

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Prophecy of Malachi

Malachi 2:1-9

6 The Agony of Ungodly Leaders, Part 1

August 11, 2019

Malachi 2:1-9

1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests.

2 "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

3 "Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.

4 "Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the Lord of hosts.

5 "My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

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

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

8 "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts.

9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

To the Glory of God

One of the main things that the Protestant Reformation did, 500 years ago, was to recover the *primacy* of the Pulpit in the Worship Service on the Lord's Day. As more and more people were saved, and

the Gospel triumphed in more and more pagan lands with more and more people, there was a move *away* from the supremacy of Preaching and Teaching the Word of God by the visible church. At first, the move was very slight, and very few even noticed it. But some did, and as they cried out for a return to the Word of God as being the primary focus of the Service, their voices were drowned out by the thunderous support to make the Service more “user-friendly”.

So, as time went on, the thrust of the Worship Service began to lean more toward other things. Soon, the Sacraments, *especially* the Lord’s Supper, began to replace solid, biblical Teaching and Preaching as the main focus of the Lord’s Day assembly. And it wasn’t long until there was an entire generation of people, *who had been raised in the church*, who had never been taught *any* of the serious and eternal Issues that are *fundamental* to true, biblical Christianity.

And as more and more people in the church “knew not God”, it became easy for the Leaders of the visible church to add more and more Man-made rituals and earthly ceremonies and carnal ordinances that had nothing to do with genuine Christianity, and that now have become standard practice in many, many religious groups. And all these extra-curricular activities, that are nowhere to be found in the Bible, all but *eliminated* any meaningful understanding of the Scriptures. Sadly, it is common today to find people, who have spent the majority of their lives in the church who understand in great detail all of the man-made rituals, but who do not comprehend even the most basic Biblical Truth.

I remember as a child in the Anglican church looking on with awe as we got to the portion of the Service where the priest and the acolytes moved the Bible from one side of the altar to the other, as the organ played loud, religious music. Now they never actually *opened* the Bible, and they certainly never actually *preached* or *taught* from the Bible. They simply moved the “sacred relic” from one side of the colorful altar to the other. And for *that* to be the *highlight* of the Service shows how far people can get when the Word of God is not honored.

Today, it is rare to find anyone who understands that Preaching *is* Worship. Much of “modern American Christianity” thinks that “Worship” has been relegated to the music played before somebody preaches. And it is common today to find people who never actually hear a Sermon, because the singing *becomes* the Service! This is when the sensual mentality of the Woodstock generation goes to church.

Now, even though I am a lousy singer, I love music. But as more and more attention and time and money and effort is spent on the music that is played and sung in the church, less and less attention and time and money and effort is spent on the Word of God being preached and taught and understood and loved and obeyed. It is common today for people to go to a particular church for no other reason than the music.

But we must understand that *every* aspect of the Lord's Day Service is Worship. From the Prelude, to the Invocation, to the exposition of the Psalms, to the Music, to the Offering, to the Catechism, to the Prayers, to the Worship Sequence, to the Sermon, to the Benediction, every single part of the Lord's Day Service is Worship. And that means that the "Glory of God" in the Person of Jesus must be the *focus* of all that we do and say and sing, and that Jesus alone must have the *preeminence* in everything.

But the Reformers of the 16th Century were wise in that they taught that we simply cannot leave the Worship Service up to the various ideas and whims of individual believers. They taught that we must look to God's infallible Word to lead us to worship God in the only two ways that give Him Honor, and the only two ways that God Himself seeks after:

1. Worship in Spirit
2. Worship in Truth

... and what these men *re-discovered* was a Concept that has since been labeled "The Centrality of the Word in Preaching". Now that may sound almost academic to you, but the reality is that unless Preaching is centered around the inspired Word of the living God, we soon descend into almost anything *except* Christianity.

Since every Word of the 66 Books of the Bible came to us by way of the mysterious supernatural process called "Inspiration", that means that the "Words of Scripture" are the most *unique* and the most *important* Words in all the world, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" very common men, who were all sinners, in the same way that the wind *moves along* a sailboat across the water. And what these men wrote down is perfect and entire and trustworthy and reliable. And so, what

we have in the Bible is both the Word and the Will of the Owner and Creator of the Universe.

