

Emmanuel Baptist Church
June 25th, 2023
Malachi 2:17-3:15 – “God’s Covenant Faithfulness”

I. Introduction

Good morning, As always it is a great honor and privilege to be able to have this opportunity to worship together and to preach the Word of God to you.

Well, this morning, we are continuing in our study through the book of Malachi and so I do invite and encourage you to take a copy of the Scripture and turn with me to Malachi chapter 2. Our text this morning will be Malachi 2:17-3:15. The title of today’s sermon is “God’s Covenant Faithfulness”

Let us read the Holy Word of God which Christ uses to sanctify and cleanse His Bride.

We’ll begin in verse 17 of chapter 2 and read down through verse 15 of chapter 3.

Read the Text

Thus, the reading of God’s Word and may His people express belief in that word by saying:
AMEN!!

Let us pray and ask God’s blessing on the preaching of His Word this morning: “Holy Father, as we continue in the study of the book of Malachi we come with a desire to hear you speak, we come with a desire to have you reveal more of yourself to us, and Lord I pray as you reveal Yourself to us that we would be granted eyes to see and ears to hear and in seeing and hearing that our faith would be increased, that our love for you and for one another would be magnified. Lord you are truly the Great Unchanging God... We know that your Love for us is unchanging, for your Essence is Love, and Father we know that you work all things together for the good of those that love you and are called according to your purpose. Father, we also know that you are a Holy God, and because You are Holy you demand that we too would be holy. Lord we know in your great love you not only justify us and declare us Holy but even now you have begun a process of sanctifying us and conforming us into the Image of Your Son... Lord you love us too much to leave us in our sin, and we thank you for this great reality, but Lord help us to know that the process of being conformed into the Image of Christ is not always pleasant but it is always good and it is a result of your great covenant love for us in Christ... Lord we thank you for your justifying grace and your sanctifying grace that is made available to us through the Person and Work of Your Son, in whose name we pray... Amen!”

II. Summary of Chapters 1 and 2

Well, before we start to dive into our text this morning, I want to take a few minutes to recap the major theme of this book as we have seen it worked out thus far in chapters 1 and 2 of Malachi.

Now at the outset of this series, I gave the following summary statement regarding the primary theme of this book.

That statement should be printed in bold on your handout and it is as follows: **The primary theme of the book of Malachi is to highlight God’s Redemptive and Covenantal Love by showing that God’s Covenant of Grace originates in the Love of the Father and that the conditions attached to His gracious covenant are not dependent on the weakness of fallen men but rather on the Covenant Keeping Christ resulting in the everlasting blessing of all who are united to the Christ by faith.**

And so, my goal in this sermon series was not to exegete every verse or draw out every practical application that can be gleaned from this wonderful book, for to do so would take at the least a few months... but rather my goal has been simply this: To show that the most important truths that are essential for you to grasp revolve around that central message of the whole of Scripture which is the Redemptive and Covenantal Love of God for His people in Christ.

My desire is that you who are believers would be enabled to see God’s love for you in Christ on every page of the book of Malachi, I hope that has been the case thus far, and I also desire that you would learn to look for God’s redemptive and covenantal love for you in Christ in all of your study of God’s Word (Elaborate on this)

And as I preach to those who may be unbelievers my goal is that they would see on every page of Malachi that their only hope is that they too would be brought under the banner of God’s Redemptive and Covenantal Love in Christ, that is their only hope.

1. Chapter 1 recap

A. God’s Gracious Plan Founded Upon God’s Love

Let’s quickly recap what we learned in chapter 1. In chapter 1 we saw God revealing that His gracious purposes for His Covenant people is rooted in God’s special Electing Love.

The book opens with that mind-blowing and heart-enlarging statement in verse 2 of chapter 1 – “I have loved you” says the Lord.

And so, at the very beginning of this book we see that God’s gracious covenantal relationship with His people is founded upon the Love of God. This great plan of God to bind Himself covenantally to a people before the foundation of the earth and then in time to redeem that people through the work of His Son... this great plan, this great decree of God finds its genesis, its very origin in the Love of God, in the very Essence and Being of the Triune God... For God so Loved the world that He sent His only Begotten Son.

