

# Loving God's Ordinances...Or Not

Malachi 2:17 – 3:18

*Halifax: 15 September 2019*

## **Introduction**

Today, I am breaking from our regular sermon series in Mark to address the subject of tithing.

- I am doing this at the request of the session of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church. In other words, the elders asked me to preach on this subject.
- The session made a similar request of me just over ten years ago.
  - The reason for this: as those charged with the oversight of your souls, the elders are concerned for you because some of you are not tithing.
  - As the pastor of the church, I am also an elder, but as one who is on the payroll, I avoid looking at the records of what members give, so I do not know specifics.
    - But knowing that some of you are not tithing causes me concern for you as well since tithing is an ordinance of God.
    - While I will be presenting a few arguments to prove that it is an ordinance for us today, if you want to hear more in defence of that, I would recommend that you listen to the sermon I preached in March of 2009.

I must admit that preparing a sermon on this subject was not an easy task for me.

- Some of you saw my letter to the congregation in which I expressed that I was actually thankful for an extra week to wrestle with how I ought to preach on this.
- In that letter I explained that the Lord had answered prayer and given me clarity about how I ought to go forward—not that I would claim to be inspired directly by God—but that He enabled me to be burdened with a message to deliver based on what it taught in the Scriptures.

And what I want to do today is not only to talk about tithing, but about the importance of loving God's ordinances in general.

- The more I worked on this sermon, the more I was convinced that this is a very important subject for our congregation to consider at this time.
  - I have a burden to deliver this message to you in hopes that through it the Lord will speak to each one of you—whether you are tithing already or not.

The passage I have chosen is in Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament.

- Malachi is an interesting prophecy because most of it is written as the Lord speaking in the first person.
  - For example, when Malachi speaks of tithing in 3:8, it says, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!...”
  - This has a powerful effect of making us realise that we are hearing from God, which, of course, we always are when we hear His word.
- The portion I will read and preach from today is Malachi 2:17 – 3:18.
  - Please listen carefully as I read it now, for this is indeed the word of God—it is God addressing us as His people.

Malachi 2:17 – 3:18: You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, “In what way have we wearied *Him*?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” Or, “Where *is* the God of justice?” 3:1 “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, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. 2 “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 launderer’s soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts. 6 “For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ 8 Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you

say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *even* this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it*. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts; 12 “and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts. 13 “Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ 14 You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? 15 So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.’ ” 16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them*; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. 17 They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” 18 Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

May the Lord add His blessing the reading of His holy Word.

**I. Notice that right in the middle of this reading, the LORD confronts His church for neglecting His ordinances.**

- Look at chapter 3, verse 7: **Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them.**

A. You see here that the LORD speaks of this neglect of His ordinances as an ongoing problem with His people.

1. They have gone away from His ordinances from the days of their fathers.
  - It has been a continual issue, a perennial problem.

- a. But what are God's ordinances?
    - It is quite simple. His ordinances are the things He has ordained for us to do... think like prayer, singing of praise, reading His word, preaching His word, keeping the Sabbath, daily prayer, gathering weekly for a holy convocation (worship service), along with things that are specific to either the Old Testament or the New Testament...
      - Such as sacrifices, feast days, food laws, ceremonial washings, circumcision, and the Passover in the Old Testament,
      - And baptism, the Lord's Supper, and especially the preaching of the gospel in the New Testament era.
  - b. The Lord says that His people have always gone away from His ordinances.
    - And I think it is clear that this has been the case even up until our day.
    - Sure, there have been times of restoration, but even these reformations have not been either as complete or as widespread as they ought to be.
    - Who among us could claim that we have been as diligent as we ought to be about keeping God's ordinances?
2. You see that Lord considers the neglect of His ordinances as departing from Him.
    - In the middle of verse 7, He says, **"Return to Me, and I will return to you."**
      - The people Malachi addresses had not completely abandoned God's ordinances... they still had the temple and they were still those who worshipped the true God and not some other god...
      - They were still bringing sacrifices, albeit lame ones, but God says that they have gone away from His ordinances and need to return to Him.
  3. They don't see it that way—they don't see that they have departed from Him by neglecting His ordinances.
    - The Lord says to them, **"But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'"**
    - When you confront someone about going away from God by neglecting His ordinances, they will almost always deny that they have done so.
      - They will say, "I have not departed from God."
      - They are like the person you confront about anger... "I was not angry," or the one you confront about drinking to excess, "I don't do that."
    - This denial is seen all the way through Malachi—they always say, "How did we do that?" whenever they are confronted about their sin.
      - That is not a good way to deal with your sin.
      - We have a Saviour, so instead of denying it, go on and admit it. Then you can repent and ask God to forgive you.
        - If you deny that you have sinned, you make God a liar and His truth is not in you. You are living in the darkness instead of living in fellowship with God.