God took very common and ordinary men and did a very uncommon and extra-ordinary thing in giving us the Bible. But God also took the very common and ordinary "tools of language", like everyday nouns and verbs and pronouns and adverbs and adjectives and prepositional phrases, and God anointed these things to give us Divine Truth.

So, the Goal of Preaching is to make the true and reliable Words of the Bible to be heard and known and understood and loved by the people so they may "believe rightly" (Orthodoxy). But the Power of the Word of God goes even further because in *believing rightly*, people, who have already experienced the Miracle of the New Birth, will change to "live rightly" (Orthopraxy).

But the Reality is that we simply can't believe and trust in what we don't understand. And we can't follow and submit to and obey what we don't understand. So, the Truth of Scripture must become known. It must be believed. It must be trusted and seen to be of vastly greater importance than the words of every other book. And one of the best ways for that to become true is through the Gift of Preaching.

Now the word "Preach" comes from a Greek word that has to do with *heralding a Message from the King*. Many years ago, villages and towns had what were called "heralders" or "town-criers". And the job of these people was to go to the center of the city and herald, or cry out, whatever message the king had for the people. And so, he would either walk through the streets or stand in the center, and with a loud, clear voice, he would say, "*Hear ye, hear ye, the king has a word to give to you!*" And the people would listen, partly because they knew that the messenger was not speaking on his own behalf. But also, the *manner* in which the messenger was crying out proved to the people that the Message was of great importance, because it was from the king himself. And if the messenger didn't speak all the words, or if he added to whatever the king had given him, he was severely punished.

But the people understood that after the messenger had delivered the king's message, the king would come to that city and he expected the people to have obeyed what he had sent the messenger to tell them. So, several things were very important to the people:

1. They needed to hear what the king had said.
2. They needed to hear *all* that the king had said.
3. They needed to *understand* what the king *meant* by what he said.

... and all three were vitally important if they hoped to obey. If the messenger spoke words that the king had not given, or if he left words off, or if he didn't help them understand what the king *meant*, there was no way they could obey, and the king would be furious when he came to that city and nobody was doing what the king wanted.

Now those of us who live in America have a problem with the concept of "Sovereignty". Because we understand things like "Liberty" and "Democracy" and the "Constitution" and the "Bill of Rights", we don't usual value concepts like "Sovereignty". We don't "do" kings here. In America, the people rule. And we are able to actually choose the people who rule over us. And if we don't like what they do, we fire them and get somebody else.

But the Bible was written in terms that run *counter-intuitive* to a Constitutional Republic. The Bible says that God is "Sovereign". And then it teaches that God is *absolutely* Sovereign. And then it goes on to say that God is absolutely Sovereign *over everything*. And finally, it puts forth the concept, that the one, true, and living God, Who is revealed in both Creation and Scripture, is absolutely Sovereign over everything, *all the time*.

So, God reigns. Absolutely. Always. And so, God doesn't ask, He doesn't request, He doesn't beg. God *acts*, and He *decrees*, and He *commands*, and He *expects*, and then God holds men and angels and demons *accountable* to what He has so ordered. God has no inclination to have to fit in with our arbitrary human notion of "Fairness". God is interested in things like "Righteousness" and "Justice" and "Mercy" and "Glory", and that He alone is known and adored and worshipped and loved and feared and obeyed and revered.

And God, all by Himself, has determined what is "Good" and what is "Bad", and what pleases Him and what pleases Him not. And God has chosen to display the "Glory of His Grace" by saving unworthy rebels by what He, alone, has done for them (at great cost to Himself), so that throughout the eons of Eternity, they will rejoice at what He has done, and they will magnify Him with unquenchable Joy. And God has determined to display the "Glory of His Justice" by leaving unrepentant

sinner to themselves *so they will not change*, so they might burn forever in Hell. And the first one thrills our hearts, while the second one terrifies us.

