

Taking Your Priestly Responsibilities Seriously!

Malachi 1

Martin G. Collins

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Are you exhibiting the qualities of a holy, royal priest of God? Or do you take your priestly responsibilities lightly? God indicted the Israelites through the prophet Malachi over the same issue.

I would like to give you a little bit of background on priests. Most references to priests in the Bible involve the priests of the Old Covenant, and these consisted of the Levitical priests in general—all the qualified males of the tribe of Levi, and the high priests of Aaron's family especially. God claimed the entire tribe of Levi for full life service to Him. So the Levites became the priests of Israel, devoting their lives to maintaining and enforcing the correct worship of God, first in the tabernacle, and eventually in the temple.

Leviticus 21 outlines the requirements for the purity that was required of the Levitical priesthood. A descendant of Aaron had to be pure, unspotted, and without any physical defects, before he could offer an offering to the Lord. Verses 17-23 list these physical defects as blindness, lameness, a marred face, a limb too long, a broken foot, a broken hand, hunchback, dwarf, defective eye, eczema, scab, or a eunuch. God wanted absolute physical perfection in His service. These imperfections fall under the categories of injury, deformity, disease, and surgery.

The priest could not go near the veil or approach the altar if he had a physical imperfection because it was established that it would profane God's sanctuary. These imperfections represented the effects of sin, and we know that sin separates man from God.

When the building of the temple of God in Jerusalem was completed in 515 B.C., the priests followed the instruction given by God in Leviticus for purifying themselves.

Ezra 6:20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean.

Here "purified" means offered sacrifices as sin offerings and continued in obedience to God's law. They also did certain ritual washings.

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Within the tribe of Levi, Aaron and his sons were given special status as high priests. The high priestly family had the highest responsibility and privilege to serve in the holy place and the most holy place of the tabernacle and the temple.

Personal, moral purity was essential to the priesthood. God chose to teach this lesson of purity and holiness through the required physical perfection of His priests, as instructed in Leviticus 21.

While the distinction between priests and people had to be clearly maintained, in order that God's holiness was recognized, similarities between priests and the children of Israel bring attention to the fact that all Israelites were priests, in certain respects. Although all Israelites did not minister in the tabernacle or temple, they were, in a sense, priests in the land as a whole. For example, the Israelites were to represent God before the nations. So high priests, Levites, and people of Israel each had what we might call priestly duties in their respective areas of responsibility.

Adam gave priestly service to God. His God-given responsibilities included following God's instructions in guarding and continuing the proper use of the earth, upholding God's example of Sabbath-keeping, and defending God's holy garden from defilement through sin. These are all priestly functions.

The children of Israel were a holy and redeemed people, which permitted them the opportunity to work in God's service. Working in God's service meant that they were performing duties that were in support of the priesthood functions. In effect, a priest is what all humans should be: guardian and defender of God's truth and His creation. The priesthood of ancient Israel was a mere shadow of God's spiritual, royal priesthood, the church.

Here, Peter is writing to the church:

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...

So God's physical, chosen nation of Israel, as a nation of priests, was a type of the members of God's church in Christ, which is a royal priesthood. There are important qualities seen in the responsibilities of the ancient Levitical priesthood that are also applicable to the royal priesthood of God, the church today.

As spiritually holy and royal priests, we must take our responsibilities very seriously. It is

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an honor and a privilege to be called to such a glorious service. However, there are times when our human nature tends to raise its ugly head, because of dissatisfaction, leading to complaining, which leads to a defiling attitude.

The prophet Malachi warns God's priesthood about such a horribly wrong attitude, as thinking that and acting like the table of the Lord is contemptible. This sermon will help us to avoid making the same mistakes that the people and priests of ancient Israel made at the time of Malachi.

Hebrews 9 and other New Testament scriptures inform us that the blood of Christ's sacrifice initially purifies us by washing away our sins at baptism. But purification is not just a one-time event. It is a continuous process because there is an ever-present need to rid our minds of worldly thoughts and our lives of sin.

