

## Divine Defamation – Malachi 3:13-15

### I. Introduction:

- A. Charles Spurgeon, in volume 59 of his Metropolitan Tabernacle sermons, said,
1. *"I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth.*
    - a. *You will say, 'Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?'*
    - b. *You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God.*
    - c. *But what I said was that to live with the object of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian."*
  2. In this I completely agree with Spurgeon.
  3. **BUT** there are many **well-known**, often **quoted**, practically **worshipped** preachers who disagree.
- B. If Spurgeon were still alive he would condemn the heresies which today are called the *"Positive Confession Theology"* and the *"Word of Faith."*
1. They also have the nicknames: *"Name it and Claim it"* and *"Gab it and Grab it."*
  2. Depending on the particular brand of the preacher, these ideas might also be called the *"Health and Wealth Gospel"* or the *"Prosperity Gospel."*
  3. Proponents of this false gospel include Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hind, T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer and Kenneth Hagan, but the current king of them all is Joel Osteen.
  4. These, and others, have become fabulously wealthy, often feasting on people who are borderline destitute.
  5. Most of them take money from people, telling them that if they give in faith, God will bless them.
  6. They preach a gospel which is **not only unscriptural**, but clearly **anti-Biblical** & ultimately **soul-damning**.
  7. Some have declared that Christ died to rid the world of the sin – the sin of poverty.
- C. Let's say that some poor widow, living on Social Security becomes convinced to give what little is left of her income to one of these Prosperity Gospel preachers.
1. She is told that if she just takes a positive attitude and lives by faith, she will be physically blessed.
  2. But her poor health continues to deteriorate, her granddaughter commits suicide, her son is thrown in jail, and the bank is threatening to take her house.
  3. Let's say she musters up all her self-generated faith and sends her last few dollars to Osteen, thinking that by doing so all her money and family problems will miraculously disappear.
  4. But again there is no positive change in her circumstances; the prosperity God doesn't bless.
  5. Do you suppose she might eventually say, *"It is vain to serve Jehovah; and what profit it is that I have kept these ordinances which the TV preacher has laid before me?"*
  6. The Prosperity Gospel is a false gospel, being used by Satan to send people to hell, because it presents a false Christ, a false salvation and both heaven and hell on earth. It produces a false faith.
- D. With the heresies of the Prosperity Gospel in mind, I'd like to look at these three verses of **Malachi**.
1. Let's consider three headings:
  2. **Verse 13** reveals people who **disrespect** and **deface** the **character** of God.
  3. In **verse 14** we see them **defame** the **service** of God.
  4. And in **verse 15** we hear them **deny** the **justice** of God.

### II. The Holy Spirit reminds us that some people are sinful enough to **DERIDE** the **CHARACTER** of the LORD.

- A. *"Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD."*
- B. We have all seen at two children quarreling about something.
1. One is bigger than the other, and the little one knows that if it comes to actual blows, she'll be hurt.
  2. So she resorts to words for her weaponry; perhaps reverting to name-calling.
  3. The same sort of thing is done by weak little humans in their unwinnable fights with God.
- C. Anyone with a modicum of religion knows that no one is going to lay a hand upon Jehovah.
1. There is no way for any sinner... not even Satan... to mount a successful frontal attack upon the Lord.

2. So it is only behind His back that the Devil whispers, *“Yea, hath God said.....?”*
  3. And the even weaker human sinner turns to slander, attacking the character of God with his words.
  4. *“The Lord is weak and can’t fix my problem; He doesn’t care; He loves wickedness and the sinful man.”*
  5. They are mean words, they are stout, hard words, but of course they are nothing but feathers floating over the head of the King of kings.
- D. The **Epistle of Jude** reaches back into ancient history and pulls up the name **“Enoch.”**
1. *“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,*
  2. *To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”*
  3. Enoch lived in a very early day, and only three generations later God destroyed most of humanity with a world-wide flood.
  4. If Enoch’s preaching revealed anything about that judgment, it was that the sinners of his day were not only **doing** wickedness, but they were **speaking** wickedness with **hard words** against God.
  5. It doesn’t take long for sinners to learn to blaspheme.
  6. I wonder what those early fools saw in the Lord which so displeased them?
  7. It reveals that the human heart has been at enmity with the holy God since the beginning.
- E. Getting back to **Malachi**, one of my sources made two comments about these stout, hard words.
1. It said that the Hebrew language suggests **assiduity & habit**; this kind of talk was **constant & pointed**.
    - a. This blasphemy wasn’t simply screamed out when the man’s hammer hit his thumb.
    - b. This was constant, daily, hourly.
  2. Then it added that this talk was not thrown directly at the Lord, but gossiped among other sinners.
  3. They would never say such things or to the Lord Himself, but it was muttered over the fence and at the coffee shop. It was uttered behind God’s back, so to speak.
  4. And then they dishonestly said, *“What have we spoken so much against thee?” “I never said that.”*
- F. But mark it down, the omniscient God knows every conversation sinful man has ever had.
1. And He knows our every idle word, every overt threat, every sinful sentence of yours.
  2. He has heard every word you have ever spoken no matter where you spoke it: in an open field or the privacy of your bedroom.
  3. He has listened to your slander as you spoke to your closest friend about some third party or about Himself
  4. Furthermore, He has intimate acquaintance with the deepest thoughts of your heart.
  5. He not only knows what you have said, but the mean spirit with which you said it.
    - a. *“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes (and ears) of him with whom we have to do.”*
    - b. *“God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things.”*
  6. So of course He knows what you have spoken against Him.
  7. Christ said to the Pharisees, *“O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*
    - a. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*
    - b. *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”*
- G. Are you ready for your every idle word to be judged by God? Your slander, your lies, your blasphemy?
1. Your words express the true condition of your heart; they will form the backdrop for your judgment.
  2. I’d recommend that you turn to God through Christ, right now, seeking His pardon and forgiveness.
  3. Repent before God and turn to Him through the Saviour, before you are eternally judged for your filthy mouth.