TRANS> But the LORD does not give up on us.

- He graciously finds a way to show us that we have indeed neglected His ordinances.

B. He charges us with our negligence in tithing and He calls this robbing Him.

- Look at His reply verse 8: **"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings."**

1. Tithes and offerings are expected of all people—not just Jews, not just Christians, but all people.
  - a. A tithe is a return to God of ten percent of the increase that He gives to us.
    - Israel was an agrarian society and they were given specific instructions about the tithe of their crops.
    - But that did not mean that a carpenter or a fisherman was not to tithe.
  - b. We see that long before God established Israel as a nation and gave them laws, the tithe was the portion that was assumed for worshippers to give to God.
    - In Genesis 14:20, when Abraham has victory in battle and Melchizedek the priest comes, Abraham gives a tithe to be offered to God first.
      - Like sacrifices, tithing was practiced in many cultures. We find records of it in Egypt, Syria, Babylon, Lydia, Assyria, and Carthage.
      - Noah even knew the difference between clean and unclean animals.
      - Since godly people practiced tithing and sacrifices with God’s approval, it indicates that God appointed these from the beginning.
    - Jacob is another biblical example of tithing before it was given to Israel.
      - When he left home fearing for his life, God appeared to him in a dream at Bethel and Jacob promised that if God would bring him back safely to Bethel, he would show that God was his God by giving a tenth of his increase in worship to God in that place.
        - In Gen 28:22, he says: **“And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”**
  - c. In Proverbs, the general principle is given that we are to give God the first of all our increase—not just crops and herds, but whatever we acquire:
    - Prov 3:9-10: **Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; <sup>10</sup> so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.**
  - d. And when Jesus came, He actually rebuked the Pharisees for being scrupulous about tithing while neglecting to look after their parents...
    - but He was careful to add that the tithing was still something they **ought to have done without leaving the others undone (Matthew 23:23).**
  - e. In the Old Testament, tithes and offerings were used to provide for worship ... to support the Levites who served at the temple and taught the people, for the offerings offered, for religious feasting, for the care of the poor and of widows.
    - In Nehemiah, the people are rebuked for neglecting to provide for the Levites so that they had to go back to work in the fields.
      - In 13:10-12, Nehemiah says: **I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. <sup>11</sup> So I contended with the rulers, and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their place. <sup>12</sup> Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.**

- f. In the New Testament, tithes and offerings are used for the support of those who preach the word, for expenses associated with worship, and for widows and the poor.
- Some legalists will argue that it can't be the same because it was the Levites and not the ministers that received it, but Paul understands that it is the principle that matters, not the details.
  - But in 1 Cor 9:13-14, Paul, without hesitation, applies the Old Testament law requiring support of the Levites to the support of those who preach the gospel.
    - He says: 1 Cor 9:13-14: **Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? <sup>14</sup> Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.**
    - This is the ordinance of the Lord for us today.
2. So the LORD is telling us in Malachi 3:8-9, that to give less than ten percent is to rob Him.
- If you are giving 5%, you are robbing God of the other 5%, not to mention what you might have given in offerings.
  - We don't like this sort of thing because it is too concrete.
    - But that is the very reason God brings this up—to show us that we are departing from His ordinances... either you are giving ten per cent or you are not.
    - We like more abstract commandments—and they are important too—like that we need to love God more or to be more considerate of our spouse...
      - But we'd rather not have an ordinance like tithing—it doesn't leave us with enough wiggle room.
      - But sometimes that is just what we need.
  - The same is true with something like not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together for worship on the Lord's Day.
    - That is an ordinance of God too.
    - The elders are given authority and responsibility to call us together in the name of the Lord for public worship—it is God's ordinance for us to comply—unless, of course, we are sick or something like that.
  - It is also true of God's prohibition against cursing, fornication, filthy talk, tax evasion—
    - As with tithes and offerings, there are aspects of these commands that are too concrete for our comfort.
    - But God gives us these things because we need some concrete standards.
  - Sure, a Pharisee may keep all of these outwardly, but even with them, Jesus pointed out specific concrete things to convict them.
    - This is not a bad thing.
    - It should not make us angry like Cain or the Pharisees.
      - It should rather lead us to repentance and to delight in Christ's provision for our sin and to thanksgiving that He cares enough to confront us.

