



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **Despising the God of our Worship**

Malachi 1:6-14

As image bearers, worship is our chief end and so our highest calling.

Isaiah 43:6b-7, "Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

From this text we conclude that we literally were made to worship God.

That no doubt is why worship is one of the primary reasons we were *re-created* in

Christ. Recall the words of our Lord:

John 4:23, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”<sup>1</sup>

Truly we were made and then remade to worship the Lord — which has massive implications when it comes our lives, one of which is found in the Psalms.

Psalm 115:4, 8, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands... Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.”

Don’t miss this incredibly important passage: you will become what you worship! A. W. Tozer put it this way:

We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God... The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God... (Tozer, 1920, p. 9)

There is no question: our view of God will directly impact how we live, what we think, the things that burden us, our response to the world around us, and so much more!

We see this worked out in the lives of the people of God in Malachi’s day. The world in which they lived was difficult! Yet a significant portion of their struggle was of their own making! The text before us is an example of this. It is no accident that the first two issues God addressed with His struggling people revolved around their *telos*, their chief end. The first we saw a couple of weeks back in Malachi 1:2-5 which revolves around God’s love for His people and so their love for Him in return. The second is the passage before us and God’s call for His people — most notably the leaders, the Priests — to live unto the glory, honor, and praise of God. Yet, because these leaders fell short,<sup>2</sup> they and the people of God reaped so much more of the miseries of this life! We pick it up with the necessity of God’s worship.

### [The Necessity of God’s Worship, Malachi 1:6-14](#)

This pericope is quite repetitive when it comes to the description of the character of God, the glory of His name, and so the need for the people of God to worship Him. Consider, we read the exalted title “the Lord of hosts” (vv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) no less than seven times, making it one of the primary themes of this passage! The expression speaks of the glory and power of God as the commander of a countless host of angelic warriors! The implication is clear: if there is anyone or anything to fear in life, it is NOT famine, warfare, want, or opposition. It is NOT an evil king, governor, or nation, BUT

God!

Matthew 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Such is the glory and greatness of our God. He alone ought to capture the fear, reverence, and so that which must move His people. And yet there is more.

Malachi 1:14 identifies God further as “...a great King...” — the significance of this title is that God’s people had just lived through the regencies of some of the greatest kings in ancient history: Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, and the like. Yet of all rulers and monarchs before whom many a Jew prostrated themselves, God was and is “the greatest” (a description Malachi uses of God four times in this text)! In light of this, we note that the passage before us revolves around His worship. Notice that v. 6 speaks of “honor” and “respect”! The word for “honor” is the word **כָּבֵד** (*kabad*) which, as you know, speaks of the weightiness or substance of the Lord.

Isaiah 64:4, “For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.”

Unlike the false gods of the nations, God the Lord acts on behalf of His people. His love, compassion, holiness, and justice result in tangible blessing or cursing!

The word for “respect” is **מוֹרָא** (*mora*) which has as its root the Hebrew word for “fear”, **יָרָא** (*yare*). Yet, unlike the word for “fear,” this word lays emphasis on the *emotion* of terror as in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 26:8, “And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror [that’s our word] and with signs and wonders.”<sup>3</sup>

This is the trauma of God’s majesty which R.C. Sproul so eloquently described as one of the results when man enters into the presence of the living God. R. C. Sproul wrote in connection to Christ calming of the storm:

We see a strange pattern unfolding here. That the storm and raging sea frightened the disciples is not surprising. But once the danger passed and the sea was calm, it would seem that their fear would vanish as suddenly as the storm. It didn’t happen that way. Now that the sea was calm, the fear of the disciples *increased*... In the power of Christ they met something more frightening than they ever met in nature. They were in the presence of the holy. (Sproul, 1984, p. 73)

that is what is behind the word for “respect”- it speaks of reverence, awe, trembling!!!

Yet there is more.

Malachi 1:11a, “For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting<sup>4</sup>, My name *will be* great among the nations...”

This expression is used three times in this passage! It describes the end toward which all of Redemptive and World History is moving. It reminds us of Paul’s words in Philippians.

