

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Malachi 2:1-9 “When Spiritual Leaders Go Bad”

Intro. In this chapter we are going to see that we have a responsibility to be good stewards of our influence with others. You do have an influence on others. What are you doing with that influence? Are you using your influence for good, or for bad?

Well in the 2nd chapter of Malachi we see that the spiritual leaders of Malachi's day were not using their influence for good but for bad. Notice how the first part of chapter 2 is directed to the priests (v.1). The spiritual condition of Israel was not good at this time, and much of the blame fell on the priesthood of Israel. If you have bad leadership, you will likely have bad followship. Jer. 5:30-31 says, “An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so.”

I believe we have a similar problem today. Too many of my preacher brethren have gone astray. Back in 1989 scandal rocked the religious world when it was revealed that Jim Baker of PTL had committed adultery, and was guilty of greed and financial mismanagement. Then we heard about Jimmy Swaggart. Through the years, I have known of some local pastors that have fallen. Recently we have heard about numerous Catholic priests that have been guilty of child molestation and other sexual misconduct. For 50 years, many denominations have been turning out ministerial students that have been taught by liberal professors, and thus they have more doubts about God's Word than affirmation of God's Word and the Gospel. I believe that except for normal human failings, I have been true to God in my 27 years of ministry. But I also remember what Paul said, “If any man thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall.”

So much of what I will say today has to do with preachers and other spiritual leaders. But again, all of us have some sphere of influence, and we must apply much of what is said today to our own lives, especially if you are a deacon, teacher, or parent. And since I Pet. 2:5 teaches that all true believers are now priests, this prophecy of Malachi has real meaning for all believers (cf. Rev. 1:6).

As we begin, I want to point out to you first of all:

I. THE CALLING OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Do you know what spiritual leaders are called by God to do? Or, to use the language of v.1, we see here what spiritual leaders are *commanded* to do. Well both pastors and those in the pew ought to know what is the calling of spiritual leaders in the church. I see 3 of the primary roles of spiritual leaders in chapter 2:

A. To Reverence God's Name – Notice in v.2 that God expected them to give glory to His name. I believe this is the commandment that God refers to in vv. 1 & 4. Eight times in Malachi you find the phrase “My name” (1:6, 11, 14; 2:2, 5; 4:2), referring, of course, to God's character and reputation. In v.11 of chapter 1 God says, “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations.” Spiritual leaders are to lead other to worship, honor, and reverence God. Our God is to be respected. He is to be

worshiped. He is to be adored. We are to show people the kind of a God our God really is. We are to so live each day that we will bring glory to God. In v. 5 of our text we see that, at one time, the tribe of Levi did just that! God said that Levi “feared Me and was reverent before My name.” And to those who so honor God, He promises in I Sam. 2:30b, “...those who honor Me I will honor...”

There is a real application in this for us today. One of the primary assignments for ministers today is to lead people to worship and honor the Lord. That means that Christ must be lifted up before the people. We ought to speak well of God to other people, and never take His name in vain.

However, the priests of Malachi’s day were failing to do this. The priests who were supposed to honor God’s name were disgracing it before the people and the Lord. Remember back in 1:6 God said, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name.” Do you honor God in what you say, and in how you live?

B. To Teach God's Truth to the People - V.6a says of Levi, “The law of truth was in his mouth...” Then v. 7 says, “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” The knowledge of God and of His will should be ever in the heart and on the lips of the priest. This could be maintained only by a constant study of the law and meditation on it. The people “should seek the law at his mouth,” for the priest was a teacher of the law, as stated in Lev. 10:11¹. The priest was also to use the Law to judge the people concerning differences that were to be decided by the law (Deut. 17:8-13). Only here (v. 7b) is a priest called a messenger of Jehovah. Spiritual leaders are to carry the message of God to a lost world and to God's people. If spiritual leaders do not get the message out, who will? Now even though God says that this was the responsibility of the priests, they were not doing it in Malachi's day.