Jesus Christ, the spiritual High Priest, is responsible for this process. As members of His church, we are part of His holy priesthood, and Jesus is the spiritual High Priest over God's house. The function of the priest was to build a bridge between man and God, and this means that Jesus not only shows us the way to God, but also, when we get there, introduces us to His presence.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We are compelled to live a life of sacrifice to God, by our conduct, which is part of our spiritual worship; by our faith, by our gifts, by our offering acceptable spiritual sacrifices.

The prophet Malachi warned the priests of Israel about their declining spiritual conditions, and in principle, the warning applies to Christians today. Malachi has the same conviction as Zachariah that God's coming to judge the world is imminent. Notice how Malachi begins his prophecy; the caption in your Bible may be similar to mine, "Polluted offerings to God."

Malachi 1:1 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

The burden that weighs on the prophet is meant to weigh on people's consciences until

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they prepare for that day, the Day of Judgment. Israel, the name used for a while of the northern kingdom, never ceased to be applicable also to the whole nation, which was represented by the few who had returned to Judah. That is Malachi's immediate audience.

Since Malachi's message is to Israel, it is appropriate that his book begins with an affirmation of God's continuing love for the covenant nation. It is interesting that when God is about to correct us, He does not always just leap right in. He first covers what good He does for us, and that is what He does here in Malachi.

The atrophy of human love in the community in Israel has undermined confidence in the divine love, and there is no appreciation of the providential supreme rulership of God, which has made possible the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. Throughout his book, Malachi speaks of the polluted offerings that were being offered by Israel's priesthood and people. We will see why their service and offerings were unacceptable to God.

Historically, the book of Malachi was written toward the end of the Persian domination of Israel, around 539—333 B.C. Sacrifices were being offered in the temple, which was rebuilt in 516 B.C. The priests had been presenting offerings for many years and had grown tired of them. Corruption had crept into the system. A major responsibility of the priesthood is to give their lives in service to God, which they did, but they did it reluctantly.

Malachi wrote about the same problems that Nehemiah faced: corrupt priests, neglect of tithes and offerings, and intermarriage with pagan wives. Today, for the church, we can translate that to hypocritical ministers, stealing God's tithes, and marrying someone outside the church.

The exiles had returned, the temple had been rebuilt, and the city of Jerusalem had returned to a substantial degree of normalcy. Apathy, negligence, and permissiveness in spiritual matters had developed. They just became weary of well-doing, but their attitudes were the problem. A measure of comfort and security under Persian overlordship encouraged the people to let down spiritually in their tasks of building their nation under God.

In the 12th year of his governorship over Judah, Nehemiah returned to Persia for an unknown period of time. It was during that interim, about 450-340 B.C., that Malachi warned of the declining spiritual conditions in Jerusalem.

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Malachi 1:1-2 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved;”
...

The Israelites’ attitude toward God had deteriorated to the point where they did not even recognize God’s love for them.

God’s love is commonly thought, among mainstream religiosity, to be a revelation first made in the New Testament. But that is far from the truth. It is implicit from the beginning and especially from the time of the covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This is an act of love; this shows God’s love. It becomes explicit in Deuteronomy, a book that records theological reflections on the covenant implications of the exodus events. It brings out the elective sense of the verb *love*.

Deuteronomy 7:7-9 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;”...

God still loved Israel at the time of Malachi. God also teaches that Israel should love Him in return, as we read in Deuteronomy 7:9. That he loves men and women is undoubtedly one of the hardest truths to grasp, because with all that is preached about, people still doubt God’s love.

Israel’s reply, in Malachi 1:2, was “in what way have You loved us?” This expresses

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disbelief, if not cynicism, and compares with the modern assertion that statements such as “God loves everyone,” die the death of a thousand qualifications because people do not truly believe that God is love, and all that He does is love. So they just spout off the saying, “God loves everyone,” without thinking it through, and not really believing it. Now they may see a child suffer and ask themselves, under their breath, “Where is God? Where is His love?”

Malachi 1:3 “But Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.”