Philippians 2:9-11, “Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The clear emphasis and theme of this passage is the majesty, glory, and awesomeness of God before whom the world is but a speck of dust and the duration of a man’s life is but a vapor! This is the God who has set His love upon His people (Malachi 1:2-5) AND this is the God whom they were called and privileged to worship! *But somehow the signals got crossed and the priests made worship about man!*

God ordained worship NOT to give man a pick-me-up OR to enable us to feel good about ourselves. RATHER, it is a time for God’s people to engage in their highest end, glorifying and enjoying the Lord! As such, all that we do in worship is NOT for us, BUT a reflection of God’s worth!

In light of this, we see that the priesthood in Malachi’s day had veered way off the course, they were taking God’s name lightly! Notice the language:

Malachi 1:6b, “A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master.<sup>5</sup> 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 [character]. But you say, ‘How have we despised Thy name?’”

The word for “despise” is **בָּזָה** (*bazah*). It is used four times throughout this pericope and describes the action of taking something or someone lightly; it is the opposite of the word for “honor.”

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament put it this way:

The basic meaning of the root is to ‘accord little worth to something.’ While this action may or may not include overt feelings of contempt or scorn, the biblical usage indicates that the very act of undervaluing something or someone implies contempt.” (R. Laird Harris, 1999, p. 98)

In addition to this word, we also read that the priests by their actions were:

- profaning [which means to wound, pierce, or to slay] the name of the Lord
- disdainfully sniffing at the call of God when it came to His worship- the expression is one of contempt, “*Fphe, the worship of God!*”

Such a contrast! As children of the living God, we are privileged to have a relationship with the King of kings and Lord of lords. And yet, we grow bored with Christ, familiar, and so *Mechanistic!* When this occurs, it isn’t long before it is reflected in our worship! That is the concern of God in the text before us.

### Their Improper Worship, Malachi 1:7-8a & 12, 13b, 8b-9, 6.

Speaking to the leaders of God’s people, the Priests said:

Malachi 1:7-8a, 12, “*You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.<sup>6</sup> But you say, ‘How have we defiled Thee?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is to be despised.’ [this is NOT referring to the communion table, BUT the tables which were placed at the side of the alter of Burnt Offering where the animals were killed<sup>7</sup>] But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?<sup>8</sup>... 12 But you [emphatic- *You, God’s priests!!!*] are profaning it [God’s name<sup>9</sup>], in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.’”*

The text is NOT clear as to whether or not this is what the priest actually were saying. In fact, it seems to indicate that the way they were “saying that the table was despised” was by their action of “presenting the blind, lame, and sick for sacrifice” (In other words, v. 8 explains v. 7)!<sup>10,11</sup>

As that is the case, these priests were teaching by their actions that God’s worship was NOT about the Lord or His honor, BUT about man, his needs, and so his desires — *which is an egregious sin on the part of the leadership, for recall:*

- What you and I worship will determine what we become!
- Accordingly, what the priests were doing here in the end would be to the ultimate harm of God’s people!

Now what is amazing about this is that by our standards, what these priests were doing would NEVER have been accepted.

Malachi 1:8, ““But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you?<sup>12</sup> Or would he receive you kindly?’ says the Lord of hosts.”

According to Persia law/custom, the local Persian governor was supported in part by the gifts/offerings of the people of his territory.<sup>13</sup> As such, God's people gave the best of their flock to these governors. Is God NOT worthy of more honor? And yet, these priests gave the worst of the flock and that with a contemptible motive.

Malachi 1:9, “But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?” says the Lord of hosts.”

Shockingly, the language here is that of placation: “*But now will you not entreat [or endeavor to secure] God's favor [through sacrifice]?*” That is the nuance. So NOT ONLY were the Priests offering defiled sacrifices to the Lord, BUT they were doing it in order to placate God so that He might look kindly upon them!

Shockingly, that was their worship! It was about man, for man, and driven by the likes and dislikes of man! As such, it fell way short of the majesty and honor of God and so created a weak and anemic people bound by the fear of man!

And yet would you notice? There is NO CONDEMNATION here! God did NOT disown these priests. In fact, He loved them (Malachi 1:2-5)! And it was because of this love, that God allowed these priests to reap what they in their sin were sowing — which brings us to the pastoral consequences.