B. God Exposes the Sins of Israel

Well, Chapter 1 then goes on to record God exposing the sins of Israel, both in general as a nation and in particular the sins of the Priesthood.

And what we saw was that at the heart of Israel’s sin was the fact that they were not thankful, they did not appreciate the special electing covenantal love of God for them. And we saw that, this was a great and heinous sin in the eyes of God. In short, they didn’t Love God.

C. God's Plan is To Expand and Magnify His Grace

But also in Chapter 1, not only do we see God exposing sins, but we also see that God's plan to address the sins of His Covenant people Israel, was not to wipe them off the face of the earth, not to do away with them, but rather to expand and magnify His special electing covenantal love beyond the borders of Israel.

What an amazing God who does things in ways we don't expect. We would expect God in response to this sinful ingratitude to withdraw His blessings, but instead God plans to expand His mercy and His love to include people from every nation and not just ethnic Jews. **(The Arms of God's Covenantal Love)**

2. Chapter 2 recap

A. God's Gracious Plan Not Dependent on the Weakness of Fallen Men

This leads us to chapter 2 and what we saw in that chapter is that God strips away the pride of men. He does this by showing that Israel had broken covenant.

The Priesthood broke the covenant of Levi. Notice verse 8: "You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts."

And further, the men of Israel were guilty of breaking covenant with God by abusing the marriage covenant. Notice verse 10 – "Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers."

I think the point of God highlighting the fact that Israel had broken covenant with Him was to drive home the point that God's plan to expand and magnify His grace beyond the borders of Israel was not going to be dependent upon the weakness of fallen men.

B. God's Gracious Plan is Dependent on the Covenant Keeping Christ

Brothers and sisters, that is what makes the Covenant of Grace a covenant of grace... because it is not dependent upon you, but rather it is dependent upon God Himself. He takes on the task of meeting the conditions of the Covenant.

We saw that highlighted for us in Malachi 2. In that chapter as we saw the failures of Israel to keep the covenant, we also saw that ***Jesus was God's plan to bring about His gracious redemptive purposes.*** We saw this displayed for us in the following ways:

1. Jesus, The Faithful Priest
 - The Priests of Israel failed to keep covenant, but Christ as the Faithful Priest will not fail. He will keep the covenant and thus bring life and peace to His people.
2. Jesus, The Faithful Husband
 - Although many of the men in Israel were not faithful to the marriage covenant, we saw that Christ was pictured as the Faithful Husband, who never breaks with His Bride, the church, that is you and I. He loves His Bride with an everlasting love.
3. Jesus, The Godly Offspring

- We saw that although as a result of the unfaithfulness of Israel they were threatening God's promise to bring forth from Israel a Godly Offspring, God in His Sovereign Providential Mercy intervened and thus Jesus is pictured for us as that Godly Offspring who would be born as a son of Israel and who would bring many sons to glory.

And so, in conclusion what we saw in chapter 2 was that the covenant of grace, which is the fulfillment of God's gracious redemptive purposes, is dependent not upon fallen men but upon the Covenant Keeping Christ.

III. God's Plan to Deal with the Sins of His Covenant People

And so with that recap and summary complete, let us now draw our attention back to our text this morning.

A. The Hardness of Israel's Heart

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

And so, we see as chapter 2 comes to a close God is still exposing the sins of Israel. He is still explaining as it were the severity of the situation. The nation was in a mess. They had become very calloused in their sins. We know in Isaiah 5:20 God says “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil”, and then in Romans 1:32 we see that the end of the road as it were when God gives a people up to their sin was as follows: “Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

What we have here at the end of Malachi 2 is a people that had gone as far as you can go into sin, and that is when you know what is good and what is evil and yet you deliberately say that that which is good is evil and you not only practice evil but give approval to those who do likewise.

Further, what we see in this verse shows that the people had lost faith in God or we could even say they had lost respect for God. They had gotten to a point that they took God's patience; they took the reality that God is slow to anger and twisted it into believing that God didn't care about sin. In Romans 2 Paul says the following: “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

This is exactly what the nation of Israel was doing. They had mistook God's forbearance to mean that God doesn't care (They asked: Where is the God of justice?)... Dear ones, they were mocking the God of glory, when all the while His patience was meant to lead them to repentance.