But God has decreed that the “way” He will save those on whom He has “set His Love” is “by” or “through” the “foolishness” of the Word that is preached. Now He didn’t have to set it up like this, but He did. And so, *nobody* is saved unless they hear the Biblical Gospel, and believe the Biblical Gospel, and respond to God’s Grace and the Gift of Faith by repenting and trusting in Jesus personally, and in what Jesus alone has done.

And that shows us the *necessity* of Preaching. And so, just like the old town-crier, God chooses men to “cry out”, to “herald”, the Message that the King of Glory has given them. They are not to make stuff up; they are not to add to or take away from the Message of the King. And they are told to preach that Message loudly, clearly, repeatedly, and unashamedly. So, we are to preach the Gospel as often and to as many people as possible, every single day, using every available means that God provides.

And the *Source* of our Preaching is not our own cleverness, or what we might think is important. God has already determined what is important. And He has provided the words that we are to use in our Preaching in 66 Books.

And 500 years ago, this all came to the forefront. And the two Issues that were the spark of the Reformation that set the world on fire, that resulted in a *re-discovery* of Grace and a *re-discovery* of the Scriptures were:

1. Who has final Authority to “bind the conscience” and determine “Right” from “Wrong”, Sin or Righteousness? (Formal Cause/Sola Scriptura)
2. How are lost people made Righteous before God? (Principal Cause/Sola Fide)

The visible church at that time answered the first Question with: “the Pope”, while the Reformers said, “No, it is Scripture and Scripture *alone*”. The visible church answered the second Question with: “Lost people are made Righteous *over time* by Grace, through Faith manifested through faithful participation in the Sacraments, faithful

attendance to the Mass, and faithful adherence to the Rite of Penance. The Reformers said, "No, we are made Righteous *instantly* by Faith and by Faith *alone*".

And as the visible church sought to first *explain* and then *answer*, and finally, to *reject* the Reformers by holding a Council¹, all they actually did was to pronounce an "Eternal Damnation"² on the Biblical Gospel. And at that point, they became "an apostate religious organization that has isolated itself from the Authority of Scripture", and they ceased to be a Church.

But, how did this "church" get to the point where they rejected what the Bible clearly teaches? They left off the clear and precise Truth of Scripture and replaced it with (well-meaning) Man-made doctrines and humanly engineered fables. And in *abandoning* the ongoing Preaching and Teaching of the Scriptures, they cut themselves off from the only Safeguard God gave us to prevent false teaching from entering in.

So, it isn't only that a church must have Preaching. It is that they must have *biblical* Preaching. They must have *clear, precise, serious*, and *full* heralding of the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God. But we must go even further and say that this full and serious and precise Preaching must be carried out with men who actually *believe*, men who are overwhelmed with both the *seriousness* and the *importance* of the Word of God, and men who have been gifted with the ability to behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, and to love what they see, and to be changed into what they see.

Other than that, you have, merely, humanly created religious organizations. And all you have are hirelings, professional talkers who speak about things they have never seen, things that have never experienced, things they don't believe, and things that don't mean anything to them. And that is *exactly* what Malachi faced in his day.

Now as we have already discovered, the Burden of Malachi is a series of "Divine Indictments" that God gives to His Own people. And last time we looked at the "Horror of Casual Worship" as Malachi cried out against the hypocritical Priests in the Temple. Verse 6 says:

¹ The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

² Anathema

A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'

But we saw that their ongoing disrespect toward God was the result or the symptom of an even *greater* problem, the Priests of Malachi's day *despised* God's Name. They were bored with God. They *devalued* God's Glory, they saw no Reason that God should be honored. So, casual, laid-back, unconcerned, and lazy Worship flows out from a heart that does not see and that does not value the Greatness of God. So, the reason the Priests were offering sick and maimed and stolen animals for sacrifices was because they did not love God, and they did not hold God to be the Treasure of the Universe.

But when you carefully read the Passage from verses 6-14, you come to see that it was not only the Priests who were dishonoring God, but the people were also being way too casual in their worship of God. For example, back in **Malachi 1:14**, the Lord said:

But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the Lord of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations.

