

CHAPTER 2

There are two great ordinances which divine wisdom has instituted, the wretched profanation of both of which is complained of and sharply reproved in this chapter.

I. The ordinance of the ministry, which is peculiar to the church, and is designed for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned by those who were themselves dignified with the honour of it and entrusted with the business of it. The priests profaned the holy things of God; this they are here charged with; their sin is aggravated, and they are severely threatened for it (v. 1-9).

II. The ordinance of marriage, which is common to the world of mankind, and was instituted for the maintaining and keeping up of that; this was profaned both by the priests and by the people, in marrying strangers (v. 11, 12), treating their wives unkindly (v. 13), putting them away (v. 16), and herein dealing treacherously (v. 10, 14, 15). And that which was at the bottom of this and other instances of profaneness and downright atheism, thinking God altogether such a one as themselves, which was, in effect, to say, There is no God (v. 17). And these reproofs to them are warnings to us.

301 MALACHI 2:1-9

CHARGE AGAINST THE PRIESTS

What was said in the foregoing chapter was directed to the priests (³⁰¹Malachi 1:6): *Thus saith the Lord of hosts to you, O priests! that despise my name.* But the crimes there charged upon them they were guilty of as sacrificers, and for those they might think it some excuse that they offered what the people brought, and therefore that, if they were not so good as they should be, it was not their fault, but the people's; and therefore here the corruptions there complained of are traced to the source and spring of them — the faults the priests were guilty of as teachers of the people, as expositors of the law and the lively oracles; and this is a part of their office which still remains in the hands of gospel-ministers (who

are appointed to be pastors and teachers, like the priests under the law, though not sacrificers, like them), and therefore by them the admonition here is to be particularly regarded. If the priests had given the people better instructions, the people would have brought better offerings; and therefore the blame returns upon the priests: *“And now, O you priests! this commandment is purely for you (v. 1), who should have taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord, and how to worship him aright.”* Note, The governors of the churches are under God's government, and to him they are accountable. Even for those who command God has commandments. Nay (v. 4), *you shall know that I have sent these commandments for you.* They should know it either,

1. By the power of the Spirit working with the word for their conviction and reformation: *“You shall know its original by its efficacy, whence it comes by what it does.”* When the word of God to us brings about, and carries on, the work of God in us, then we cannot but know that he sent it to us, that it is not the word of *Malachi — God's messenger*, but it is indeed the word of God, and is sent, not only in general to all, but in particular to us. Or,

2. By the accomplishment of the threatenings denounced against them: *“You shall know, to your cost, that I have sent this commandment to you, and it shall not return void.”*

Let us now see what this commandment is which is for the priests, which, they must know, was sent to them; and let us put into method the particulars of the charge.

I. Here is a recital of the covenant God made with that sacred tribe, which was their commission for their work and the patent of their honour: The *Lord of hosts sent a commandment* to them, for the establishing of this covenant (v. 4), for his covenant is said to be the *word which he commanded* (^{1945B} Psalm 105:8); and he sent *this commandment* by the prophet at this time for the re-establishing of it, that it might not be cut off for their persisting in the violation of it. Let the sons of Levi know then (and particularly the sons of Aaron) what honour God put upon their family, and what a trust he reposed in them (v. 5): *My covenant was with him of life and peace.* Besides the covenant of peculiarity made with all the house of Israel, there was a covenant of priesthood made with one family, that they should do the services, and, upon condition of that,

should enjoy all the privileges, of the priest's office — that, as Israel was a peculiar nation, a *kingdom of priests*, so the house of Aaron should be a family of priests, set apart for the service and honour of God, to bear up his name in that nation, as they were to bear up his name among the nations; both the one and the other, in different degrees, were to *give glory unto God's name*, v. 2. God covenanted with them as his menial servants, obliged them to do his work and promised to own and accept them in it. This is called *his covenant of life and peace*, because it was intended for the support of religion, which brings life and peace to the souls of men — life to the dead, peace to the distressed, or because life and peace were by this covenant promised to those priests that faithfully and conscientiously discharged their duty; they shall have peace, which implies security from all evil, and life, which comprises the summary of all good. What is here said of the covenant of priesthood is true of the covenant of grace made with all believers, as spiritual priests; it is a covenant of life and peace; it assures all believers of life and peace, everlasting peace, everlasting life, all happiness both in this world and in that to come. This covenant was made with the whole tribe of Levi when they were distinguished from the rest of the tribes, were not numbered with them, but were *taken from among them and appointed over the tabernacle of testimony* (^{<0419>}Numbers 1:49, 50), by virtue of which appointment God says (^{<0412>}Numbers 3:12), *The Levites shall be mine*. It was made with Aaron when he and his sons were taken to *minister unto the Lord in the priest's office*, (^{<0211>}Exodus 28:1. Aaron is therefore called *the saint of the Lord*, (^{<0416>}Psalms 106:16. It was made with Phinehas and his family, a branch of Aaron's, upon a particular occasion, (^{<0212>}Numbers 25:12, 13. And there the covenant of priesthood is called, as here, the *covenant of peace*, because by it peace was made and kept between God and Israel. These great blessings of life and peace, contained in that covenant, God *gave to him*, to Levi, to Aaron, to Phinehas; he promised life and peace to them and their posterity, entrusted them with these benefits for the use and behoof of God's Israel; they received that they might give, as Christ himself did, (^{<0218>}Psalms 68:18. now, for the further opening of this covenant, observe,