Brothers and sisters, we see that in people today. I've seen and heard people who would arrogantly mock God as they sinned. People might say things like: I better be careful, God might strike me dead, all the while not believing that God will strike them dead in due time. Psalm 90:3

reminds us that God is the one who returns man to dust. God is the one who gives you your life and He is the one who will take your life. The Proverbs remind us: A fool makes mock at sin, which is ultimately to mock the God of justice... but the Scriptures also remind us that God will not be mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

Well, this I think paints the picture of the situation that God is about to address:

B. God's Plan to Address the Situation

This brings us to Malachi 3 and God's plan to address this awful situation.

Verse 1 - "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."

In this verse we have to carefully distinguish who is who in order to understand it.

It begins by saying "Behold, I will send My messenger to prepare the way before Me" And so we have 3 personal pronouns used in this verse (I, My, and Me)– The question is: Who is the I, My, and Me in this verse? Well in the context of the passage, this is clearly referring to God... it is referring to Yahweh or Jehovah. It is the LORD of hosts as the conclusion of the verse clearly indicates.

As we move forward in the verse it says that God/Yahweh, the LORD of hosts will send his messenger, and he, that is the messenger, will prepare the way before me.

Now, who is the messenger that will prepare the way before God?

Is it Malachi? Remember the name Malachi means messenger. No, the context does not lend itself to concluding that this messenger is Malachi. You see Malachi 3:1-5 have a future-oriented context. That is the context here is that Malachi is making a prophecy about something that will happen at a later date. Further, when we see that Malachi 3:1 and Malachi 4:5 serve as parallel verses, we see that Malachi is not referring to himself as the messenger but rather he is referring to Elijah the prophet.

So, does that mean that the messenger that God will send to prepare the way is Elijah. Again, the answer would be no. Now we cannot make this conclusion from the book of Malachi itself, but because we follow the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture we are able to conclude that Elijah is not the messenger that will prepare the way before God. We can and must do this because the NT in multiple places such as Matthew 17 identifies, John the Baptist, as the fulfillment of Malachi's prophesied messenger. And so, the messenger who prepares the way in verse 1 is John the Baptist.

The verse then goes on to identify one with the term Lord. Who is this Lord who will suddenly come to his temple? Well, we know that the temple being referred to is God's temple. And yet, we see Yahweh speaking of this Lord as someone that is separate from Him.

Now, at first glance this can be a bit tough to think through, but clearly the answer he is that the one referred to as Lord is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus, the phrase messenger

of the covenant refers not to John the Baptist but rather to Christ. Further, because the way that Yahweh speaks of this Lord who is coming in a way that is distinct from Himself and yet interchangeable with Himself points to the reality that the Christ who will come is God. The Word was with God and the Word was God as John will say in his Gospel.

Dear ones, this is a clear example of the doctrine of the Trinity. That there is but One True God and yet this One God exists eternally as three distinguishable Persons, the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. This is a mystery that is beyond our ability to comprehend but it is a mystery that has been revealed to us and thus we must believe it and declare it as it has been revealed.

Now, we've established from verse 1 that God's plan is to send John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Christ who is the messenger of the Covenant of Grace.

Now let us look at the way in which the Christ is going to accomplish the work of addressing the sins of His covenant people.

C. The Christ Will Come as Both a Refining Fire and a Consuming Fire

1. Christ as a Refining Fire (Vs 2-4)

Let us read verses 2-4: "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years."

So, as we move into these verses, we see that the coming Messenger of the Covenant promised in verse one will come as a Refining Fire and as a Fuller's Soap.

Both of these images, point to the reality that the Christ is coming to do a purifying work and that this work will be done thoroughly and severely.

The first image is that of a Refiner's fire. Now this image of course is meant to make us think about the intensity of the refiner's fire which of course is necessary in order to melt down precious metals and remove the dross from the metals leaving purified gold and silver.

