

Some people think they can appease God by pitching up to church at Christmas and Easter. Doing things like getting married in church, getting the kids baptised in church. We think doing that will keep God happy. We've given him some attention, so he'll be okay with that.

Now I don't think many of us think like that. But what about us? We're regular; part of a small group. But could it be that we're just going through the motions of religious obligations. It's not done out of any sense of honour or respect for God. We go through the motions just to make some half-hearted effort to appease God. It doesn't feel like a joy and delight, it's more of a chore that I have to endure. Is that closer to describing you?

It might be we prioritise our family or our work over honouring God. Now please don't get me wrong. Work is good, family is good. These are good things. The issue that this passage will make us consider is whether they have gone from being good things, to being God things. Anything that becomes a higher priority to us than God is idolatry. Idolatry is putting something in the place that should be God's. If God is not our number one priority, if he is not our primary focus than we are making exactly the same mistake as the Israelites in Malachi's day were.

This book was written about 2,500 years ago to the Israelite nation. The Israelites were God's people. We saw last week that God loved his people and he reminded them of his love because he chose them and he'd defeated their enemies.

This section is a warning to stop dishonouring God by being half-hearted towards him. This wasn't written to people who only occasionally turned up at the temple. This was written to the ones who went every week. The ones who looked like they were fully committed. And superficially they did look committed, but God calls them out for their half-heartedness. This is a danger for us too. We can so easily look like we're all sorted in our Christian life. But, each of us need to humbly and deeply consider our attitude to God. Are we whole-hearted? Or, do we just give God the scraps from our life? Let's pause for a moment to think about our own attitude to God.

1. God deserves honour (1:6a)

Malachi 1:6 "A son honours his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty." The LORD Almighty is God. And he uses 2 very simple illustrations to say he deserves honour and respect. In the culture of the Malachi's day this would have been blindingly obvious, and it's still

mostly true today. A son should honour his father. That's normal and appropriate. Henry should honour me. Likewise, in our workplaces we should respect our bosses.

God uses these illustrations from normal life to highlight how he should be treated. The Israelite people were his children; he calls them his son. He was also their master. He had authority and power over them. And as father and master he deserves honour and respect.

God uses a lesser to greater argument here. If they honoured their earthly father; if they respected their earthly masters, how much more should they honour and respect the Lord God Almighty?

Now, if God is God. If God is the creator and sustainer of all things. If God is the LORD Almighty, which means he is the LORD of hosts. If God is who he claims to be, then he deserves respect. He is all those things, so, they should honour him.

And that's still the case today. God is still due respect and honour from all people. He's still the giver of life. He's still the sustainer of life. All things come from him. He's still our master. God deserves our honour. That simply means treating God as God, putting him first in all things. Doing what he wants us to do, not rejecting him and doing whatever we want to do. The question is,

2. Do we honour God with our actions? (6b-14)

Well the Israelites clearly didn't. Look down again at verse 6. They showed contempt for his name. And God's name represents all that he is, his whole character. Not only that but, see Verse 7, they placed defiled food on God's altar. Look at verse 8, they were bringing blind, diseased, crippled animals to offer to God as sacrifices. Not only was that expressly forbidden in the law, but what kind of attitude is that to show God?

God deserves to be our number one priority and focus. God deserves to have the best of us. Do you think that giving God your cast-off animals shows adequate respect and honour? Of course not, it's not even close. God should have been offered unblemished perfect animals. But they were giving him the dross, the ones they couldn't sell. They were giving God their least valuable animals. The one they wouldn't dare to give to their earthly governors.

Imagine it like this. It would be like you were hosting a dinner party and the Queen was one of your guests. How do you think she'd react when she realised that you'd cooked her dinner with Tesco Value mince that was 2 weeks passed its sell by date? Now of course you'd never do that. If the Queen was genuinely coming around, you'd pull out all the stops, you'd produce the finest food you'd ever done. Well the Israelites were in effect giving God out of date Tesco value mince. Isn't that shocking?

They're doing as little as possible to appease God. They give him a bit of respect, but he's way down their priority list. And, even the little they do for God, they see as a wearisome burden. See verse 13. They say God has laid on them a burden that is too hard to bear.

What a shambles the Israelites were. What a disgrace. They were paying lip service to God. See verse 10, God says to them they may as well put out the fires in the temple and close the doors. What they are doing doesn't please him. They were offering him such rubbish; it was all a complete waste of everyone's time.

Their actions showed their feelings towards God. God's accusation, that they had shown him contempt and defiled his altar, was accurate. They had dishonoured God.

However, the question we're forced by these verses to consider is, do we give God the honour he deserves? Now we're in a very different situation that the Israelites 2,500 years ago were.

Before Jesus came sacrifices had to happen in the temple which was geographically fixed in Jerusalem. But here God is pointing forward to a day when all the nations will say God's name is great. That means all nations will give God the honour and respect due to him. Offerings to God would no longer be physically located in Jerusalem. It will be global. And those offerings would be pure, they would be perfect. Look at verse 11, "My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty."

How is that possible? What is God pointing forward to? Well of course it's Jesus Christ. The Old Testament sacrificial system was fulfilled and completed by the Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross. The Old Testament sacrificial system was an illustration that pointed forward to God providing a once for all time perfect sacrificial lamb. Jesus' death on the cross was that once for all time perfect sacrifice that never needs to be repeated.