## II. What are the consequences of neglecting God's ordinances?

- Let's take a moment to think this through.
- A. First, it brings God's displeasure and curse upon us
  - Malachi 3:9 says: **"You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation."**
  - 1. Think of how disrespectful it is to God to ignore God's ordinances.
    - Do you do that with your taxes to the civil government and expect to get away with it?
      - Will they accept it if you tell them, "Oh, but you see, I didn't make enough this year to pay my taxes..."
    - Or what if you went into Walmart and just carried stuff off and said, "Oh, but you see, I need these things and I couldn't afford to buy them."
  - 2. The Lord says that you are cursed with a curse when you don't bring all the tithes and offerings.
    - Robbing Him will never pay in the end.
    - It deprives you of His blessing and favour, and He often will bring financial hardship on you. I have seen this time and again with those who don't tithe.
    - God even says to test Him by bringing the whole tithe and see if He doesn't bless you with a fullness.
      - Verse 10-12: **Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. <sup>11</sup> And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the LORD of hosts; <sup>12</sup> "and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.**
  - 3. And notice that when all are not tithing, it affects the whole church.
    - God says, **"You have robbed Me, even this whole nation."**
      - Though we will be judged individually at the last day, the whole church (worldwide, nationally, denominationally, and locally) is judged when tithing is neglected.
      - When God sent famines and things to chasten His people for not tithing, the famine fell on those who were tithing as well as those who were not.
- B. Second, the neglect of God's ordinance of tithing removes food from God's table.
  - In verse 10, He says, **"Bring all the tithes into my storehouse that there may be food in my house."**
  - 1. What does that mean?
    - Doesn't God own the cattle on a thousand hills? Does He need our offerings? He provided our food, why not His own? What does this mean?
  - 2. What it means is that God has left it to us to provide for the ordinances of His house of worship.
    - As we saw, in the OT, tithes were for the Levites and for the temple with its sacrifices... in the NT it is for the ministry of the gospel.

- If you neglect your tithes and offerings, it hinders the church's worship and ministry—we can't call additional labourers as soon, and that limits ministry.
    - This is very practical. Churches are closing up today in North America because people do not support them.
- C. Third, by neglecting God's ordinances you do not receive the benefit of them.
1. If you only come to one service when there are two,
    - you and your children are only receiving half of the ministry that the elders are providing for you.
      - What if they only went to school half the time?
  2. The same is true if you do not pray and prepare yourself for worship—even making sure that you and your children get adequate rest...
    - and that you and they are fully engaged when you are here.
    - It is a good idea to ask questions afterward to see if they were listening.
- D. Fourth, when you neglect God's ordinances, you, on your part at least, destroy the church's ordinances.
- Some churches close up in the summer because people don't come...
    - many don't have a second service because people only come to one anyway... why go to the trouble?
    - many have dumbed down music or sermons because the people complained and would not attend if the ordinances were more substantial.
  - Moreover, if everyone is there all the time, we outgrow our church and it is that much sooner that we are able start daughter churches.
    - If only half the people come, we don't have enough people at worship to think about a second congregation.
- E. Fifth, it is a terrible witness in the community.
- If Christians are half-hearted about God's ordinances, do you think the world is going to be interested? Not likely!
    - If you only come half-heartedly yourself, what kind of success will you have in getting other people to come?
  - It is a church that is enthusiastic about God's ordinances that will draw others.
    - Do you care about the souls of those around you?
    - If people come and see an empty church with people sauntering in late, they will assume there is nothing going on there, and they will probably be right.
- F. Sixth, it discourages other believers and especially the elders and the minister.
- I know on my part, I often pray for each of you when I am preparing a sermon. I am burdened to deliver a message from God's word.
    - But if you hardly ever come, it is super discouraging—why should I keep praying for you? Why should I put in the effort? And why should the elders?
  - And it discourages other believers who have come to worship.
    - One of the great blessings of corporate worship is that we together exalt the Lord and together lift our prayers and together receive His word and sacrament.
  - And think of Christ Himself who intercedes for us from heaven... and how it grieves Him when we neglect the ordinances He uses to bless us.

