

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Burden of Malachi

Malachi 2:10-16

8- The Burden of Treachery Among God's People- Part 1

October 6, 2019

Malachi 2:10-16

10 "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?"

11 "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

12 "As for the man who does this, may the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone* who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the Lord of hosts.

13 "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand.

14 "Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord 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.

15 "But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that one do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

16 "For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

To the Glory of God

Now back in September of 2007, the German politician, Gabriele Pauli, shocked her political constituents, and news outlets worldwide

went berserk, when she offered a bill in the German Legislature that proposed that the Institution of Marriage should only last seven years.

Described at the time as "*Bavaria's most glamorous politician,*" the 50-year-old, twice-divorced, motorcycle-riding, Pauli campaigned for her Party's Leadership, in part, with the hopes of formalizing and institutionalizing a phenomenon that has become known throughout the world as "the Seven-Year Itch", a widely recognized *psychological* phenomenon that says that spouses drift away from each other and desire to explore other romantic interests after being married for "seven years".

The term "Seven- Year Itch" began to be used by psychologists and secular Marriage counsellors late in the 19th and early in the 20th Century as an effort to explain the exponential *increase* in sexually transmitted diseases among *married* couples at the seven-year mark. But the term became popular in *our* Culture due to a movie made back in 1959.

Pauli's proposal was that legal Marriages would automatically *expire* after eighty-four months, at which time the spouses could either *renew* their Union, or go along on their own merry ways with no legal penalty and without having to *formally* "divorce". Now it is instructive to note that Pauli's proposal did *not* win approval. But her effort was significant in that it was the first time in the history of Western Civilization that a nationally recognized politician tried to *formalize* the dissolution of Marriage *without* Divorce. And now that that line has been crossed, we can only guess as to what will come about in the future.

Now contrast that with what happened right here in this Church on September 5, 2008, just a year after Pauli was announcing her idea in Germany. Right in front of this Pulpit, at the celebration of 30 years of Marriage, my Wife and I stood before a dear Pastor friend of mine, our friends, our family, and the members of this Congregation, and most importantly before our God, and we *renewed* the Marriage Vows that we had publicly uttered back in 1978...

I will love you and be faithful to you...
In plenty and in want,
In joy and in sorrow,

In sickness and in health,
For better or for worse
To love and keep and cherish you,
As long as we both shall live
Or until Jesus returns
For Christ has made us One.

"As long as we both shall live." No exceptions. No "out" clauses. Not just in plenty, joy, and health, but also in want, sorrow, need, and sickness. No allowances for any "Seven-Year Itches", or any other "Year"; or any other "Itch". My Marriage will last until either Rhonda or I tells the other *"Goodbye"*, in death, or if Jesus should return before then. Four hundred and ninety-three months ago, Rhonda and I left Father and Mother to make Covenant with three different entities:

1. God
2. Each other
3. Those who witnessed it

... in accord with **Genesis 2:24** that says:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

... and we took Jesus's Words with utter seriousness when He said:

Matthew 19:6b

... What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

Now if you were to ask either one of us, we would not tell you that the last 41 years has been easy or even simple. Certainly, it has never been boring. Rape, Down's Syndrome, Acute Non-lymphocytic Leukemia, Chemo-therapy, Amputation, Cerebral Palsy, Tragedy, Sorrow, the Death of two children, Persecution, Abandonment, Car wrecks, Poly-Myalgia Rheumatica, a river of tears, frequent nights without sleep, pacing the floor, crying out to God. praying the *"O God!"* kind of Prayers....

No, the married life that Rhonda and I have lived has *not* been easy. But, after almost seven *times* seven years in, we will *both* tell you

that Marriage is truly a *glorious* thing, a Wonder, and a Miracle. And we will *both* tell you that there are no “outs” from our Marriage but that which we will face at some point in the future, physical death.

