

# Spiritual Treason

Malachi 2:10–16

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## Introduction

Betrayal. Treachery. Duplicity. Double-crossing. Treason. Each of these words conjures in our souls a kind of aversion, a kind of antipathy, a kind of disgust that makes us uncomfortable, unsettled, and even angry. We look upon traitors with a special kind of revulsion. Benedict Arnold betrays the United States to the British, and his name becomes a byword for the rest of history—a nickname for betrayal. Demas, once a fellow-worker with the Apostle Paul, sending his greetings to the people of God in the close of Colossians and Philemon, by the end of 2 Timothy, has “loved this present world,” and has deserted Paul on the mission field. And who can forget the arch-traitor, the son of perdition: Judas, who betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss—who sold the Lord of glory into the hands of His enemies for a few pieces of silver. Our souls recoil from the *thought* of such men.

And that’s because betrayal is marked by a special kind—an aggravated kind—of evil. It’s one thing to sin against someone openly by some sort of outright act of unrighteousness. But it’s another thing to cover that act of enmity under the cloak of friendship. Betrayal is so repugnant to the virtuous mind precisely because it is a breaking of trust. It is evil masquerading in the name of goodness—again: hostility and enmity in the name of friendship. It’s laced with the most vicious kind of deception: the kind that lulls an unsuspecting person into letting their guard down, and then striking them when they’re at their most vulnerable.

It’s why the pain of being betrayed cuts so deep. When Joseph realized he had been sold into slavery not by marauders and kidnappers but by his own brothers—it must have broken his heart. “It’s one thing to be treated this way by enemies! But by my own family?” When David realized that he was being betrayed by Ahithophel, his trusted counselor, and by Absalom, his own son, he gives voice to the pain of betrayal in Psalm 55:12–14. He says, “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, Then I could bear it; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, Then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, My companion and my familiar friend; We who had sweet fellowship together [and] Walked in the house of God in the throng.” We hear a similar sentiment from David in Psalm 41:9, though this time speaking not only for himself, but also in a prophetic sense articulating the thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He experiences Judas’s betrayal of Him. He says, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.”

And we know exactly what he's saying, because, though certainly not to the same degree as Jesus and Judas, and maybe not even to the same degree as David, Absalom, and Ahithophel, we have felt the pain of betrayal in our own lives. Maybe it was a professional betrayal, where there was some sort of breach of contract, or someone took advantage of your good-faith in a business transaction. Maybe it was a feigned friendship, where you discovered that someone who represented himself to you as a loyal friend was really maligning and undermining you to others behind your back. Maybe you have experienced what is amongst the worst of person-to-person betrayals: the breaking of the marriage covenant by a spouse's adultery.

To one degree or another, we all know this pain. And we all understand what David says in those passages. "I could handle this kind of offense from my enemies! I could sustain this kind of mistreatment from the world! But from you? My dear friend? Whom I trusted? We who have had (what I thought was) such sweet fellowship together? That my soul cannot bear!"

God had bound Himself to Israel by covenant. "I have loved you," He says to them, at the very outset of this book. "I have set My covenant love upon you and bound Myself to do you good by My own promise." And Israel had entered into covenant with God. Exodus 24:7: Moses reads the book of the covenant and the people respond, "All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!" And Moses sprinkles them with the blood of the covenant. And Yahweh is faithful to His covenant; He is characterized by perfect covenant faithfulness. That untranslatable Hebrew term *chesed*—which is predicated of God perhaps more than any other designation—is that *lovingkindness*, that *steadfast*, *loyal love*, that *covenant faithfulness* to His people. Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that Yahweh your God, He is God, the faithful God, *who keeps His covenant* and His *chesed* to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments." First Kings 8:23: "O Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, *keeping covenant* and showing *chesed* to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart." It was unmistakable! It was axiomatic! Yahweh keeps His covenant! Yahweh is faithful!

