion of two people into one, which God supernaturally created. As the Lord points out: **“Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth”** (vs. 15). A marriage is more than just a social contract between two people. Something more goes on when two people are joined in marriage: something mystical. **“They will become one flesh”** (Gen. 2:24). Those who are married are newly created into one being. More than this, their marriage becomes a model of the relationship between Christ and her bride, the Church. Paul says: **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church”** (Eph. 5:31–32). And if “God created marriage to illustrate the most blessed of all spiritual relationships—the union of a believing man or woman with Christ, the divine bridegroom of the church—then divorce must therefore illustrate apostasy or the falling away of a man or woman from God, which is damnation” [Boice, 246].

Malachi points out here, as we noted before, that divorce makes it difficult to raise up godly children: **“And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring.”** “Why did God make Adam and Eve only one flesh, when He might have given Adam many wives, for God certainly had more than enough of the Spirit, or creative power, to furnish many partners? However, because God was seeking a godly offspring, He restricted man and woman to a single bonding, for He knew that a plurality of mates for either partner was not conducive to raising children to the glory of God” [Kaiser, 466].

As a marriage lengthens, and the first blushes of love recede, we need to take special care to view marriage as a life-long commitment. Malachi exhorts: **“So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth”** (vs. 15). A successful marriage requires self-discipline and restraint. We need to **“guard ourselves”** against worldly desires, and realize that giving into the temptation to stray from **“the wife of our youth”** will lead to great pain and suffering. Ask anyone who has committed adultery whether they regret it. Odds are, they will say they do. True happiness comes in the stability of a life-long marriage.

Finally, Malachi presents the most compelling argument against divorce: **“I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith”** (vs. 16). Make no mistake, God **“hates divorce.”** How much clearer can it be said? This statement by God Himself is unequivocal, uncompromising, and should be made clearly known by ministers of God’s Word to their hearers: **“God hates divorce.”**

God also hates **“a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment.”** This idiom seems to mean that God hates when a man does **“violence”** (the divorce), and then covers it by making excuses (**“the garment”**). I do not think there is any sin for which more excuses are made than divorce. It is the most rationalized of sins that is committed. “Instead of trying to find loopholes in God’s commandment or trying to convince ourselves that our spouse is not a Christian or is at least not behaving as one and is therefore divorceable, we ought to be shouting the holiness of marriage from the housetops” [Boice, 244].

To those who are married, I exhort you to begin today in the work of building your marriage, so that it will remain strong for years and years, for the rest of your life. This requires effort. It is not easy. It requires humility, submission, and (especially) a great amount of selflessness on the part of both partners.

To those who are not yet married, I exhort you, when looking for a marriage partner, to heed the words of God, that He hates divorce. So, choose a believer, and choose someone who is willing to work at love, and to work at building a lasting relationship. May the Lord guide you and bless you in this.



A Classic Study: Patience in Affliction

A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here, we continue a reprint of excerpts from Richard Baxter's work entitled *Obedient Patience*. In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

Oppression and Injustice by Men of Wealth and Power - I

Another case that requireth patience is oppression by men of wealth and power in the world, and injustice of ungodly governors. Justice is so much due to all mankind, and injustice so odious, that we are ready to take it the more heinously when we cannot have our right. Oppressing landlords raise their rents to such a height, that poor men, with the most tiring care and labour, can hardly live. And some rich men do think that their wills must be poor men's rule, and that they must deny them nothing that they command; as if the poor were slaves, that had no property or benefit of the law. And worst of all when in too many nations on earth, rulers are unjust, and haters of just and upright men, and either break all bounds of law to ruin them, or else turn the law itself against them; and when they justify the wicked, and condemn the innocent, yea, when piety, and honesty, and conscience, are made the most intolerable crimes, and filthiness and sensuality do pass for works of one that may be trusted; these cases call for extraordinary patience, and it is the more grievous because that magistracy is a special ordinance of God, and the image of His supereminence and governing power shineth in it: and to have Satan get possession of it, and turn it against God Himself who made it, and make that the plague and calamity of mankind, which was instituted for order, justice, and defence, and the upholding of goodness, and suppression of sin, this is a most grievous case. The same I say of cruel masters tyrannizing over their servants, and wicked parents oppressing virtue in their children. Here patience is of great necessity.