Now, we must remember that under the specifics of the Old Covenant, the Levitical Priests didn't personally own any land. But that means that the Levites also couldn't personally own any flocks of animals either. So, this particular "Divine Indictment" had to do with the rank and file Jew who owned land and who had flocks. And God says here that they kept the strong and healthy animals for themselves to sell and make money off of, but gave God their maimed and diseased and mangy animals for Sacrifices. And God pronounced a Divine Curse upon them.

And this tells us that the problem of Casual Worship was a problem that had grown *beyond* the Priests and beyond the Temple workers and was now infecting all the people God had chosen to belong to Him. All over Israel, during the last 400 years before Jesus was born, people began to love money more than they loved God. And this Sin had now worked its way into their Worship of God. And instead of

giving God their *best*, they brought the worthless leftovers of their business to God.

But now, as we begin to explore what the Prophet wrote in Chapter 2, we see that Malachi focuses directly on the Priests. Look again at Verse 1:

And now this commandment is for you, O priests.

But we now have a problem. In order to make an Old Testament Passage *relevant* to us, who live under the infinitely superior New Covenant, we have to ask a series of Questions:

1. Is there a "Priesthood" under the New Covenant?
2. If so, *who* are these Priests?

Now, to begin with, the New Testament never uses the term "Priest" to describe a Pastor or Elder in the Church that Jesus is building, and the Church over which Jesus is Head. There is no official or formal "Priesthood" in the New Testament Church. And the reason for this is very clear: Jesus Christ Himself has become a permanent Priest for us. And that Truth has made the Old Testament Priesthood completely obsolete. Now to verify this, please go with me to **Hebrews 7:23-28**:

The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, *appoints* a Son, made perfect forever.

Now this Passage teaches that Jesus Christ is now the one and only Priest between us and God. And the reason for this is that His

perfect Sacrifice was *final*. But also, because **Hebrews 7:16** says Jesus became our High Priest:

... not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.

... and then, **Hebrews 9:11&12** go on to say:

... when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Now when you put all this together, you come to realize that the Old Testament Priesthood has been *forever* replaced, "once and for all", by the priestly Ministry of Jesus in two ways:

1. Through the "once for all" offering of Himself as the final Sacrifice for sin.
2. Through His "ongoing" Intercession for us today from His Throne in Heaven.

... and that means that there is no formal or official Priesthood in the New Testament Church. And that also means that any religious organization that *has* a formal and official Priesthood is at war with both the *finality* and the *sufficiency* of Jesus' Sacrifice on the Cross.

So, for example, in the Roman religious system, they have a formal and official Priesthood. And that Priesthood is *extremely* important to them, because, to them, the Mass is a *real* sacrifice. In their Man-made religion (that is entirely unbiblical) the Bread and the Cup are "transubstantiated" into the literal Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and are offered up to God *for the forgiveness of sins*. This *repeated* sacrifice, by those who believe the pope is infallible, caused an official Priesthood to be *mandatory*, so these Priests could administer the sacrifices *in the same way* that the Old Testament had an official Priesthood to offer the animal sacrifices.

But the Reality is that, in the minds of these people, both the Mass and the clerical Priesthood, *minimize* and *distort* the "once-for-all

Sacrifice" of Jesus Christ on the Cross at Calvary 2,000 years ago. And so, by *disobeying* the Bible and having a formal Priesthood, the Truth that there are no more sacrifices for Sin is lost to the average Roman. And the glorious Good News that the Death of Jesus Christ, once for all, was sufficient to forgive all who believe, is either grossly *minimized* or not comprehended at all. And that is why there is no more official Priesthood in the New Testament, and that is *why* it is so wrong to have one. The priestly offering of sacrifices is over. And our Lord Jesus ended it forever!

But what replaced the Levitical Priesthood of the Old Covenant is the wondrous New Covenant Truth of the "Priesthood of the Believer". So now, in the Church, in Jesus Christ, the entire Body of saved and redeemed people are what the Apostle Peter described in **1 Peter 2:9&10:**

But you are A *CHOSEN RACE*, A royal *PRIESTHOOD*, A *HOLY NATION*, A *PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION*, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were *NOT A PEOPLE*, but now you are *THE PEOPLE OF GOD*; you had *NOT RECEIVED MERCY*, but now you have *RECEIVED MERCY*.