### III. In the second verse of our text, we see the **SERVICE** of God **DEFAMED**.

- A. *"Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?"*
1. *"Ye have said, It is a useless waste of time to serve God."*
  2. *"Ye have said, there is no profit in doing what the Lord requires and in observing what He says."*
  3. *"Ye have said there is no reason to walk mournfully before Jehovah."*
- B. Maybe my memory is failing, but couldn't think of any command for Israel to walk mournfully before the Lord.
1. It might be argued that to have a repentant and humble attitude is commanded and is profitable, and I would agree, but *"to constantly walk around as if in mourning"* is not the same thing.
  2. This is the only place in the Bible where this Hebrew word is used.
    - a. And my resources tell me that it is related to the color *"black."*
    - b. Those people blackened themselves; not their faces, but their clothing.
    - c. As the British might say, they wore their widows weeds.
  3. Were there people in Israel who dressed like strictest Mennonites, thinking that it bought favor with God?
  4. How necessary is a strict dress code to some people's confused estimation of salvation?
- C. **Isaiah** deals with some of these things in **chapter 58**.
1. Backslidden Israel stoutly demands of the Lord in **verse 3**: *"Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?"*
  2. God replies, *"Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours."*
    - a. *Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.*
    - b. *Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*
    - c. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*
    - d. *Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"*
- D. What was God's purpose for commanding repentance and ordaining fasting?
1. It wasn't so that sinners could boast in their holiness and piety.
  2. It wasn't to provide people with an opportunity to make a show of their religiosity.
  3. It was to bring people to their knees; to give them an opportunity to see their wickedness; and to force them to look to the needs of others.
- E. **Job 21** is a scripture which seems to echo **Malachi**.
1. **Verse 14**: The wicked *"say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."*
  2. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"*
  3. Job replies on behalf of the Lord, *"Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me."*
  4. You who say that God doesn't care whether or not we serve Him need to wake up.
  5. Because, *"How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger."*
- F. **Malachi** reveals that the Jews were beginning to recognize that their mourning was not to their advantage.
1. *"What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?"*
  2. They had an early version of the false doctrine of the *"Prosperity Gospel."*
  3. But they had been disappointed.

G. Consider the word “profit” in **verse 14**.

1. *“There isn’t any profit in keeping the Lord’s rules and regulations.”*
  - a. It is the word “*betsa*” (*beh’-tsah*) and it is used about two dozen times in the Old Testament.
  - b. It speaks of profit, but of a very special kind.
2. The three occasions they are used in **Proverbs** are typical of them all.
  - a. **Proverbs 1:19:** *“My son if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.*
  - b. *They lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives.*
  - c. *So are the ways of every one that is **greedy of gain**; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.*
  - d. **Proverbs 15:27:** *“He that is **greedy of gain** troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.”*
  - e. **Proverbs 28:16:** *“The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth **covetousness** shall prolong his days.”*
3. The Hebrew word is most often translated “*covetousness*,” because the kind of profit these people wanted was unlawful.
4. God told Moses, *“ Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating **covetousness**; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”*
5. Malachi was saying, the only reason people gave the appearance of serving God was for financial reward.
6. And when the Lord didn’t open them the windows of heaven, pouring out the blessings they wanted, they determined that it wasn’t profitable to serve Him.

H. Notice also the word “*ordinance*;” *“what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance.”*

1. I probably don’t have much right to make this application, but I think it is appropriate.
2. In religion today, we observe two ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
3. How many people under the blanket of Christendom keep those ordinances for the salvation of their souls?
4. Someday, at the Great White Throne of God if not before, they will find out that there is no profit in keeping those ordinances if their hearts were not repentant and their faith was not in the Saviour.

