

From the Book of Malachi.

THE UNIVERSE UNDER GOD.

PART 10: TWO WORLDS OF INFLUENCE: REVEALED TRUTH & HUMAN COUNTER-AGENCY, 2:4-9.

#1. The priests (Levitical priesthood) were called to stand between the Almighty & the world of men. This is the positionality assigned to the church of God.

#2. "True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity", v.6.

#3. The very fact of revelation from God ("My covenant") creates obligation, responsibility, duty & privilege. Men of unquestioned character, belief, purity & purpose are required. Courage, preparation & competence are the personal qualities that support the covenant.

#4. The priests were to push the terms of the covenant, the terms of the word of God into immediate historical conditions. One of those conditions is ever present: HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY.

#5. "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, v.7.

#6. A very sober, substantial mission. Turning people back "from iniquity", demands intervention, imposed contradiction, conflict, risk, boldness & immovable conviction. THEIR JOB WAS "TO HOLD THE LINE"!

#7. "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way...", v.8.

#8. The priests were vulnerable to the world, corruptible & estranged from the word of God. No solution, they, they were part of the problem.

#9. Sacrilege! The priesthood had been co-opted by HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY. This is the forever problem. And so they "...caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts", v.8.

#10. The preservation of the relation between God & the people was the tragic victim. A relation (covenant) "...of life and peace...", v.5.

#11. Question: Does the contemporary church want to live worthy of the office of "...the messenger of the Lord of hosts"?, v.7.

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PART 11: THE SHIFTING AXIS, 2:10-12.

#1. The frontiers of Israel were not geographic nor political; they were spiritual. The prophet proclaimed that Israel had transgressed their spiritual frontiers & exceeded revealed parameters of behavior & morality.

#2. "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?, v.10. Social sinews were broken; no one could trust anyone! Effective social collapse.

#3. The explanation: THE ISRAELITES HAD VOLUNTARILY DISSOLVED ALL OF THE SPIRITUAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THEMSELVES & THE NATIONS AROUND THEM.

#4. None of that was absolutely necessary. Israel, as an aggregate, had, over time, shifted the axis of existence from the Supernatural-->to humanistic counter-agency.

#5. Along with this tragic exchange came repercussions: spiritual, cultural, social, moral & relational. Treachery, abomination & the profane had become characteristic.

#6. "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god", v.11.

#7. There is no indication that this was not a conscious decision on their part. Israel had become apostate! They supported a religion devoted to humanistic counter-agency.

#8. The foundations are always tending to shift toward the humanistic; the priests (the preachers) were positioned by "the Lord of hosts" to defend against the ever present humanistic downturn.

#9. The preachers, themselves, preferred the humanistic counter-agency. They had led the way & provided a manufactured "justification" for it. The preachers fostered the deception.

#10. Consequences were grave, v.12. Chiefly causal, was their treatment of revelation; "to profane the covenant of our fathers", v.10. The contemporary church is no less susceptible to humanistic counter-agency than was Israel. The integrity of the Bible is usually under severe assault.

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PART 12: THE REMNANT OF THE SPIRIT, 2:13-17.

#1. The "Spirit" (v.15) must refer to the Holy Spirit. His work in time & through time has produced knowledge of the greater absolute reality. Defy that, & human life takes a disturbing jolt.

#2. "There is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, ...weeping...groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand", v.13. The people & the priesthood were no longer presentable before the Lord; let alone their offerings. The Almighty had refused them. Futility of religion was, at least, one immediate condition. They were emotional, despondent & evidently confused. Those are symptoms of people without spiritual direction & perception.

#3. Again, came back a redirectional question: "Yet you say, 'For what reason?'" v.14. "...Because the Lord has been a witness...", v.14. The real King of Israel had watched their behavior at the deepest levels. Example: marriage. The union between husband & wife is SPIRITUALLY REGULATED. But that phenomenon had become meaningless. The (a)marital relation between a man & his wife was & is correlated to the (b)presence of the eternal Witness & (c)regulated by revealed terms of conduct.