And, 1. We must here be very careful to distinguish between true power and its abuse, and not to think evil of power itself because it is abused. And this must be the more carefully studied, because here practically to distinguish is exceeding difficult. For the best things when corrupted, are the worst. It is hard to love rain and waters in a deluge, when it drowneth the country, men and beasts. One that had seen the fire of London, or yesterday the burning of Wapping, might be tempted to take first to be more terrible than amiable. If physicians killed twenty for one they cured, men would grow into a dread or hatred of their profession: and as to rulers, judges, and all sorts of magistrates, the case is the same. They are God's ordinances (in general) and good in themselves, and if well used would be the great blessing of the world; God's ordinary means to protect the innocent, encourage the godly, and bring ungodliness to shame; to keep rich men from oppressing the poor, and the unruly multitude from popular rage against their neighbours or superiors; to keep up equity and justice, and to frustrate treachery, perjury, and fraud; in a word, to be God's ministers or officers for the common good, and to see His laws obeyed by the subjects, being themselves the most zealous in obeying them, and to be a terror to blasphemers, fornicators, murderers, thieves, oppressors, and other evil-doers, and a praise and defence to them that do well.

There are two cases which are no better than ruin to mankind; that is, to have no government, and to have utter tyranny, which designeth the undoing of the subjects, souls and bodies, by forcing them to sin against God to their damnation (as far as force can do it), or commonly to die as martyrs, and which is used to subvert the government of God, and to set up wickedness and will, and to destroy the common welfare.

And there are two cases which are such as we must submit to. One is the tolerable injustice and oppression of ungodly rulers, who will kill, and ruin, and persecute some particular innocent men, but yet are for the common peace and welfare, and do more good by their government than hurt by their abuse. These must be patiently endured, so far as the evil cannot lawfully be remedied. The other sort is the defective government of good rulers, who endeavor the common good, and promote piety, and suppress sin, but with such mixture of failings as follow their personal imperfections, and with such blots as David had in the case of Mephibosheth and Uriah, and as Ada had, that oppressed many of the people, and as Constantine had in the case of Crispus and Athanasius, and as Theodosius senior had in the case of the Thessalonians, and as Theodosius junior and Anastasius had in the case of the Eutychians, and as even our King Edward VI had about the death of the Duke of Somerset, and he about his brother's death. Grotius owneth the old saying, that the names of all

good kings may be written *uno annulo*, in one ring: I think that is too hard a censure. But even the best are men: and as a physician's faults, though few, cost the patient dearer than all their neighbors' faults do; so a prince's faults, though he be extraordinary good, may cost a kingdom dearer than the faults of thousands else. Yet these honest princes are so great blessings to the world, and so rare, that it is a happy nation that hath no worse, and must be very thankful to them.

But there is a fifth sort imaginable in Eutopia, and those men of so perfect wisdom and goodness, as that all their government is just. Short of heaven, there is little hope of this, unless there be a golden age to come, or such a reign of Christ for a thousand years as some describe, which is but the reign of wisdom, justice, piety, and love. But when God hath some great blessing for a land, He useth to raise up rulers better than the rest of the nations have: and when sin provoketh Him, He removeth them quickly from an unworthy land, as He did Josiah, and our King Edward VI and Jovian in the Roman Empire. Yea, sometimes a wicked people and clergy prevail against a godly king, as they did against Ludovicus Pius in France.