1. The considerations upon which it was grounded: It was *for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name*. The tribe of Levi gave a signal proof of their holy fear of God, and their reverence for his name, when they appeared so bravely against the worshippers of the golden calf (^{<0226>}Exodus 32:26); and for their zeal in that matter God

bestowed this blessing upon them and invited them to consecrate themselves unto him. Phinehas also showed himself zealous in the fear of God and his judgments when, to stay the plague, he stabbed *Zimri and Cozbi*, ^{<156>}Psalm 106:30, 31. Note, Those, and those only, who fear God's name, can expect the benefit of the *covenant of life and peace*; and those who give proofs of their zeal for God shall without fail be recompensed in the glorious privileges of the Christian priesthood. Some read this, not as the consideration of the grant, but as the condition of it: *I gave them to him, provided that he should fear before me*. If God grant us life and peace, he expects we should fear before him.

2. The trust that was lodged in the priests by this covenant, v. 7. They were hereby made *the messengers of the Lord of hosts*, messengers of that covenant of life and peace, not mediators of it, but only messengers, or ambassadors, employed to treat of the terms of peace between God and Israel. The priests were *God's mouth* to his people, from whom they must receive instructions according to the lively oracles. This was the office to which Levi was advanced; because, in his zeal for God, he *did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children*, therefore *they shall teach Jacob God's judgments*, ^{<157>}Deuteronomy 33:9, 10. Note, It is an honour to God's servants to be employed as his messengers and to be sent on his errands. Angels have their name thence. Haggai was called *the Lord's messenger*. This being their office, observe,

(1.) What is the duty of ministers: *The priests' lips should keep knowledge*, not keep it from the people, but keep it for them. Ministers must be men of knowledge; for how are those able to teach others the things of God who are themselves unacquainted with those things or unready in them? They must keep knowledge, must furnish themselves with it and retain what they have got, that they may be like the *good householder*, who *brings out of his treasury things new and old*. Not only their heads, but their lips, must keep knowledge; they must not only have it, but they must have it ready, must have it at hand, must have it (as we say) at their tongue's end, to be communicated to others as there is occasion. Thus we read of *wisdom in the lips of him that has understanding*, with which they *feed many*, ^{<158>}Proverbs 10:13, 21.

(2.) What is the duty of the people: *They should seek the law at his mouth*; they should consult the priests as God's messengers, and not only hear the message, but ask questions upon it, that they may the better understand it

and that mistakes concerning it may be prevented and rectified. We are all concerned fully to know *what the will of the Lord is*, to know it distinctly and certainly; we should be desirous to know it and therefore inquisitive concerning it. *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* We must not only consult the written word (*to the law and to the testimony*), but must have recourse to God's messengers, and desire instruction and advice from them in the affairs of our souls as we do from physicians and lawyers concerning our bodies and estates. Not but that ministers ought to lay down the law of God to those who do not enquire concerning it, or desire the knowledge of it (they must *instruct those that oppose themselves*, ⁵¹²⁵ Timothy 2:25, as well as those that offer themselves), but it is people's duty to apply to them for instruction, not only to hear, but to ask questions. *Watchman, what of the night?* Thus *if you will enquire, enquire you*; see ²³⁰⁸ Isaiah 21:8, 11, 12. People should not only seek comfort at the mouth of their ministers, but should seek the law there; for, if we found in the way of duty, we shall find it the way of comfort.

II. Here is a memorial of the fidelity and zeal of many of their predecessors in the priest's office, which are mentioned as an aggravation of their sin in degenerating from such honourable ancestors and deserting such illustrious examples, and as a justification of God in withdrawing from them those tokens of his presence which he had granted to those that kept close to him. See here (v. 6) how good the godly priest was, whose steps they should have trod in, and what good he did, God's grace working with him.