Following the movie’s success, the notion of a “Seven-Year Itch” caught traction in a Culture obsessed with “No-Fault Divorce” and became a convenient excuse for boredom with Monogamy. Subsequent research claimed, initially, that such a “Seven-Year Itch” was actually *confirmed* by the data. But a more thorough investigation eventually pointed to “Four Years”, while other research said “Twelve Years”, and still more to “Three Years”. Increasingly, the Studies are finding there’s no magic number at all, and the number “Seven”, as well as any other moment to acquire the “Itch,” has actually been just a Myth, and nothing more than an excuse to alleviate any responsibility to actually honor the Marriage Vows.

Now, if you look closely, you will see that what Malachi is really talking about in the Passage before us is the subject of “Treachery”. And he mentions this Issue over and over again in this Passage. In verses 10, 11, 14, 15, and 16, Malachi was “moved along” by God the Holy Spirit to write down a particular Hebrew word: *bagad* (Strong’s #898), which has to do with people *who act deceitfully and faithlessly*.

Now after almost five decades of following Jesus, I have come to understand several very important Principles about God. And one of those is that God *loves* faithfulness. God is pleased and His Name is honored, when we are so transformed, by what God alone does for us, that we live in such a way that we are dependable and reliable and trustworthy and faithful. God *despises* deceitfulness, and here, Malachi says that God *hates* Treachery.

And so, as Malachi was raised up to be the last Prophet who operated under the Old Covenant, the Burden he received from the Lord includes God’s condemnation of Treachery. And as we examine this part of Malachi’s Divine Burden, we will see that Treachery manifests itself in the lives of God’s people in three different ways:

1. Treachery Between Covenant Brothers (Verse 10)
2. Treachery in God’s People Marrying Unbelievers (Verses 11&12)
3. Treachery in Divorce (Verses 13-16)

Another way of understanding Malachi’s Burden would be to see that

God's people were being *faithless* and *deceitful* in their Relationships with one another, and in falling in love with pagans, and in Marriage.

So, 2,400 years ago, the Priests of Israel were neck-deep in their own version of the "Seven- Year Itch". Four hundred years before Messiah was born of a virgin, it was *common* for those men, who handled the Word of God, those who represented God to the people, those who offered Sacrifices to God, to be *unfaithful* in their Marriages. Four centuries before God took on human flesh and became Man, Divorce and Re-Marriage was *rampant* among the Priesthood of God's chosen people.

But, in addition to the Priests not being faithful in their Marriages, the average Jew of that day was also unfaithful. And they were walking in deceit and not honoring Covenants and Contracts, and even individual personal relationships. And so, Malachi is calling them, and us, to examine ourselves and to make sure that we are being faithful in every area of our lives.

No, today, when anyone begins to call attention to the fact that Divorce and Re-Marriage is, once again, becoming *common-place* among God's people, they are met with statements like:

- "*Things happen*"
- "*Life caught up with us*"
- "*We just drifted apart*"
- "*We're just not compatible*"
- "*We got married too young*"
- "*We don't have anything in common*"
- "*Don't be Legalistic*"

... where the last one is nothing more than a "catch-all phrase" designed to silence anyone from discussing any Sin. Today, even among the saved, the overwhelming majority of Divorces fall underneath a single category, "*Irreconcilable Differences*" (whatever that means). For example, recently, the "darling" of the visible Evangelical Movement (that sees American Politics as the means by which a sacred Revival of Holiness will come), Sarah Palin, has been caught up in a Divorce with her Husband of over 30 years. And the Cause? "Incompatibility of

Temperament such that they find it impossible to continue to live together as Husband and Wife."¹

Now my intent this morning is NOT to simply find fault or to cause any pain or hurt to anyone, who has, at some point in the past, or who is currently going through a Divorce. Divorced people are some of the most hurting people in our Culture, and they deserve our Prayers and Mercy, NOT our Condemnation. And the only reason I bring up my own personal Marriage in this Sermon is to verify with all of you that I am *qualified* to stand here and preach and be your Pastor, and, secondly, that I am *qualified* and very willing to sit down with you and help you to also have a good and strong and lasting Marriage. So, even though some will assign self-serving or even self-righteous motives for what I am preaching this morning, the Reality is very simple:

1. I desire to honor Faithfulness and condemn Treachery as the Bible does.
2. I desire to accurately preach from **Malachi 2:10-16**.