Likewise, the second image: a Fuller's soap is meant to make us think of the work of a Fuller. Now this a term that is not familiar to us today. So, what is a Fuller and what is a fuller's soap. Well, a Fuller was someone who cleaned clothes. And the process by which they did this was to wash the clothes using a strong lye soap, something akin to bleach. After the clothes were washed with this strong lye soap, the clothes would be placed on rocks and beaten with sticks. The result of that process would be that the clothes were both clean from dirt and impurities and the clothes would be soft and supple.

And so, these images reveal that the Christ is coming to address the sins of His covenant people by doing a work of purification on their behalf.

In verse 3 it says that the Messiah will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

I think it would do us well at this point to stop and think about the mercy of God that is being displayed in this verse. Last week in chapter 2 we looked extensively at the failures of the sons of Levi... We saw in chapter 2 that the Priesthood was guilty of breaking the covenant of Levi... notice what it says in verses 8-9 of chapter 2 – “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, 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.”

And so, in light of that, when we read in chapter 3:3 that the Messiah is going to come and purify the sons of Levi, that is meant to leave us in awe of the grace of God.

And so, the question we need to ask here is this: Do we see this promise that the Messiah is going to purify the sons of Levi being fulfilled in the New Testament?

The answer is yes...I think in two ways: First literally and secondly by way of analogy.

First... turn with me if you would to Acts 6. Now we know in Acts 6:1-7 we have the record of the office of deacon being instituted in the church. This office of deacon was in response to a great need in the church that had risen to a level that was threatening the unity of the church as well as taking the apostles away from their duty of prayer and the ministry of the Word. Now, we know that the Holy Spirit greatly blessed in this situation and the church appointed 7 godly men to the office of deacon and as a result of this we have a remarkable statement recorded for us in verse 7 of chapter 6...

There it says “And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

There we have it... a great many of the sons of Levi were saved, and they became obedient to the faith... they did exactly what it said they would do in Malachi 3:3... “They brought offerings in righteousness to the Lord.” **This should make us so wow, as well as give us great hope**

Secondly, what we will see take place in the context of the New Covenant is that the concept of the priesthood will be expanded beyond just the sons of Levi or just beyond the concept of a few within the covenant community being priests but rather everyone in the context of the New Covenant Church are priests to God.

Turn with me if you would to 1 Peter 2 and let’s notice vs 5 and vs 9. Verse 5 states “You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

And then notice verse 9 – “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

Brothers and sisters, wrapped in what we see here in Malachi 3:3 is the promise that God will make us as a people, you and I, into a priesthood that has been purified by Christ Himself so that we might bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

Then we move to verse 4. Here we are reminded that in chapters 1 and 2 it wasn't just the priests who were guilty before God but rather the whole of the nation had sinned against God. Well in verse 4 we see that the Refining Fire comes to purify the whole of God's people... that is what is meant by the reference to Judah and Jerusalem... And what we see promised here is that it will not just be the priests who will be purified by the Messiah but that the whole of God's people will make offerings that are pleasing in the sight of God.

And that's important. In the context of the New Covenant, all of God's people will make offerings that are pleasing in the sight of God. This is because the very essence of this new covenant of which Christ Mediates, is the purifying work of Regeneration and subsequent sanctification. In this New Covenant, what God will do is, He will take out the heart of stone from His people and He will give them a new heart, a heart that desires to obey and make offerings which are pleasing in the sight of God.

Dear ones, the purifying work of the Messiah is truly a thorough work. Thus, the imagery of the Refiner's Fire and The Fuller's Soap. It is a work in which He cleans us up from the inside out. In the New Covenant that Christ administers what happens is that Christ purifies His people not just by giving an external Law but by changing and purifying our hearts internally so that we freely desire to keep that Law. He places within our hearts a new principle of love, and that love desires to express itself through obedience, true obedience to the Laws of God. This is the way that Christ administers His Covenant, and consequently because the two are one in the same, this is the way that the King exercises His rule within the context of His Redemptive Kingdom. There's some pretty weighty theological truths wrapped up in this passage.

Listen to the following verses which make this absolutely clear:

John 14:15 - "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:21- "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me."

John 14:23- "Jesus replied, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."