2. Because bad rulers are a great national judgment, it calleth a land to search after and repent of national sins; for it is for such that this calamity usually cometh. When Gildas describeth the horrid wickedness of the British kings, he describeth the great wickedness of the clergy and people as the deserving cause. And no wonder, when in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah, though the kings were excellently good, yet the unreformed, obstinate clergy and people so provoked God that He would not spare them, but cast them off into captivity and ruin. But usually God gratifieth their pernicious desires, and giveth them such bad kings as they would have, as He did Saul, Jeroboam, etc., and permits people to please themselves to death.

3. Take heed that selfishness and error cause you not to judge worse of governors than they are, and to take just restraint or punishment, for oppression, and to think all unjust that is displeasing to you. This error is common to the selfish, partial sort of men, that judge men and actions by self-interest.

4. Take heed lest over-much love to your estates or liberties make some injustice and injuries done you, by rich men or rulers, to seem much greater than they are, and it be your vice that rendereth them insufferable.

(This study will continue in the next issue)



New Testament Study: Matthew 12:38-50



Request for a Sign

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”

³⁹He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

⁴³“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

⁴⁶While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. ⁴⁷Someone told Him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

⁴⁸He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹Pointing to His disciples, He said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Matthew has just related how, after Jesus amazed the crowds by miraculously healing a blind and mute man, the Pharisees attributed the miracle to the power of the devil. Now, the Pharisees request a miraculous sign: **“Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you’”** (vs. 38). The Pharisees show amazing arrogance here. The wondrous and beautiful miracles that Jesus had performed were not good enough for them. They want to dictate to Him when and where to do a miracle, in order that they might (possibly) believe He is sent from God. They are like many today, who “flatter themselves that they only require a little more proof to become decided Christians; they fancy that if their reason and intellect could only be met with some additional arguments, they would at once give up all for Christ’s sake, take up the cross and follow Him” [Ryle, 135]. Many today say, “Oh, if God would just come down and reveal Himself directly to me, in a miraculous way, then I would believe.” Such arrogance! In saying this, they make themselves a ruler over God, dictating to Him how to reveal Himself. They ignore all the revelations of God that can be found in His creation, and through the work of His people. More importantly, they ignore the time when He did come down and show Himself to the world, through Jesus Christ.

Jesus denied their request to perform a sign at their bidding: **“He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here’”** (vss. 40–42). Though Jesus denied their request for a sign at their bidding, He did offer to give them a sign in His time, the sign of Jonah: **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”** (vs. 40). Jesus, of course, was speaking of His death and resurrection. This sign should have turned out to be sufficient for the skeptical Pharisees, and indeed, should have been sufficient for skeptics throughout the ages. No other sign is needed. If the power of Christ’s resurrection is not sufficient to believe, then nothing is.

By citing the history of Jonah here, Jesus teaches us a couple of things. First, Jesus affirms that the story of Jonah was true—as true as the

death and resurrection of the Lord Himself. Jesus states: **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”** (vs. 40). “Jesus refers to the story of Jonah, and his miraculous preservation in the whale’s belly, as undeniable matters of fact. Let us remember this if we hear men professing to believe the writers of the New Testament, and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament, as if they were fables: such men forget that in so doing they pour contempt upon Christ Himself. The authority of the Old Testament and the authority of the New stand or fall together; the same Spirit inspired men to write of Solomon and Jonah, who inspired the Evangelists to write of Christ” [Ryle, 135].

Second, Jesus teaches us that Jonah’s history foreshadowed Jesus’ life, as so much of the Old Testament does. “Jonah’s case was analogous to this, as being a signal judgment of God, reversed in three days, and followed by a glorious mission to the Gentiles” [JFB, 75]. “Jesus’ life story is well symbolized by that of Jonah. They cast our Lord overboard, even as the sailors did the man of God. The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners; our Lord’s death made peace for us. Our Lord was a while in the heart of the earth as Jonah in the depth of the sea; but He rose again, and His ministry was full of the power of His resurrection. As Jonah’s ministry was certified by His restoration from the sea, so is our Lord’s ministry attested by His rising from the dead. The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Ninevah, and so does the risen Saviour demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom His message comes” [Spurgeon, 158]. This is just one example of many, many typological passages in the Old Testament that prefigure Jesus and His ministry. The whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, speak of Jesus. We can find Him on every page.