1. See how good he was. He was ready and mighty in the scriptures: *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for the use of those that *asked the law at his mouth*; and in all his discourses there appeared more or less of the law of truth. Every thing he said was under the government of that law, and with it he governed others. He spoke as one having authority (every word was a law), and as one that had both wisdom and integrity — it was a *law of truth*, and truth is a law, it has a commanding power. It is by truth that Christ rules. *The law of truth was in his mouth*, for his resolutions of cases of conscience proposed to him were such as might be depended upon; his opinion was good law. *Iniquity was not found in his lips*; he did not *handle the word of God deceitfully*, to please men, to serve a turn, or to make an interest for himself, but told all that consulted him what the law was, whether it were pleasing or displeasing. He did not pronounce that unclean which was clean, nor that clean which was unclean, as one of the

rabbin expounds it. And his conversation was of a piece with his doctrine. God himself gives him this honourable testimony: *He walked with me in peace and equity*. He did not think it enough to talk of God, but he walked with him. The temper of his mind, and the tenour of his life, were of a piece with his doctrine and profession; he lived a life of communion with God, and made it his constant care and business to please him; he lived like a priest that was chosen to *walk before God*, ^{<WEB>}1 Samuel 2:30. His conversation was quiet; he was meek and *gentle towards all men*, was a pattern and promoter of love; he walked with God in peace, was himself peaceable and a great peace-maker. His conversation was also honest; he did no wrong to any, but made conscience of rendering to all their due: *He walked with me in equity*, or rectitude. We must not, for peace-sake, transgress the rules of equity, but must keep the peace as far as is consistent with justice. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable*. Ministers, of all men, are concerned to *walk with God in peace and equity*, that they may be *examples to the flock*.

2. See what good he did; he answered the ends of his advancement to that office: *He did turn many away from iniquity*; he made it his business to do good, and God crowned his endeavours with wonderful success; he helped to save many a soul from death, and there are multitudes now in heaven blessing God that ever they knew him. Ministers must lay out themselves to the utmost for the conversion of sinners, and even among those that have the name of Israelites there is need of conversion-work, there are many to be turned from iniquity; and they must reckon it an honour, and a rich reward of their labour, if they may but be instrumental herein. It is God only that by his grace can turn men from iniquity, and yet it is here said of a pious laborious minister that he turned men from iniquity as a worker together with God, and an instrument in his hand; and *those that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars*, ^{<WEB>}Daniel 12:3. Note, Those ministers, and those only, are likely to turn men from iniquity, that preach sound doctrine and live good lives, and both according to the scripture; for, as one of the rabbin observes here, *When the priest is upright many will be upright*.

III. Here is a high charge drawn up against the priests of the present age, who violated the covenant of the priesthood and went directly contrary both to the rules and to the examples that were set before them. Many particulars of their sins we had in the foregoing chapter, and we find (Nehemiah 13) that many corruptions had crept into the church of the Jews

at this time, mixed marriages, admitting strangers into the house of God, profanation of the sabbath-day, which were all owing to the carelessness and unfaithfulness of the priests; here it is charged upon them in general,

1. That they transgressed the rule: *You have departed out of the way* (v. 8), out of the good way which God has prescribed to you, and which your godly ancestors walked before you in. It is ill with a people when those whose office it is to guide them in the way do themselves depart out of it: “*You have not kept my ways, not kept in them yourselves, nor done your part to keep others in them,*” v. 9.

2. That they betrayed their trust: “*You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, have violated it, have contradicted the great intentions of it, and have done what in you lay to frustrate and defeat them; you have managed your office as if it were designed only to feed you fat and make you great; and not for the glory of God and the good of the souls of men.*” This was a corrupting of the covenant of Levi; it was perverting the ends of the office, and making it subservient to those sensual secular things over which it ought always to have dominion. And thus they forfeited the benefit of that covenant, and corrupted it to themselves; they *made it void*, and lost the life and peace which were by it settled upon them. We have no reason to expect God should perform his part of the covenant if we do not make conscience of performing ours. Another instance of their betraying their trust was that they were *partial in the law*, v. 9. In the law given to them they would pick and choose their duty; this they would do and that they would not do, just as they pleased; this is the fashion of hypocrites, while those whose hearts are upright with God have a *respect to all his commandments*. Or, rather, in the law they were to lay down to the people; in this they *knew faces* (so the word is); they *accepted persons*; they wilfully misinterpreted and misapplied the law, either to cross those they had a spleen against or to countenance those they had a kindness for; they would wink at those sins in some which in others they would be sharp upon, according as their interest or inclination led them. God is *no respecter of persons* in making his law, nor will he in reckoning for the breach of it; he *regards not the rich more than the poor*, and therefore his priests, his ministers, misrepresent him, and do him a great deal of dishonour, if, in doctrine or discipline, they be respecters of persons. See ~~1~~ Timothy 5:21.