But Israel was faithless. Israel was treacherous. Israel broke the covenant that they had made with God at Sinai. They had betrayed the covenant that they had sworn to uphold by their faithful obedience to Yahweh's commandments. And not just Israel historically, but this community of Judah of Malachi's day, who had been rescued out of exile and restored to their land. Even they had been found traitors to Yahweh's covenant. We've spoken about it already in our first three sermons on Malachi—how the people, 80 years downstream from God's promises of Messianic renovation, had seen no such glorious revolution, and had become doubtful of the trustworthiness of God's character; and in their faithlessness, they had become disillusioned and apathetic. They believed God let them down. And so we saw in chapter 1 verses 6 to 14, how the priests allowed their hearts to drop out of their worship practices. They went through the motions of the temple service, but familiarity had bred contempt, and the temple worship became little

more than empty formalism. We also saw in chapter 2 verses 1 to 9, how far those priests had fallen from the standard of God’s covenant with Levi—how they were to be worshipers, and teachers, and disciples, and shepherds, but how they had fallen woefully short in each of those duties, and how God had promised to judge them severely: cursing them, cutting off their family line, and even humiliating them by spreading the dung of their corrupt sacrifices all over their faces.

Well, it’s no surprise that, as the religious leaders lapsed into disobedience, the people they were leading followed suit. As go the priests of Israel, so goes the nation of Israel. While God has been a God of covenant faithfulness, Israel has been a nation of covenant treachery, of betrayal.

And in fact, as we come to our text this morning, we find this theme of treachery and betrayal littered throughout our passage. Look at the middle of verse 10 of chapter 2: “Why do we *deal treacherously* each against his brother so as to *profane the covenant* of our fathers?” Verse 11: “Judah has *dealt treacherously*.” Verse 14: “...the wife of your youth, against whom you have *dealt treacherously*.” Verse 15: “Let no one *deal treacherously*.” And verse 16: “Take heed that you do not *deal treacherously*.” What has happened? The God who is faithful to His covenant has summoned into court this nation of traitorous covenant-breakers.

And He has **three charges** against them—**three evidences of their treachery**, of their betrayal, of their covenant unfaithfulness.

But this is not just a history lesson. This is not just a diatribe on Israel’s betrayal. The reality is: you and I are no less covenant-bound to Yahweh than Israel was. As we’ve said in past weeks: if anything, we are more covenant-bound to Yahweh, because we live in the age of New Covenant fulfillment—united to the very Messiah whose coming Israel longed for. And yet, like Israel, those of us in the visible church are often guilty of the very same **charges of treachery**. We have *betrayed* our confession of covenant faithfulness, and have become unfaithful.

We do not consistently offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God as our spiritual service of worship. We do not “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is,” but we set our minds on things below, and we succumb to worldliness. We do not consistently walk in the newness of life that has been purchased for us by our resurrected Savior-King. We dally with the sins that Christ died for. God has been a God of covenant faithfulness to us. But we have often been a people of covenant treachery, of betrayal.

And so my prayer for this morning is that Yahweh’s rebuke of His ancient people would be an instrument of sanctification for His people today, in this place—that we would repent of our own treachery and renew our commitment to live faithfully before God in response to His unfailing, covenant-keeping grace.

## I. Defilement (2:10–12)

Well, that **first charge of treachery** is, number one, the charge of **defilement**. And we find this in verses 10 to 11. Malachi asks, “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yahweh which He loves *and has married the daughter of a foreign god.*” Yahweh rebukes His people for the **defilement** that is brought upon them by intermarrying with the pagan nations.

This was a significant problem in the post-exilic community. Ezra mentions it in Ezra 9:2. He says, “They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness.” Nehemiah mentions it in chapter 13, verses 23 to 27: “In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people.” And then listen to Nehemiah’s reaction: “So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, ‘You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.’” How’s that for pastoral care?

What made Nehemiah react so strongly? Why does Malachi call this “dealing treacherously” and “profaning the covenant of our fathers”? Well, let me say it clearly: it was not because the Bible prohibits interracial, or perhaps better said, interethnic marriage. You’ll remember that Numbers 12 tells us that Moses married a Cushite woman. Boaz marries Ruth the Moabitess. Matthew 1 includes Rahab—the Canaanite from Jericho—in Jesus’ genealogy. And Malachi himself, just a few verses later in chapter 3 verse 5, rebukes Israel for failing to show compassion to the “alien,” or the “foreigner” (CSB). So, Scripture is not saying that intermarriage is a **defilement** because it’s somehow immoral for people of different ethnicities to marry one another. Not at all.