### Fruitlessness, v. 10.

Malachi 1:10, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates<sup>14,15</sup>, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on My altar!*<sup>16</sup> I am not pleased with you,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘nor will I accept an offering from you.’”

Recall what we saw last time. God is utilizing Covenantal Language. God being “pleased” or “displeased” refers NOT to an emotional response of the part of the Lord (He is impassible). It is NOT God being moved to happiness or sadness on account of His people. RATHER, it is God making a declaration as to the consequence of His people's service — specifically that it was “NOT pleasing” and therefore “unacceptable”!

There are many benefits that accompany a saving relationship with Christ that go beyond forgiveness. When the child of God lives by faith (cf. Hebrews 11:6), they enjoy tangible benefits in the Lord — NOT on account of merit, BUT consequence.

Galatians 5:2, “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.”

Is Paul suggesting that if the Galatians reverted back to a works-righteousness

relationship with God they would lose their salvation? No! Well then, in what way would “Christ be of no benefit to them”? They would NOT come to enjoy/experience the covenant blessings that accompany the life of faith/dependence upon God- like “These blessing are the assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end” (WSC #36). Yet these are but a few.

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

Though we are in Christ, if we do NOT draw near to God in prayer (~the throne of grace), we will NOT “find grace to help in time of need.” This blessing comes as we rely upon the Lord in trial!

James 4:6, “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

James here is NOT talking about saved verses unsaved people, BUT proud verses humble Christians. The life of faith/reliance/dependance upon God- humility- brings with it “a greater grace.” That is what Paul is talking about when he said, “When I am weak, then I am strong”! (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Isaiah 58:13-14, “If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the Lord honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, from seeking your *own* pleasure, and speaking *your own* word, THEN you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

The focus of this passage is NOT on graces that all enjoy in Christ, BUT on those which come as the child of God spends the Lord’s Day refreshing themselves in Christ! These are the “rewards/benefits/consequences of those who rely upon Christ” (Hebrews 11:6)! Conversely, when we speak of God “cursing” the ones He loves (as in v. 14), we likewise take this as covenant language in which the efforts of God’s people are met NOT with wrath or condemnation, BUT with “leanness of soul”- as in the Psalms with David’s testimony:

Psalm 32:3-4, “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. [Selah].”

Psalm 106:15 (KJV), “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

The focus in our text is on the benefits that accompany the life of faith/reliance/delight in God! It is these benefits which the priests of our passage forfeited when they chose to worship God their way! That brings us to a second consequence when we fall into Mechanistic Christianity in our worship, that worship becomes a burden.

### Worship Becomes a Burden, v. 13a.

Malachi 1:13a, “You also say, “My, how tiresome it is!” And you disdainfully sniff at it,’ says the LORD of hosts...”

I recently heard an illustration of the teaching of this text. As we go about our lives on a daily basis, we carry around our body weight rather effortlessly, don't we?

- We get out of bed in which we literally squat our body mass.
- We go down or up a flight of stairs with ease.
- We mow the lawn, vacuum the floor, or clean the kitchen with little or no effort.

Yet try to do these things when you are sick! Just getting out of bed may require all the strength you have. Christian, when our walk with God is healthy, the call placed on our lives in the form of God's worship is a delight. It is only when we are spiritually ill that His worship becomes “wearisome” ... a “burden” ... “tiresome”!

And so, that which was Korah's greatest delight — something he would rather enjoy than the abundance of many wicked (cf. Psalm 84) — had become a burden to the Priests!

How so? Because the outward activities of godliness do NOT bring with them the powerful benefits of Christ. Accordingly, the priests may have been offering the scheduled sacrifices, BUT their hearts were far from God! They were “...holding to a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5)!

That brings us to a third and final consequence of mechanistic Christianity and its impact on worship.

### Many Amongst the People of God became Defiled, v. 14a.

Malachi 1:14a, “But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock, and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord...”

The whole of this pericope (vv. 6-13) concerned itself with the rebellion of “the priests” and so the leaders of God's people. Yet with this verse, God turns His focus to the people of God as a whole. The implication is that the *laissez-faire* attitude of the priests had infected them! When word got out that the priests were offering to the Lord



less than the best, “their sin spread like gangrene” (cf. 2 Timothy 2:17) until many amongst God’s people likewise were worshipping the Lord in a self-styled manner!<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the covenant warning that God gave the priests in vv. 6-13, in v. 14 He gave to the people of God.