So, how does this passage in Malachi about half-hearted sacrifices to God relate to us? Well, we're still supposed to make offerings to God. The difference is that we're supposed to offer our whole lives to him. Romans 12. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your true and proper worship."

We're supposed to offer our whole lives to God. We've already said that it was shocking the way the Israelites treated God with such disrespect and dishonour. I think it is much, much worse when we do the same thing. They were trusting in a promise that God would one day act to end the problem all humanity had with sin. It was a promise about a future event. But for us, we know it's happened. Jesus' death on the cross for our sins has happened. It's no longer a promise; it's an event. Jesus has done everything we need to make us part of his eternal family. Our response is to look like we belong in that family. Our response is to reflect our true eternal identity. Our response is to honour God.

But there are times when all of us are half-hearted towards God. We don't give him the honour and respect that he deserves. When we consider what Christ has done that's shocking isn't it?

You know at the last census about 70% of people in this country claimed to be Christians. But only about 2% regularly go to church. Are the 68% of the population who say they're Christians yet never go to church really showing God the honour he deserves? Maybe they go occasionally when they can fit him into their busy schedules. That's exactly what I was like when I was a student. I'd go to church when I was home in Cornwall during the holidays, but wouldn't bother during term time. God was less important than going to the pub after watching rugby special on a Sunday evening. I was a long way from giving God the honour he deserves.

But, to be fair, that doesn't describe most of us. We're here, and it's not even Christmas or Easter! We might be in a house group, we may give money to support the work of the church. But are we just going through the motions? Are some of us in danger of thinking that simply turning up to church will be enough to honour God? During the rest of the week there's nothing to distinguish us from anyone else. Is that giving God the honour he deserves? Is that prioritising God the way he deserves?

Those of us at school; how do you show your whole-hearted commitment to Almighty God during the week? What do you need to change to serve the Lord Jesus Christ more effectively this week?

Do you read the Bible every day so you can listen to God? Do you talk to God in prayer during the day? How does your relationship with God impact the way you live your life at school?

What about those of you who work? Is there anything that distinguishes the way you work from your non-Christian colleague? How are you honouring God in your workplace?

Each of us should think deeply about these things. What do you need to change to show you honour God in what you do?

But, it's not just about what we do, it's also what we say.

3. Do we honour God with our words? (2:1-9)

Not only were the priests supposed to honour God through the sacrificial system, they were also supposed to faithfully teach God's people. And in this, they also failed to honour God. God spells out their failure in verses 8 and 9. But, before he gets to that point he explains the consequences of their failure and gives an example of what they should have been like.

Look at verse 3. God's uses a graphic and shocking image. How do you fancy having dung spread on your face and then being carted off to the dump with the rest of the rubbish. The dung and offal were unclean and unacceptable as part of the sacrifice and were carted off to be burnt outside the city. This is the same result that will in effect happen to the Israelites if they continue to dishonour God. This is very strong language.

Instead they should have followed the fantastic example of Levi. He revered God. He was in awe of God's name. Look at verse 6. He gave true instruction; he taught about God faithfully. He didn't lie; he walked in peace and uprightness. He caused many to turn from sin to honour God.

So, the Priests should have been doing the same thing. Look at verse 7, "'For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.'" That's what they should have been doing. But, the reality fell a long way short. See verse 8. "But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty.⁹ "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."

They picked out the bits of the Bible they liked and ignored the bits they didn't. They taught what the people wanted to hear. They downplayed the reality and seriousness of sin. This was a complete abdication of their duty and responsibility to God's people. And they showed they dishonoured God by what they said.

Now, we don't have priests anymore. The Old Testament role of priest was completed through Jesus, our great high priest. For example, this description of Levi, in this passage, is a perfect description of Jesus. He came and was the perfect Levi, the perfect priest, who always honoured God. Unlike the priests in Malachi's day who stuffed up, our great high priest, the Lord Jesus, did everything perfectly. He perfectly taught all that God the Father wanted him to teach. He honoured God in every area of his life, what he did and what he said all done perfectly. And he did all that for our sake, for our salvation. He did this so he could be our perfect sacrifice to die in our place.

However, even though Jesus has done everything for us to be saved, we still show whether we honour God by what we believe and say. God still expects us to honour him in every area of our lives, including what we teach.

Yes, of course this has a very direct application to me. I am the person responsible for what is taught here at the Windsor Fellowship Church. God will hold me to account for the faithfulness of what is said. I mustn't show partiality, I mustn't pick and choose. I must strive to faithfully teach what God says in His word, the Bible.

But, what about you? Well, we're all responsible for what we think about God's word. We honour God by doing what he says. We regularly say to our twins, "You show you love us by doing what we say. It's not enough just to say you love us, or to say you're sorry, you have to show it by your actions." In the same way, we should we love God, we show we love Jesus, by doing what he says. Being faithful to God's word. As Jesus said in John 14, "if you love me you will obey what I command."

God deserve honour and respect. The question is, are we giving God the honour and respect he deserves? And if we're not we really need to listen to the warnings contained in this passage. The consequences of dishonouring God are severe.

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