

There are six disputations in Malachi.

Each disputation begins with an assertion from the LORD,
the expected challenge from the accused (“But you say...”),
and the LORD’s answer – through his prophet –
vindicating God’s actions and warning of his judgment
against those who oppose him.

Let’s take a moment and see how this all works together:

The first assertion is here in verse 2:

“I have loved you, says the LORD.”

The question – the challenge – is in verse 2 as well:

“But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’”

And then the LORD answers with the story of Jacob and Esau.

The second assertion comes in verse 6:

where God claims that the priests despise his name.

The question, at the end of verse 6,

“But you say, How have we despised your name?”

And God answers by pointing out the worship errors of the priests and people.

The third assertion comes in 2:10-12 –

where God claims that Judah has been faithless

because they have intermarried with those who worship other gods.

The question of 2:14 is why does God not accept our offerings?

And God answers because you have divorced the wife of your youth.

The fourth assertion comes in 2:17 –

where God claims that Judah has wearied the LORD with their words –

and so they ask “How have we wearied him?”

and God replies that they have wearied him

by saying that God delights in those who do evil.

The fifth assertion comes in 3:6 –

where God asserts that Israel has not kept his statutes – and calls them to return,

and so they ask, How shall we return?

And God accuses them of robbing him –

and so they ask, “How have we robbed you?”

and God replies that they have withheld their tithes and contributions

again returning to the theme of worship.

The sixth and final assertion comes in 3:13 –
where God asserts that Israel’s words have been hard against the LORD,
and so they ask, “How have we spoken against you?”
and God replies, “You have said, it is vain to serve God”

Each of these six assertions end with a warning of judgment.

- 1st Chapter 1, verse 4 speaks of God’s judgment against Edom.
- 2nd Chapter 2, verses 1-6 warn that God’s curse is coming upon the priests.
- 3rd Chapter 2, verse 16 is more implicit – if a man covers his garment with violence,
that only implies what God will do to him...
- 4th Chapter 3, verse 5 says that God will draw near in judgment against sorcerers, adulterers, etc
- 5th Chapter 3, verse 10-12 promises blessing to the one who is faithful
(and a rebuke to the devourer)
- 6th Chapter 4, verse 1-3 speak of the coming judgment against the wicked
and blessing for those who fear the LORD.

It’s also worth noting that the second and fifth assertions each have a double “but you say” –
suggesting that there is a chiasmic structure to the whole book.

The book opens with a declaration of God’s love for his people –
and ends with a promise of blessing for those who fear him –
and judgment for those who oppose him.

The 2nd and 5th disputations focus on worship.
And the central disputations (the 3rd and 4th) focus on the moral and ethical lapses of the people.

1. The Assertion: “A Son Honors His Father” (1:6a)

*⁶ “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?
And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my
name.*

God had started by saying,
“I have loved you.” (1:2)

God loves you.
He is a loving Father who cares for his children!

But that is not the end of the story.

Sometimes we can talk about God’s love in a very flimsy way:
“God loves you just the way you are!”

In one sense, that’s the truest statement ever:

God loves you – in spite of all your failings and flaws.
But if you say “God loves you just the way you are” –
so therefore you don’t need to change...

well, now, that is a lie straight from the pit of hell!

God’s love is a love that changes us – that transforms us – that makes us more like him.

And so if God has loved us - but we have not loved him...
then we have a problem...

The second disputation in 1:6-2:9 turns the focus to how Israel – the son of God –
has failed to honor God as father.

God starts with a couple of givens:

“A son honors his father.”

I think that *every child* starts off reverencing his father (and mother).

When a child is young, Daddy and Mommy are *everything*.

And even when a father has failed miserably –

his children still *want* to honor their father

(and much of the anger and bitterness that can be directed against a father
comes from the hurt that ‘my father failed me’ –

which signals that they *honor* what fatherhood stands for,
even if their particular father didn’t measure up).

So a son *honors* his father.

And “a servant his master.”

The master-servant relation is less intimate.

But there is an honor due to masters as well.

And particularly here, the word translated “master” is the word “Adonai” –
which means “lord” or “master”
(and is one of the names of God as well!).

In our day, we have “employers” rather than “masters” –

but the same basic principles apply:

if you are making fun of your boss – just as your boss walks into the room,
you are probably not going to be working there much longer!

If God were only a master –

then he would deserve our honor and reverence!

But God is not merely a master – he is a father – and a *good father*
who loves his children!

But God is not merely a father!

He is *God*.

He is the one who made you –
and – he is the one who chose *Jacob* to be his son.
“Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated.”

And more particularly,
God chose the tribe of Levi – and the house of Aaron –
to be his priests –
priests who would bless his people and place his *name* upon his people!

But the priests are the one who have particularly failed!

says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.