1 John 5:3 – "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome,"

2 John 1:6- "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments."

The Fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecies about a new and better covenant is realized in the Power of the King displayed in His Sovereign and Miraculous work of granting spiritual life to dead men, by giving them a new heart thus placing within them a principle of love that freely desires to obey the commandments of the King.

And so, the questions that you must ask yourself this morning are obvious: Have you been washed by the Fuller's Soap? Have you been purified by the Refiner's Fire? Have you been

cleansed by the blood of Christ? Have you experience the God of Grace taking out your heart of stone and giving you a new heart that desires to obey the commandments of God?

Dear ones, I must make myself clear on this point: What must take place if you are to truly be a Christian is not merely that you are cleaned up on the outside. You can learn to dress right, talk right, outwardly act right, and thus be accepted as one who truly possesses a new heart, while all the while being a white-washed tomb and full of dead man's bones. Have you been saved? Have you been changed? A saved life is a changed life! Do you truly love the Lord? Are you serious about following Christ with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength or are you a fake? Are you one who is deceived yourself into thinking all is well with your soul when absent from your very heart is a true desire to love and obey Christ? Trust and Obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus.

If this transformation has not happened in your life, then you are standing outside of God's covenant, you are standing outside of His kingdom.

And so, what should you do if you are outside of God's covenant? Well, you must submit yourself to the Refiner's Fire and to the Fuller's Soap. You must come to Christ with a willingness not just to be forgiven of your sins, but to have your sins stripped and purged from your very heart.

But dear ones, take heart, for you if come to Christ confessing your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you AND to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Do you desire to be cleansed from all of your sins? You can't clean yourself up good enough, your righteousness is filthy rags. Your only hope is to come to Christ, for He is a Refiner's Fire and a Fuller's Soap, and when He gets done with you, you will be made fit for heaven.

2. Christ as a Consuming Fire (5)

Well, at this time let us turn our attention to verse 5 – “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.”

Here in this verse Malachi reveals to us that not only will Christ come as a Refining Fire to His Covenant people but that He will come as a Consuming Fire to the wicked.

The Scriptures make it clear that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God for He is a consuming fire. This verse is meant to be a stark reminder to all who read this prophecy from Malachi that God is not to be mocked. He will be a swift witness against the wicked. We've talked about the fact that God is slow to anger and that His justice moves slowly. His patience in bringing ultimate justice is meant to lead sinners to repentance but when Justice does come it comes suddenly, it comes swiftly and it catches the wicked off guard. Psalm 73 states that God sets the wicked “in slippery places; and He makes them fall to ruin. And then listen to this most frightening warning: the Psalm says - They are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!”

Whether the wicked person dies or Christ returns while they are still alive... they will be destroyed in a moment and swept away utterly by terrors.

Dear ones, let us heed the words of Psalm 2 that says “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him”

IV. God’s Covenant Faithfulness (Verse 6)

Now, let us turn our attention to verse 6: “For I the Lord do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

What does this verse mean? Well, this verse teaches 2 great truths. On the One Hand it teaches us something of the Nature of God Himself, and on the other hand it reveals to us how this aspect of the nature of God is a great comfort to the people of God and a terror to the wicked.

A. Based on His Nature

First, God states that “He does not change”. This statement reveals that God in His very essence does not change. The theological term here is that God is Immutable. That is, he does not and cannot change. Now this immutability of God extends to all that pertains to God. It includes His very essence, it includes His Divine perfections or attributes, and it includes His decree or purposes.

And so, the immutability of God is grounded or based upon His very nature. In other words, what we mean when we say that God is immutable is not just that He is faithful or reliable in the way that a man might be faithful or reliable. You see a man might be faithful, he might reliable, he may keep His promises, but a man might also be unfaithful, or unreliable, and he may break his promises. And so, unfaithfulness is a possibility with man, in fact, we can say unfaithfulness is inevitable in man in his sinful state.

But God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of a man that he should repent. When it comes to God it is absolutely guaranteed that He will be faithful for it is impossible for God to change. It is impossible for God to be unfaithful to His promises. God would cease to be God if he were to change. And thus, God reveals to us here among many other places in Holy Scripture that He does not change. And brothers and sisters herein lies, the very foundation of the whole of the message of Scripture.