... and ...

1 Peter 2:5

you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

... and what the Apostle John saw:

The Revelation 1:6

He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This means that Who Jesus is, and what Jesus alone has done, has opened the way for every sinner, from every nation on earth, to come directly to God through Him. We do not need any earthly "Mediator". We can go with Jesus, our glorified High Priest, right into the Holiest Place where God Himself dwells. And, because of what

Jesus did, *all by Himself*, we can find Grace to help in our time of greatest need (**Hebrews 4:16**).

So, there is no official Priesthood in the New Testament Church. And no church Leader is called "Priest" because of their Office in the Church. So, in that sense, when Malachi speaks of the Priests here, *all* genuine believers have to apply this to our lives. And so, all truly saved people should worship the Lord *deliberately, seriously, and purposefully*. We should never seek to "get by" by offering God our *least*. We should strive to prove that we believe that Jesus is the Treasure of the Universe by giving God our *best*; our *best* time, our *best* energy, our *best* mental state, and our *best* rejoicing. And we should never worship God casually.

But now this raises another Question: Were there *other* duties that Priests had in the Old Testament *besides* offering sacrifices for the sake of the people, duties that *may* indeed be continued in the New Testament? Yes! Look again at **Malachi 2:7**:

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

So, in addition to being the men who sacrificed the animals, the Priests, under the Old Covenant, were also Teachers. And *this* part of the Ministry of the Priests is *continued* in the Church of the New Testament with the Ministries of both the Pastors and Elders. **Ephesians 4:11** says that Jesus gave the "Ministry Gifts" of both Pastors and Teachers to His Church, to "**equip the saints for the Work of the Ministry**". **1 Timothy 3:2** says that there are to be "Overseers" in the Church who are "**able to Teach**". And in **1 Timothy 5:17** the Apostle Paul wrote that some Elders in the Church are to labor *continually* and *exclusively* in both Preaching and Teaching (cf. **Titus 1:9**).

So, this *part* of the Priests' duties is *continued* in the Pastors and Elders of the New Testament Church. And these men are responsible to Teach and to guide and to lead the Church in pleasing the Lord by being Biblical. But they are never called "Priests," because that would imply too much likeness to the Old Testament Office. Pastors do not offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, not in the Mass or any other way. We do not offer Jesus Christ to the people through the Mass. Instead, we point people to the finished, all-sufficient Work of the Cross

and directly to the living, interceding Jesus Christ, by the Word of God. And that means that Pastors and Elders are Teachers and Preachers above all else.

So, my Conclusion is that **Malachi 2:1-9** is very relevant for us today because the priestly failure that Malachi talks about has to do *especially* with their Responsibility as Teachers and Models and Shepherds for the people. And the Failure that the Prophet warns against here would be just as much failure today!

But now another Question comes up: Why should you (who are *not* Pastors or Elders) be interested in what Malachi has to say here about the pastoral Ministry? And there are some important Answers to that Question.

First of all, I only have "this much" time left. And when I breathe my last, this Congregation will have to call another man to be your Pastor. But the Reality is that most churches are grossly unprepared to do this because they have not been taught the biblical vision of the Pastoral Ministry. So, usually what happens is that the Congregation gets a group of young men to come in and preach a few "sugar stick" sermons each, and then they "vote" on who will lead them in God. And that is probably the single *worst way* to pick a new Pastor.

The next Pastor of this Church will not only need to comprehend the Biblical Truth about the Sovereignty of God in all things, he should also be a part of the "spiritual DNA" of this particular Body of believers. We are not important people. We are all sinners, who have been saved by Grace. But God has done a very unique thing here that young men are NOT going to learn in Seminary, no matter how good that Seminary might be.