God’s name is holy.
God had warned in the third commandment –
“you shall not take the *name* of the LORD in vain.”
But now the priests have despised the name of the LORD.

The response of the priests is perhaps predictable!
If your father came to you and said, “you have despised my name” –
you might wonder:

2. The Challenge: “How Have We Despised/Polluted Your Name?” (1:6b-7)
But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’

And God responds:

⁷ *By offering polluted food upon my altar.*

But the priests don’t seem to understand:

But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’

And so God spells it out for them:

By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.

What does Malachi mean by “the LORD’s table”?

The imagery here is that those animals that are offered to God by sacrifice
are “food offerings” for the LORD.

The imagery is that God himself partakes of the animals that are given to him.

They are offered in the fire – they are burned –
so that God is the one who “consumes” them in the flames.

And so, if you offer diseased animals to God –
what does that say about how you view God?

3. The Answer: By Offering Blind, Lame, Sick Animals (1:8-12)

⁸ *When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.*

We’re not really used to animal sacrifices –
so let me put it another way.

What do you give to God?

I got five minutes – well, actually, it’s more like thirty seconds –
I’ll give that to God!
And then I’ve got a lot to get done!!!

He’s God – so he’s there all the time – he can fit in around all the important things I have to do!!
Is that how we treat God?

For the OT Israelite it was the same:

Hey, that burnt offering – it’s just going to get burned in the fire!
No one is eating it –
so if I use one of the duds in the flock, it’s not like God cares...
After all, I can use the best lambs for the peace offering –
that’s still for worship – and it’ll taste better!!

But would you do that to the governor?

Would you give *him* a gift of a diseased lamb?
If you were having a banquet with all the most important people in town,
would you choose the most pathetic pieces of chicken in the store?
Of course not!
You’d be going all out to get the best cuts of meat!

And yet, we treat God as though he is satisfied with the scraps of our time and energy!

⁹ *And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.*

God wants your *best*.

That was the point of the law – back in Leviticus 22 –

that said that God's people should never offer a blind animal – or a lame one –
or any blemished animal as a burnt offering or peace offering.

When you offer an offering to the LORD, it should be the *best* that you have.
Why?

Because he is the one who made us –
and he is the one who loved us – and redeemed us.
So give him your best!

And in the OT, the priests were the gatekeepers – the guardians of God's holy place.
If they were faithful, they would refuse to accept an impure offering.

Why would they accept sick animals?

Well, for one, if it was used for the burnt offering –
then the worshiper gets to cull out the sick and weak animals
and gets 'credit' for worshiping God –
and the priests are more popular –
since they are 'good for business...'

As one commentator puts it,

“Culling the herd and getting worship credit from God
for what was not worth keeping anyway was like killing two birds with one stone.
The alternative – giving up the very best of what one owned,
the finest breeding stock and the healthiest individual animals –
was something plenty of Israelites probably were simply not willing to do.
So the compromise worked.
People and priests were both advantaged, and worship attendance increased.
Only God was the loser...” (Stuart, 1301)

Why did God tell them to give the first – and the best – to him?
Doesn't that sound kind of selfish of God?

It does –
until you realize that God was only doing this to show us *who he is!*
After all –
what did God give?

God loved the world in this way –
that he gave his only-begotten Son...

The reason why God told us to give the first and the best to him –
is because that is what God does!

He gives the first and the best.

And so those who would worship him must become like him.
You become what you worship.

And so God cries out to the priests:

¹⁰ *Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!*

Oh that there was *one priest*
who would shut the doors of the temple on these vain sacrifices!
If only there was one priest who would be man enough to stand up against it –
and rebuke Israel for treating God’s house like a den of robbers!

I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. ¹¹ For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be ^[b] great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

Hear the contrast!

The priests are being repudiated.
God will *not* accept an offering from the hand of the priests –
but he *will* accept incense in every place – and a pure offering.
He will accept incense (and Revelation sees incense as the prayers of the saints) –
he will accept the prayers of his people – rising as incense before him –
he will accept a pure offering in every place –
and the name of the LORD of Hosts will be great among the nations!

God’s name will be great.

The name of the LORD of hosts –
why is God’s name so important?
Because “God’s greatness is immeasurable.” (Stuart 1298)
Human intelligence cannot comprehend *God*.
So when we encounter the living God we encounter his gracious condescension –
we do not encounter his *essence* –
we cannot know God “in himself” –
we only encounter him as he has revealed himself –
(we only know ‘his energies’ – his self-manifestation) –
Which he has made known in his *name*.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
and we have beheld his glory – the glory of the Only Begotten Son of God,
full of grace and truth.

God’s name is one of the most basic ways in which he has made himself known.
And so, when we disregard God’s Word – when we ignore his commands –

we also profane his name.
We slander his name by our actions!

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Hallowed be thy name."
May God's name be treated as holy.