Remember, the main theme of Scripture. That the whole of the Scripture is to reveal the Redemptive and Covenantal Love of God for His people in Christ. This Covenantal Love of God for His people in Christ is grounded in the immutability of God’s very Essence and consequently the Immutability of His Decree. The God who cannot change, placed His unchanging and unfailing Love upon a People, and He made an unchanging Decree before the foundation of the earth that He would save that very people through the Person and Work of Christ.

B. Based on our Relation to God

Now, that we've seen that God's covenant is founded upon His unchanging Nature, let us look at how this is a great comfort to God's people and a terror to the wicked.

Notice, what it says in verse 6- Based upon the reality that God does not change it says "Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."

What we see here in the immediate context is this:

Because, the children of Jacob, that is Israel, was in covenant with God, God does not deal with them as a consuming fire. You see, God's redemptive purpose in this historical covenant, the Old Covenant, was that through Israel the Messiah would come at the appointed time. Because that was God's redemptive and unchangeable purpose, He would not consume Israel in wrath, despite the fact that that is exactly what they deserved as a result of their sin.

God is saying because I am Immutable, I will be Faithful to my Covenant, and thus the purposes of my covenant will be realized.

Now, this verse also has direct application to us today under the context of the Covenant of Grace. In the Covenant of Grace, God's unchangeable purpose is to bring each and every person in that covenant into a saving union with Jesus Christ.

And thus, for those of us who are in a covenant of grace with God, we do not experience Him as a consuming fire but rather we experience him as a Refining fire.

And dear ones, that makes all the difference.

You see there are only 2 overarching Covenants in the Scripture and consequently you must be under one or the other, there is no 3rd option.

On the one hand, there is the Covenant of Works, with Adam as the Federal Head.

On the other hand, there is the Covenant of Grace, with Christ as the Federal Head.

If you are not a believer and follower of Christ, this means you are still in a Covenant of Works with God. And if you are in a Covenant of Works with God this means that you will be judged by God on the basis of Adam's failure in the Garden and on the basis of your own failure to obey the Law of God perfectly. The Bible is clear. The wages of sin is death. If you stand before the Holy God, in the day of judgment, seeking to be justified on the basis of your own Law keeping, you will experience God as a Consuming Fire and you will perish eternally.

On the other hand, if you are a Christian, this means that you are in a Covenant of Grace with God. And to be in this Covenant with God is to experience Him not as a consuming fire but as that refining fire. To be in a covenant of grace means that God has begun a good work in you and He will bring it to completion. This work includes both justification and sanctification, and ultimately it includes glorification.

Because God is an unchanging God you can be assured that if you remain in a Covenant of Works with Him you will perish but if you are in a covenant of grace with Him you will have life forevermore.

V. God's Unchanging Nature Continues (verses 7-12)

Well, this leads us to the next section in our passage, and I will just quickly touch on this section for time's sake. That section is verses 7-12 of chapter 3. This next section is where we find those verses that are most often used to teach on the subject of tithing, and consequentially these same verses are often twisted and manipulated by the prosperity preachers to trick people into giving as a means of basically using God like an investment account.

Well, I'm not going to take the time in this series to discuss tithing and Christian giving, although that is an important topic that deserves the Christian's careful thought and obedience to the revealed will of God.

The reason, I'm not going to do that in this series, is because the point of this series is to stick to the main point of each passage and the main point of this passage does not have to do with tithing but rather it is a continuation of the previous point made concerning the unchanging nature of God.

In verses 7-12 what we see is this. God is saying very plainly: If you come to on My terms, which are the terms of faith and repentance with a desire to truly obey me, I will relate to you as those who are in a covenant of grace with me and thus you will be blessed. However, if you continue to relate to me on your own terms, I will be a consuming fire to you.

Now, no doubt there are many practical lessons that can be drawn from these verses but due to the limitations of this series we will have to leave off with that.

VI. The Lack of Discipline as a Judgment of God Against the Wicked (vs 13-15)

Now, let us turn our attention to verses 13-15.

Let's read these verses: "Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, "How have we spoken against you?" You have said, "It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and escape."