**IV. Finally, in verse 15 we see people who DENIED God’s JUSTICE.**

A. They denied that God is equitable in His treatment of the righteous and the wicked.

1. *“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”*
2. These short-sighted, Biblically-ignorant, professing servants of God were saying that it wasn’t the humble servants of God, but the sinfully arrogant and proud who are the happiest people on earth.
3. Those who work and produce evil are the most established in the world.
4. And the people who tempt God with their defiance are the ones advancing and escaping most of the problems in life.
5. The key words in those last three statements are “*on earth*,” “*in the world*” and “*in this life*.”

B. *“And now we call the proud happy.”*

1. Solomon once said, *“Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.”*
2. And one such fool, enjoying almost as much wealth as Joel Osteen, was Herod Agrippa.
3. Agrippa was propped up in his office by the Romans and the Jewish Sadducees.
4. He tried to defy God by persecuting God’s church, killing James the brother of John and attempting to execute Peter.
5. **Acts 12:20:** *“And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king’s chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king’s country.*
  - a. *And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.*
  - b. *And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

c. *But the word of God grew and multiplied,*” proving the Lord is not pleased with the arrogance of man.

C. *“Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*

1. But the Lord is patient and merciful, and that fall may not take place until the day of the proud man’s death.
2. *“Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased (guaranteed); & he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”*
3. The point is: God has declared pride to be one of man’s worst sins.
4. It will always, eventually, end in judgment and destruction.

D. Conversely, true humility is recognized and blessed by God.

1. *“Thus saith the high an lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit...” (Isaiah 57:15).*
2. **James 4:10:** *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”*
3. If you will humbly fall in repentance before the cross of Christ, trusting Jesus’ sacrifice to reconcile you to the Father, you will spend eternity with Him.
4. But if self-righteousness and pride keep you from repentance, you will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire.

E. *“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up...”*

1. They are set up in the way that a builder constructs a house.
2. Last fall, we visited Washington, Kentucky, living some of the history I love and about which I have written.
3. I saw a house in which one of the friends of John Gano had lived.
4. I almost passed it by, because it didn’t look to be more than 50 or 60 years old, but it was in fact built 200 years ago.
5. It is still standing, because it was built well and on a good foundation.

F. The wicked and proud, may look at their lives and see brick upon brick, stone upon stone, until they have good-looking multistoried structure.

1. But the buildings of the wicked are described the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 7:**
2. *“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*
3. *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*
4. *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:*
5. *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”*

G. They that work wickedness may believe themselves to be set up, but they have no foundation under them.

1. The truth which the blind people in Malachi’s day were missing is the fact that God’s storm is coming.
2. There is a judgment day when all of the inequities of this world will be completely and permanently corrected.
3. **Revelation 20:12-13:** *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*
4. *And the sea give up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.*
5. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*
6. *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire.”*

- H. *“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”*
1. What does that mean: *“they tempt God?”* How can God be tempted?
  2. It certainly doesn't refer to temptation to sin, because the triune God is impeccable and incapable of sin.
  3. No, it speaks of the way in which the wicked live.
  4. Despite knowing God's hatred of sin, they live in such a way they dare God to judge them.
  5. Paul refers to this kind of attitude and behavior in **Romans 1**.
    - a. While understanding the nature of God, they deny Him in their schools, in their mega-churches, in their evolutionary philosophies and in their day-to-day lives.
    - b. They change the truth of God into lies.
    - c. They redefine salvation, making it something secular and earthly.
    - d. They are without understanding, without natural affection, implacable and unmerciful.
  6. *“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”*
  7. Living in defiance of the Lord, they tempt God to judge them, as Herod Agrippa did.
- I. And those professing saints, who look for immediate blessings for simply serving God as He requires, are living a pipe dream and deserve to be disappointed.
1. In their confusion when they believe that the wicked prosper, they may think that the practice of evil is more profitable than righteousness.
  2. Such is a horrible assumption.
  3. Jehovah is still God, and He is still holy. But He is also gracious and patient.
  4. Today wickedness and greed may appear to be the best way to get by in the world.
  5. But *“the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”*
- J. And what is that will of God?
1. It is that you humble yourself before the Lord in repentance and sorrow for sin.
  2. And that you put your trust, your allegiance and your love, on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- K. We are just a few days before a new year.
1. It is reminiscent of **Malachi**, the last book of the Old Testament.
  2. Turn one page in your Bible and you are into the New Testament.
  3. Today, while in the Book of Malachi, you have an opportunity to look forward unto Jesus, the author and finisher of true faith.
  4. What a perfect time to bow before the Saviour, the King of kings.