I believe that the main duty of the pastor of a church is to teach the Word of God. God have mercy on the church that expects its pastor to be the public relations man, running all over town doing this and doing that, and also expects him to spend his time in the administration of church affairs. The primary calling of the pastor is to study the Word of God and then teach it to his people. Remember that a situation like this confronted the apostles in the early church. They said, “...It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” (Acts 6:2).

Friday, I attended the annual meeting of the Association. Someone gave the disaster relief ministry report. During the report she asked all the pastors to stand. Then she pointed out that not one pastor had helped the disaster relief teams. Afterwards I quoted Acts 6:2 to another pastor. God hasn’t called pastors to be involved in every ministry of the church. We are to put priority upon the Word of God and ministering to the spiritual needs of people. There should be plenty of other people in the church who can minister to physical needs.

C. To Turn Many from Iniquity – In v.6b we see that the old-time Levitical priests “turned many away from iniquity.” You may remember the time when Moses confronted the nation regarding the sin, and he said, “Whoever is on the LORD'S side--come to me” (Exodus 32:26). It was the Levites who stood with him, and helped Moses take a stand against evil in the camp. Even so, God call preachers, deacons, and parents to do the same. First, we must turn from iniquity in our own lives. Then, we can and should lead others away from sin. Preachers and other leaders need to take a stand against sin. We need to preach against sin, even when the whole world seems to be

¹ “and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.”

accepting it, and tolerating it. Then Gal. 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Spiritual leaders, whether pastors, deacons, S.S. teachers, or parents, need to confront those that we lead when they go astray, and seek to turn them back to righteousness.

However, the best way to turn people *from* sin is to lead them *to* Christ. Until you know Christ and love Christ, you will not turn from sin. In fact, Romans 2:4 says “the goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Paul wrote of the conversion of the Thessalonian believers. Note the word order. He said that they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Only when they turned to the true God were they willing to forsake their idols. So we spiritual leaders ought to be soul-winners.

Jack Hyles, the pastor of the First Baptist church of Hammond, Indiana was a great soul-winner. I read that one time he went into an airport restaurant there, and he was having breakfast. His waitress said, "Would you like a menu." He said, "Yes madam." "You like some coffee." "Yes madam." "You ready to order." "Yes madam." She said, "Yes madam, yes madam, yes madam. Is that all you can say is 'yes madam'?" He said, "Yes madam." And she was very snippity to him. He went ahead and ordered and she just kind of slung the food in front of him. And he ate it. She had a scowl on her face. And when he got up to leave, he put something like a 10 dollar bill by the plate and walked out. She said, "Hey, you left some money on the table." He said, "Don't people tip around here." She said, "You mean that's for me?" He said, "Yes madam." She said, "You would give me a tip like that after the way I've treated you?" "Yes madam." She said, "I don't understand it. Why?" He said, "I looked at you. I could tell you were hurting. I knew you were facing some kind of problem. I just felt maybe this would make your day a little better." She started to cry. She said, "Mister, you don't know the problems I've got. I got up this morning with a child that was sick and I had to go to work. That child is the only joy that I have. I don't have anybody else. I don't have a husband. And I couldn't get a babysitter and I had to leave that sick child alone at home to take care of himself. And then on the way here to work, my car broke down and I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't have the money to have it fixed. I was late to work and the boss chewed me out." He said, "I knew you were hurting." And he told her about Jesus. Right there though tears she gave her heart to Christ, and was wonderfully saved. Soul winners like that will be rewarded. Daniel 12:3 says, “They that turn many to righteousness shall be as the stars forever.”