The reality is that these verses touch on a theme that is shot through the Scriptures and we could easily spend an entire sermon just on these verses. But in the interest of time, I'm just going to go straight to the point of what these verses are teaching.

What is being said here is almost identical to what we saw in Chapter 2:17.

What God is saying to the Israelites is this you are acting in unbelief, because you think that I do not see the wickedness of evildoers. You think because I am slow to anger that I do not keep a record of their wrongdoings or that at the right time I will bring recompense. (We will see next week that God does keep a book of remembrance). There is nothing that God does not see, and there is no sin that will go unpunished. You see what the Israelites were failing to understand is

that one of the primary ways that God judges the wicked in this life is to give them up to their lusts. He gives them what they desire... but in the process of doing so the wicked harden themselves. And thus what the wicked are doing is storing up wrath for themselves... they are making themselves fat for the slaughter... they are in a very real way like lifeless branches that draw no sap from the vine... we know that happens to lifeless branches, the longer they sit there the more they dry out, and if you've ever burnt a fire you know what a fire does to dead branches that have been left to dry out for a long time... the fire quickly and ferociously consumes them...

Brothers and sisters, it may seem like the wicked are escaping the wrath of God, but they are not... they are lifeless branches that God has left to dry, but when His Day of Wrath comes, they will be consumed by the Living God.

VII. Conclusion

1. The Pardoning Grace of the Covenant of Grace

Well, brothers and sisters let us bring this sermon to a conclusion. And I want to do that by highlighting the dual nature of the Covenant of Grace, which we have seen today is founded upon the Immutable Nature of our Holy God.

The first aspect of the Covenant of Grace that we need to understand is that the grace of this Covenant is a pardoning Grace. If you are in the covenant of grace with God this means that God is now for you and not against you. As Romans 8:1 beautifully says: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And side note quickly... any time you see the phrase "in Christ" in the Bible that is the same thing as saying in the covenant of Grace with God. What it means to be in the covenant of grace is to be united to Christ.

Now, what this verse means is that God has no more wrath against you... Christ Jesus has paid the penalty for your sin and in so doing has extinguished the consuming fire which is the wrath of God against sin.

Picture it this way: Backfire illustration.

We all want and need to be forgiven of our sin and that is what the Covenant of Grace offers.

2. The Purifying Grace of the Covenant of Grace

However, the mark of someone who has truly been saved is that not only do they want to be freed from the penalty of sin, but they also desire to be freed from the power and the presence of sin.

The second aspect of the Covenant of Grace is that the grace of this covenant is a purifying grace. It is a grace that leads to transformation.

Remember, we stated that the wicked were like lifeless branches that were not drawing sap from the vine and thus were drying out for the day when they will be consumed by fire. Well, the

branches that are alive and are abiding in Christ (there is that phrase again... in Christ means – in the covenant of grace)... those branches that are in Christ are dealt with in what way? They are pruned... this means they are cut, that which is not good for them is cut away... This is just another analogy that says what our passage has been saying today.

The Pruner's Shears, The Refiner's Fire, the Fuller's Soap, are all pointing to the same reality... If God has called you into His Kingdom, that is into His Covenant of Grace, He has called you into that Kingdom to struggle against the corruptions of your heart and to go through a process of killing your sin and being purified from your unrighteousness before you enter into glory.

And so, in conclusion, the question you must ask yourself is this:

Are you willing to be cleansed from your sin? This is what it looks like to live the Christian life... it is a life of putting off and putting on... it is a life of dying to yourself and picking up your cross daily... it is a life of being passed through the Refiner's Fire.

Come to Christ today, believing that if you trust in Him, He will begin a good work in you and because of His Covenant Faithfulness He will complete that work. As it was said of Jesus... Having Loved His Own, He loved them to the very end. Jesus Christ is the Same, Yesterday, Today, and Forever... He does not change... therefore you, Oh weak and feeble Christian, you are not consumed, but rather Christ loves you, and He will never leave you, He will never forsake you, He will raise you up on the Last Day, and He will present You to Himself without spot or wrinkle, and dear ones, you will reign with Him forever and ever in the beauty of Holiness.

Prayer: