

Dead Orthodoxy

Disputing God's Justice

→ Christmas prep applies directly to our passage
→ There is a right way and a wrong way to question God

Luke 1 - Zechariah the priest is told by an angel that his elderly wife will have a son. His response: "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." ⇒ Gabriel makes him unable to talk

- Mary is told by an angel she will give birth to the Son of God. Her response: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ⇒ Angel explains to her

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? Z wants more evidence → skepticism + unbelief
M wants to understand → trust + faith

↓ declares Z was asking in unbelief

→ There is a right way + a wrong way to question God. The community that Malachi was addressing was definitely asking in the wrong way!
Malachi 2:17-3:5 ESV

[17] You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

[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; and 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 fullers' soap. [3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. [4] Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

[5] "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

Context – the truth of the situation

THE TRUTH: God's people dishonour his character and question his existence

[17] You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

→ become a burden

- Weary – The "community has wearied God with "religious" words and cultic activity devoid of any loyalty, conviction, or devotion" (Hill 261).

1. Dishonour his character:

- They suggest that he is not only indifferent to evil, but tolerates and delights in it

Psalm 145:17 ESV [17] The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

2. Question God's existence

- To ask "Where is the God of justice?" is to question if God really even exists

John Calvin: There seems not then to be an impropriety in this—that there is no God, except he be the judge of the world; for he cannot divest himself of his office without denying himself. But they malignantly impeached God; nay, they now insinuate that there is none, because he had abdicated his judgment; for they took it as granted, that God had ceased to be the punisher of wickedness, which was most false but yet they thought that according to facts it was certain and clear. Hence they concluded that there was no God, as his divinity must have been abolished together with his judgment. We hence see to what extent of insolence they burst forth in their complaints, so that they either charged God with injustice, or alleged that his divinity was annihilated.

In contrast to faithful, loyal love

- Slandering God's character is contrary to love
- Questioning God's very existence is in opposition to faithful loyalty

↳

- dishonour his Name
- question his existence

If there is a God, He will be judge

Content – the truth for Malachi’s audience

THE TRUTH: God opposes evil through judgment

Accusation:

“Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.”

Rebuttal:

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. [3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. [4] Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

- Like a refiner’s fire and like a fuller’s soap: purification and covenant renewal
- He will sit as a refiner – “...the smiths of ancient times “sat” bending forward over their small smelting furnaces to assay the purity of the metal...” ⇒ NOT INDIFFERENCE
- This is what is required for their worship to be accepted BUT METICULOUS CARE

Accusation:

“Where is the God of justice?”

Rebuttal:

[5] “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

- In requesting God’s judgment in pursuit of justice, they will get what they ask for, but not what they wanted
- **Amos 5:18 ESV [18]** Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!
- God is the witness, prosecutor, the judge, and executioner
- Sorcerers, adulterers, liars, oppressors, disrespectors – disloyal, unfaithful, unloving

Consider – the truth to act on

THE TRUTH: There is a proper way to question God

Later on in Malachi the prophet “offers some perspective on approaching God in times of distress and perplexity, teaching that human beings may test or challenge the Lord from a posture of faith – not a posture of unbelief and disobedience” (Hill 286).

“According to Scripture, there is a correct and legitimate way to question the divine dispensation and God’s dealings with his people...When these lamentations arise from a deep longing for God, from a need to have communion with him, to understand his way with the life of his people, and to know his way through history, there is nothing wrong with it. As in the case of Job, this is a struggle against god for the sake of god, and as such a spiritual movement toward and a communion with him” (Verhoef 294-5)

Psalm 73 [from Bible]

Dead orthodoxy questions God from a posture of skepticism and unbelief.

Living faith questions God from a posture of trust and love.

⇒ ARE YOU QUESTIONING GOD? WHAT IS YOUR POSTURE?

Christ – the truth for us

THE TRUTH: Jesus offers a new covenant

New Covenant is the name for the new relationship we have with God through Christ.

[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; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ⇒

- John the Baptist is the first messenger:

- **Matthew 11:7-10 ESV** [7] As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? [8] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. [9] What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’

- Jesus is the Lord and the messenger of the new covenant

Superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant

- Better mediator (without sin) (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24)
- Better sacrifice (Heb. 9:6–10:18; Isa. 42:6; 52:13–53:12)
- Better provision (the Spirit of God; Ezek. 36:24–28)
- Better promise (impartation of a new heart; Ezek. 36:24–28)

Ezekiel 36:24-28 ESV [24] I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. [25] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. [28] You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

GOSPEL

- Regeneration, born again, a new heart
- For sinners → *cannot obey God*
- For saints

Hebrews 13:20-21 ESV [20] Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, [21] equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

↳ COMMUNION