So, my vision for the next Pastor of this Church is someone who comes to be a part of us, lives with us, worships with us, so we can observe how he loves the people and how he cares for the Truth, long term, not over a few weekends. I want to know how the next Pastor handles persecution and pressure. I want to see how he treats his wife, and how he raises his children. I want to find out how he pays his bills, and how he pursues Holiness in his daily life. The next Pastor should be a man of white-hot passion for God's Word, and God's people, and God's Glory. And he should be a man who is familiar with fasting and sacrifice. But most importantly, (and this is second only to how he

handles the Word of God) our next Pastor should be a man, who has personally suffered for the Glory of God.

Beloved, we do not want a “professional clergy- man”. The modern church is filled with educated and cultured and sophisticated men who all have the correct educational pedigree, and yet most have no idea how to hunger and thirst after Righteousness. They are graduates of the finest Bible-training colleges on earth, and yet most of them have never panted after God as the deer pants after the water-brook. They are masters of organization and administration, and yet they are not jealous for Jesus Christ to be seen and feared and admired and obeyed and glorified.

So, you should be praying daily for me and the Elders of this Church, and for the next man whom God will raise up to stand in this Pulpit. But the Reality is that you can't pray with confidence and power if you don't know what the Bible teaches about both the Pitfalls and the Purposes of true, godly Ministry.

It is always a great encouragement to me when people respond to my Ministry with understanding, when there is a deeply shared common vision of why I am doing what I'm doing. Yet that kind of deep, joyful responsiveness is simply not possible except where the people learn what the Biblical Vision of the Pastoral Calling is.

So, I want to lay a foundation over the next several Lord's Days to find out what Malachi infallibly teaches us about why what God spoke to the Old Testament Priests is relevant for Pastors today, and why even non-Pastors should care about what it teaches.

Now what seems to almost be an epidemic lately (and one that captures all the headlines) is the failure of men, who walk in the Calling of either a Pastor or Elder, to maintain a godly and holy life of sexual purity. The statistics tell us that 6 out of every 10 men in the church today are routinely engaged in pornography. Marital fidelity is at a low point, Divorce among believers is growing, and now we have a whole new range of sexual sins facing us that previous generations didn't have to worry about.

And God has burdened my heart about this. So, I have spent the better part of the last 20 years teaching what “Biblical Manhood and Womanhood” looks like. And I stress this because I see this as the seminal Issue of our time. And from the fact that Men no longer know how to be godly and loving, and Women no longer understand what

godly Womanhood is, we have all of the other things that flow out from this confusion like Abortion, unloved and unwanted children, abandoned children, molested children, and epidemic of violence toward women, ungodly Marriages, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, transgenderism, etc., all because godly and loving Men are not leading in the Home and in the Church, and godly and loving Women are not supporting them. Back in 2004, when we gathered together in a Solemn Assembly to fast and cry out to God for Marriages, I preached that this one Issue would consume this nation.

My point is that I absolutely agree that sexual sins in the Ministry is a big deal, and I will never minimize that. Back in 2017, the Banner of Truth ran an article about a godly man, who had just died and went to be with Jesus. His name was Erroll Hulse, a Baptist pastor from Liverpool, England. Hulse helped Ian Murray begin the Banner of Truth Ministry (of which I highly recommend). In 2011, Hulse and 17 other Pastors contributed to a marvelous book entitled *"The Preacher and Preaching"*. And on pages 76-77- Hulse wrote:

“It is a morbid and depressing fact that when it comes to adultery, there are too many casualties among pastors. Ministers are just as vulnerable as others. No area, no country, no denomination is immune. The damage done in each case is irreparable: the breakdown, as far as ministry is concerned, final. This is a distasteful subject, but we cannot shirk it. The matter demands faithful treatment. Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”³

Just this past week I wept as I read about yet another Pastor, Joshua Harris, the Pastor of a huge mega-church in Virginia, and the author of several books that influenced millions of young people to forsake the world and sexual immorality, is now divorcing his wife of 19 years, renouncing everything he ever said or wrote, leaving the Ministry, leaving his church, denouncing Christianity, and embracing sexual perversion.