¹² *But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.*

You profane his name when you disregard the holiness of his table.
When God says that something matters – and yet you say that it doesn't –
then we have a disagreement!
And when we are disagreeing with God –
that is generally *not* a very good place to be!

But isn't that often how we approach it?
This is precisely where the second challenge comes in!

4. A Second Challenge: "What Weariness This Is" (1:13a)

¹³ *But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts.*

That dismissive – derisive "snort"!
Don't waste my time!!

... that was too easy...

I am way too familiar with that posture.
That dismissive – derisive 'snort' has come too often from my nostrils...

It's bad enough when we do it to each other!
But then we do it to God!
And we say that *God's* ways are tiresome...

... and what's the point – he doesn't seem to care!
He doesn't *do anything* about it!

But God answers the cheat with strong words:

5. The Second Answer: God's Curse on the Cheat (1:13b-14)

You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. ¹⁴ Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.

He'll have words for the priest next –

but he starts with the worshiper – with the one who *could offer* a blameless sacrifice,
but chooses to offer a blemished sacrifice instead.

After all, we are *not* owners of creation.

This is *my Father's* world – not mine!

We are stewards –

and we must use the things of this world in the service of their Creator!

This principle has been driven home to me as we've been rehabbing the house at Navarre.

I do not own this house – it is not *mine* to do with as I please.

I am its steward.

Part of this is because it is in a historic district.

Those glorious stained glass windows are part of the house.

I couldn't remove them and sell them if I wanted to!

I can simply steward them and hand them over to the next steward.

But the fireplaces are not part of the deal.

I could remove them and sell them!!

But that is not the way of a steward!

Gimli described the way of a steward in the *Two Towers* –

as he describes the Glittering Caves of Aglarond:

“None of Durin's race would mine those caves for stones or ore,
not if diamonds and gold could be got there.

Do you cut down groves of blossoming trees in the springtime for firewood?

We would tend these glades of flowering stone, not quarry them.

With cautious skill, tap by tap - a small chip of rock and no more, perhaps,

in a whole anxious day - so we could work,

and as the years went by, we should open up new ways,

and display far chambers that are still dark,

glimpsed only as a void beyond fissures in the rock.”

If that is true of a house built merely with a craftman's skill,

how much more is that true of the creation itself – formed by the Great King himself!

For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

What do you hear when you hear the terms “great King”?

In English, we tend to use the adjective “great” to say he's not a just a good king,

He's a *great* King – he's better than a good king!

But that's not what a great King is!

The relationship between a king and great King

is more like that of a grandfather and a great grandfather.

To say “I am a great King” is to say – I am *more* than just a king.
I am the King of Kings – the kingliest of kings –
I am the King who rules over the kings of this world.
The Great King is the one who conquers the nations
and establishes his covenant with the lesser kings who are under his sway.

Is that how we treat our God?

6. The Promised Judgment: God’s Curse on the Faithless Priest (2:1-9)

2 “And now, O priests, this command is for you. 2 If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.

In Numbers 6, God had told the priests to bless God’s people and place his name upon the people but now God says that he will curse their blessings.

Many have noted that all the language of the Aaronic blessing can be found in these verses.
It doesn’t always come through in translation, but in Hebrew, it’s all there:

The LORD bless you (v2) and keep you (v7, 9)
The LORD make his face (v3, 4, 9) to shine upon you.
The LORD be gracious to you (1:10), and lift up his countenance upon you (v9)
and give you peace (v5, 6)

The priests were commanded to bless the people –
to place God’s *name* upon the people.

When people came to the priest –
the priest was the one through whom the blessing of God came to the people.
You bring your offering to the priest –
the priest offers it to God –
God accepts your offering from the hand of the priest –
the priest thus receives the blessing of God –
and then the priest blesses you.

But now God says that he will *curse* their blessings.

I tremble at this.

Because while pastors are not the *same* as OT priests –
we are called to *bless* God’s people.
But when pastors dishonor the name of Jesus –
and when they encourage their people to dishonor the name of Jesus –
then their blessings are turned into curses!

What does this mean?

God's blessing comes through his presence, his favor, his care, his peace.
To turn a blessing into a curse means the *lack* of God's presence,
the lack of his care – his favor – and his peace.

Think about it!

If a pastor says

³ Behold, I will rebuke your offspring,^[e] and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.

That sounds pretty awful!

The dung of your offerings shall be spread on your faces!

But the image is quite straightforward!

If you bring crappy offerings to God,

then the crap of your offerings will be on your face.

Verses 4-9 then recount the story of the Levitical priesthood:

⁴ So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. ⁵ My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. ⁶ True instruction^[e] was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. ⁷ For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people^[f] should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. ⁸ But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, ⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

Levi? (was never a priest! Undoubtedly means Aaron)

Contrast between faithful priest and faithless