TRANS> Much more could be said, but as you can see, neglecting God's ordinances has serious consequences.

- But now let's get to the heart of the matter.
- What is the root of the problem with us that we would neglect the ordinances of God?

### **III. When we neglect God's ordinances, the root of the problem is that we do not value His ordinances.**

A. God accuses His people of saying that His ordinances are of no benefit to them!

- Look at Malachi 3:13-15: **"Your words have been harsh [the word means *violent*] against Me," says the LORD, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' <sup>14</sup> You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? <sup>15</sup> So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.' "**

1. God considers it harsh toward Him when we say that the ordinances He has graciously given us as our loving Father are of no benefit to us.

- His ordinances should be the most important activity in your life!
- It is in these that we express our praise to Him, that we behold Him in His glory revealed in His word, that we learn of His grace and love, that we grow in our understanding of His will for our lives and make our commitments to Him as His people.
- It is in His ordinances that He feeds us and refreshes us and strengthens the bonds of love between us and Him, and with each other.

2. To say that the ordinances that He has appointed are of no benefit to us is to say that His saving work is of no value to us.

- It is to insult God and His Son and His gracious gift of salvation because that is what is ministered to us through His ordinances.
- Those who say there is no benefit in keeping His ordinances are like Israel when they came out of Egypt and said it was better for them in Egypt: Num 11:5-6: **"We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup> but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"**
  - How it infuriated God who had made them His people and given them His ordinances for them to say such things!

B. This contempt of God's ordinances stems from a failure to recognise our need of the cleansing God provides for His people in Christ.

- That is the subject of the first part of our reading... from chapter 2, verse 17, to chapter 3, verse 5. Take a look with me.

1. In 2:17, God describes how His people are accusing Him of not dealing justly concerning them.

- They said that He must delight in the wicked nations around them because these wicked nations seemed to be better off than they were...
  - They said, "Where is the God of justice?"



- It is very much the same as what we saw in 3:13-15 where they said that there is no benefit in serving the LORD.
  - You see, that is why they were neglecting their tithes and neglecting His ordinances in general—because they saw no profit in them.
    - So here in 2:17, they are saying, “Where is the God of justice? Why doesn’t He deal with all the wrong in the world and deliver us?”
2. And the LORD basically says, “Okay, I will come and administer justice, but you may not like what I do!”
- Look from chapter 3, verse 1—I will read it and make comments...
  - Mal 3:1: **“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.** [That, of course, refers to John the Baptist who was Christ’s forerunner who prepared people by calling them to confess their sins in preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Verse 1 continues:] **And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight** [A bit of sarcasm here—they *said* they wanted Him to come when they said *Where is the God of justice*, so He is saying... the Lord in whom you claim to delight will indeed come]. **Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.**
  - But then in verse 2, He asks them a serious question: **“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 launderer’s soap.”**
    - In their minds, the reason He needed to come was to destroy the bad people around them and give them the prosperity they wanted.
      - But the real reason He was coming was to cleanse *them—His people—* from *their* sins.
      - That was what the all the ordinances of the temple testified to—*their* need for cleansing from sin before a holy God.
  - Even those very sacrifices at the temple conducted by the sons of Levi that testified to their need to be cleansed from sin by God needed to be purified.
    - Thus verse 3 says: **He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.**
    - He will make their offerings acceptable... verse 4: **“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years.**
  - But you see, many of the people of Israel were not looking for cleansing for *them*—they did not value *that*.
    - Therefore, God’s ordinances that primarily testified to God’s marvellous cleansing from sin and to helping them put off sin and put on holiness were of little interest to them.
  - For them, the coming of the LORD would not be at all what they were looking for—indeed, look at verse 5: **“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against**

