

Message #4**Malachi 2:1-9**

There is a statement that is made in James 3:1 concerning leaders. James says, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” Ministers are heading to a very serious judgment.

One thing is for sure, ministers do not want to get sloppy when it comes to their handling of God’s word. Leaders do not want to get sloppy when it comes to studying to rightly divide God’s word. There is a serious judgment on the line and that warning had better be taken very seriously.

The people responsible for leading and teaching and instructing the people in Malachi’s day were the priests and they were a disaster. They are a big part of the reason why God stopped speaking to the Nation Israel. Religious worship services had become a joke and frankly, should have been shut down. But they weren’t.

We know the leadership was pathetic because, when Jesus Christ finally did come to Jerusalem, those leaders despised and rejected Him.

GOD GIVES HIS PRIESTS SPECIFIC COMMANDS AND WARNINGS AND INSTRUCTION CONCERNING WHAT THEY WERE DOING AND WHAT THEY WERE NOT DOING, AND SHOWS THEM THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR GOD CURSING HIS OWN PEOPLE.

In verse 1, we specifically learn that this message is aimed straight at the priests. These priests had the responsibility to lead people into true worship and life based on the revealed word of God. That was their job. They were not doing their job.

It was their responsibility to study the Scriptures; communicate the Scriptures; examine the offerings and sacrifices to see that they met the code, to offer the offerings and to instruct the people in the true ways of God. That was their job. Also, when there were tough cases of dispute, their job, according to Deuteronomy 17:8-10, was to think through all Biblical data and pronounce a judgment.

The problem with these priests is that their hearts were not right (v. 2). So the first thing we learn from **verse 2** is this is a heart issue. A person could be a minister in a church, could be a leader in the church, could be a priestly parishioner in the church and really not have a heart right with God.

It is important to grasp the Hebrew word “heart” (leb or lebab) versus the English concept of heart. When most people use the word heart, they think of their emotions. If someone says that really touched my heart, they mean it really touched their emotions.

In Hebrew, it is very different. The heart can refer to the physical organ called the heart, but it also refers **to the center of thought and action based on one's mind** (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 427).

The heart is the place from which knowledge, thoughts, action, feelings and speech are derived. As one writer said, the heart is “the command center of a person's life.”

God demands that His leaders have hearts right with Him and what is described in this chapter are a bunch of leaders whose hearts were not right with Him. What happened is you had priests and leaders involved in religious rituals, but their hearts were not right with God.

So God addresses this and he confronts these priests. There are five parts to the message God gives to these priests, which are all derived from these verses:

PART #1 – God points out what the priests were not doing. **2:2**

There are three specifically stated items these priests were not doing. Keep in mind they are going to worship services, but they have real heart issues. Nothing in this list is anything the congregation could see. But God saw it, because He saw the heart.

(Item #1) - They did not listen to the word of God. **2:2a**

These priests were not listening to the word of God. They were not prayerfully seeking to study it, know it and apply it. That is a very serious charge against a priest because as **verse 6** says, a priest right with God should be after “true instruction.” There are very serious warnings and consequences for leaders who do not listen to God's word.

(Item #2) - They did not honor God's name. **2:2b**

These were priests, who gave people the impression that they honored God, but they did not really honor God and God would not honor them. Whether or not a person honors God is an internal heart issue and not an external issue. Although, what is in a person's heart will eventually externally surface.

Now the name used here is the “LORD of hosts” name. It is repeated in **v. 2, 4, 7, 8**. So the priests were not teaching the people that God was the God who is in sovereign control of all forces in heaven and on earth. They were not taking His word seriously and they were not honoring His name.

(Item #3) - They were not keeping the ways of God. **2:9a**

God expects His leaders to be concerned with keeping and obeying His word. These leaders weren't doing that in the privacy of their own lives. This was all a public religious show.

PART #2 – God points out what the priests were doing. **2:8**

There are four realities mentioned:

(Reality #1) - They had turned aside from God's ways. **2:8a**

God expects His leader to take in His word and apply it. Rather than having a life and ministry that walked with the Lord, they were turning away from the Lord. They turned away from the word of God and the things they had been taught.

(Reality #2) - They had caused people to stumble by their instruction. **2:8b**

Instead of their instruction helping people and getting them back on track with God, they were causing people to stumble.

Robert Alden, in his commentary, said, "To have an ill-prepared minister, an incompetent pastor, a hireling for a shepherd was bad enough; much worse was it to have a deceiver, a schemer, a wolf in sheep's clothing for a leader" (*Malachi*, p. 715).

(Reality #3) - They had corrupted the covenant of the Levitical priests. **2:8c**

A covenant was a legal agreement between two parties. The word "corrupted" means to damage something so bad that it is ruined and out of commission. The specific covenant to which Malachi is referring is the one that was made in Numbers 25:11-13. God made a covenant with the Aaronic line to be priests. It was their responsibility to carry out ministry in a way that maintained peace with God.

These priests were completely ruining everything pertaining to the priesthood and God.

(Reality #4) - They were showing partiality in instruction. **2:9b**

These priests were apparently favoring the rich and famous. They were not applying God's word consistently and fairly. They may have been partial to certain passages.

When we track the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ, He always taught the truth and it did not matter who the audience was.

The job of the minister is to accurately proclaim the truth and when a minister bends it because it is not politically correct or because it may be offensive or because the text may not please an audience or be positive, they are displaying the same kind of partiality that these leaders displayed and God does not view them favorably.