... which is the next Passage in our verse-by-verse "journey" through the **Book of Malachi**. I would remind you that I didn't write this Passage. I had nothing to do with what God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the Prophet Malachi to pen down here. But the "Burden of Malachi" *needs* to be preached. And it *needs* to be listened to and understood. And it *needs* to be taken to heart and obeyed, because this, too, is the Word of the living God. So, let me show you why this is a big deal. Through Malachi, God says:

... an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem ...

... an "Abomination"? Wow! This must really be a serious Issue to be classified as an "Abomination". I mean God only used that word 46 times in the entire Bible. Now *all* Sin dishonors God, and *all* Sin is wrong, and all Sin will be either be adjudicated on the Cross or in Hell. But an "Abomination" is reserved for really *awful* Sins that God Himself

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/09/politics/sarah-palin-todd-palin-divorce-filing/index.html>. **Note:** I have no idea whether Mrs. Palin is guilty of any sin. And I am not "piling on" by bringing her up. She may have nothing to do with this action by her Husband. My only reason for using her as an example in this Sermon is because she was equated with the "Judge Deborah" during the 2006 Presidential Campaign by many Evangelicals (and it was prophesied by many that she would be the next President)- and the Reason given for the Divorce is germane to what I am trying to say.

has a very *powerful* and *intense* Hatred toward. Now the most widely talked about "Abomination" is found in **Leviticus 18:22** that says:

You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

... and most everybody knows that one. But **Proverbs 6:16-19** gets into seven other Issues that God despises just as much as Sexual Perversion:

There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness *who* utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

So, what is it that the people were doing that classifies as an "Abomination" and that causes the Sanctuary of the Lord to be profaned?

[The chosen people of God] **married the daughter of a foreign god**

... so, *whatever* we may think about this, God said that saved people falling in love with and marrying unbelieving spouses was an "Abomination"! Now the correct context here is that saved Men were marrying unsaved Women, because in that day Men "married" and Women were "given in Marriage". So, Malachi is rebuking the Men of Israel because, like Samson before them, they were being *unfaithful* to the Covenant and marrying the daughters of pagan gods. In other words, the people of God were not good enough for these Men, and they had to find themselves Wives from the unsaved nations of the world. And God calls this Sin an "Abomination", and something that profanes the Sanctuary of God.

So, Treachery in their personal Relationships, Treachery in not keeping the Covenant about Marriage, and Treachery in Divorce. So, the chosen, circumcised Men of Israel, who walked around with the Sign of the Covenant in the foreskin of their flesh were being unfaithful and deceitful to each other, unfaithful and deceitful to the Covenant, and unfaithful and deceitful in their own Marriages. And look what was happening as a result of all these Abominations:

you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand

... which means that God no longer hears their Prayers. God no longer accepts their Sacrifices. God's Presence is no longer with them. So, there is a separation between them and their God because of these Sins. And yet, when Malachi confronts them with their sin and points to the obvious results of their Abominations, the people are bewildered:

Yet you say, 'For what reason?'

... and this is the most frightening thing of all. Because even though they are all neck-deep in Sin, even though they are *willfully* and *repeatedly* committing Abomination after Abomination, they are NOT convicted, they have NO idea why God is angry with them, and they are amazed that God is not near.

This is what happens when people, who *know* the Truth, do not *love* the Truth, or *honor* the Truth as being from God. This "hardness of heart", where Conviction bounces off and doesn't penetrate, is the result of *constantly* being warned by God, and *constantly* making excuses and *refusing* to repent.