3. That they did a great deal of mischief to the souls of men, which they should have helped to save: *You have caused many to stumble at the law*, not only to *fall in the law* (as the margin reads it) by transgressing it, taught and encouraged to do so by the examples of the priests, but to *stumble at the law*, by contracting prejudices against it, as if the law were the minister of sin and gave countenance to it. Thus Hophni and Phinehas by their wickedness *made the sacrifices of the Lord to be abhorred*, ^{<WD17>}1 Samuel 2:17. There are many to whom the law of God is a *stumbling-block*, the gospel of Christ a *savour of death unto death*, and Christ himself a *rock of offence*; and nothing contributes more to this than the vicious lives of those that make a profession of religion, by which men are tempted to say, "It is all a jest." This is properly a *scandal*, a *stone of stumbling*; there is no good reason why it should be so to any, but *woe to those by whom this offence comes*.

4. That, when they were under the rebukes both of the word and of the providence of God for it, they *would not hear*, that is, they would not heed, they *would not lay it to heart*; they were not at all grieved or shamed for their sin, nor affected with the tokens of God's displeasure which they were under. What we hear does us no good unless we lay it to heart and admit the impressions of it: *You will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name*, by repentance and reformation. *Therefore* we should lay to heart the things of God, that we may give glory to the name of God, may praise him in and for all that whereby he has made himself known. It is bad in any to rob God of his honour, but worst in ministers, whose office and business it is to bear up his name and to give him the glory due to it.

IV. Here is a record of the judgments God had brought upon these priests for their profaneness, and their profanation of holy things.

1. They had lost their comfort (v. 2): *I have already cursed your blessings*. They had not the comfort of their work, which is the satisfaction of doing good; for the blessings with which they, as priests, blessed the people, God was so far from saying *Amen* to that he turned them into curses, as he did Balaam's curses into blessings. That profane people should not have the favour of receiving God's blessings, nor those profane priests the honour of conferring and conveying them, but both should lie under the tokens of his wrath. Nor had they the comfort of their wages, for the blessings with which God blessed them were turned into a curse to them by their abuse of them; they could not receive them as the gifts of his

favour when they had made themselves so obnoxious to his displeasure by not laying to heart the reproofs given them.

2. They had lost their credit (v. 9): *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people.* While they glorified God he dignified them and supported their reputation, and a great interest they had in the love and esteem of the people while they did their duty and *walked with God in peace and equity*; every one had a value and veneration for them; they were truly styled *the reverend, the priests*; but when they forsook the ways of God, and corrupted the covenant of Levi, they thereby made themselves not only mean, but vile, in the eyes even of the common people, who, the more they honoured the order, the more they hated the men that were a dishonour to it. Their conduct, their misconduct, had a direct tendency to this, and God owns his hand in it, and will have it looked upon as a just judgment of his upon them, and not only produced by their sin but answering to it; they put dishonour upon God, and made *his table and the fruit thereof contemptible* (³⁰⁰Malachi 1:12), and therefore God justly put dishonour upon them and made them contemptible; they exposed themselves, and therefore God exposed them. Note, As sin is a reproach to any people, so especially to priests; there is not a more despicable animal upon the face of the earth than a profane, wicked, scandalous minister.

V. Here is a sentence of wrath passed upon them; and this the prophet begins with, v. 2, 3. But it is conditional: *If you will not lay it to heart*, implying, “If you will, God's anger shall be turned away, and all shall be well; but, if you persist in these wicked courses, hear your doom — Your sin will be your ruin.”

1. They shall fall and lie under the curse of God: *I will send a curse upon you.* The wrath of God shall be revealed against them, according to the threatenings of the written word. Note, Those who violate the commands of the law lay themselves under the curses of the law.