PART #3 – God points out what He was going to do. **2:2-4, 9**

We need to see the emphasis on the personal pronoun “I.” God says this is what I am going to do. When a minister refuses to honor God in their heart, God does not just turn His head and let that go. He will eventually move and carry out some very negative actions.

(Negative Action #1) - God would curse them. **2:2b**

Now whatever this logistically, specifically means at the moment, what we do know is that cursing is the opposite of blessing. In Deuteronomy we learn that cursing includes all kinds of things.

When we went through Deuteronomy 28, we catalogued 29 different kinds of cursings God names. God can curse the location, the food, the family, the fields, the flocks and herds. God can take away the income. God can send pestilence, disease, drought that does not stop. He can cause mental instability, physical instability and spiritual instability. He can stop His prosperity and protection. He can cause everything to go bad and no one can stop it.

It was the ministers who were responsible for leading the people into the cursing of God. Don't think God can't do this. He can. Move away from God and His word and He can allow our world to collapse.

(Negative Action #2) - God would curse their blessings. **2:2c**

The blessings He had given them would be cursed. He would put a stop to all the good things He gave them.

(Negative Action #3) - God would rebuke their offspring. **2:3a**

God specifically mentioned that in Deuteronomy 28:18. God said He would make certain that their children would not amount to anything.

(Negative Action #4) - God will degrade them. **2:3b**

God would see to it that His own people were degraded and humiliated. Look at what God says He would do. God would never get elected to office by telling people this. God says I will see to it that refuse will be smeared all over your faces. God says I will smear your faces with dung.

(Negative Action #5) - God will let them know that the negative things are from Him. **2:4**

God says I want My people to know that I am doing this to them because the ministers are corrupt and they have led you into this.

(Negative Action #6) - God will humiliate them before all the people. **2:9a**

It is a shame that Israel does not realize this today. Their religious leaders have led them away from God and His word and His blessings. Their own religious leaders have led them into the way of God's cursings.

Many ministers today are doing the same thing. They are not leading the people to the word and will of God.

PART #4 – God points out how the priests should view the covenant of God. **2:5**

God made a priestly covenant with Levi and the way that was viewed by God and Levi is the way the priests should always view this. There are four ways that God wanted His ministers to view Him and their responsibilities:

(Way #1) - God's covenant with priests was a covenant of life. **2:5a**

Levi had the responsibility to fear God and do what God wanted Him to do and God would give him and his priestly family a "full, happy life." Ministers have a responsibility to point out that the key to a great life is a right relationship to God. Everything about your life is contingent upon your relationship with God. He is the key to an eternal life and He is the key to an abundant life. He is the key to a full life and happy life.

(Way #2) - God's covenant with priests was a covenant of peace. **2:5b**

This is a covenant of "shalom." When one is in a peace relationship with God, there is no negative hostility in the relationship. A minister has a responsibility to point people to the truth about being in a peaceful relationship with God.

In this dispensation, the minister must teach the doctrine of justification, because that is the key to peace positionally (Romans 5:1). But then he must also teach the importance of applying God's word and the doctrine of sanctification because that is the key to peace practically (Philippians 4:4-9).

(Way #3) - God's covenant with priests is one that reveres God. **2:5c**

The Hebrew "mora" speaks of a deep, reverential fear and reverence for God because He is so stupendous (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 459). Ministers have a responsibility to have this themselves and they have the responsibility to teach the people to have a fear and reverence for God.

(Way #4) - God's covenant with priests is one that stands in awe of God. **2:5d**

The word "awe" (hatat) describes one who fears God and is very timid before God, realizing His sovereignty and terror (*Ibid.*, p. 314). The writer of Hebrews says, "Let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe" (Heb. 12:28).

This is the kind of attitude God's people should have about God. This attitude is totally amazed and in awe and even baffled by the fact that God would have a relationship with them. Ministers have a responsibility to teach the people that they need to stand in awe of God. God says I demand that My leaders reverence Me and stand in awe of Me.

PART #5 – God points out what the priests should be doing. **2:6-7**

These priests had seven responsibilities:

(Responsibility #1) - Priests have a responsibility to give true instruction from their mouths.
2:6a

Notice the point is not just giving any kind of instruction; but true instruction from God's word. The minister's job is not to give a bunch of social or psychological junk to people, but true instruction from the word of God. The job of the minister is not to please the people; it is to communicate the truth of God to the people.

(Responsibility #2) - Priests have a responsibility to not communicate unrighteous things from their mouths. **2:6b**

Woe to the minister who twists God's word and promotes unrighteous things.

(Responsibility #3) - Priests have a responsibility to walk in a peaceful relationship with God.
2:6c

Ministers have a responsibility to be examples to the flock by submitting themselves to the word of God so they have a peaceful relationship with God.

(Responsibility #4) - Priests have a responsibility to live upright lives. **2:6d**

God expects and demands His leaders lead righteous lives and live righteous lives that are consistent with His word.

(Responsibility #5) - Priests have a responsibility to turn people away from iniquity. **2:6e**

God says I expect My ministers to teach My word and point out sin and iniquity and preach against it.

(Responsibility #6) - Priests have a responsibility to preserve knowledge. **2:7a**

Ministers have a responsibility to preserve and protect true doctrine and true knowledge.

(Responsibility #7) - Priests have a responsibility to be one from whom others may seek knowledge. **2:7b**