No, what makes intermarriage a **defilement** for Israel is that it was *interfaith* marriage. And that’s why Malachi phrases this as he does: “Judah...has married the daughter of a foreign *god.*” At the outset of the Mosaic Covenant, Moses explained this to Israel. Deuteronomy 7:3: “You shall not intermarry with them,” verse 4: “*For* they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.” And so the prohibition of intermarriage with the nations was for the specific motive of not engaging in *syncretism*—of not being wooed away to serve the gods of the nation the other spouse belonged to.

It strikes at the pure worship of Yahweh. And it's not hard to see how that would work itself out. Perhaps some of the men in the post-exilic community were looking to establish ties with the other peoples within the Persian Empire—maybe aiming to broker business deals or land agreements as a result of marriage ties. But then you live with a woman. And not only do you grow to care for her to the point that the things most important to her become endeared to you as well, but: the worship of false gods isn't nearly as demanding and contrary to the flesh as the worship of the true God. And so as time passes, and as the promises of Messianic renovation still don't materialize, how easy it would be to become lax in devotion to Yahweh.

Back in Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah reminds the people that this very thing was Solomon's downfall. Nehemiah 13:26: "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things?" Yes He did. First Kings 11:1: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with he daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which Yahweh had said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.*'"

And so this is why this is such a treacherous betrayal of covenant loyalty. Yahweh is the one Father of Israel, verse 10. Yahweh is the one God who created this nation by calling out Abram, a moon worshiper from Ur of the Chaldeans, and entering into covenant with him. Malachi is saying: intermarrying with the pagans is a profaning of that very covenant. By yoking themselves so intimately with those who are not the people of God, they are striking at the truths of the oneness of the Father who adopted them, the oneness of the God who created them.

One commentator puts it this way: "The oneness of God determines the oneness of Israel. ... God is Israel's Father and Creator, [and thus] they have one origin and therefore are intimately related to one another, [and therefore] it is inconceivable that the members of this people should break the faith among themselves [by marrying those who are not God's people]." He then asks, speaking as if he were them, "Why do we not honor the exceptional spiritual unity which binds us together as members of God's covenant people?" (Verhoef, 266).

It's an abomination, verse 11 says. This is the term used in the Law of the especially wicked and idolatrous practices of the pagan nations. And yet Malachi says, This abomination "has been committed in *Israel* and in *Jerusalem*." These are the people of *God* who are **defiling** themselves in such abominable ways! This is *Jerusalem*, the place where God said in 1 Kings 8:29, "My *name* shall be there"! This is the city that Daniel 9:18–19 says is called by Yahweh's name! And because God dwells in and among His people, Malachi calls Israel, "the sanctuary of Yahweh," verse 11. Israel is Yahweh's dwelling place! The people themselves are the temple of God. But they are profaning that temple, Malachi says—the sanctuary which Yahweh loves. It's just unthinkable.

And it ought to be just as unthinkable for us as the New Covenant people of God! The people of God no longer have any ethnic or national boundaries, but the New Testament does call us “a chosen race,” 1 Peter 2:9! We are the new humanity, re-created in Christ Jesus, the Second Adam—the head of the new spiritual race. We are Second Adamites, and in that sense we are only to join ourselves in the covenant of marriage to those within the family of God.

The Apostle Paul gives that very instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:39: a Christian is “free to be married to whom she wishes, *only in the Lord.*” Only to those who are united to one another spiritually, because of their spiritual union to Christ, can come together in the covenantal union of marriage. To do otherwise would be to **defile** the temple of God with idols, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6. “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? ... Or what agreement has the temple of God with Idols? For we are the temple of the living God.”

How can it be that those who are the covenant people of God—the people who have witnessed the fulfillment of everything post-exilic Judah was hoping for; we upon whom the ends of the ages of have come; we who are the temple of God—how can it be that we could ever find any pleasure in romantic companionship with an enemy of the very Gospel by which we are saved? Believer, how can your soul delight in someone who stands opposed and rebellious to the very Savior whom you claim is the fountain of all delights? How can you be attracted to someone who hates the One you claim is the most attractive Person in the world to you: the Lord Jesus Christ? Whatever is lovely in a person is only lovely because of what it reflects of the loveliness of Jesus, the image of the invisible God, and the exact representation of His nature.

And so I say to those seeking a spouse: it simply cannot be that those who are fundamentally opposed to the honor and glory and worship of Christ our great Bridegroom find a place of dearness and closeness and intimacy in our hearts. To be romantically pursuing someone who is not a believer in Jesus is unthinkable for a Christian. It is nothing other than spiritual adultery, a profaning of the covenant of salvation, a **defilement** of the temple of God with idols.