2. Neither their employments nor their enjoyments, as priests, shall be clean to them: *“I will curse your blessings, so that you shall neither be blessed yourselves nor blessings to the people, but even your plenty shall be a plague to you and you shall be plagues to your generation.”*

3. The fruits of the earth, which they had the tithe of, should be no comfort to them: *“Behold, I will corrupt your seed; the corn you sow shall rot*

under ground and never come up again, the consequence of which must needs be famine and scarcity of provisions; so that no meat-offerings shall be brought to the altar, which the priests will soon have a loss of." Or it may be understood of the seed of the word which they preached; God threatens to deny his blessing to the instructions they gave the people, so that their labour shall be lost, as that of the husbandman is when the seed is corrupt; and so it agrees with that threatening (~~23~~Jeremiah 23:32), *They shall not profit this people at all.*

4. They and their services shall be rejected of God; he will be so far from taking any pleasure in them that he will loathe and detest them: *I will spread dung in your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts.* He refers to the sacrifices that were offered at those feasts. Instead of being himself pleased with the fat of their sacrifices, he will show himself displeased by throwing the dung of them in their faces, which he does, in effect, when he says, *Bring no more vain oblations; your incense is an abomination to me.* Note, Those who rest in their external performances of religion, which they should count but *dung, that they may win Christ*, shall not only come short of acceptance with God in them, but shall be filled with shame and confusion for their folly.

5. All will end, at last, in their utter ruin: *One shall take you away with it.* They shall be so overspread with the dung of their sacrifices that they shall be carried away with it to the dunghill, as a part of it. Any one shall serve to take you away, the common scavenger. *Reprobate silver shall men call them, and treat them accordingly, because the Lord has rejected them.*

~~23~~MALACHI 2:10-17

UNLAWFUL MARRIAGES

Corrupt practices are the genuine fruit and product of corrupt principles; and the badness of men's hearts and lives is owing to some loose atheistical notions which they have got and which they govern themselves by. Now, in these verses, we have an instance of this; we here find men dealing falsely with one another, and it is because they think falsely of their God. Observe,

I. How corrupt their practices were. In general, they *dealt treacherously every man against his brother*, v. 10. It cannot be expected that he who is false to his God should be true to his friend. They had dealt treacherously with God in his tithes and offerings, and had defrauded him, and thus conscience was debauched, its bonds and cords were broken, a door was opened to all manner of injustice and dishonesty, and the bonds of relation and natural affection are broken through likewise and no difficulty made of it. Some think that the treacherous dealings here reprov'd are the same with those instances of oppression and extortion which we find complain'd of to Nehemiah about this time, ^{<463>}Nehemiah 5:3-7. Therein they forgot the God of their fathers, and the covenant of their fathers, and rendered their offerings unacceptable, ^{<2111>}Isaiah 1:11. But it seems rather to refer to what was amiss in their marriages, which was likewise complain'd of, ^{<463>}Nehemiah 13:23. Two things they are here charged with, as very provoking to God in this matter — taking strange wives of heathen nations, and abusing and putting away the wives they had of their own nation; in both these they dealt treacherously and violated a sacred covenant; the former was in contempt of the covenant of peculiarity, the latter of the marriage-covenant.

1. In contempt of the covenant God made with Israel, as a peculiar people to himself, they married strange wives, which was expressly prohibited, and provided against, in that covenant, ^{<463>}Deuteronomy 7:3. Observe here,

(1.) What good reason they had to deal faithfully with God and one another in this covenant, and not to make marriages with the heathen.

[1.] They were expressly bound out from such marriages by covenant. God engag'd to do them good upon this condition, that they should not mingle with the heathen; this was the *covenant of their fathers*, the covenant made with their fathers, denoting the antiquity and the authority of it, and its being the great charter by which that nation was incorporated. They lay under all possible obligations to observe it strictly, yet they profaned it, as if they were not bound by it. Those profane the covenant of their fathers who live in disobedience to the command of the God of their fathers.

[2.] They were a peculiar people, united in one body, and therefore ought to have united for the preserving of the honour of their peculiarity: *Have we not all one Father?* Yes, we have, for *has not one God created us?* Are we not all *his offspring?* And are we not *made of one blood?* Yes,

certainly we are. God is a common Father to all mankind, and, upon that account, *all we are brethren*, members one of another, and therefore ought to *put away lying* (⁴⁰⁰⁵Ephesians 4:25), and not to *deal treacherously*, no, not *any man against his brother*. But here it seems to refer to the Jewish nation: *Have we not all one father*, Abraham, or Jacob? This they prided themselves in, *We have Abraham to our father*; but here it is turned upon them as an aggravation of their sin in betraying the honour of their nation by intermarrying with heathens: “*Has not one God created us*, that is, formed us into a people, made us a nation by ourselves, and put a life into us, distinct from that of other nations? And should not this oblige us to maintain the dignity of our character?” Note, The consideration of the unity of the church in Christ, its founder and Father, should engage us carefully to preserve the purity of the church and to guard against all corruptions.