**those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.**

- These were covenant people, outwardly Israelites, but they had never repented of their sin... so when the LORD came, He would testify against them—it would be a ministry of condemnation to those that did not repent.
  - They were not looking for a Saviour to cleanse them from their sin—and that is why they found little of worth in God’s ordinances now.
    - As far as their outward circumstances in the world, they looked around and in many cases the nations around them that did not serve God were better off than they were.
3. And that, you see, is the reason people do not value the ordinances of God today.
- If you do not delight in Christ as the one who cleanses you from your sin...
    - by whose death you have full forgiveness and who is at work in you to bring you from sin to more and more holiness and growth in His grace,
      - then you have little to praise God for... little to pray about (except that the God of justice would deal with all the bad people and make you healthy and prosperous), and little learn from God’s word.
    - His ordinances are not for the self-righteous.
      - That’s the reason His church so often neglects His ordinances and replaces them or modifies them with their own innovations.
    - This was the condition of the covenant people as a whole when Malachi wrote these words, as it was when Christ came, as it is today.
      - That is why there is little interest in supporting the ordinances of God with tithes or real heartfelt engagement.
        - Verse 14 again: **“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?’ ”**

#### **IV. But praise God that there are among His people those who truly do delight in Christ and His ordinances.**

- These are always among His people.
    - They are spoken of in Malachi 3:16-18.
- A. They are described as those who feared the LORD.
- See that in verse 16? It says, **Then those that feared the LORD.**
    - It is not all the people or even most of them... but some of them.
    - But what does this mean—that they feared the LORD?
1. Fearing the LORD means that they deeply respect Him as God.
- They understand that as their creator, He has all authority in heaven and earth.
  - They understand that they, along with the whole human race, have sinned against Him and deserve to perish under His wrath and curse.
  - To them, He is real and these truths are real.
    - And for that reason they are thrilled with His promise of forgiveness of sin and cleansing by His grace that is set forth in His ordinances.

2. And because they fear Him, they talk to each other about Him.
  - You can see that in verse 16 as well... **Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,**
    - And at the end of the verse it tells you what they are talking about—God’s name. It says that they are those who **fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.**
    - His name is all that is revealed about Him—His names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works... the things that are revealed in His ordinances.
      - He Himself is revealed to us as a pure and holy God who is also a gracious Saviour for us sinners who come to Him for His cleansing.
        - This delights those who fear Him... I mean, what could be better than to have His salvation?

B. Look at how God responds to those who fear Him.

1. He notices them—they stand out among the people as those who fear Him.
  - Verse 16 says: **Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them;** [He sees that we delight in Him and in His saving work] **so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.**
    - Kings kept books of remembrance where they recorded the good deeds of their subjects that they might reward them.
      - The point is that God takes note of those who fear Him and remembers who they are that He may reward them.
2. And look at what God promises to do concerning those that fear Him!
  - Look at what He says about them (verse 17). Two things.
    - a. First, He says: **“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels.”**
      - Just think of it—not because they are good, but because they come to Him for cleansing—He claims them as His own!
        - He takes them to be His jewels—those whose purpose will be to shine with His glory—to glorify Him in the beauty He gives them for their ashes—the holiness He gives them in place of their sin.
      - Oh there is nothing so good as this!
        - How full of happiness this ought to make us!
    - b. He goes on to say, **“And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”**
      - They deserve to perish for their sins the same as anybody else—but He spares them as His own sons who serve Him.
        - They are as His Son is to Him...
        - He loves them and He will not condemn them because He has provided for their cleansing through Christ.
    - c. Remember, all they do is delight in Him as the God who cleanses His people from their sins—as shown in His ordinances.
      - They see that they are sinners and they come to Him to be forgiven and transformed—

- C. And the outcome of this special treatment of those that fear Him?
1. God says, verse 18: **Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.**
    - When God makes those who fear Him His jewels and spares them from judgment, then it will be very easy to see the benefits being His people!
      - Oh what a difference there will be between those who fear Him and those who don't!
  2. This is in answer to the complaint of the covenant people in general—most of them unbelievers—that there is no noticeable benefit for those who keep God's ordinances.
    - All the way through Malachi, they complain that they have little to show for being God's people.
      - We saw their complaint at the end of chapter 2 when they asked where the God of justice was...
      - And their complaint in verse 14 that it was useless to serve Him.
        - That was the reason they went away from His ordinances.
  3. But God assures them here at the end of chapter 3 that the distinction will be unmistakable even for these hypocrites on the Day of Judgment.
    - Already it is clear to those who know His salvation.
    - They would never say that there is no benefit in serving God and in keeping His ordinances!
      - In these ordinances they are connected with Him, as sinners, as the God who cleanses them from all their sins.
      - To them, God's ordinances are priceless—of extreme value.
        - A tithe is a small price to pay to have these ordinances among them.