But, as bad as that is, and I want you to hear me clearly, sexual immorality in the Pulpit is NOT the worst sin that a Pastor or Elder can engage in. What is *infinitely* worse than Adultery or even

³ *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel Logan, pp. 75–76

Homosexuality is the defection of far too many Pastors and Elders from the Authority and Sufficiency of sacred Scripture and away from Biblical Truth. Look, the damage done by a Pastor who falls into sin is horrific, *especially* when that Sin is sexual. But the damage done to the souls who that man leads astray, by incorrect, misleading, incomplete, or outright false teaching, is *far* worse, *infinitely* worse, *eternally* worse.

When God had finished moving in what we now call the First Great Awakening, in New England back in the 1740s, there were many Pastors, who reacted against the "God-centered" basis of that great Revival, and they turned wholesale toward a "Man-centered" Theology. And as soon as the Glory of God became distant in their minds, it wasn't long until they eagerly followed Charles Chauncy, a Boston Congregationalist, into the heresies of either "Unitarianism" or "Universalism".

And over 200 years later, in New England, you can still feel the icy effects of that Biblical departure on the condition of the churches in New England. Would to God that Charles Chauncy had only committed Adultery! And would that this were our only problem today! Don't be misled! The sexual scandals in the Pulpit of our day are NOT the greatest danger to the Church. The great Danger is the *minimizing* of deep spiritual commitment to doctrinal, biblical Truth in general and the Glory of God in specifics.

When God predicted the ruin of His Own people in the **Book of Amos**, He didn't say it would be caused by sexual sins in the Ministry. No, God said that the Famine that would utterly destroy them was a "Famine of the Word of God":

Amos 8:11&12

Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord God, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea And from the north even to the east; They will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, But they will not find *it*.

But look closely at what God says here. This would NOT be ...

... a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the Lord

... so, *this* Famine causes people to not be able to “hear” the Word of God. And whether that means that this Famine is actually a Famine in the ear of the individual, or a Famine in the mouth of the one who is supposed to teach God’s Word, or both, I’m not sure. But this is frightening. So, this is NOT a lack of access to Bibles, or a lack of churches, or even the removal of the ability to read the Bible. No, this is Divine Judgment where God no longer *allows* people to “hear” the Word of the Lord!

That is the single most *devastating* Priestly failure. In fact, I will tell you that it is the fact that the Pastors do not preach the Bible, and because they are no longer *passionate* about the Glory of God, that is the CAUSE of their sexual sins. But it all starts with what we do with Divine Truth. And that’s the problem that the Prophet Malachi was most concerned with as well.

What Malachi does in Chapter 2:1-9 is contrast the Failure of the Priests of his day with the Successes of the early Priests in Israel’s history. In verses 2, 8, and 9 Malachi mentions five different Failures. And in verses 5, 6, and 7 he describes what a successful Priesthood looks like. So, let’s explore this together:

Malachi 1:1&2

And now this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

Malachi begins this 2nd Chapter by speaking on God’s behalf and saying:

And now this commandment is for you, O priests

... and then Malachi gives us two horrible Failures of the Priests here:

1. The Failure to listen to God.
2. The Failure to “take to heart” the Glory of God.

1. The Failure to Listen to God

If you do not listen... then I will send the curse upon you...

The first great Danger to the Pastoral Ministry is that the Voice of God in Scripture is drowned out by other voices. One of the most frightening things in the Ministry is the very real possibility that one day we may wake up and open the sacred Book, and yet not hear anything from God. Remember what God told Amos about the kind of famine He was going to send. But why is this so terrible? Because the last line of verse 7 says the Minister of the Word is:

... the messenger of the Lord of hosts

And that means that there is a difference between a "Lecture on the meaning of ancient Texts", and a "Message from the Lord of Hosts". Jesus Christ gave the Gift of Pastors and Teachers to His Church, not simply to "share", *not* to talk about spiritual issues, and *not* to lead discussions about old writings. God did not tell the Pastor to simply "explain problems", not to simply "study texts"; we are not told to psycho-analyze the inner cry of the individual". No, we are called to "herald a Message from the Lord of Hosts to God's people". And you simply cannot *herald* what you have not *heard*.