Jesus compares the Ninevites’ response after hearing the preaching of Jonah, to the Pharisees’ (and, in general, the children of Israel’s) response to Jesus’ ministry: **“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here”** (vs. 41). The Pharisees had a much greater advantage than the Ninevites to believe the words of the man of God that came to them. The Ninevites were heathens, while the Pharisees already professed a belief in the True and Living God. Jonah the prophet, though he preached to them, had no desire that the Ninevites be saved, while Jesus tirelessly carried out His ministry, and went to great lengths (even dying for them) to save the children of Israel. Jonah’s preaching was accompanied by one miracle, and that a rather odd one, in that he was spit up onto the beach by a large fish; Jesus

performed all sorts of signs and miracles, culminating in His resurrection from the dead. Surely, in every way imaginable, the Pharisees had the advantage of having **“one greater than Jonah.”** Indeed, the Ninevites, in addition to standing in judgment and condemning **“that generation”**, could stand in judgment and condemn many generations since then, including our own. We, who have the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the great news of the Gospel, have much more evidence to repent and turn to God than the Ninevites did. “It was a sublime spectacle when the whole population of that vast heathen city, the proud king, the nobles and all, down to the very humblest, repented at the preaching of Jonah” [Broadus, 277].

Significantly, the example of the repentance of the Ninevites is an example of Gentiles turning to God. Jesus gives one more example of a Gentile turning to God: **“The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here”** (vs. 42). “As the fame of Solomon brought the queen of the south from the uttermost parts of the earth, so does the doctrine of our Lord command attention from the utmost isles of the sea” [Spurgeon, 159]. The example of the Queen of Sheba, the **“Queen of the South”**, is also notable here because she turned to God through the preaching of the wisdom of God, without the benefit of signs and miracles. Jesus, of course, spoke many words of wisdom, in addition to performing signs and wonders. The Queen of the South will surely **“rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.”**

One of the points that Jesus was making with these examples was that the children of Israel at the time Jesus walked the earth had a great advantage over those of any generation that preceded them, for the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy was occurring before their eyes. The Messiah Himself walked with them, talked with them, taught them, and even served them. Such first-hand knowledge of the Messiah brought with it a great amount of responsibility for them to respond to it, repent and totally turn their lives over to their Lord.

Does this sound radical? To totally turn your life over to the Lord. To do any less is actually dangerous. Jesus speaks next of the dangers of partial religious conversion: **“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation”** (vss.

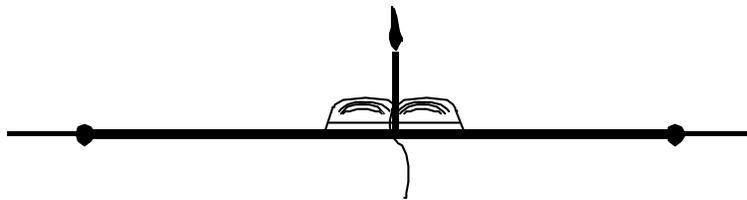
43–45). Jesus here teaches us a bit about the spiritual world and the dynamics of an aspect of the spiritual war. He speaks here of a man who experienced a partial religious conversion. We are not told the details of the conversion experience, but we are told that **“an evil spirit came out of the man.”** Perhaps he was a drunkard who overcame his addiction; or a violent man who became a man of peace; or a profligate who put behind his evil ways. However, he did not follow up on his conversion and turn his entire life over to God. His conversion was incomplete. The **“evil spirit”** left, but nothing came to replace it. The man did not replace the power of the evil spirit with the power of God. A void was left. And so, the evil spirit returned and found **“the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order.”** Note the wording here. The man’s life was not messed up, but **“put in order.”** From all external appearances, the man had it altogether. No doubt he was often congratulated on his transformation, on his renewed spiritual state. And yet, there was spiritual emptiness inside—a vacancy left to be filled. The evil spirit took advantage of this spiritual emptiness, and took with it **“seven other spirits more wicked itself”**, to go back and live in the man. **“And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”** The partial conversion was actually detrimental to him. He chose to only partially turn his life over to God, and the result was that his entire soul was lost. “There is a terrible persistence in wickedness: it returns, and the soul not indwelt by the rightful Tenant is always beleaguered. Mere reformation is never enough...” [Buttrick, in Morris, 329].

