



Malachi 2:1-9
“The Danger of Departing from the Way”

NKJ Malachi 2:1 "And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

2 If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, To give glory to My name," Says the LORD of hosts, "I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, Because you do not take it to heart.

3 "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants And spread refuse on your faces, The refuse of your solemn feasts; And one will take you away with it.

4 Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue," Says the LORD of hosts.

5 "My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name.

6 The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity.

7 "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

8 But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," Says the LORD of hosts.

9 "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base Before all the people, Because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law."

It is often the case that as I exposit the word of God in preaching, I myself am sorely convicted. Truly I can say that I too need to hear and be under the authority of the gospel. But I must tell you that as I go over verses like these, as a Pastor I cannot help but be like the Apostles at the last supper who when Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" became exceedingly sorrowful and began to ask Him "***Lord, is it I?***"

I read these verses wherein the priests are rebuked in the sternest possible terms for departing from teaching the way of the Lord and profaning his worship, and I am compelled to ask the same question that I have no doubt thousands of pastors in the past have wondered, "***Have I done likewise or have I remained true to my calling?***"

The scriptures are full of warnings like this for Pastors, for instance James puts it very simply when he says:

NKJ James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

As Malachi says in verse 7 the "***the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.***"

The Pastor is a *Malak* a Messenger, or in the Greek *Anggelos* of the Lord. The Lord has committed his revelation into his hands like a scroll given to an ambassador, and it is his calling to open up that scroll and proclaim its contents faithfully. Simple right? Ah, I wish.

Imagine this, a great King gives his messenger a scroll and sends him off to a far country, to a nation in rebellion against the rule of his king. And the messenger comes into the square and opens the scroll and looking over the contents he sees that he is to read the proclamation of the great king's judgment against this people. He is to call the rebels and enemies of the true king who have disregarded his laws, he is to tell them that if they will truly repent and turn to him humbling themselves he will receive them with mercy, but if they will not then will receive a terrible judgment, which judgment is listed in excruciating detail.

Now imagine this messenger as he stands there all alone in the public square, countless angry eyes upon him. As he opens the scroll he thinks, "Oh no, this is death sentence for me, they'll rip me to pieces if I say all of these things to them. The king wants me to call these proud people LAWLESS REBELS and ENEMIES? Uhhhh... I don't think so. Let's make that **"Basically good people at heart"** how about disregarded his laws, ummm How about **"tried to keep his laws to the best of their ability"** repent and turn to him, that would imply they had sinned, how about **"if you will just agree to cooperate with me in your governance"** humble themselves? No no, **"strive for greater self-actualization through the pursuit of good morals and civility"** mercy? Oh no that would mean an act of unmerited grace they hadn't earned. No **"you will earn the even greater blessings of peace and prosperity under the great facilitator"** If not, swift judgement, no no, **"Uh, you won't be as personally fulfilled and happy"**

So when he has delivered this altered message, instead of being ripped to pieces by the "rebels and enemies" he is being smiled at by all the **"basically good people at heart"** He kids himself, well I delivered the kings message as I was commanded and everyone is happy.

This scenario has happened again and again and again in Christian history. But the question is, do we have any right to alter, to neuter the message of our Sovereign Lord? Do God's ministers have what is called *discretionary power* to alter or add to his word so that people might be pleased, or amused? The answer is no. And when they do so the Lord is not pleased.

In Malachi, the priests have already been rebuked for profaning his worship by allowing abominable sacrifices to be offered on his altars, and now he says that if they persist in this he will send a curse upon them. He says he will rebuke their descendents, and will spread *Peresh* that is literally Hebrew for *Dung* upon their faces, because that is what these lame and blemished offerings that they are giving him are at heart.

So the priests have profaned the sacrifices by taking away from their rigor to please the people, and now he also accuses them of failing to proclaim his law for the same reasons. In these things they have ceased to be like the priests of old and have become once again like the priests who spoke lies to the people in the name of the Lord prior to their being sent into exile. One of the things that the Lord said to that generation in Hosea 4:6 in condemning the priests was:

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Depart from the way of the Lord and it will be a cause of condemnation, and will cause many to stumble. For the word of God is the way to heaven. Depart from it and you are instantly in the broad path that leads to destruction. Church after church in history has repeated this pattern turning away from the preaching of the gospel, saying well we don't want to offend people by being too narrow, and has ceased to proclaim the simple declaration of the Lord: ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** Now there is a narrow message. If we just broaden it and say that there are many ways to heaven, people will be happier. But in so doing they forget what Jesus taught about the Broad and the Narrow:

Matt. 7:13 " Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Malachi then is seeking to Reform the practices of the Priesthood, he wants a return to the pure administration of the sacrifices or ordinances of the Lord, because these sacraments of the OT church pointed forward to the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of blemished, blind, lame animals aside from showing a heart that held the Lord in contempt was not an accurate picture of what would come. Only the perfect unblemished lamb Jesus could take away the sins of the Lord, they were by analogy teaching the people that any old lamb will do and undercutting the gospel.

He also wants them to return to the preaching of the pure word of God, the law of truth setting forth God's awesome standard and showing them that if they were going to be saved it must be through the atonement God provided. Dumb down the law, make it palatable to the people and you set the stage for pharisaism and works righteousness. Worse yet they had corrupted the message so much that they the people were falling into open sin, saying that God's standard was less than righteous less than perfectly holy.

They had even corrupted the discipline derived from the law, showing partiality in its administration. The mighty and powerful might expect preferential treatment from the priests. This practice of taking bribes and bestowing favors and abusing their office was wretched and led to the condemnation of the sons of Eli and Samuel. But we fool ourselves if we think this did not continue and get worse, in fact by the time Christ came we see that the high priests office was utterly corrupt. Even James had to rebuke the pastors of his time saying:

James 2:1 "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"

4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

It is a terrible temptation to show this kind of partiality today. [explain]

So what was the Lord seeking in the church as he delivers these words to Malachi? A Reformation in Word, Sacrament, and Discipline. And that was what over a thousand years later the Reformers themselves would seek saying that these three things were absolutely vital to having a *true church*:

The Belgic Confession teaches:

" The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in chastening of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself."

" As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry." [Belgic Confession, Article 29]

Application: What then should we seek? True Pastors, and a True Church! [*Note the danger of even beginning to depart from the way*]

NKJ 2 Timothy 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:

2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.