Today the Pulpit of the American Church is filled with Politics, and Social Issues, and Patriotism, and Pragmatism, but it is *not* filled with God. It is not filled with God and the particularities of His Holiness that leaves us breathless and that causes us to wonder after Him. The average person today is awed by new apps for their phones, and the special effects of the latest super-hero movie, but we seldom are in awe of God. We fear terrorists, and higher taxes, and the future of the Social Security trust fund, and an over-reaching Federal Bureaucracy, but we do not fear God. We are angry with liberals and politicians and judges that legislate by fiat, but we are not angry at the Sin in our lives that *dishonors* God, and that gives the unsaved world a schizophrenic view of Christianity through our Casual Worship.

We know what our favorite movie star says, and we know what our favorite politician says, and what our sports stars say, but do we know what the Owner and the Creator of the Universe says?

And it is one thing for all this to be true. But it is quite another thing for this to go on and on and on for decade after decade after decade among those who say that Jesus is the Treasure of the Universe! We have to know that all this is caused by "Spiritual Apathy", and the fact that the Pastors and the Elders and the Leaders of the Church are *not* hearing the Word of the Lord! But the Voice of God through Malachi rings loudly today:

If you do not listen... then I will send the curse upon you...

... so, we need to beg God that He would forgive us, and heal us, and visit us again. We need to weep between the porch and the altar and cry out to God that He would open our ears to hear, and that He would loosen the tongues of the Pastors and Elders so that the Word of God is preached and heard and understood and loved and obeyed by the very people that God has called to be His.

2. The Failure to "Take to Heart" the Glory of God

... if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name... then I will send the curse upon you

Now please look carefully at how God phrased this second Failure. The Issue that God brings up here is NOT whether people believe in the Glory of God, or whether the Glory of God is good, or even great, or whether it is a part of the Pastor's Theology, or whether it should be preached. That is NOT Malachi's Burden here. The Burden of the Prophet is that the Priests do not **"take it to heart"** to give Honor to God's Name.

Now the phrase **"take it to heart"** is interesting. There are only two places in the entire Old Testament where this Hebrew word is used, here and in **2 Samuel 19:19**. And what this word conveys to us is a weighty and serious conscious effort to "put" or "lay" or to "set" something very important on something else. So, for example, a genuine believer takes a serious and eternal Truth, and he purposefully "sets" that Truth, or he decisively "lays" that Truth, or he consciously "puts" that Truth in his heart. And that effort of laying it on his heart

shows that he is taking that Truth *seriously*, and is not casual or nonchalant about it.

So, this means that the Honor of God's Name, the reverential Awe of God's Reputation, the Glory of God, is not merely a line-item of the Pastor's personal theology that he tips his hat toward periodically, but it is the *passion* of his very soul. This has to do with the Glory of God *not* being a side issue, or an Issue of secondary importance to the Pastor, but that it is prime. It is *central* to all he says and does. It is the ground on which he walks, the air that he breathes, and the motivation of his entire life.

So, when picking a Pastor, the Congregation should ask the man where the Glory of God fits in with his Ministry. Does the Glory of God come *before* the approval and praise of the people? Does it come *before* his wife and children? Does it rank *higher* to him than his own professional advancement, or his food? Does it come *before* any financial reward and material comfort? Does this man return back to the Glory of God again and again and again in his Sermons, as though it is the central theme in all of Scripture? Does he point to it like the needle of a compass toward the magnet of Truth, or like a weather-vane in a strong wind? Does his passion for God's Glory come out in private as well as in public, in his praying as well as his preaching, and in his playing as well as his studying?

Tell me what could be more crucial in calling a Pastor, or praying for a Pastor, or holding a Pastor accountable than that he "lay it to heart", that it "weigh heavy on his heart", to give Glory and Honor to the Name of God?

O, how I beg you to pray for me and the Elders that we would be men like this! O, how vital it is to have men like this in the Pulpit! O, how we are all paying the price for *not* having men like this! Plead with God that He would be Good to us to raise up men like this so that God will lift the Curse that troubles us all.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.