Now, that doesn't mean those of you who are already married to unbelievers should separate from them. Paul also says that in 1 Corinthians 7:12–13: “If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.” So, if the unbeliever consents to live with you, the marriage covenant is not to be broken simply because there is an unequal yoke. You honor the Gospel by honoring the covenant of marriage that you made before God and witnesses! (And we'll see more about that in a minute.)

But to those of you not yet married: heed this exhortation from the prophet of God not to deal treacherously by pursuing marriage to an unbeliever. Verse 12 says, “As for the man who does this, may Yahweh cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to Yahweh of hosts.” “Everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering” is just a way of saying everyone. Malachi says every Israelite who refuses to heed this warning deserves to be cut off from the people of God.

And though we in the New Covenant aren't a physical nation from which people may be driven out, nevertheless, in an analogous way, those professing Christians who pursue romantic relationships with unbelievers are not acting like Christians at all, and therefore, if there is no repentance, they are to be “cut off” from the visible expression of the people of God by means of the church discipline process. First Corinthians 5 says, “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

## II. Divorce (2:14–16)

Well, that brings us to a **second charge** that Yahweh leveled against Israel. Not only were they acting treacherously by defiling themselves via intermarriage. They were also **divorcing** their *present* wives to enter *in* to those relationships! Number one: defilement; and number two: **divorce**. Malachi says in verse 13 that God refuses to accept their offerings; we'll get back to that in a moment. But they arrogantly ask, in verse 14, “For what reason?” “*Why* doesn't Yahweh receive our worship?!” Answer: “Because Yahweh has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.” And then in verse 16 He defines that betrayal explicitly: “‘For I hate divorce,’ says Yahweh, the Lord of Israel.”

So, Israel wasn't only betraying the covenant that God had made with them via Abraham. They weren't only betraying the covenant Law that God had given to Moses. They were also betraying the covenant of their *marriages*, to which Yahweh Himself acts as witness. You see, marriage is much more than a civil or contractual agreement. It's much more than a nice ceremony and a fun party designed to celebrate the glory of the bride and groom. Contrary to what Hollywood tells you, marriage is not just another relationship to be entered into and broken off from every couple of years based upon fluctuating emotions. Marriage is a covenant, made in the presence of God and man, in which one man and one woman pledge their faithfulness one to another for life. Look at the end of verse 14: Your husband is your husband *by covenant*. And your wife is your wife *by covenant*.

In Proverbs chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, Solomon is counseling his son to pursue wisdom, which, he says, will “deliver you from the strange woman, from the adulteress who flatters with her words; that leaves the companion of her youth *and forgets the covenant of her God*.” You see,

marriage is not even just a covenant between husband and wife; it is “the covenant of [our] *God*.” In every marriage—whether between believers or unbelievers—in every marriage, God stands as witness in the covenant ceremony, whereby He Himself joins the two into one. This is why Jesus says, Mark 10:9, “What therefore *God* has joined together, let no man separate.” God is not a casual observer at the wedding ceremony. In every marriage under heaven, the Lord God, the Creator of marriage, testifies, “I stand as witness to this covenant. I confirm this union. I record it in the record books of heaven. By the power vested in Me as the Creator of marriage, and as the covenant-keeping God of Scripture, *I* now pronounce you, My image-bearers, husband and wife, in a way that pictures My Son’s own covenant with His bride, the Church.” And so one commentator writes, “The job of the witness was actually that of an enforcer or guarantor. Thus, a covenant witness is not the same as a court witness, who simply gives testimony in a trial. A covenant witness was the third party who could and did make sure that the direct parties to the covenant kept its terms” (McComiskey, 1337). So when God sees His people dealing treacherously with their covenant wives, He steps in to testify against them.

And why does He do that? Look again at verse 16: Because God *hates* divorce. Now, just what a striking, jarring comment that is! This is the God of love! the God who *is* love! This is the God of unfailing patience—the longsuffering God whose spirit strives with man! This is the loving Father who delights to give good gifts to His creatures, who opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing! What could make *this* God hate? And the answer, of course, is that the God who is good must hate evil. The God who is righteous must hate unrighteousness. David says of God in Psalm 5:5, “You hate all who do iniquity.” He says in Psalm 11:5: “The one who loves violence His soul hates.”