So, it is Good to be "Pro-Life". But if you are faithless in your Personal Relationships, you are an Abomination to God. It is Great to campaign against "Sexual Perversity" being normalized. But if you are dating, or have fallen in love with, or you have married an unbeliever, you have profaned the Sanctuary of God. And it is Wonderful to vote for political candidates who are "Pro-Family". But to those who have dealt treacherously with the Wife of your youth, Malachi speaks on God's behalf and says to you:

"For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So, take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

So, I am authorized, by the God of Heaven, to tell you this morning, that the one, true, and living God, the Owner and Creator of

the Universe, the Father of Jesus Christ, *hates* Divorce. He *hates* Division. He *hates* Faithlessness. He *hates* Deceit. He *hates* Treachery. And the word that was translated into English here as “**hate**” comes from the ancient Hebrew word (*sane*; Strongs #8130) that means: *hate*. And that means that God has *strong, passionate dislike* for Divorce. He *despises* Division. He *loathes* people, who say they are saved, from dealing treacherously with each other, and God Almighty *abhors and abominates* Faithlessness.

Now I am fully aware that this doesn't mean too much to those who really don't *care* what God thinks. But those of us, who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth *do* care. You see, we have been gifted with the ability to love God. And so, what God *says*, and what God *loves*, and what He *hates*, matters to us. A lot. In fact, very *few* things matter *as much* to us as what God says. And *nothing* matters more.

So, when God, through His inspired and infallible and inerrant Word, says, “*I hate Divorce*”, God's people sit up and take notice. When God says that those who marry unbelievers profane His Sanctuary, we stand at attention. When God says that walking in Treachery makes us an Abomination and stops Him from hearing our Prayers, we tremble. And when God says that it matters how saved people deal with each other in relationships, we listen. But we then do something else. We then go about, by God's Grace and in the Power of the Holy Spirit, to “fashion our lives” so that so that we can be found *faithful* to what God has said.

Look, with all that is going on in our Country today, more than at almost any time since the Resurrection, the perishing world needs to see a corporate Testimony from the visible Church that we actually believe what the Bible teaches. For example, as we publicly repeat phrases like, “*Jesus is the Treasure of the Universe*”, those who “know not Christ”, need to see human beings suffering in pain and deprivation, *without complaining*. Because as we “suffer as a Christian” (**1 Peter 4:16**), we *prove*, more powerfully than bumper stickers and ball-caps, that “Jesus is *better* than *anything* this world can *give* to us, and He is *better* than anything this world can *take away* from us.”

As the people of the 21st Century watch us forsake the pagan world and purposefully pursue Holiness, the Testimony that “our Treasure is in Heaven and not on this earth” becomes life-changing and

unexplainable outside of the Reality that the Bible must be true. We must understand that it doesn't take the Power of the Holy Spirit to hate people who hate us. That's easy; any old sinner can do that. But it *does* require us to be "endued with Power from on High" to actually love our enemies, and to pray for them, and to do good to them. So, if we are commanded to treat our enemies like that, how should we treat our Covenant Brethren?

It doesn't take the Miracle of the New Birth to shun people who are not saved and build walls around ourselves so we can be "safe" and "secure". We must remember that God didn't call any of us to be "safe" or "secure". God called us to be "faithful" and "fruitful" and "busy", and God told us to be "salt" and "light", and He commanded every single one of us to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature".

The Glory of the Doctrines of Grace, the Truth that, since God is Sovereign, our Salvation is Eternal and that it *cannot* be lost, was never designed to give us the freedom to sit on our "double-wides" and rejoice that we are saved while the world is on fire. No, the Sovereignty of God was designed to free us from the "fear of Death" so that we can be absolutely fearless and go ahead and take great risks in heralding the Gospel to the lost, and be used by God to expand the Kingdom of God throughout the earth.

And it doesn't take the Glory of the risen Christ to be *faithless* to our spouses, or to fall in love with lost people, or to defraud a brother in Christ. But for me to labor for over four decades so that my Marriage Vows are not a mockery, for me to "bring my body under" and not *allow* myself to fall in love with somebody who refuses to love my Savior, and for me to strive, day in and day out, to uphold the Dignity of the Miracle of Salvation to the degree that I would not deceive a Covenant brother, even if my life depended on it, that does require that I become a "new creation".

When those, who are still in their sins, watch two imperfect sinners fight and struggle and strive and defend and support and labor and pray and fast and cry out to God to *uphold* Marriage, and as they watch us honor Covenants and Agreements and Contracts, as they see us be faithful in marrying only genuine believers, as they witness us confess our sins, and step on top of our mistakes, and repent, as they see us humbly and imperfectly build strong and godly and solid and

holy Marriages, through hell and high water, then God is pleased, and Christ is exalted, and the Mystery of the glorious Covenant between Jesus Christ and His Church is seen, and it is valued, and it is honored.