In context, Jesus, with His story about the partially converted man, may have been specifically referring to the children of Israel, their initial partial response to the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself, and then their subsequent rejection of Jesus. “The dispossession may refer to the great impression made by John and Jesus, which in most of the people was proving temporary, so that in finally rejecting the Messianic reign they would become more completely than ever the subjects of Satan, and in forty years more would plunge into sore calamity and ruin” [Broadus, 279].

At this point in His teachings, Jesus is interrupted: **“While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, His mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to Him. Someone told Him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’”** (vs. 46–47). We learn from Mark, a little more background to this episode. Before Jesus started teaching, He entered a house, **“and again a crowd gathered, so that He and His disciples were not even able to eat. When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind’”** (Mark. 3:20–21). So, Jesus’ fam-

ily had good intentions. They were concerned that, in Jesus' zeal for service, He was harming Himself by neglecting to eat and rest. However, they misinterpreted His zeal for service as insanity. How familiar does this sound? This scene has been played out countless times throughout the history of Christianity: family members and friends of Christians who think that the zealous, spirit-filled, untiring servants of God are crazy. What Jesus' family members didn't realize at the time was that Jesus received His power, zeal, sustenance and guidance from God, and that the Spirit of God would dictate when Jesus would rest.

Jesus pointed out to His earthly family that there is a new sort of kinship: **"He replied to him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to His disciples, He said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'"** (vs. 48-50). Jesus took this opportunity to "teach there is higher kinship, supreme over even the closest earthly one; it is based on union of life with God and expressed in deeds of righteousness... It is striking that He uses these words in detail, clearly originating new and holy humanity, to be known by one great characteristic, its devotion to the will of God" [Thomas, 182]. For the believer, the spiritual bond to Jesus is much greater than any earthly relationship. What a privilege that we are blessed with a personal relationship with the Lord of the Universe. "All believers in Jesus are of the royal family, princes of the blood, brothers of the Christ" [Spurgeon, 162].



Knowledge Brings Responsibility

"Many a man's knowledge is a torch to light him to hell."

-- Thomas Watson (1620-1686)

A Topical Study: The Shortness of Life



[Here we continue a series that urges a certain indifference to life, and the things of this world, due to the shortness of life, and the vanity of the things of this world. This series is taken from a funeral sermon by Samuel Davies.]—*Ed.*

Indifference to Life Urged from Its Shortness and Vanity by Samuel Davies (1724 –1761)

²⁹But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; ³⁰And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; ³¹And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. (I Cor. 7:29-31 AV).

The next branch of the inference refers to the sorrows of life. “**It remaineth that they that weep be as if they wept not.**” Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer than the vital breath inspires our lungs; and we can weep no longer than till death stops all the fountains of our tears; and that will be in a very little time. And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, His own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and He will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy. But if all the discipline of our heavenly Father fails to reduce us to our duty, if we still continue rebellious and incorrigible under His rod, and consequently the miseries of this life convey us to those of the future, the smaller will be swallowed up and lost in the greater as a

drop in the ocean. Some desperate sinners have hardened themselves in sin with this cold comfort, "That since they must be miserable hereafter, they will at least take their fill of pleasure here, and take a merry journey to hell." But alas! What a sorry mitigation will this be! How entirely will all this career of pleasure be forgotten at the first pang of infernal anguish! Oh! What poor relief to a soul lost forever, to reflect that this eternity of pain followed upon and was procured by a few months or years of sordid guilty pleasure! Was that a relief or an aggravation which Abraham mentions to his lost son, when he puts him in mind, "**Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst they good things?**" (Luke 16:25). Thou hadst then all the share of good which thou ever shalt enjoy; thou hadst their portion in that world where thou didst choose to have it, and therefore stand to the consequences of thine own choice, and look for no other portion. Oh! Who can bear to be thus reminded and upbraided in the midst of remediless misery!