Now this might be the worst news that could be shared with any leader of God’s people because of them, God’s people had gone astray! Think of it.

- If the greatest joy we can have as leaders, parents, disciplers, and the like is “hearing of our children walking in the truth” (3 John 4), then what would be a massive source of discouragement?
- Knowing that a disciple of ours was NOT walking in the truth because of our failure!

Such was the third message God gave to the Priests in this passage. On account of them, covenant cursing — *leanness of soul* — would rest on all who followed their unholy example!

All this brings us to the question of the hour: So, what? What are we to do with this passage? God gave the answer at the beginning of this prophecy as He declared His unconditional love for His people, “‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord.” (Malachi 1:2a) And so the call for us is to love God in return!

Now as we have seen, mechanistic Christianity begins when we take our love-relationship with God for granted! It is this love-relationship which God has deigned to be that which produces all the benefits and fruit of the Christian life. Recall what David wrote:

Psalm 26:3, “For Thy lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Thy truth.”

Because of who God is — our loving Father — David was impelled to “walk in the truth of God’s word”!

Romans 12:1a, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice...”- it is knowledge of “the mercies of God” which produces holy living!

When it came to the call that God places upon the lives of His people, Nehemiah reminded them:

Nehemiah 8:10b, “...the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

The “secret” — if there is a secret — to maturing in our walks with God, holy living, diligent service in the cause of Christ, and the like is NOT willing to do more stuff or to be

more religious BUT heeding the command to “delight yourself in the Lord” (Psalm 37:4)!

And that is why when we get sidetracked in our walks, thinking that the service of God and so the pleasure of God is bound up in our religious acts of service, one of the first things that is compromised is God’s worship! Lain Duguid wrote:

This failure of true worship to engage the heart and mind invariably flows out of a failure to recognize and remember God’s love to us in the gospel... Worship cannot simply be commanded; it has to be drawn out of us as we contemplate the gospel and our hearts are stirred afresh by God’s amazing grace to us... ¶ It is this undeniable love of God in Jesus Christ that, when properly understood, transforms our hearts from reluctant worship to joyful praises. Grasping the gospel turns us from haters of God into those whose chief delight is to glorify and enjoy God. (Duguid, 2010, pp. 206-207)

So Christian, allow today’s passage to serve as a Shibboleth in your walk with God. If God’s worship is boring, the answer is NOT to change it so that it generates excitement in your life. RATHER, the answer is to go back to the basics in your walk, placing as your highest daily objective delighting in the Person and Work of our Lord!

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Consider Philippians 3:3. Worship is one of the things that defines us Christians, “For we are the *true* circumcision [In other words, we are the genuinely saved! And what is it that marks us as such?], who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

<sup>2</sup> “The Lord’s rebuke is particularly addressed to the ‘priests’, who, by teaching the law and overseeing the sacrifices of God’s people, should have provided them with ethical and religious instruction that would have guided their steps in the truth. These were the two most important aspects of a priest’s calling in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 33:10). In fact, the priests of Malachi’s day had failed in both of these key areas: in these verses the spotlight rests on their failure in the overseeing of sacrifices, while in the passage that follows it turns to their failure to teach God’s law (2:5–9).” (Duguid, 2010, p. 200)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also Jeremiah 32:21.

<sup>4</sup> “‘From the rising of the sun to its setting’ is a comprehensive merism, a literary feature that uses two extremes to incorporate everything in between: the Lord’s name will be revered from the uttermost east to the most distant west and everywhere between those horizons.” (Duguid, 2010, pp. 203-204)

<sup>5</sup> “Like his prophetic predecessors Malachi realized that the heart of the trouble he was probing was a broken relationship with God. Instead of affection and trust there was antipathy to God’s nature and will. That is why the priests failed to honour him with worthy sacrifices. Malachi was not concerned about the minutiae of the cultus but about the refusal of reverence for a Father and obedience for a Master who was great ‘beyond the border of Israel’.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 244)