Christian Marriages are a pointer to the Savior Who, *without conditions*, chose to "set His Love" on His Bride, the Church (**Ephesians 1:4-6**). And for 2,000 years now, through thick and thin, with all her failures and unfaithfulnesses, our risen Lord continues working, unendingly, constantly, to:

Ephesians 5:26b&27

... sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she [the Church] would be holy and blameless.

When all the many exceptions and conditions are thrown out, at the most fundamental level, a Man must learn to "love his wife as himself" (**Ephesians 5:22**) and discover the unspeakable Joy of **The Acts 20:35**:

... It is more blessed to give than to receive.

... but the Priests, of the final 400 years of the Old Covenant, were Selfish. And they were sinful. And they were carnal. And so, God raised up this obscure Prophet to call them into Account with Him about their backsliding.

Now last time, we saw, in verse 8, that the result of the Priests of Israel's sins was that many of the Jewish people were following their Leaders into horrific evils. And Malachi spoke for God when he gave them a Divine Indictment and said:

Malachi 2:8

But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts.

... and what was God's Response to the sins of the Priesthood?

Malachi 2:9a

So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people...

... and what was the Sin that God was judging?

... you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

In other words, when the Leadership no longer lives in a godly way, when the Leadership no longer preaches and teaches the Truth, the first visible Sign is that the people begin to copy their Leaders. And the average believer lives in blatant worldliness and public, and blatant unrepentant Sin. And the Result of God's people living as though they don't have God's Word, and like they haven't been separated to God, is that the Church becomes a laughing stock to the lost world, and the Respect and the Honor and the Worth of the Church is trampled under the feet of the Gentiles.

When there is a Famine in the land for the Word of God, the spiritual Nourishment that enables the eye to spot Sin as sin becomes ineffective. The spiritual Protein that gives Strength to the soul to do what is Right and pleasing to God is missing. The spiritual Eye becomes diseased and blind, and the clear, distinct lines between "that which is Holy and that which is Profane" begins to blur. The moral Muscle of the Will atrophies, and the Result is that the constant beckoning of the World wins out because there is no Strength to stand against it. We must always remember that when the faithful and full Ministry of the Word goes wrong, when the edge of the Sword is dulled many are caused to stumble.

But because God is serious about the Eternality of His Covenant with His Church, God will be faithful to raise up common, utterly unimportant men to stand and proclaim the all-important Word of the Lord. And that Prophet will call both the people and the Priest to Repentance. And God then blesses the humble and broken Repentance with a spiritual "Awakening", and a renewed interest in the things that matter to God.

So, as I said, in the Passage before us, Malachi was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to hand out Divine Indictments to both the People and the Priests concerning three different Issues where the Chosen people were dishonoring God with their Sins:

1. The Issue of Personal Relationships
2. The Issue of God's People Marrying Unbelievers
3. The Issue of Divorce

... so, even though I won't finish this today, let's begin to look at all three.

1. The Issue of Treachery in Personal Relationships

Malachi 2:10

"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?"

The Days of Malachi's Burden saw widespread *dishonesty* among the people of God. Jews, who had been sovereignly separated to God in Salvation, were not keeping their word with other Jews who had also been separated to God in Salvation. Trusts were being broken. Lies were being spoken, and Legal Contracts were not being honored. And so, God empowered this Prophet to stand and proclaim:

Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us?