In the same way, the God who is unfailingly faithful must hate treachery and betrayal. And therefore, He hates divorce, which is the treacherous breaking of the marriage covenant. Yes, it’s true that God permits divorce in those exceptional cases of adultery and abandonment. And if you have been the offended party in a divorce—whose spouse has committed adultery or who has abandoned the marriage, you need feel no pang of conscience. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:15, “the [offended] brother or sister is *not under bondage* in such cases, but God has called us to peace.” However, that doesn’t change the fact that God’s disposition toward divorce is one of hatred and hostility. He hates the breaking of the marriage covenant, because He loves the picture of His Son’s covenant-keeping grace with the church that marriage is designed to be.

And that’s where we must go. Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 5. This final paragraph of Ephesians 5 teaches us that God has designed marriage to be more than just a plan for human flourishing, or as the bedrock of family and society. He’s designed marriage to make much of His own glory by magnifying the relationship of covenant-keeping grace that exists between Christ and His Bride, the church. All throughout verses 22 to 33, Paul grounds every one of his instructions on marriage—the husband’s loving headship, the wife’s respectful submission—



everything is grounded in Christ's headship over the church and the church's submission to Christ. It's everywhere: *as* Christ, *so* the husband; *as* the church, *so* the wife. And then, in verse 31, he quotes from the first wedding sermon in Genesis 2:24: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." And the very next thing he says is: "This mystery is great; but *I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.*" This whole time he's been talking about marriage, but this whole time he's been speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Which means: marriage is a parable of the Gospel! Marriage exists to illustrate the way that Christ keeps the covenant commitment that *He* made to *His* Bride. And what is that commitment? "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The Good News is that Jesus has saved His people from sin, from God's wrath, from just punishment, from fruitlessness, and from a wasted life. He has taken our sin out of the way so that we can enjoy fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer forever. And marriage is purposely designed to display the glory of that Good News. Marriage exists to tell the truth about the Gospel! And the Gospel is, in part, that Christ never leaves His bride. The covenant of your salvation is sure, believer! Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

Well then: what does divorce do? Divorce lies about the Gospel. When a husband divorces his wife without biblical grounds, he is communicating that Christ might actually leave you and forsake you if at some point He finds your sin too intolerable. "I just can't handle her anymore! I just can't take it! I give of myself, I lay my life down, and she betrays me again, and again, and again! I'm done." Will Christ ever say that to you, believer? No. But divorce preaches that Christ might say that about His bride. When a wife divorces her husband without biblical grounds, she is communicating that the church might actually forsake Christ as her Savior, because she finds Him impossible to live with. "You just don't know what I go through! You don't know what it's like to live with him at home! I just can't take it anymore! I have to get out!" Will the church ever say that about Christ? No.

Neither of those things is true. Christ will never leave His people, no matter how sinful we are, because He has paid for our sins by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross. And the true church will never abandon Christ, no matter how deceived we may be about His love and care for us because of our trials. No matter how deceived we may be, our eyes have been opened to behold His glory, and He has captivated our heart: "Lord, to whom else shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!" Christ will never leave the church. The church will never leave Christ. And so: divorce lies about the Gospel. And so God hates it.

And He hates it in 5<sup>th</sup>-century BC Israel, and He hates it in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American evangelicalism. And so you need to heed this warning. Some of you are tempted to deal treacherously with the wife of your youth. Some of you are more than tempted: some of you are

doing it. And the elders grieve over it. Some of you are tempted to deal treacherously with the one who is your husband by covenant. You need to fight that temptation! You need to fight for fidelity in your own marriage because, one, you know God hates the covenant betrayal of divorce, and you love Him and you want to please Him in everything you do.

But even deeper than that: you need to fight for faithfulness to your marriage covenant in the strength of the unfailing covenant-keeping grace that you have been shown by Christ every day of your Christian life. And you need to bend that covenant-keeping grace that you receive from Him out toward your husband or your wife, and keep covenant! Because it would repulse you—wouldn't it—to lie about the precious Gospel by which you have been saved.