#4. The men "...dealt treacherously..." with their wives. Humanistic counter-agency was destroying a spiritual structure.

#5. Marriage is not, primarily, a social arrangement subject to social criteria; it is a covenant relation between husband, wife & the Lord of hosts. "...she is your companion and your wife by covenant", 14.

#6. Temptation, fleshly desires, freedom of will are always present. Those things were not the real problem.

#7. The causal factor was the absence of the "Spirit". Not even "...a remnant of the Spirit..." remained among them, v.15.

#8. Integrity of revealed truth was no longer a working preventative; no longer could it put a cap on their thought, speech & behavior. Sound familiar?

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PART 13: THE REMNANT OF THE SPIRIT, 2:13-17.

#1. "But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth", v.15.

#2. A "remnant" is a fraction of full devotion to the supernatural authority of the Holy Spirit. Yet Malachi reports that even that much cognizance of His revealed truth administered a prohibition on treachery toward one's wife. It is a base to build on.

#3. "...seeking a godly offspring..." was pursued without treachery. The relation between the teaching of the Holy Spirit--& one's own spirit ("your spirit") was determinant. This testifies to the fact that the spirit of the man precedes conduct. The spiritual (intangible, immaterial) part of us reveals itself in time & circumstance.

#4. Condition of soul is precedent to human reason; which is made relative to it. The Holy Spirit through His published covenant makes known the rules for thought, speech & behavior. Human conduct partakes of one's spiritual state of being.

#5. The word of God is supreme & determinant over all interests, personal & collective. If condition of soul sets the precedent for conduct, then, one must "take heed" to that continuum: Holy Spirit-->Covenant-->personal spirit-->conduct.

#6. "'For I hate divorce', says the Lord, the God of Israel...", v.16. Another way of saying that the Almighty hates treachery. A believer is not to "...cover(s) his garment with wrong...". So, revealed truth, the Holy Spirit & a transformed personal spirit conditions reasoning & conduct.

#7. Revelation makes objective the will of God. It is not subject to human opinion. "You have wearied the Lord with your words...", v.17. Their representations were false relative to scripture. "...How have we wearied Him?..." Their utterance was humanistic counter-language: "...Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them...". Evil was normative.

#8. Imagine what could be prevented in the world, if men in time & circumstance pursued revealed truth, as it is given. "...the God of justice..." is witness!

#9. Psychology is not sufficient to explain human personal behavior.

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PART 14: ABSOLUTES & VALUES.

#1. There is a term that ought to be banished from our working vocabulary. The term is "values".

#2. Values are generated by consensus & are subject to changing societal influences. However absolutes are revealed by God & are immutable in time & space.

#3. The advent of scientific skepticism has proposed questions & doubts regarding the existence of God. A notable & literary nineteenth-century philosopher (Nietzsche) remarked that if God is dead (he meant irrelevant) then there are no absolutes to be considered. In just such a case, mankind can only appeal to "values". All of which are quite relative to mankind within the temporal dimension.

#4. There is a branch of philosophy called "analytic". Analytic philosophy is concerned with the critique & appraisal of scientific propositions. The idea is to improve them.

#5. "Christian values" is an unfortunate term. Its use implies that biblical teaching is on a par with the accepted understanding of "values".

#6. This situation could conduce to the recognition of something we may call "Analytic Christianity". A bad development. A mixture of scripture & human wisdom. Contemporary opinions about the Bible: Its supposed cultural dependence, its anachronistic language & customs, the interpretive effect of human wisdom, literary criticism have all but reduced biblical teaching to the level of "values".

#7. Amounting to a neutralization of revealed truth; the Bible is shorn of its absolutism! "The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi" (1:1) does not portend toward "values". The prophet deals in absolute terms. The priesthood had treated the "oracle" as "values laden", to be jettisoned when convenient, 2:8.

#8. "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts", 2:7.