That is God speaking there, through Malachi. The verb *hate* should be understood in the light of God’s electing love. The fact that Jacob was chosen, that is loved, meant that Esau was rejected, or hated. Rejection is inherent in the exercise of choice. Anytime you have choice, one for another, there is an element of an act of love and an act of hate, in the mildest of senses, in the most general of senses.

Personal animosity towards Esau is not implied. However, Esau and his descendants, by nursing resentment and showing hostility toward Jacob, did bring God’s judgments down on them. There is a lesson here for members of God’s church. When a man or woman is ordained to a position in the church, some other members may feel rejected. If that feeling of rejection is allowed to worsen into hostility, they bring judgment on themselves. Just because someone is not ordained does not mean that he is a lesser man spiritually; everyone cannot be ordained, everyone cannot be a leader. Everyone has their function in the church, and everyone’s function is important, just like the body has all of its parts that are essential to the working of the whole.

Malachi 1:4 Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,” thus says the Lord of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever.”

The name by which Edom is known, the “Territory of Wickedness,” or in some translations, the “Wicked Country,” contrasts with the name given by Zachariah to Judah, where he calls them “The Holy Land.” Whereas Judah would be cleansed, Edom would be the people with whom the Lord is angry forever, and that terrible judgment should have caused Judah in all humility to be thankful for God’s love for her. But at the time of Malachi, Israel was not thankful for God’s love.

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Malachi chooses as proof of God's love evidence which can be tested out of Israel's own experience, through their own eyes, by looking at other nations.

Malachi 1:5 "Your eyes shall see [speaking to Israel], and you shall say, 'The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'"

They might have seen it earlier, but preoccupation with their own internal difficulties has prevented the necessary wider look of God's dealings with other nations. Israel was so focused on her own problems that they could not see that God had His hand in other nations, not that He was blessing them as much as He had blessed Israel, but He could still, nevertheless, be seen in the workings of other nations.

If Israel were more outward looking, she would come closer to a knowledge of God's love, and see, by contrast with the experiences of other nations, how wonderfully God had dealt with her. When the recipient of God's love failed to see that God loved her, there was little hope of her having any testimony to the other nations. Israel is expected to have a conversion away from apathy to new conviction, and the same holds true for members of God's church. We cannot be apathetic in our faith, in our dedication and obedience to God. We must have a new conviction, daily, in that we are living God's way of life.

Having addressed the nation as a whole, the prophet Malachi turned to those set apart for God's service, whose greater responsibilities involve them in the greater accountability, speaking of the priests. I remind you, members of God's church are in training as a holy priesthood. Speaking to God's chosen people, the apostle Peter writes:

I Peter 2:5 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As we are being trained as a holy priesthood, we must be very careful to serve God in an acceptable way, rather than in the unacceptable way the spiritually deteriorating priests of Malachi's time did.

Malachi directed his message of judgment to a people plagued with corrupt priests, wicked practices, and a false sense of security in their special relationship with God. Malachi 1:6-10 pictures God's reaction to those who do not live a superior way of life,

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even though they know better. God indicts the Israelites for offering inferior, sometimes even deformed, animals on his altar. The spiritual parallel concerns the offering of our lives in service to Him and our fellow man.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

As we continue with God's indictment through Malachi of the Israelites, specifically and especially the priests at that time, we will see the parallels to us today. Let us take a look at why the attitudes of the priests were unacceptable to God.

I have nine principles to give you which coincide with Malachi 1:6-14. The first principle, the Israelites' lack of honored reverence is shown by their despising God's name. In Malachi 1:6, my Bible has the caption "Polluted Offerings."

Malachi 1:6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? [Remember, this is God speaking through Malachi.] And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'"

Since the majority of priests would have had sons and since the law of Moses was self-evident, a priest would have whole-heartedly supported this first proposition, "a son honors his father." This appeal to the fifth commandment kept God's covenant requirements in the foreground, and that is probably why Malachi mentions it. The servant honored his master because he belonged to him by right of purchase and had no other option but to obey. The question is whether the priests regarded God as their father or their master. Either way, there are inescapable obligations.