<sup>6</sup> “*Polluted* (Hebrews *mēgo`āl*) has primarily a ritual meaning (Ezra 2:62, ‘excluded as unclean’), but these sacrifices are polluted in the first place by the attitude of mind of the offerers, and only secondarily by ritual imperfections.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 244)

<sup>7</sup> “The prophet was not referring to the table for the bread of the Presence (Exodus 25:23) because he had blood sacrifices in mind, but to tables mentioned by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40:39–43; cf. 44:16). These were provided at the gates of the inner court for the purpose of slaughtering the sacrifices...” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 245)

<sup>8</sup> “Every sacrificial animal was to be without blemish (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3, 10, etc.), and the law expressly forbade the offering of blind, lame or sick animals (Leviticus 22:18–25; Deuteronomy 15:21).” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 245)

<sup>9</sup> “When the Israelite spoke of God’s name he was speaking of his person. If God’s name was despised or polluted he was polluted. The Hebrew ‘polluted thee’ (supported by the Syriac and Vulgate) is likely to be original, but the harsh expression offended Greek ears, and so LXX, followed by the Old Latin, read ‘polluted it.’” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 244)

<sup>10</sup> “Clearly the priests would never have said that it was permissible to despise the Lord’s table, but Malachi is trying to bring to the surface subconscious attitudes by drawing out the implications of unworthy actions.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 245)

<sup>11</sup> If we believe the best about these priests- keeping in mind the difficulty of the day with its famine and food shortages- it may very well be that these priests thought they were doing good.

Twice a day, the priests were to perform the divine worship which involved the sacrifice of a lamb. Now at a time where food was scarce (cf. Nehemiah 5:1-5), what would it hurt if instead of killing the diseased and sick animal and throwing their body away (which is what they did at this time with diseased animals), we offered them instead to God and gave the healthy animal to the hungry people for food? As noble as that may sound (and I am putting the best spin on this that I can, for it may very well be that the priests were just being selfish, endeavoring to save the best for themselves), nevertheless we must never forget that with God we are dealing with a Holy Being! Entering His presence is always on His terms not our own.

<sup>12</sup> “The Hebrew phrase is literally, ‘Will he lift up your face?’, an idiom that means to show someone favour and acceptance. If they were to appear before their civil leader to request a favour or to ask for a decision, they would be expected to bring a gift. To present a second-rate gift to such an important person in the secular realm would be regarded as a personal insult, and would almost inevitably spell disaster for their appeal. Yet when it came to making their petitions and requests to the Lord, a decision-maker of far greater power and authority than the secular governor, they had no qualms about bringing such second-rate offerings.” (Duguid, 2010, p. 2002)

<sup>13</sup> From Nehemiah 5:14-15, we know that when Nehemiah served as governor, he did NOT take from the people of God the offerings which his office allowed according to Persian law. Yet the other Persian governors did.

<sup>14</sup> “The best contribution any of the priests could have made to the task of ensuring that pure offerings were made would have been to shut down the whole enterprise. Even though that action would have breached the laws in the Pentateuch that required the offering of daily sacrifices, it would have been better to break those laws than to keep on observing the letter of them when the intent of the whole sacrificial system was being flouted so profoundly. After all, the reason for these offerings was to please the Lord, but the Lord could hardly take pleasure in offerings which assumed that God necessarily owed a blessing in return for sacrifice,

no matter how flawed that offering might be. If it was intended to be 'tribute' (*minḥâ*) to a superior, it was a wasted offering, for it brought the Lord no delight." (Duguid, 2010, p. 203)

<sup>15</sup> "God's wish that someone might close the doors of the temple veils a threat that God would himself bring the temple worship to an end, which he did forever by the agency of the Roman armies under Titus in A.D. 70." (James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 582)

<sup>16</sup> "*Kindle fire upon my altar* refers to the part of the priests in worship, not to the slaying of the animals, which was done by the offeror (Leviticus 1:5; 3:2; 4:24, 29)." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 246)

<sup>17</sup> "If God's ministers are godly, the people of God will tend to be godly also and even the ungodly will have some cause for honoring the Lord's name. If ministers are unfaithful—if they suggest by their conduct that God is contemptible and his service a burden—then the people will not be edified, their lives will not exhibit the excellencies of God's character, and God will be despised among the heathen for their sake." (Boice, 2006, p. 581)