So here in Malachi we see a good statement of the calling of spiritual leaders. Next, let's see:

II. THE CHARGES AGAINST THESE SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Vs. 8-9 lists several charges against the priests. We need to make sure that we do not make these same mistakes. Now based on these charges, I want to warn of 2 of the errors we should avoid:

A. We Should Not Depart from God's Way - V.8a says, “But you have departed from the way....” What way? They had failed to give honor to God, to teach the people the way of God's Law, and they had failed to turn people from sin. Then, the last of v. 9 says, “...you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law.” God has determined the path, the way in which we should walk. Even the priests were not walking in that way, nor were they leading the people to do so. Instead of enforcing the law, they were partial to some. They were shutting their eyes to the fact that people were bringing lame and sick animals for sacrifice. Preachers and others need to learn

God's way from the Word of God, and carefully walk in that way, and lead others to do so as well. We should not depart from God's way to the right, or to the left. Folks, there is a right way to live, but too many are living other ways. Let us resolve to live the right way, God's way.

Let me warn you of something. Spiritual leadership usually does not depart from the way all at once. It is usually a gradual matter. They gradually stop having that quiet time with God. They start allowing what seems to be minor sin, and then they allow major sin, rationalizing all the while.

B. We Must Not Cause People to Stumble – In v.8b God said, “You have caused many to stumble at the law.” You have made the law to many a stumbling block, instead of the light of their way, through your example and through false teaching, as though the law allowed or commanded things which in reality are sin.

When preachers and others sin and fall away from God, there are some who will stumble over them and not come to believe in Christ as a result. When leaders in a church fight with one another, and a church splits, I can assure you that there will be people who will never darken the door of a church again. When a pastor or deacon or S.S. teacher has a moral failure, there will be people who will never darken the door of a church again. We should not do anything to cause people to stumble. We need to maintain a good witness of Jesus at all times. People tend to say about their sin, “I am not hurting anyone but myself.” That is not true. Unconfessed sin in a leader or parent will certainly have negative effects upon others. Parents, your children are watching you, and you had better not cause them to stumble by a bad moral example. Jesus said in Mark 9:42, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

God has brought charges against the priests. He also warns of the consequence of disobedience. I hope you do understand that sin has consequences. In Isaiah 45:7 the KJV says, “I make peace, and create evil.” But the word translated “evil” can mean, “calamity, adversity,” which is the result of evil. Note it's meaning in that verse is the opposite of “peace.” God has so created the universe that sin has consequences! Note the warning of v. 2, “If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, To give glory to My name... I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart.” Failing to give heed to God's Word, and the sin that results, always brings a curse. One day there will come a terrible harvest from the seeds being planted today by those who despise God's laws and the principles He has built into nature. I believe we are already beginning to reap that harvest! Just remember, when you sow the seeds of sin, the harvest usually does not come immediately. It comes later. So young people, don't be deceived. Just because you seem to be getting by with sin now, that doesn't mean it will always be that way. As Moses said, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” It will catch up to you, and you will live in regret.

On the other hand, notice what God said in v.5, “My covenant was with him, one of life and peace.” Obeying the covenant would result in life and peace, while disobeying the covenant would result in death and adversity.

So let's examine in detail the consequence of failure. God was going to judge the priests more severely than He would judge the people. Why? Because of their position of responsibility. I would rather be the worst sinner on this earth than to be a minister who goes into the pulpit with an unbelieving heart and gives only a few pious platitudes to the congregation, or a minister who

fails morally. God is certainly going to hold that man responsible.

Let's look at 3 of the judgments God may give for failing to give heed to His correction:

A. Your Blessings Will Be Cursed (v.2b) - Some interpret "blessings" in the sense of what we think of as the blessings of God, such as health, material prosperity (which priests received), etc. God will curse temporal blessings, such as their corn, and wine, and oil. Instead of experiencing blessing from God, they will only experience the curse of sin.

Others see it as a reference to the blessings pronounced by the priests upon the people by virtue of their office. These God will curse, i.e. He will make them ineffective, or turn them into the very opposite. As He had turned the curses of Balaam into blessing (Num. 23:11), so now He would turn the blessing pronounced by the priests into a curse.