So, it's not just: "Divorce is bad! Force it back! If you hate your husband or hate your wife, just stay together and live in the same house and be roommates!" No. It's more than just, "Don't do what God hates." *Don't* do what God hates! But think of it: "I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." I, as a member of the Bride of Christ, have been loved in such an exquisite manner that my Bridegroom has borne all my affliction, all the weakness and indignity of my nature, all the vileness of my sin, and has been forsaken by His Father, and rose again on the third day to triumph over the sin and death that was mine for eternity! And then: He keeps me! He doesn't send me away! He doesn't divorce me, though I give Him reason to every single day.

And here's the key: If I have been loved like that, I can love like that. If you have been loved like that, you can love like that. You can find strength to deal graciously with your husband, to deal graciously with your wife—not first because you're just "so in love," but first because you're keeping covenant the way that God keeps covenant with you in Christ. And if you can throw light upon the truth of that covenant-keeping grace, you are *satisfied*!

Some of you might have been asking before, "Wait, are you saying that I can't find anything attractive or delightful in my unbelieving spouse?" That's right: you can't. What is lovely is only a reflection of the image of Christ, and the unbeliever stands opposed to Christ in all that He is. But *here* is where you find the affection and the delight to love someone who is undeserving—to willfully do good to someone who is unlovely in themselves. You find that affection and that delight in Christ Himself! in your Bridegroom, who loves *you* that way, even though you don't deserve it! "If I've been loved that way, I'm satisfied; my heart is at rest; and so I can be free to lay my life down to love that way—even when the person I'm loving has nothing to commend himself or herself to me."

The strength to love the unlovely comes from the love of Christ, who loves you, the unlovely. "His love satisfies my soul! It frees me from needing to be made much of. It frees me from

having to insist upon my rights. And so, because my heart has been put to rest by this great love, I can be free to love freely!”

### III. Blasphemy (2:13)

There’s a **third charge of treachery** that Yahweh brings against Israel in this passage. And that is, number three: **blasphemy**. Defilement, divorce, and **blasphemy**. And we see this most clearly in the verse we skipped, so turn back to Malachi chapter 2, and read verse 13. Malachi says, “This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.”

As a result of their betrayal of both (a) the covenant between them and God and (b) the covenant of marriage between one another, God had stopped receiving the sacrifices they brought for the temple worship. And it seems the people became aware of this because God was not answering their prayers for a fruitful harvest. In Chapter 3 verse 11, God says that “the devourer” was “destroy[ing] the fruits of the ground.” There were economic consequences to their disobedience! Well, naturally, then, the people prayed that God would provide crops, but they eventually realized that He was not answering those prayers with favor. Sin had cut off communion with God—even as Isaiah 59:2 says, “Your iniquities have made a *separation* between you and your God, and your sins have *hidden His face* from you so that He does not hear.” Sin hinders prayers! Psalm 66:18: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”

Well, in response to that broken fellowship, the text says: the people wept. But this was not a *godly* sorrow over sin for the offense that it was to God that led to their repentance—to a change of direction, to a forsaking of sin and a return to God in faithfulness. No, it was the *worldly* sorrow that grieves over the consequences of sin! that mourns over the fact that, “I got caught! and it’s costing me something!”

It was a similar phenomenon that God rebuked Israel for several centuries earlier in Hosea 7, and verse 14. There He says, “And they do not cry to Me from their heart when they wail on their beds; for the sake of grain and new wine they assemble themselves, they turn away from Me.” You see? “They turn *away* from Me. They don’t turn *toward* Me, in repentance. They come to worship because they want My *gifts*, not because they want *Me*. And even their displays of emotion—it’s not from their heart. They think their histrionics and their displays of fleshly emotion will manipulate Me into giving them what they want. ‘They worship Me with their *lips*, but their *hearts* are far away from Me.’”

And when Malachi says that they “cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping and with groaning,” I can’t help but hear overtones of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings

18. You remember: in an attempt to rouse Baal to action, these pagan prophets called out to their false god, the text says, “from morning until noon.” And when it didn’t work, Elijah mocked them and said, “Maybe Baal’s in the bathroom! Or maybe he’s asleep!” And “so,” verse 28, “they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. When midday was past, they *raved* until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice.”

Weeping and wailing and raving and even self-harm—all of this was the way the pagans worshiped their gods—hoping to move their god to compassion by their excessive displays of emotionalism and willpower sacrifice. We see that in multiple places: the idolaters in the temple in Ezekiel 8:14 are “weeping for Tammuz,” a god of the Phoenicians. Isaiah 15:2–3 speaks about how the people had gone to the high places in Moab to weep: “Everyone is wailing, dissolved in tears.” Malachi is telling Israel: “Your heartless worship is no better than paganism.”