A father/son relationship between God and Israel is implied at the beginning of the exodus deliverance:

Exodus 4:22 ...Thus says the Lord: "Israel is My son, My firstborn."

Isaiah's prophecy opens with a complaint of the heavenly Father against His rebellious sons. Like other prophets, Malachi realized that the heart of the trouble he was probing

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was a broken relationship with God. It always seems to be the core of all of our problems. Instead of affection and trust, there was hostility to God's nature and will, and that is why the priests failed to honor Him with worthy sacrifices.

Malachi was not concerned about the trivial details of a system or variety of religious worship, but about the refusal of reverence for a father and obedience for a master, who was great beyond the border of Israel. Israel asked, "How have we despised Your name?" Sinful attitudes are most often secret faults; secret, that is, from the consciousness of the sinner, but they are not excused on that ground. We are held accountable for our actions and our sins.

The first part of the indictment against the priests, in Malachi 1:6, contains two questions from God: where is My honor, and where is My reverence? The priests were not properly fearing and reverencing God. God's name was mentioned with contempt, and if the leadership failed in this, the people failed for lack of direction. The people imitated the priesthood in their treatment of God.

The priests despised God's name, His word and ordinances, causing even the sacrifices of the Eternal to be detested, as Eli's sons did, in the account of I Samuel 2:

I Samuel 2:29 "Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?"

Eli had honored his sons more than he had honored the Eternal in this context. God had promised that Aaron's descendants would always be priests, and He had confirmed that promise by covenant oath. But because of flagrant disobedience, the house of Eli, like the house of Saul later, would be judged by God. Although the Aaronic priesthood was perpetual, individual priests who flagrantly sinned could thereby forfeit covenant blessing.

I Samuel 2:30 "Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the Lord says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.'"

Honor here literally means "makes heavy those who honor Him." The modern expression used today is *heavyweight*, which means to treat someone as a very

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intelligent, influential, important person; to give them respect.

Despised or disdained, as it is in some translations, literally means “make light those who despise Him,” or we could say, “shall be made light of,” or “they will be made vapor,” or taking it further, “they will be vaporized.” It is a very strong word in the Hebrew. The modern expression used today is *make light of*, which means to treat someone as trifling, or unimportant; to pay little or no attention to.

We have to be very careful that we do not make light of God through indifference. We must honor God by properly reverencing His name. The first principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their despising God's name.

Second principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their pride, presumptuousness, and arrogance.

Malachi 1:7 “You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the Lord is contemptible.’”

These sacrifices are defiled or polluted in the first place by the attitude of the mind of the offerers, and only secondarily by ritual imperfections. The priests not only reduce the sacred things to common things, but they perverted them to serve their own purposes. This is the general charge against them. To this, they pleaded “not guilty,” and even challenged God to prove it against them. In Malachi 1:6, God has Malachi write, “Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’”

In the church today, dissatisfaction and complaining are serious problems. There is always an undercurrent of discontentment among some people. They complain about the song-leading, and the sermonettes, and the commentaries, and the sermons, and even the prayers. They criticize the CGG website, or *The Berean*, or *The Forerunner* magazine. They grumble about the Feast site. The speakers, authors, and many of the other brethren have prayed for God's inspiration for the messages. We ask God before services and afterwards to inspire the messages and help us to make use of them in our own lives.

These complaints are the same thing as saying, “the table of the Lord is contemptible.” A very, very, serious sin. The table of the Lord today is the spiritual food in the form of the various messages that are presented for the praise and glorification of God, and the admonition and encouragement of the members of the church. Those who do not appreciate that are saying, “The table of the Lord is contemptible.” In Malachi 1:7, they

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retort, "In what way have we defiled you?" Their defense was their offense, and their questions to God prove them proud, presumptuous, and arrogant.

With every sacrifice, they were to bring an offering of fine flour mixed with oil, but they brought polluted bread or defiled food. In one sense, they were telling God, "Just be glad we offered you anything at all." People today in effect say, "God is pleased with me whenever I show up; after all, I am doing Him a favor by being there." That may not be what they literally say, but that is what their actions say. A cheap religion that costs little in sacrifice is not acceptable to God, and so is worth nothing.

