

## This Commandment – Malachi 2:1-2

### I. Introduction:

- A. We are going to have a short word-study this evening.
  - 1. I doubt that this will be on the final exam in that day when you stand before the Bema judgment seat.
  - 2. But it does provide us with a little insight into the heart of God.
  - 3. I hope through this study you will be able to see the Lord as our **Heavenly Father**, the sovereign **King**, and as the **Judge** over all which He has created.
- B. Let's consider the word "**commandment**" there in **verse 1**.

### II. There are twelve Hebrew words which are all translated "**commandment**."

- A. There are also a few more translated as the verb "**command**," but we won't get into them.
  - 1. As I read through all those words, I found that six were only related to people: kings or governors.
  - 2. We won't concern ourselves with them.
  - 3. We are only interested in the commandments which God has given to men, but also to one other.
- B. Three Hebrew words are used only once in the Bible, and none of those are found here in **Malachi**.
  - 1. But let me share them with you.
  - 2. In **Psalm 147** we read: "**Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion.**
    - a. **He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat.**
    - b. **He sendeth forth his COMMANDMENT upon earth; his word runneth very swiftly.**
  - 3. Let's call this the **commandment of PROVIDENCE**.
  - 4. It isn't a command to men, but rather to other things in Creation.
  - 5. The sovereign God commands the rain, the sun, the drought, the locusts, and they all obey.
  - 6. We have a wonderful God who can fill our pantry with the fruit of the earth – or not.
- C. **Amos 2:4** is another single use word.
  - 1. "**Thus saith the LORD; for three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his COMMANDMENTS, and their lies caused them to err, after which the fathers have walked: but I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.**"
  - 2. In Hebrew, this "**commandment**" speaks of **enactments**, **appointments** or **statutes**.
  - 3. This would be the sort of commandment the congress, or a king, would create. It is absolute.
- D. **Ezra 6:14** uses an interesting word when speaking of God's commandments.
  - 1. It is also applied in the same verse to the wishes of three kings.
  - 2. The verse reads, "**And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the COMMANDMENT of the God of Israel, and the COMMANDMENT of Cyrus, and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia.**"
  - 3. The first definition of this Hebrew word is "**taste**."
  - 4. "**And they builded, and finished it, according to the (taste or wishes) of the God of Israel.**"
  - 5. That commandment definitely leaves a pleasant is my mouth.
  - 6. Christians should yearn to do those things which our Saviour wants or wishes, as well as those things which He has demanded.
- E. The word "**dabar**" is used about twenty times, and about half of them are the commands of human kings.
  - 1. For example, **Vashti** refused to obey the wicked command of her royal spouse Ahasuerus.
  - 2. The word literally means "**word**" and is translated that way almost eight hundred times.
  - 3. But its most famous use is in the five books of Moses: the decalogue.

4. Moses was ***“with the LORD forty days and forty nights (on Mount Sinai)... And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the TEN COMMANDMENTS.”***
5. The Old Testament scriptures speak of the ten commandments as the ***“ten words of God.”***
6. Not only the written word, but when God speaks we need to listen.
7. We shall be judged by the words of God.

- F. The word ***“peh”*** is translated ***“commandment”*** about thirty times.
1. Even though it is not directly related to ***“dabar”*** its meaning certainly is.
  2. Literally it refers to the ***“mouth”*** or the ***voice*** of God.
  3. ***Exodus 17:1: “And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the COMMANDMENT of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.”***
  4. In this case, the commandment of God was ***not legislation***, but ***leadership***.
  5. It is sort of like ***Psalm 32:8*** where God says: ***“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”***
  6. If we are intent on serving God aright, we will not only be listening to His voice, and reading His word, but, metaphorically speaking, by watching His eyes we will see the direction He wants us to go.
- G. The last, and most common word translated ***“commandment”*** is ***“mitsvah.”***
1. And I suppose this is the word we most commonly picture when we hear of God’s commandments.
  2. ***Deuteronomy 7:9: “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his COMMANDMENTS to a thousand generations.”***
  3. This is also the word which David uses about two dozen times in ***Psalm 119***, where he praises the commandments and Word of God.
    - a. ***“I will delight myself in thy COMMANDMENTS, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy COMMANDMENTS, which I have loved; and I will meditates in thy statutes.”***
    - b. ***“I love thy COMMANDMENTS above gold, yea, above fine gold.”***