[3.] They were dedicated to God, as well as distinguished from the neighbouring nations. *Israel was holiness to the Lord* (⁴⁰¹⁰Jeremiah 2:3), taken into covenant with him, set apart by him for himself, to be to him for a name and a praise, and upon this account he *loved them* and delighted in them; the sanctuary set up among them was the *holiness of the Lord*, which he loved, of which he said, *It is my rest for ever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it*; but by marrying strange wives they profaned this holiness, and laid the honour of it in the dust. Note, Those who are devoted to God, and beloved of him, are concerned to preserve their integrity, that they may not throw themselves out of his love, nor lose the honour, or defeat the end, of their dedication to him.

(2.) How treacherously they dealt, notwithstanding, They profaned themselves in that very thing which was prescribed to them for the preserving of the honour of their singularity: *Judah has married the daughter of a strange god*. The harm was not so much that she was the daughter of a strange nation (God has made *all nations of men*, and is himself *King of nations*), but that she was the daughter of a strange god, trained up in the service and worship of false gods, at their disposal, as a daughter at her father's disposal, and having a dependence upon them; hence some of the rabbin (quoted by Dr. Pocock) say, *He that marries a heathen woman is as if he made himself son-in-law to an idol*. The corruption of the old world began with the intermarriages of the *sons of God* with the *daughters of men*, ⁴⁰¹²Genesis 6:2. It is the same thing that is here complained of, but as it is expressed it sounds worse: The *sons of*

God married the daughters of a strange god. Herein Judah is said to have *dealt treacherously*, for they basely betrayed their own honour and *profaned that holiness of the Lord* which they *should have loved* (so some read it); and it is said to be *an abomination committed in Israel and in Jerusalem*; it was hateful to God, and very unbecoming those that were called by his name. Note, it is an abominable thing for those who profess the holiness of the Lord to profane it, particularly by yoking themselves unequally with unbelievers.

(3.) How severely God would reckon with them for it (v. 12): *The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this*, that marries the daughter of a strange god. He has, in effect, cut himself off from the holy nation, and joined in with foreigners and *aliens to the commonwealth of Israel*, and so shall his doom be; *God will cut him off, him and all that belongs to him*; so the original intimates. He shall be cut off from Israel and from Jerusalem, and not be *written among the living* there. The Lord will cut off both *the master and the scholar*, that are guilty of this sin, both the teachers and the taught. The blind leaders and the blind followers shall fall together into the ditch, *both him that wakeneth and him that answereth* (so it is in the margin), for the master calls up his scholar to his business, and stirs him up in it. They shall be cut off together *out of the tabernacles of Jacob*. God will no more own them as belonging to his nation; nay, and the priest that *offers an offering to the Lord*, if he marry a strange wife (as we find many of the priests did, ⁴⁵⁰⁸Ezra 10:18), shall not escape; the offering he offers shall not atone for him, but he shall be cut off from the temple of the Lord, as others from the tabernacles of Jacob. *Nehemiah chased away from him*, and from the priesthood, one of the sons of the high priest, whom he found guilty of this sin, ⁴⁶³⁸Nehemiah 13:28.

2. In contempt of the marriage-covenant, which God instituted for the common benefit of mankind, they abused and put away the wives they had of their own nation, probably to make room for those strange wives, when it was all the fashion to marry such (v. 13): *This also have you done*; this is the second article of the charge. For the way of sin is down-hill, and one violation of the covenant is an inlet to another.

(1.) Let us see what it is that is here complained of. they did not behave as they ought to have done towards their wives.

[1.] They were cross with them, froward and peevish, and made their lives bitter to them, so that when they came with their wives and families to

worship God at the solemn feasts, which they should have done with rejoicing, they were all out of humour; the poor wives were ready to break their hearts, and, not daring to make their case known to any other, they complained to God, and *covered the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying*. This is illustrated by the instance of Hannah, who, upon the account of her husband's having another wife (though otherwise a kind husband), and the discontent thence arising, whenever they went up to the house of the Lord to worship *fretted and wept*, and was in *bitterness of soul, and would not eat*, ^{<9006>}1 Samuel 1:6, 7, 10. So it was with these wives here; and this was so contrary to the cheerfulness which God requires in his worshippers that it spoiled the acceptableness of their devotions: God *regards not their offering any more*. See here what a good Master we serve, who will not have his altar covered with tears, but compassed with songs. This condemns those who left his worship for that of idols, among the rites of which we find *women weeping for Tammuz* (^{<2084>}Ezekiel 8:14), and the blood of the worshippers gushing out upon the altar, ^{<1183>}1 Kings 18:28. See also what a wicked thing it is to put others out of frame for the cheerful worship of God; though it is their fault by their fretfulness to indispose themselves for their duty, yet it is much more the fault of those who *provoked them to make them to fret*. It is a reason given why yoke-fellows should live in holy love and joy — *that their prayers may not be hindered*, ^{<6087>}1 Peter 3:7.