God does not despise the widow's mite; He despises the miser's mite. Part of that mite is our time and our efforts. The table of the Lord, or the Lord's table, is an expression used only by Malachi in the Old Testament. It is a very powerful expression.

The priest would never have said that it was permissible to despise the table of the Lord, but Malachi is trying to bring to the surface subconscious attitudes, by drawing out the implication of unworthy actions and thoughts.

Ezekiel 44:6-9 "Now say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "O house of Israel, let Us have no more of all your abominations. When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it—My house—and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set others to keep charge of My sanctuary for you." Thus says the Lord God: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who is among the children of Israel.'""

Part of the issue is that illegitimate access to the temple was prohibited, and so explicitly forbidden to God's presence. Therefore, resident aliens cannot play a role in the service of the temple. With regard to God's church today, a non-baptized attendee of the church, a spiritual resident alien, should not lead songs, or pray, or teach during Sabbath services, which is a formal worship of God; it is a praising and a glorifying of God. The Sabbath must be kept holy and pure, and we must worship God in spirit and in truth.

The reason I bring this up is because I recently heard that some of the other groups are having days that they call, for example, "Youth Day." The youth perform the entire

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service. Many of them, if not all of them, are unbaptized attendees, and therefore are spiritual aliens to the church, although sanctified by their parents. In a sense, they are aliens to the church, and really should not be leading, speaking, or teaching to the rest of the congregation. What you have is unbaptized, non-spiritual people teaching the spiritual. It is a defilement of God's services.

The second principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their pride, presumptuousness, and arrogance.

Third principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their disobedience.

Malachi 1:8 “And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi expanded the charge against the priests. Every sacrificial animal was to be without blemish, and the law specifically prohibited the offering of blind, lame, or sick animals on the altar.

Deuteronomy 15:21 But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.

Malachi emphasized the violation of proper Levitical responsibility. The priests were very familiar with Levitical law, but they were negligent in carrying it out according to God's instructions. Although the law was explicit—that what was offered in sacrifice would not have a blemish—yet they brought the blind, the lame, and the sick; and, we are again told this in Malachi 1:13, the torn, and the lame, and the sick, that was already to die of itself. They had become quite corrupt, and their attitudes did not give one bit of care about what God thought or what God wanted. They were just going through the motions.

We see this quite often in the mainstream Christian groups: people just show up, give their ten minutes to God each week, and then they head home and think they have done their duty.

The priests and the people humanly reasoned that the rejects were “good enough” for

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such a purpose, and God asks, "Is it not evil?" But in the opinion of the priests, there was no evil in offering such as these. These offerings would be unacceptable to a human governor, much less to God. They would not dare to insult a political leader in the same way that they had insulted God.

Although our attitudes of mind are largely hidden from us, the actions to which they lead are out in the open for all to see. So the third principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their disobedience. It is so obvious that I did not want to spend a great deal of time on that one.

Fourth principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence could not be forgiven, because their attitude and motivation was unacceptable.

Malachi 1:9 "But now entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" says the Lord of hosts.

It appears that there is a bit of sarcasm here. This is not a call to repentance, because Malachi assumes that God would not accept them in their present mental state. It is rather ironic, since it implies something like this: "Go now, seek the favor of God, because you would not seek that of your governor," meaning they were too afraid to go to the governor and seek anything. Since they would not show God half the respect they were willing to show the governor, why should God accept what they had to offer in worship and sacrifice to Him? They would not have taken those blemished and decomposing items that they were offering to God, to the governor. Their offering of gifts would not be a means of securing God's favor because their attitude and motivation was wrong, making it an unacceptable offering to God.

The expression, "accept you," is from the Hebrew idiom literally meaning, "He will lift up your face." The picture of Esther before Ahasuerus comes to mind in Esther 4 and 5. If he accepted her, he would extend the scepter, and she would lift her bowed head. Rejection meant she would back out the door with her head bowed. The point here in Malachi 1:9 is that God would not extend His favor when the gifts for thanksgiving and appeal were given, because their shoddiness was an outright insult.