Upon the whole, whatever afflictions or bereavements we suffer in this world, let us moderate our sorrows and keep them within bounds. Let them not work up and ferment into murmurings and insurrections against God, who gives and takes away, and blessed be His name! Let them not sink us into a sullen dislike of the mercies still left into our possession. How unreasonable and ungrateful, that God's retaking one of His mercies should tempt us to despise all the rest! Take a view of the rich inventory of blessings still remaining, and you will find them much more numerous and important than those you have lost. Do not mistake me, as if I recommended or expected an utter insensibility under the calamities of life. I allow nature its moderate tears; but let them not rise to floods of inconsolable sorrows; I allow you to feel your afflictions like men and Christians, but then you must bear them like men and Christians too. May God grant that we may all exemplify this direction when we are put to the trial.

The third branch of the inference refers to the joys and pleasures of life. "**The time is short; it remaineth therefore that they that rejoice be as if they rejoiced not**"; that is, the joys of this life, from whatever earthly cause they spring, are so short and transitory, that they are as of no account to a creature that is to exist forever; to exist forever in joys or pains of an infinitely higher and more important kind. To such a creature it is an indifferency whether he laughs or weeps, whether he is joyful or sad, for only a few fleeting moments. These vanishing, uncertain joys should not engross our hearts as our chief happiness, nor cause us to neglect and forfeit the divine and everlasting joys above the skies. The pleasure we receive from any created enjoyment should not ensnare us to make it our idol, to forget that we must part with it, or to fret, and murmur, and repine, when the parting hour comes. When we are rejoicing in the abundance of earthly blessings, we should be as careful and laborious

in securing the favour of God and everlasting happiness as if we rejoiced not. If our eternal All is secure, it is enough; and it will not at all be heightened or diminished by the reflection that we lived a joyful or a sad life in this pilgrimage. But if we spend our immortality in misery, what sorry comfort will it be that we laughed, and played, and frolicked away a few years upon earth? Years that were given us for a serious purpose, as a space for repentance and preparation for eternity? Therefore, let **“those that rejoice be as though they rejoiced not”**; that is, be nobly indifferent to all the little amusements and pleasures of so short a life.

And let **“those that buy be as if they possessed not.”** This is the fourth particular in the inference from the shortness of time, and it refers to the trade and business of life. It refers not only to the busy merchant, whose life is a vicissitude of buying and selling, but also to the planter, the tradesman, and indeed to every man among us; for we are all carrying on a commerce, more or less, for the purposes of this life. You all buy, and sell, and exchange, in some form or other; and the things of this world are perpetually passing from hand to hand. Sometimes you have good bargains, and make large acquisitions. But set not your hearts upon them; but in the midst of all your possessions, live as if you possessed them not. Alas! Of what small account are all the things you call your own upon earth, to you who are to stay here so short a time; to you who must so soon bid an eternal farewell to them all, and go as naked out of the world as you came into it; to you who must spend an everlasting duration far beyond the reach of all these enjoyments? It is not worth your while to call them your own, since you must so soon resign them to other hands. The melancholy occasion of this day may convince you, that success in trade, and plentiful estate, procured and kept by industry and good management, is neither a security against death, nor a comfort in it. Alas! What service can these houses and lands, and numerous domestics, perform to the cold clay that moulders in yonder grave, or to the immortal spirit that is fled we know not where? Therefore buy, sensible that you can buy nothing upon a sure and lasting title; nothing that you can certainly call yours tomorrow. Buy, but do not sell your hearts to the trifles you buy, and let them not tempt you to act as if this were your final home, or to neglect to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven; treasures which you can call your own when this world is laid in ashes, and which you can enjoy and live upon in what I may call an angelic state, when these bodies have nothing but a coffin, a shroud, and a few feet of earth.