### III. After looking at dozens of these scriptures, I think I can describe God’s commandments in three ways.

- A. Laying aside the Lord’s providential commands which guides the weather, earthquakes, hurricane tracks and the spread of the plague, I see three kinds of commands in regard to us.
1. Some of them are ***orders***; some of them are ***guidelines*** and some of them are ***pronouncements***.
  2. Putting it another way, God’s commandments can be classified as either ***rules, suggestions*** or ***guarantees***.
- B. The vast majority of God’s commands, coming from several different original words, are ***laws*** or ***orders***.
1. The Creator, and King of His creation, has enacted legislation which is to be obeyed implicitly.
  2. The Ten Commandments are ten examples.
  3. These commandments are not open for public debate. They are the law of the King of all kings.
  4. Samuel told Israel: ***“If ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against he COMMANDMENT of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.”***
  5. As I think about ***Malachi 2:1***, I lean toward this use of the word ***“command.”***
    - a. ***“And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.”***
    - b. But I also lean toward a third interpretation, which I’ll get to in just a minute.
- C. The second category of commandments, and I say this with reservation, might be classified as ***“guidelines.”***
1. And my reason for saying this can be seen in the consequences when the commandment is disregarded.
  2. When the King’s command is broken, the sinner should expect the wrath of the Sovereign.
    - a. ***“The soul that sinneth it shall die.” “The wages of sin is death”***
    - b. The punishment for breaking this kind of divine commandment is always the same: eternal death.

3. But the second kind of command has its own built-in punishment which may not be death.
- D. As I said, one of the Hebrew words often translated “**command**” could be translated “**taste**” or “**wish**.”
1. An example is found in **Exodus 17:1**: **“And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the COMMANDMENT of the Lord, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.”**
  2. We could say that these represent the commands which God lay’s out before the Christian.
  3. There are consequences for disobedience but they are not eternal.
- E. There is a warning printed on each package of cigarettes, which reflects the commandment of God.
1. They essentially say, “Smoking this stuff will make you sick; it may kill you; it may harm your family.”
    - a. There are natural laws which say, “If you inhale some things or ingest other things, you will suffer the consequences.”
    - b. God put those rules and consequences into place, and we must abide by them or suffer.
  2. Jumping off the top of a building in Manhattan may not be fatal, but it is not wise, and there are human commandments against that sort of thing.
  3. To break these laws is foolish, but none of them will, of themselves, send the guilty party to Hell.
  4. This is not the kind of command to which our text in **Malachi** refers.
- F. But perhaps the third might be.
1. God has established rules – commands if you like – which do have guaranteed results.
  2. You might say that these commands are more like prophecies or pronouncements.
    - a. Smoking or chewing tobacco may, or may not, give you mouth, or some other cancer.
    - b. You may survive base jumping off a building with a high-tech parachute.
    - c. But if you neglect to strap on that parachute, the law of gravity does guarantee death.
  3. There are buoys and chains across our river a few hundred feet in front of the dams.
    - a. They are in place to tell boats not to get too close to the dams, because the current gets very strong and may drag that boat over or into the dam.
    - b. God created the laws which govern currents and the movement of water.
    - c. At some point they become unalterable.
    - d. It is seriously recommended that you don’t boat or swim out into that current or you will die.
  4. There is a divine, but unwritten commandments, not to stick pointed metal objects into electrical outlets.
  5. There is no doubt about it: doing that will send an electrical shock through your body.
  6. **“And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you.”**

#### IV. Now let me try to tie these things together.

- A. In some of God’s commands we see Jehovah as the King, the Sovereign who has the authority to enact any law He chooses, demanding that His subjects obey.
1. Some rebels will rebel because they don’t like the idea of a dictator telling them what to do, no matter how loving He might be.
  2. But their rebellion doesn’t bother the Lord one way or another. His will shall be done. Period.
  3. And that brings us to the fact that this lawgiver is also the final judge.
  4. Most of God’s laws are not suggestions but criteria upon which we are all to be measured, **and “the soul that sinneth it shall die.”**
  5. But there is something for the Christian to remember: this lawgiver is our loving Heavenly Father.
  6. It is for our good that these commandments – all of God’s commandments – were given.
  7. These commandments aren’t in place to punish us, but ultimately to bless us.
  8. For example, the law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.

- B. And this should affect our motivation for obedience.
1. Should we obey the dictates of the commandment because God is the supreme dictator over His creation?
  2. Or should we obey only because it is to our benefit to obey?
  3. ***“If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you.”***
- C. Of course we should obey for whatever reason, but David teaches us something else.
1. In **Psalm 119** we see obedience because we love the Lord, and we love whatever He wants us to do.
    - a. ***“O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thou, through the COMMANDMENTS, hast made me wiser than mine enemies...”***
    - b. ***“My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy COMMANDMENT are righteous. Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.”***
  2. David so loved God’s Word and commandments that he yearned for the opportunity to obey.
  3. And then he added, ***“Let thine hand help me,”*** acknowledging that he was not very good at obedience.
- D. It was not because Jehovah is King or Judge that David loved to obey God’s commandments.
1. It was because Jehovah was his Saviour/God and Heavenly Father.
  2. **There** should be **our** motivation to obedience as well.