God called them to repentance for profaning His name, and He told the priests to humble themselves and repent. So the fourth principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence could not be forgiven because their attitude and motivation were unacceptable.

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The fifth principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their laziness.

Malachi 1:10 “Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the Lord of hosts, “Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.”

Malachi is serious when he says that it would be better to shut the doors, rather than perpetuate worthless worship. God wished that the temple would shut down, in one sense, as long as it was not serving as a proper meeting place for God and man. Why should any self-deceiving rituals go on in it? It was all in vain. Not only were the sacrifices ineffective, but the priests and the people thought that their deeds were winning God’s approval. So why not just shut the temple doors, and be done with what was, for the priests, merely a nuisance?

Malachi is indignant that such artificial rituals should be thought to have any value, and so give false confidence. It would be better if everyone would know that God had no pleasure in them, then for them to deceive themselves and think that they were pleasing Him.

The priests would not even perform one of the least of the priestly functions, such as shutting the door, or kindling the fire on the altar, without pay. It was the duty of some priests to stand at the doors of the court of the altar of burnt offerings and to have excluded blemished victims.

We see the same attitude predominantly in most churches today. Some people never bother to become friends with the brethren, even forsaking the assembling of themselves together with other brethren when they are within reasonable distance from one another. Church gatherings have ceased to be places where people worship in spirit and in truth; they have become merely meeting places and social clubs and are judged for their entertainment factor, rather than the depth of spiritual teaching and accuracy of doctrine.

So people heap up teachers for themselves, listening to this sermon or that sermon from different groups, and they really judge which is best by which is most entertaining. “Who is the best speaker?” Not by the depths of spiritual teaching and accuracy of doctrine. When people are listening to so many different ministers at the same time, it cannot be good for them.

It would be better for the building to close down, rather than to continue misleading

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those who think that their insincere attendance and reluctant support pleases God. Malachi has in mind throughout this passage the responsibilities of the priests. Remember, the apostle Peter tells the saints, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood." The fifth principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown in their laziness, in their apathy.

Sixth principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their lack of magnifying God's name. In Malachi 1:11, the principle is expressed positively in order to contrast with the other principles, which are stated negatively. This is done for emphasis.

Malachi 1:11 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," says the Lord of hosts.

The beginning phrase of verse 11, "from the rising of the sun, even to its going down," is comprehensive in scope. It conveys the universality of God's reign and the imminence of the revelation of Himself to the nations as Maker, King, and Redeemer. This orients the text of Malachi towards the future. Malachi uses the future tense three times, which implies that the situation described here will happen in the future.

God told His faithless priests that there would be others who, in different places and in later times, would bring acceptable offerings. His reference is to the New Testament church. Those offerings would not only be physical, in the form of money, but more importantly, they would be spiritual, represented here by incense in the form of prayer and praise. Revelation 5:8 tells us that incense corresponds to prayer. Psalm 141:2 says, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense."

Hebrews 13:15-16 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

God states in Malachi 1:6 that the Israelite priests and people despise My name, but He will find others who will magnify it. In effect, He says, "Do not think that I will not have any worshipers without you, because from the East to the West, My name shall be great among the Gentiles, the very people whom you look down upon as repulsive."

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Four times in chapter 1 of Malachi, the prophet describes God as great, in verses 5, 14, and twice in verse 11, because he wants to be sure that the truth will register. It is a very important principle to remember: God's name must be magnified. God declares that He will secure the glory of His own name, and punish those who profane it. He will magnify His law and make it honorable, even though they despise it and make it contemptible. Instead of Him being worshipped and served among the Israelites only, He will be served and worshipped everywhere. His name will be revered and feared everywhere on the earth, eventually.

So the sixth principle is that the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their lack of magnifying God's name.

The seventh principle: the Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown by their hypocrisy.

Malachi 1:12 "But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.'"