So, once again, the Issue of "Fatherhood" comes into play. And this is a theme that runs all through the Burden of Malachi. And as I told you at the beginning of our Journey, the Issue of Fatherhood, or the *lack* of Fatherhood, the *absence* of strong, godly, and loving Fathers in the Home, and the lack of strong, godly, and loving Men leading in the Church today, is a sure Sign to us that God is not pleased. The very *last* thing that Malachi spoke to Israel was:

Malachi 4:5&6

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

... and my final Sermon in this Series will deal with that. So, Malachi asks, **"Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us?"** And the people responded, *"Sure! We are the people of God, and God is our Father! Yes! We are the chosen people! Yes! We are the seed of Abraham! Yes! We are those whom God loves, above all the other nations of the world!"*

... and yet, they were *defrauding* one another and dealing *treacherously* with one another, and being *faithless* and *deceitful* to one another. So, like all of God's Prophets, Malachi was not satisfied with their rehearsed and memorized Answer. And so, he responds to them with another Question:

Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?

"If you are God's people, why do you act like those who aren't? If you are the seed of Abraham, why are you betraying each other? If God is your Father, why do you defraud your Covenant Brother? If God has set His Love on you, why do you treat your brother with hatred?"

And this illustrates and very simple but very profound Principle that God Himself has established:

If you belong to God, act like it!

If you have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth, don't act and don't talk and don't live like those who haven't. If you believe God's Word is true, then strive with all your might (and God's Help) to obey it. If you say that Jesus is your Treasure, then nothing else is. Almost 500 years after Malachi wrote this, the Apostle John put it like this:

1John 1:6

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

... and ...

1 John 2:4

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

... and...

1 John 2:9

The one who says he is in the Light and *yet* hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

We must realize that the *validity* of our Salvation does NOT lie in the *memory* of the Experience of what happened to us when God first saved us. No! What determines whether our Salvation is genuine or not depends on the disposition of our heart, *right now*, the attitude of our mind, *right now*, and the actions that we are involved in, the decisions we are making, *right now*. If there is no love for God, no love for God's people, no love for the things of God, then there is no Salvation.

And so, when truly saved people sense that our love for God is growing cold, or weak, or when we sense that we are getting "weary of well-doing", or we are becoming "bored with God" and with His Word, when our Prayer-life is waning, when we are hungering and thirsting for anything EXCEPT Righteousness, when we are no longer panting after God like the deer pants after the water-brooks, it is at that moment that God is Good to allow us to realize that we are distant from God. And so, we are powerfully convicted, and we fall on our faces, and we cry out to God, and we repent of our worldliness and our weak hearts, and God comes near! And there is a Reunion, and an Awakening, and a Revival! Why? Because God has set His Love upon us, and Jesus died to save us, and He WILL NOT LET OUR SOULS BE LOST!

Beloved, we don't *deserve* to be saved. The only thing we *deserve* is Damnation, and we absolutely have earned that. But we have been wondrously adopted into the Family of God by what Christ alone has done for us, and God is our Father. And we marvel at that. But that also means that we have NO "say-so" in who else God saves and adopts. We do not have the Right, nor the Ability, to choose our Covenant brothers and sisters. They are chosen for us. But because the same

God, Who saved us saved them, every single born-again believer is *required* by the Gospel to love every other born-again believer. No exceptions. Why? Because God is our Father!

And because that is true, a genuinely saved soul loves his Covenant brother *more* than he loves himself. And that is not true for *some* believers, it is part and parcel to what it means to belong to Jesus. And what that looks like in everyday, practical terms is that he will *prefer* his brother *above* himself, to the degree that he will die rather than defraud, or lie to, or injure his brother.

And that is *especially* true with those brethren who are poor, or aged, or weak, or sick, or who cannot offer you anything in return. No other visible and measurable trait illustrates the genuineness of our Salvation any *better* or any *more* than our ongoing disposition toward the *weakest* member of Christ's Kingdom. And so, verse after verse, Passage after passage, Illustration after illustration, from cover to cover in the Bible tells us that the validity of our Eternal Inheritance is absolutely measured by how we treat the saved poor, and the saved widow, and the saved orphan, and the saved sick, and the saved aged.

And let me tell you how serious this is to God. If we are going to *disobey* the Bible and ignore these people and harden our hearts against them, and be cold and calloused toward them, we would fare better with God if we just admit that we don't care, and go ahead and acknowledge that we are lost and wicked. But, if we have the audacity and the unmitigated gaul to turn our hearts away from those Covenant brothers and sisters simply because to help them is *inconvenient* and *difficult*, and then use, as an excuse, that we are too busy serving God, we have *dishonored* the very Foundation of Christianity itself, and we have become nothing but self-righteous and self-centered Pharisees.