[2.] They dealt treacherously with them, v. 14-16. They did not perform their promises to them, but defrauded them of their maintenance or dower, or took in concubines, to share in the affection that was due to their wives only.

[3.] They *put them away*, gave them a bill of divorce, and turned them off, nay, perhaps they did it without the ceremony that the law of Moses prescribed, v. 16.

[4.] In all this *they covered violence with their garment*; they abused their wives, and were vexatious to them, and yet, in the sight of others, they pretended to be very loving to them and tender of them, and to cast a skirt over them. It is common for those who do violence to advance some specious pretence or other wherewith to cover it as with a garment.

(2.) Let us see the proof and aggravations of the charge.

[1.] It is sufficiently proved by the testimony of God himself: “*The Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth* (v. 14), has been witness to the marriage-covenant between thee and her, for to him you appealed concerning your sincerity in it and fidelity to it; he has been a witness to all the violations of it, and all thy treacherous dealings in contempt of it, and is ready to judge between thee and her.” Note, This should engage us to be faithful both to God and to all with whom we have to do, that God himself is a witness both to all our covenants and to all our covenant-breaches; and he is a witness against whom there lies no exception.

[2.] It is highly aggravated by the consideration of the person wronged and abused. *First*, “She is *thy wife*; thy own, bone of thy bone and flesh of thy flesh, the nearest to thee of all the relations thou hast in the world, and to cleave to whom thou must quit the rest.” *Secondly*, “She is *the wife of thy youth*, who had thy affections when they were at the strongest, was thy first choice, and with whom thou hast lived long. Let not the darling of thy youth be the scorn and loathing of thy age.” *Thirdly*, “She is *thy companion*; she has long been an equal sharer with thee in thy cares, and griefs, and joys.” The wife is to be looked upon, not as a servant, but as a companion to the husband, with whom he should freely converse and *take sweet counsel*, as with a friend, and in whose company he should take delight more than in any other's; for *is she not* appointed to be *thy companion*? *Fourthly*, “She is *the wife of thy covenant*, to whom thou art so firmly bound that, while she continues faithful, thou canst not be loosed from her, for it was a covenant for life. It is the wife with whom thou hast covenanted, and who has covenanted with thee; there is an oath of God between you, which is not to be trifled with, is not to be played fast and loose with.” Married people should often call to mind their marriage-vows, and review them with all seriousness, as those that make conscience of performing what they promised.

(3.) Let us see the reasons given why man and wife should continue together, to their lives' end, in holy love and peace, and neither quarrel with each other nor separate from each other.

[1.] Because god has joined them together (v. 15): *Did not he make one*, one Eve for one Adam, that Adam might never *take another to her to vex her* (~~cross~~ Leviticus 18:18), nor put her away to make room for another? It is great wickedness to complain of the law of marriage as a confinement,

when Adam in innocency, in honour, in Eden, in the garden of pleasure, was confined to one. Yet *God had the residue of the Spirit*; he could have made another Eve, as amiable as that he did make, but, designing *Adam a help meet for him*, he made him *one wife*; had he made him more, he would not have had a *meet help*. And wherefore did he make but one woman for one man? It was *that he might seek a godly seed — a seed of God* (so the word is), a seed that should bear the image of God, be employed in the service of God, and be devoted to his glory and honour, — that *every man having his own wife, and but one*, according to the law, (^{<410>}1 Corinthians 7:2), they might live in chaste and holy love, under the directions and restraints of the divine law, and not, as brute beasts, under the dominion of lust, and thus might propagate the nature of man in such a way as might make it most likely to participate of a divine nature, — that the children, being born in holy matrimony, which is an ordinance of God, and by which the inclinations of nature are kept under the regulations of God's command, might thus be made a *seed to serve him*, and be bred, as they are born, under his direction and dominion. Note, The raising up of a godly seed, which shall be *accounted to the Lord for a generation*, is one great end of the institution of marriage; but that is a good reason why the marriage-bed should be kept undefiled and the marriage bond inviolable. Husbands and wives must *therefore* live in the fear of God, that their seed may be a godly seed, else were they *unclean*, but *now they are holy, as children of the covenant*, the marriage-covenant, which was a type of the covenant of grace, and the conjugal union, when thus preserved entire, of the mystical union between Christ and his church, in which he seeks and secures to himself a godly seed; see ^{<415>}Ephesians 5:25, 32.