#9. Revealed absolutes cannot be subject to time itself, historical conditions, human experience nor human reason.

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PART 15: THE REVEALED UNDERSTANDING OF TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY, 3:1-7.

#1. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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", v.1.

#2. TIME, LIFE & HISTORY ARE ABSOLUTELY RELATIVE TO SUPERNATURAL, ULTIMATE REALITY. Necessarily, then, the world we live in is not the final & ultimate reality. It cannot be the pinnacle of existence. The Levitical priesthood was charged with right teaching about all things temporal. The "Lord of hosts" shapes time, history & materiality as He wills. John will come into time declaring this truth. Messiah "will suddenly come to His temple". The priests had been given the obligation to teach Israel the true nature of the temporal dimension: its relativity before God. Unquestionably time is fully relative to the word of God. Revelation, in all its forms, stands as the AXIS OF UNDERSTANDING. Time, history & materiality are not, nor can they be free-standing.

#3. To recognize that there is absolute reality & relative reality is an act of faith. The "temple" was surely symbolic of this distinction.

#4. The teaching priests (2:6,7) were obliged by the Lord to persistently maintain this understanding of time, history & materiality. It brooks no compromise.

#5. However, in the vacuum of revealed truth, the true understanding of time was lost, even reversed. It is a SIN OF PERCEPTION to believe that God, revelation & supernatural reality are all relative to this world!

#6. Yet that was how Israel decided to live. Correction of such FUNDAMENTAL ERROR was the province of those called to teach, the preachers.

#7. Now the question: How shall we live in this world of time, history & materiality?

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PART 16: THE REVEALED UNDERSTANDING OF TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY, 3:1-7.

#1. Time, history & materiality are constituted by the Almighty as an OPEN SYSTEM, v.1. Empiricism posits a closed system. Nothing gets in; nothing gets out. The theory necessarily assumes that there is nothing that exists outside of & beyond the temporal order that could possibly intervene. But the prophet defies the theoretics. There is God, standing beyond time, history & materiality, introducing supernatural force-->into temporality. Time is, therefore, subject to supernatural modification. Fear is predicated to some non-trivial degree upon the assumption of a CLOSED SYSTEM. When gripped by overwhelming fear, the theoretics of the supposed CLOSED SYSTEM tend to overrule faith in revelation. Historical conditions, one begins to believe, are a one-way street with predictable outcomes. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger...". The universe, historical conditions & personal circumstances are hardly closed to supernatural intervention. The famous Confederate general, "Stonewall" Jackson, cautioned us to avoid the personal weakness of "TAKING THE COUNSEL OF YOUR FEARS!" The Bible teaches that the theoretics of the CLOSED SYSTEM are another form of HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY. "...He is coming, says the Lord of hosts". A central idea in the Book of Malachi is the contradiction between between SUPERNATURAL FORCE-->coming into time & HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY<--directed against it. The priests were obligated to correct the false theory of the CLOSED SYSTEM. And with the sunset of its vanity, hope begins to shine. Hope against a contrarian world, hope against distressing circumstances, hope against unreasoning fear. TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY ARE RELATIONAL! All other perceptions are incompatible with the Scripture. Reading the Bible from within the embrace of CLOSED SYSTEM THEORETICS ensures humanistic response.

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PART 17: THE REVEALED MEANING OF TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY, 3:1-7.

#1. TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY BEHAVE IN COUNTER-INTUITIVE WAYS UNDER THE WILL OF GOD, UNDER THE WORD OF GOD, UNDER THE POWER OF GOD, v.1.

#2. This means that physics & physiology, referred to as DISCOURSE CONSTRAINTS, do not have controlling determinant influence over time.

#3. DISCOURSE CONSTRAINTS applied to time, history & materiality stipulate that any language use violating what physics limits & or what human physiology is competent to achieve is meaningless.

#4. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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".

#5. Those words capture the miraculous conception of Messiah. Yet discourse constraints dictate that human tissues do not & cannot behave in that way. It's too counter-intuitive &, in consequence, meaningless.