Now, listen: I am sympathetic to tears. Mourning over sin with tears out of the genuine grief that it brings to God is not the enemy. One of the most memorable quotes from Charles Spurgeon that I’ve ever read is when he said, “I do not myself understand much about a dry-eyed faith.” Amen! Me neither! The other day, I was reading Psalm 22 to my kids at breakfast, and I just absolutely lost it! The kids are looking at Janna like, “Is Dad ok?” Mike Riccardi is not the enemy of tear-filled worship, when it comes from a heart broken by sin and bandaged by grace.

But I *am* the enemy—and the prophet Malachi is the enemy—of trying to manipulate God by ostentatious displays of grief and sadness, thinking, “Oh, He’ll have to answer my prayers if I can whip myself up into enough of an emotional fervor.” Malachi’s saying, “That emotion, those tears aren’t for God. It’s only for what He can give you.”

And that is **blasphemy**—in the truest sense of the term. That is, literally, taking God’s name in vain, calling out to God under the pretense of worship, all while your heart is empty and your hands are unclean.

God says, “I’m a witness between you and your wife by covenant, which covenant you are now breaking in order to join yourself to the daughter of a foreign god. You want to deal treacherously with the wife of your youth—with your first love, who has been by your side all these years, to whom your heart ought to be knit together, whom you ought to love more tenderly than anyone else, whom you have pledged to love and support for the rest of your days. You want to betray the vows of *that* covenant, and then you want to come into the temple and offer sacrifice to *Me*? And you have the nerve to ask Me why I don’t accept those sacrifices?”

You get God wrong, friends, if you think you can divorce your life Monday through Saturday from your life on Sunday—if you think that your life outside of church is somehow your “private

life,” that it escapes the notice of God, and that He accepts you so long as you go through the motions of Sunday worship. That’s not how this works. God is a witness against your covenant unfaithfulness. And unless you come to Him in sincere repentance and godly sorrow over your sin, forsaking the way of wickedness and returning to Him in faith, there will be a breakdown in communion. He will not receive your worship, except as a provocation to judgment.

And you get God wrong if you think that you can persist in patterns of sinning, and then come to church, or not even come to church: just come before Him in prayer, and just feel bad enough about your sin—do the emotional penance to the point that the tears flow and you cry out for forgiveness—all the while knowing, in the back of your mind, you’re making provision to go back to those broken cisterns again. “Do not be deceived. God is not mocked.” You can’t fool God into forgiving you. You can’t bribe God with closed eyes and raised hands and loud singing, while you refuse to repent of and mortify sin. That would be nothing but **blasphemy**—nothing but taking God’s name in vain.

### Conclusion

And so may it be, saints, that we learn the lessons that post-exilic Israel was too proud to learn. Let us put all treachery far away from us. We may not betray the temple of the Holy Spirit of God and **defile** ourselves by intermarrying with the enemies of the Gospel. We may not betray the Gospel of our salvation by pursuing **divorce** from our marriage covenant, and in so doing lie about the Gospel. We may not betray the name of our God by **blaspheming** Him with corrupt, manipulative worship practices, as if somehow we could fool Him, who searches the heart and tests the mind, in whose eyes no creature is hidden, but all things are open and laid bare. And to whatever degree such temptations have been gaining a foothold in our hearts, I call you to repent of your treachery, and to walk in faithfulness to the God who always keeps covenant.

But I remind you that your repentance and your faithfulness is not what joins you to Yahweh. Christ alone is what joins you to Yahweh. “Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus.” And so for the ones whose sins have been atoned for, how can we walk in treachery to that Gospel covenant? How can we walk inconsistently with the grace that we have been shown? How can we break covenant, when Christ kept covenant unto His own undoing? unto that wretched cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” I’ll tell you why: So that He does not have to forsake us in His justice, but now must in accordance with justice reward us according to the righteousness of our Substitute, according to the obedience of the Man who never sinned in thought, word, or deed, who was never unfaithful—not even in His thinking.

What a glorious Gospel has rescued us! Let us not be faithless. Let us come to God in faithfulness, in the strength of the grace by which we have been saved.