By contrast with what is about to happen, Malachi turns to the sacrifices offered by the priests of his own time. Malachi strips away all self-deception by putting into blunt language the motives that he discerns. "You say the table of the Lord is defiled." The clause is parallel to: "Its fruit, its food, is contemptible."

This was God's assessment of their intentions. The priests were charged with profaning God's name when they declared that His table was defiled and its food contemptible. The food was the cereal and meat offerings the priests put on God's table. It was the priests' responsibility to keep the unclean and blemished animals from defiling the altar—inferior animals and unacceptable offerings.

The priests were hypocrites because they were the ones complaining of defilement. The people were poor, and they used it as an excuse for giving defiled and blemished offerings. The priests let them do so, for fear of offending the people. If they offended the people, they thought they would lose all support from them. The priests would accept the defiled and blemished offerings, though God would not. The priests were hypocritically pretending to be more indulgent than God was. They were deceivers; they dealt falsely and fraudulently with God.

God's desire was for the people and priests to stop and realize that their lack of blessing was not caused by God's lack of concern, but by their disobedience of the law. Notice

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what it means to be a hypocrite. In the New Testament, the word *hypocrite* is based on the Greek theatrical words that mean *actor, to play a part*. The essential identifier of hypocrites, therefore, is that they pretend to be something that they are not. It coincides with what we think of as hypocrisy today. Hypocrites pretend to be paragons of virtue and Godliness on the outside, while lacking spiritual virtue and character on the inside, from the heart.

Mark 7:6-7 He [Christ] answered and said to them [the Pharisees and scribes], “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

So Jesus’ graphic exposure of the hypocrites here is to picture them as white-washed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within, are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Not a pretty picture at all.

These types of people are what Malachi refers to when he talks about those who say, “The table of the Lord is defiled, and its food is contemptible.” Or today people say, “I did not get anything out of that sermon,” or “I do not like it when the minister talks about depressing things,” or “I would rather not be here, in this church, but there is no place else to go.” Not only is that insulting to the other brethren, it is self-righteous and hypocritical.

So the seventh principle is that the Israelites’ lack of honor and reverence is shown by their hypocrisy. Thankfully, these things are not all-encompassing problems in the church; there are just some who, through human nature, tend to exhibit them.

Eighth principle: the Israelites’ lack of honor and reverence is shown by their weariness for things related to God.

Malachi 1:13 You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness! And you sneer at it,’ says the Lord of hosts. “And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” says the Lord.

Malachi put into words the thoughts of the priests—“Oh, what a weariness!” For them, the holy service of God had become a bore, a labor of duty rather than of love, a yoke around their necks. Malachi notes their boredom with the ritual, and the Christian has

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much less cause to be bored with worship. We do not have to do all of that laborious work with the sacrifices that they had to do, yet we still find in ourselves, through human nature, to let down at times.

Malachi notes their boredom with the ritual, and its implication, “you sneer at it,” is the same as saying, “You look in contempt at going to Sabbath services.” Some translations say it should be rendered “Me.” If that is the case, the statement would be, “You sneer at Me,” (this is God speaking), or “You look in contempt at Me, in coming before Me.”

The very men who were mediators between God and His people, the teachers of Israel and the court of appeal, were by their own choice profaning their office in bringing shame upon the name of God. “Sneer” or “snuffed”, that is, “You sneer at it,” is a metaphor taken from cattle, which when they do not like something, they snuff their noses at it. After this, neither they nor any other cattle will eat it.

In Micah 6:3, God challenges Israel to prove to Him that there is a weariness or hardship of His service:

Micah 6:3 “O my people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me.”

In Isaiah 43:22-24, God shows that it is the people who have wearied Him, not He who has wearied them. In II Thessalonians 3:13, we are cautioned by the apostle Paul not to become weary in well-doing. When we take for granted God’s mercy and blessing, the result is weariness, apathy, and boredom.

So the eighth principle is that the Israelites’ lack of honor and reverence is shown by their weariness for things related to God.

Ninth principle: the Israelites’ lack of honor and reverence is shown in their deception.

Malachi 1:14 “But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—for I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “And My name is to be feared among the nations.”