[2.] Because he is much displeased with those who go about to put asunder *what he has joined together* (v. 16): *The God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away*. He hath indeed permitted it to the Jews, *for the hardness of their hearts*, or, rather, limited and clogged it (^{<418>}Matthew 19:8); but *he hated it*, especially as those practised it who *put away their wives for every cause*, ^{<419>}Matthew 19:3. Let those wives that elope from their husbands and put themselves away, those husbands that are cruel to their wives and turn them away, or take their affections off from their wives and place them upon others, yea, and those husbands and wives that live asunder by consent, for want of love to each other, let such as these know that the God of Israel hates such practices, however vain men may make a jest of them.

(4.) Let us see the caution inferred from all this. We have it twice (v. 15): *Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth;* and again, v. 16. Note, Those that would be kept from sin must *take heed to their spirits*, for there all sin begins; they must keep their hearts with all diligence, must keep a jealous eye upon them and a strict hand, and must watch against the first risings of sin there. We shall act as we are spirited; and therefore, that we may regulate our actions, we must consider *what manner of spirit we are of;* we must *take heed to our spirits* with reference to our particular relations, and see that we stand rightly affected to them and be of a good temper, for otherwise we shall be in danger of dealing treacherously. If our own hearts deal treacherously with us, whom will they not deal treacherously with?

II. Observe how corrupt their principles were, to which were owing all these corrupt practices. Let us trace up the streams to the fountain (v. 17): *You have wearied the Lord with your words.* They thought to evade the convictions of the word, and to justify themselves by cavilling with God's proceedings; but their defence was their offence, and their vindication of themselves was the aggravation of their crime; they affronted the Lord with their words, and repeated them so often, and persisted so long in their contradictions, that they even *wearied him;* see ^{<BIB>}Isaiah 7:13. They made him weary of doing them good as he had done, and stopped the current of his favours; or they represented him as weary of governing the world, and willing to quit it and lay aside the care of it. Note, It is a wearisome thing, even to God himself, to hear people insist upon their own justification in their corrupt and wicked practices, and plead their atheistical principles in vindication of them. But, as if God by his prophet had done them wrong, see how impudently they ask, *Wherein have we wearied him?* What are those vexatious words whereby we have wearied him? Note, Sinful words are more offensive to the God of heaven than they are commonly thought to be. But God has his proofs ready; two things they had said, at least in their hearts (and thoughts are words to God), with which they had wearied him: —

1. They had denied him to be a holy God, and had asserted that concerning him which is directly contrary to the doctrine of his holiness. As he is a holy God, he hates sin, *is of purer eyes than to behold it, and cannot endure to look upon it,* ^{<BIB>}Habakkuk 1:13. He *is not a God that has pleasure in wickedness,* ^{<BIB>}Psalm 5:4. And yet they had the impudence to say, in direct contradiction to this, *Every one that does evil is good in the*

sight of the Lord, and he delights in them. This wicked inference they drew, without any reason, from the prosperity of sinners in their sinful courses (see ⁴⁹⁸⁵Malachi 3:15), as if God's love or hatred were to be known by that which is before us, and those must be concluded *good in the sight of the Lord* who are rich in the world. Or this they said because they wished it might be so; they were resolved to *do evil*, and yet to think themselves *good in the sight of the Lord*, and to believe that *he delighted in them*, notwithstanding; and therefore, under pretence of making God not so severe as he was commonly represented, they said as they would have it, and thought he was *altogether such a one as themselves*. Note, Those who think God a friend to sin affront him and deceive themselves.

2. They had denied him to be the righteous governor of the world. If he did not delight in sin and sinners, yet it would serve their turn to believe that he would never punish it or them. They said, “*Where is the God of judgment?* That God who, we have been so often told, would call us to an account, and reckon with us for what we have said and done — where is he? He has forsaken the earth, and takes no notice of what is said and done there; he has said that he will *come to judgment*; but *where is the promise of his coming?* We may do what we please; he sees us not, nor will regard us.” It is such a challenge to the Judge of the whole earth as bids defiance to his justice, and, in effect, dares him to *do his worst*. Such scoffers as these there were in the latter days of the Jewish church, and such there shall be in the latter days of the Christian church; but their unbelief shall not make the promise of God of no effect; for the day of the Lord will come. *Behold, the Judge stands before the door; the God of judgment is at hand.*