One of the earliest Books of the New Covenant was the Epistle written by James around 47AD, around 18 years after the Resurrection. And in **James 1:27**, the half-brother of Jesus Christ said:

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Now this doesn't mean that we should reward laziness or be unwise concerning our limited means. So, we should *always* use

wisdom and discretion when seeking to be obedient. But our love and compassion for those whom Christ has saved should be seen and felt and experienced, and it should be real and tangible and constant. And this is so important and so true that in **John 13:35** Jesus Himself said:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

They will *not* know we belong to Jesus by our oratory skills, or because we can preach like a house on fire, or because we understand the Bible. No. Jesus said that the lost, pagan world will know that we belong to Jesus because of the love that we have one toward another.

Now it is common today to hear well-meaning Preachers and Teachers in the modern church say that believers should give to and do for the lost world *before* we give to and do for our own spiritual Family. And even though that may sound really spiritual, that notion is actually unbiblical. We should treat each other *better* than we treat the lost. Now that doesn't mean we can lie and cheat and steal from the pagan world. But it *does* mean that we must *prefer* our brothers and sisters *above* the lost people of the world.

And the Principle behind that is that when the lost people see how we love one another and care for each other, God will use that to provoke them to jealousy. The pagan world is cold and uncaring. But, in the Church, Love flows like a river, and Peace and Joy abound. And even though we can't always eliminate Poverty or even Hardships and Trials, we *can* and we *should* weep with those who weep, even as we rejoice with those who rejoice.

Back in the early days of the Church, Christianity was an illegal and persecuted Religion. And the Persecution was everywhere. The Romans, who dominated Palestine at that time, thought that Christianity was *atheistic* because we only worshipped one God, while they had a plurality of gods. And the Roman Authorities feared Christians because they refused to acknowledge the Emperor as a god. And even though Judaism was established as a monotheistic Religion, during the first Century the average Jew (based on false Teaching from their Leaders) thought that Angels were almost gods, and so prayers and offerings to Angels was common. And Christians would rebuke Jews for their idolatry, and the Jewish Authorities hated them for it.

So, Christians were persecuted unmercifully by the Romans and the Jews and the Gentiles of other nations.

It was common for a Christian to receive a knock at his front door at three in the morning and the Father was dragged off into prison, never to be heard from again. No trial, no due process, no day in court, no rights, no lawyer, if you were a follower of Jesus, you were automatically found guilty. So, all the verses in the New Testament about visiting those in Prison had to do with Christians going into the rat-infested and barbaric Prisons to pray with and encourage other believers. Back in the 1st Century, simply being saved was deadly.

But when believers went to visit other believers in Prison, many times they themselves were imprisoned. Because the only people who visited the despised Christian were other Christians. Publicly associating with believers brought about great hardship. So, after Stephen was stoned to death, Dr. Luke wrote this in **The Acts 8:2**:

Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him.

Now the only way these believers could bury Stephen was to go to the Authorities and ask for his body, which identified them as also being believers. Also, the only people, who would dare to make "loud lamentation" over the death of a believer were other believers. And so, look at what happened as a result of the early Christians preferring each other, even in death:

The Acts 8:3

But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Horrific, unmerciful, barbaric, constant, and even illegal Persecution was common against the early Church. When people became members of the Church back then, they paid a price. And yet, the ongoing, public, and typical Testimony was that, in the Church, Love among the Christians was something to behold and radically different from every other Institution on earth.

And yet, in spite of the danger, Prison visitations were *common* in the early Church. Writings that have been uncovered show us that many of the first believers, people whom we will never know their

names, took great risks and fearlessly obeyed the Bible, and preferred their brothers with Joy and consistency. In fact, God used this open, public, and preferential Love to such an extent that many Roman Authorities were saved as a result. Beloved, the lost world of our day needs to see such a demonstration of Love among us. And may God be Good to us to grant that.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729
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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.