(This study will continue in the next issue.)



A Study in Psalms: Psalm 50

Psalm 50 - God's Message to Earth

A psalm of Asaph.

- ¹The Mighty One, God, the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
From the rising of the sun
to the place where it sets.
- ²From Zion, perfect in beauty,
God shines forth.
- ³Our God comes and will not be silent;
a fire devours before Him,
and around Him a tempest rages.
- ⁴He summons the heavens above,
and the earth, that He may judge His people:
- ⁵“Gather to me my consecrated ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”
- ⁶And the heavens proclaim His righteousness,
for God Himself is judge. *Selah*
- ⁷“Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel,
and I will testify against you:
I am God, your God.
- ⁸I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices
or your burnt offerings,
which are ever before me.
- ⁹I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,
- ¹⁰For every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills.
- ¹¹I know every bird in the mountains,
and the creatures of the field are mine.
- ¹²If I were hungry I would not tell you,
for the world is mine, and all that is in it.
- ¹³Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

¹⁴Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
 fulfill your vows to the Most High,
¹⁵And call upon me in the day of trouble;
 I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

¹⁶But to the wicked, God says:
 “What right have you to recite my laws
 or take my covenant on your lips?

¹⁷You hate my instruction
 and cast my words behind you.

¹⁸When you see a thief, you join with him;
 you throw in your lot with adulterers.

¹⁹You use your mouth for evil
 and harness your tongue to deceit.

²⁰You speak continually against your brother
 and slander your own mother’s son.

²¹These things you have done and I kept silent;
 you thought I was altogether like you.

But I will rebuke you
 and accuse you to your face.

²²“Consider this, you who forget God,
 or I will tear you to pieces,
 with none to rescue:

²³He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me,
 and he prepares the way

So that I may show him
 the salvation of God.”

In this psalm, God summons all the people on earth to give them a message. The summons serves as an introduction to the psalm (vss. 1–6). Then God rebukes His people for their inadequate worship of Him (vss. 7–15). Next, God rebukes those who are not His people for their sins against each other (vss. 16–21). God concludes the psalm with a message of warning to those who are not His people, telling them, in essence, that they had better get right with Him.

This is the first of the psalms of Asaph. Asaph was a Levitical musician (see I Chron. 15:17,19; I Chron. 25:2), probably the chief musician (see I Chron. 16:7), during the days of David. He distinguished himself as a prophet, as well as a psalmist (see II Chron. 29:30). His gift of prophecy is evident in this psalm, as most of the words in the psalm are the direct words of God Himself.

The psalm begins with God summoning the people of the earth, in order to give them a message: **“The Mighty One, God, the LORD,**

speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth” (vss. 1–2). The psalm begins with three names of God: “**The Mighty One, God, the LORD**” or literally, “*El, Elobim, Jehovab*”. These three names denote three different aspects of God. The first, “*El*”, denotes God the Almighty (as translated here, “**the Mighty One**”); the second, “*Elobim*”, denotes God as Creator and, as such, the only proper object of worship; the third, “*Jehovab*”, is the name of God as given to the children of Israel, and so denotes the personal God of His people.

God summons everyone on earth, “**from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.**” We would do well to heed to the summons. “A message from God claims prompt, solemn and universal attention. Nothing can be more dangerous than to despise it” [Plumer, 551]. Of course, we would do well to listen and heed all of God’s Words, as given to us in the Bible.

The message that God has to give in this psalm is weighty, as testified by the entrance God makes: “**Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before Him, and around Him a tempest rages. He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that He may judge His people**” (vss. 3–4). His message is a message of judgment.