B. God Will Remove Such Leaders & their Families in Shame - V.3 literally reads, "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants...." "rebuke" is a participle, "I am rebuking...." The word translated "descendants" is literally "seed," in the sense of offspring, as in v.15, where the same Heb. word is clearly used of children. I believe that God is warning that He will remove their descendants from serving as priests. The priests failed to give heed to Malachi, and by the time of Jesus, the priesthood of Israel was corrupt. So God carried out this warning when the Romans destroyed the temple, and thus destroyed the Jewish priesthood.²

Even worse than that is what follows. God says he will spread refuse on their faces. This related to their service as a priest. The dung of the sacrificial animals was to be carried away to an unclean place outside the camp and burned there, in the case of the sin-offerings (Ex. 29:14). It could never be left in the animal. Therefore, when God says that He will spread dung upon the faces of the priests that would mean that they would not be able to serve at His altar. Why? Because no unclean thing can come there. To speak of spreading dung on the faces of the priests is strong language, indeed! Such priests are fit only to be carried away outside the camp from His presence. So God is saying that He will remove them from spiritual leadership in such a way that it will be very embarrassing to them. This has happened many times! It happened to Jim Baker, and to many others.

C. God Will Make Such Leaders Contemptible - This is first brought out first in v.3, "Behold, I will ... spread refuse on your faces" Scattering dung in the face was a sign and figurative description of the most ignominious treatment. The contempt of the Lord, which they show by offering blind or lame animals, He will repay to them by giving them up to the greatest ignominy. Then v.9 indicates something similar, "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people...." The priests wanted to be popular, and even twisted the Law to gain friends, but the people had no respect for them. The people despised them. Leaders with integrity and character will have their enemies, but they will still gain the respect of the people.

I'm afraid this has been fulfilled in our day. A July 18, 2002 CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll

² Some believe this could refer to God rebuking the seed of the ground. You will remember that the priests were to be given the tithe of the crops- wheat, barley, figs, grapes- a tenth was given to the Lord to support the priests. Now God says that He will corrupt the seed out there so that they wouldn't be getting the tithe that they had been getting. In this case, the consequence of their sin would be in the financial realm. Yet another interpretation follows the LXX., and adopts different vowel pointings, and sees it as "the arm." Rebuking the arm does not mean exactly "laming the arm," nor manifesting His displeasure in any way against the arm, which the priests raised to bless. It is with the arm that a man performs his business or the duties of his calling; and rebuking the arm, therefore signifies the neutralizing of the official duties performed at the altar and in the sanctuary.

showed that only 66% of people trust Protestant ministers (same as doctors in that poll), and only 45% trust Catholic priests. They were outranked by school teachers at 84% (Cindy Davis!), but better than lawyers at 25%, and car dealers at 15%. There was a time in our own land when ministers were listened to and highly respected, but that day is past. God said this would happen when the ministry is not giving out His Word.

Oh yes, there are indeed serious consequences when we sin because we fail to give heed to God's word.

Conclusion: I want to close with v.17, "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...'" Our nation likewise has arrived at the point of a perverted sense of good and bad. Why is this? Well, when there are ministerial problems in a nation, then there will surely be moral problems.

I want to close the message by issuing a call to some young man here today who will answer God's call to be a faithful and good minister of the Gospel. Then I want to call upon our church and family leaders to commit yourself to being the leader God has called you to be. And if there is someone here today who doesn't want to reap the terrible harvest of sin, then let me encourage you to turn to Jesus. He is the only One that can forgive you, and give you the power to live God's way.

Sources: C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 10/23/89); Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be" Series: *Old Testament, Malachi: Be Amazed* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1996); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

This document has not been transcribed from an audio recording, but is the result of the sermon preparation process. Most outlines are original to the author, but much of the content of the notes are taken from commentaries, other sermons, and Bible study aids (see sources above). Sermons are preached without notes, and thus the content of the "live" sermon is in the author's own words. To get an audio recording of this message, you may send \$1 for each audio cassette tape ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834.