The particular example given in this verse is the voluntary offering, vowed under stress as a thanksgiving if God will grant deliverance. A male animal was specified for such a

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sacrifice.

Leviticus 1:3 If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord.

Priests, people, and resident aliens were permitted to pay vows (you will find that in Leviticus 22:18-19). All were open to the temptation to offer a cheap substitute when the time came to fulfill those vows. The cheat who attempted to deceive God when paying his vows was cursed. Recitation of the blessing and the curse was an integral part of the ceremony of covenant renewal in Joshua 8:34. To be cursed was no empty threat, but led to death, whereas the blessing bestowed life.

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;...

The person who trifled with God would not go unpunished, but would find out that He is a great King, as well as a Father and Master. He did not spare those who flouted His majesty. God emphasized again that His name is to be feared; that is, honored and revered. Even the heathen dreaded God because of His judgments, and what a rebuke and disgrace this was to the priests and the people of Israel who did not honor and revere Him.

Church leaders throughout history have run the risk of treating sacred things as ordinary. Familiarity with spiritual matters without a personal conviction to God leads to a treatment of them with indifference. Those who treat the worship of God apathetically are deceived because they do not really know God at all. If they truly understood His sovereignty, majesty, and awesome attributes, they would come before Him in awe, joyfulness, and humility.

The Israelites' lack of honor and reverence is shown in their self-deception.

As spiritually holy and royal priests, we must take our responsibilities very seriously. It is an honor and a privilege to be called to such a glorious service. However, there are times when our human nature tends to raise its ugly head because of dissatisfaction, leading to complaining, which leads to a defiling attitude. Let us avoid making the same mistakes and attitude that the people and priests of ancient Israel made, as the prophet

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Malachi describes. May we not allow ourselves to think and act like, “the table of the Lord is contemptible.”

Members of God’s church are in training to be kings and priests. Part of that training is that we are given priestly duties to assist our high priest.

Hebrews 10:19-21 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest [that is, Jesus Christ] over the house of God [that is, God’s church]...

Jesus is the epitome of perfection. He is the perfect High Priest, being the divine Son of God, who alone has sinless perfection, but still being a brother to humanity through His previous physical life.

In contrast to the sinner of ancient Israel with the offerings of the flawed priests and people, Jesus was the sinless offerer of His sinless self, once and for all, on behalf of His people. He is the quintessential excellence of the High Priest, because He made Himself the perfect sacrifice. Not only in His offering, but also in His place of service. He perfected the priesthood, because He entered into the most holy place of heaven to make atonement. Our High Priest is faithful and pure, so we must emulate Him as His royal priesthood.

The author of Hebrews, who was probably the apostle Paul, points out the characteristics required of us as a royal priesthood, under the High Priest, Jesus Christ, as we draw close to God.

Hebrews 10:22-25 ...let us [especially as individuals, but also as a group] draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

What we have here is the priestly attitudes and actions necessary to properly fulfill the office of God’s priests. There are seven things listed in Hebrews 10:22-25 that show us

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how we should be conducting ourselves as priests.

First, we must have a sincere, repentant, humble, faithful attitude. Second, we must have genuinely accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins. Third: we must have pure thoughts and actions, guided by the Holy Spirit. Fourth, we must be dedicated and consistent in our faithful submission and obedience to God and in our worship of Him.

Fifth, we must be considerate of and of benefit to one another, while at one and the same time, motivating each other with an excitement for God's way of life. This requires being a true witness of His way of life—that is, setting an excellent example.

Sixth, we must not refuse to or avoid meeting and fellowshiping with other members of God's church on the weekly Sabbath and Holy Days. Seventh, we must encourage one another and not become weary in well-doing. A word of praise, or thanks, or appreciation goes a long way to boost a person's morale, especially when discouraged. Our Christian obligation and dedication to one another is all the more pressing because the time is short.

May God grant us the spiritual maturity to properly honor and revere Him. We must never forget that we are members of God's holy, royal priesthood. What a high privilege and honor we have been given. It is an awesome opportunity, and we should not let it go to waste.