#6. Every promise that God ever made to us covering time, history & materiality demands the counter-intuitive! Forcing discourse constraints upon the Bible is but another attempt at HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY.

#7. All the biblical miracles demonstrate that everything temporal behaves in counter-intuitive ways under the power of God.

#8. However, human beings immersed in the phenomenon of experience, often find scriptural counter-intuitive teaching about time, history & materiality to be too much to swallow! Such biblical ideas appear risky, uncertain & dangerous.

#9. Examples abound in the sacred language manifold of believers who, in their own times, were confronted by the counter-intuitive meaning of revelation. It is nothing new.



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PART 18: THE REVEALED MEANING OF TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY, 3:2-7.

#1. TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY IS SUBJECT TO ABSOLUTE INTERVENTION.

#2. Absolute intervention comes at any time, in any manner & with whatever magnitude of supernatural force. Such intervention is fully independent of time, history & materiality.

#3. "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", v.2.

#4. The Almighty is the irresistible force. Jesus' appearance in history made no claim upon Him. Culture, society did not color His thought, speech & behavior. He was among men but independent of them.

#5. "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness", v.3.

#6. Never intimidated by historical conditions, Messiah came to confront, contradict & correct. Courage & conviction were His mantle. Jesus did not come to "fit in". Compromise was not on His compass. "Righteousness" was His pursuit. The Levitical priesthood was corrupted by their own devices.

#7. Worshipful "offerings" were made that were categorically unacceptable to the Almighty! Jesus was sent into time, history & materiality on behalf of the God who despises HUMANISTIC COUNTER-AGENCY.

#8. Every believer in every age, every church in every contemporary setting has inherited that exact same purpose! Believers individually & in the aggregate are not to be liable to temporal influences. Believers are called to confront & contradict any departure from revealed truth. The Lord was not interested in POPULAR APPEAL; He was compelled to generate repentance.

#9. "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years", v.4.

#10. Revelation, itself, cannot be improved upon. The reading of the Bible in its integrity is not to be influenced by historical conditions. Time, history & materiality are not the starting point for understanding the truth of scripture. The starting point is the grammatical structure of the biblical language manifold.

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PART 19: THE REVEALED MEANING OF TIME, HISTORY & MATERIALITY, 3:1-7.

#1. TIME, HISTORY & was MATERIALITY & MEN IN TIME ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD, v.5. "Then I will draw near to you for judgment...against the sorcerers...adulterers...those who swear falsely...those who oppress the wage earner...and oppress the widow...and the orphan...and those who turn aside the alien...those who do not fear Me..."

#2. Surely this is not an exhaustive list of behaviors deemed punishable by the Almighty, it is exemplary. One takes note that the "judgment" mentioned here is effected in time, history & materiality. This is not DEFERRED JUDGEMENT until the well known day of judgement. It is forced into, not merely insinuated into the temporal reality.

#3. The growth of appeal to the occult ("sorcerers") is an endangerment to mankind & their social structures. Adultery is a strategic threat to the stability of any people. Not just by its natural effects but by the danger of supernatural intervention. Bearing false witness corrupts reputations & robs civil justice systems of trustworthiness. Oppression of wage earners & their rightful rewards deplete the well-being of those who bear much of the exertions of labored production in any society. Blatant abuse & neglect of widows & orphans is an indictment against the condition of soul of any nation. Mistreatment of aliens (not part of the covenant between God & the people of God) is forbidden. Judgement will fall sooner or later upon those who do not "fear God". And their behavior shows that.

#4. Worldly doctrines of "Social Justice" & "Social Engineering" are attempts at grabbing power. The theory being that exertion of more government power, more legislation over individual behavior will crystallize into a just society.

#5. But that has never been humanistically achieved. The true solution is personal repentance & heartfelt devotion to revealed truth. Modern history has been adrift on a sea of blood spilled by those obsessed with the famous "will to power"!