God first summons His own people: “**Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice... Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God**” (vss. 5, 7). He rebukes them, not for the actual sacrifices, but for their attitudes in giving the sacrifices: “**I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?**” (vss. 8–13). Apparently, the children of Israel were offering sacrifices with the attitude that they were doing God a favor, as if God needed the sacrifices they were offering. And with this attitude, they no doubt felt that God would be indebted to them for the sacrifices they were offering.

Of course, as God points out to them, such an attitude is ridiculous. What could mere man give to the Creator of the Universe, that God could not create for Himself? The sacrifices that the children of Israel were offering were not for God’s benefit, but for their own. They were sacrifices of atonement, for the covering of their sins, as prescribed by the Law, that they might have a right relationship with God.

Now, we also should heed this rebuke of God. Just as God didn’t need their sacrifices, so also does He not *need* our service. We should never serve Him as if we are doing Him a favor, as if we are indispensable to

Him. He could, at any time, raise up rocks and stones to take our place. “We show our scorn of God’s sufficiency, by secret thoughts of meriting from Him by any religious act, as though God could be indebted to us, and obliged by us” [Spurgeon, 395]. We should rather realize what a privilege it is that we may be chosen for service by the Creator of the Universe.

Our attitude should be one of thankfulness to Him. God commands His people to show their thankfulness and express their need for Him: **“Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me”** (vss. 14–15). This command to us is also a blessing. What a blessing that we have a God who welcomes us to **“call upon Him in the day of trouble.”**

Next, God addresses those who are not His people: **“But to the wicked, God says: ‘What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you’”** (vss. 16–17). God addresses the **“wicked”**, those who **“hate His instruction and cast His words behind them.”** There are many who think that God is greatly imposing on mankind by giving him rules and commandments. For some reason, they do not think that the Creator of the Universe has a right to make the rules that His creation must follow. They think that they set themselves free by casting the Lord’s words behind them, but they are merely switching masters. They change from servants of God to slaves of sin. “The man who casteth God’s word behind him, cannot choose but serve a worse master, and be made slave to his lusts, and be led away to every sin, as temptation leadeth him” [Dickson, 299]. With no moral foundation, they are led by temptation into every sin that presents itself to them: **“When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother’s son”** (vss. 18–20).

After entering into a life of sin by putting God’s words behind them, the wicked then, because they are not immediately punished by God, think that God approves of their activity: **“These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you”** (vs. 21). But they will be surprised when they meet God face to face: **“But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face”** (vs. 21).

But God is gracious. He puts off that face-to-face meeting with Him, and gives us time to repent, and turn to Him. Moreover, He encourages us to repent, and shows us the way to salvation: **“Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue: He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation to God”** (vss. 22–23).

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True Faith Proven

"I know law, and custom, and education, and friends, when they side with godliness; are a great advantage to it, by affording helps, and removing those impediments that might stick much with carnal minds. But truth is not your own, till it be received in its proper evidence; nor your faith divine, till you believe what you believe, because God is true who doth reveal it; nor are you the children of God, till you love Him for Himself; nor are you truly religious, till the truth and goodness of religion itself be the principal thing that maketh you religious. It helpeth much to discover a man's sincerity, when he is not only religious among the religious, but among the profane, and the enemies, and scorners, and persecutors of religion; and when a man doth not pray only in a praying family, but among the prayerless, and the deriders of fervent constant prayer; and when a man is heavenly among them that are earthly, and temperate among the intemperate and riotous, and holdeth the truth among those that reproach it and that hold the contrary; when a man is not carried only by a stream of company, or outward advantages; to his religion, nor avoideth sin for want of a temptation, but is religious though against the stream, and innocent when cast (unwillingly) upon temptations; and is godly where godliness is accounted singularity, hypocrisy, faction, humour, disobedience, or heresy; and will rather let go the reputation of his honesty, than his honesty itself."

-- Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

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